

Cont. From Page 1

Shah calls Ladakh living land of 'dharma' for centuries

their lives forward. The presence of these sacred relics in Ladakh reminds us that India's civilisation has, for thousands of years, given the message of peace and coexistence," he said.

"In a diverse region like Ladakh and Kargil, this message becomes even more relevant. This heritage still tells us that amidst conflicts & unrest, only the path of peace and compassion can provide solutions. The return of the relics on Buddha Purnima has enhanced the significance of the festival for the people of Ladakh," he added.

"These sacred relics have come to Ladakh after 75 years. It is as if Buddha himself is present here today," Shah said, adding that followers of Buddhism and people of other faiths in Ladakh and Kargil would draw spiritual energy from the relics.

Highlighting Ladakh's role in the spread of Buddhism, Shah said Kashmir was once an ancient centre of Buddhist studies, Mahayana philosophy and Buddhist art, from where Ladakh first came into close contact with Buddhism.

He said Emperor Ashoka's envoys had laid the foundation of Buddhist influence in Ladakh through Kashmir and Gandhara, while Mahayana Buddhism expanded in the region during the Kushan period between the first and third centuries CE.

The Silk Route linking Kashmir, Leh, Yarkand, Khotan and Tibet became a channel not only for trade but also for ideas, monks, manuscripts and artistic traditions, Shah said.

He said later, Tibetan influence between the seventh and tenth centuries further enriched Ladakh through Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions.

Shah also appealed to the Ladakh administration to ensure complete arrangements so that followers of all faiths, especially Buddhists, could visit and pay obeisance to the relics.

The Piprahwa relics of Tathagata Buddha, ancient sacred remains and associated objects linked to Gautama Buddha discovered at Piprahwa in the present-day Uttar Pradesh near the Nepal border, arrived in Leh on Wednesday.

Shah inaugurated the exposition of sacred Buddha relics by observing traditional religious rituals. During the ceremony, he bowed reverently before the relics of Buddha to pay his respects.

The ritual includes offerings to the idol, religious scriptures, and the stupa. The idol symbolises the body of Tathagata Buddha and is dedicated to the long life of enlightened beings. The religious scriptures represent the preservation and dissemination of sacred teachings, symbolising the speech of Tathagata Buddha. The stupa signifies purity and enlightenment, symbolising the mind of the Tathagata Buddha.

Following the completion of these offerings, the home minister proceeded to light the ceremonial lamp at the Buddha statue, marking the formal inauguration of the exposition, officials said.

He was accompanied by Ladakh LG Vinai Kumar Saxena, MP Ladakh, CEC LAHDC Kargil, prominent political and other personalities, besides senior officials.

He also laid the foundation stone of a 10,000 lts per day dairy plant at Kargil and launched a series of dairy development initiatives for Ladakh through virtual mode.

The initiatives, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, include mobile milk testing laboratories, modern milk cooling systems and strengthening of dairy infrastructure aimed at boosting self-reliance in the Union Territory.

Officials said a modern dairy processing plant with a capacity of 10,000 litres per day was being set up at an estimated cost of Rs 25 cr by Indian Dairy Machinery Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).

The project is being implemented under the National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD) of the Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, with a grant of Rs 12.74 cr, assistance of Rs 10 cr from NDDF and the remaining financing through LUTDCF funds routed via the Himachal Pradesh administration, officials said.

The plant will run on a 350-kilowatt solar energy-based system, ensuring clean and sustainable operations in the high-altitude region, officials said.

For milk procurement, a modern Mobile Milk Collection and Cooling System will be deployed to directly collect milk from farmers, preserve quality and strengthen the regional economy.

He said that Ladakh had become a model of rapid transformation since the 2019 bifurcation of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, and listed sweeping political, social and economic changes in the Union Territory.

The region has remained at the centre of Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's development agenda, he said.

Shah said Ladakh had long demanded Union territory status due to lack of development and asserted that the decision had brought visible change across sectors.

His remarks came amid renewed calls by the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) for resumption of talks with the Centre on statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule.

"Ladakh had an old demand to be made a Union territory. The basic reason for this demand was that development was not taking place here. Now I want to tell you what has been done after it was made a Union Territory in 2019," Shah said. Policy Debate Forum

He said that Ladakh has now seven districts and 193 panchayats, with five new districts - Sham, Nubra, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass - created and notifications already issued.

Shah said that local languages had also been given administrative recognition. "Earlier only Hindi and English were in use, but now Bhoti, Purgi and Urdu have also been accorded importance".

Highlighting infrastructure growth, he said road length in Ladakh has increased from about 1,799 km before 2019 to 4,040 km now. "The road constructions has almost doubled."

The Centre bifurcated the erstwhile state of J&K into two Union territories - Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh - on August 5, 2019, when it also abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution.

Shah said that the number of bridges has risen from 19 to 72 increasing the number by three times.

Spelling out development in other sectors, he said that mobile towers have increased from 344 to 653, while helipads have gone up from seven to 41, he said. "Snow-clearing machines, crucial for the region, have increased from 60 to 215."

On power infrastructure, Shah said grid-related works have increased from 145 to 184, while distribution transformers have gone up from 1,182 to 3,153.

"I am giving these figures on this scale because after becoming a Union Territory, it (Ladakh) has remained the focus of the Narendra Modi government, the focus of the prime minister of the country, and so many development works have taken place together," the minister said.

He said the impact of better infrastructure was visible in road connectivity, with the Zojila Pass, which earlier remained shut for 127 days, remaining closed for only 19 days this year. "The Kargil-Leh road, which earlier remained

closed for nearly 175 days, was shut for only 11 days."

Shah said work on the Zojila tunnel is in progress, construction of the Shinkun La tunnel has started and a new civil airport is also coming up.

He said that VSAT connectivity has been extended to all panchayats and major work has been undertaken to upgrade telecom towers.

In the education sector, Shah said Sindhu Central University has been established, 174 ICT labs set up, 130 smart classrooms created, 40 science laboratories built and 24 Atal Tinkering Labs established.

He said Ladakh became a fully literate administrative unit in 2024 and claimed there was no illiterate person left in the region.

"Nearly 98 per cent households have been provided tap water connections under the Har Ghar Jal scheme, while substantial work has also been carried out in agriculture and horticulture," he said.

Shah said Ladakh's budget has risen from Rs 1,000 crore when it was part of the erstwhile Jammu and Kashmir state to Rs 6,000 crore now. Jammu & Kashmir Travel

He also announced the formation of the Sindhu Infrastructure Development Corporation, saying it would play an important role in promoting industrial growth in the coming years. "We want this border region to become self-reliant," Shah said.

He asserted that development in the UT had taken place because of the vision of the prime minister.

The relics were brought from Delhi to Leh in a special Indian Air Force aircraft by Drukpa Thuksey Rinpoche and Khenpo Thinlas Chosal of Matho Monastery. Officials said the relics would remain available for public veneration at Jivetsal from May 2 to 10, followed by an exposition in Zaskar on May 11 and 12, and thereafter at the Dharma Centre in Leh from May 13 to 14, before being flown back to Delhi on May 15.

By abrogating Art 370, PM fulfilled dream of Sardar Patel: LG

Sinha said that India's pride as the world's largest democracy was deeply rooted in the vision and ideals of Sardar Patel.

"His unwavering belief in unity amidst diversity stands as our greatest achievement, a testament to his resolute commitment to 'Ek Bharat, Shreshth Bharat'. The strength we draw from weaving together our traditions, cultures, and heritage into the fabric of progress is a living reflection of Sardar Patel's steadfast determination and enduring legacy," he said.

"Maharashtra is the land of industries, spirituality, selfless-service and sacrifice. Icons like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Peshwa Bajirao, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar devoted themselves to Mother India and for the cause of national unity," he added.

"At every sacred pilgrimage across India, the name of Ahilyabai Holkar resounds. Her vision and devotion breathed new life into the nation's spiritual traditions and carried them forward with renewed strength," he said.

The LG said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India had discovered a renewed spirit of confidence, dignity, and progress.

"Over the past 12 years, the PM's guidance has inspired citizens to transform resolve into action, reshaping the nation's landscape with development and determination and his tenure has marked a historic milestone, making him India's longest-serving elected Head of Government," he added.

8th CPC to visit Srinagar

Following this, representatives must request an appointment via the designated NIC forms link by May 16, 2026, using the unique memo ID provided during the initial submission.

While specific venue details and meeting schedules for the four-day visit were expected to be released shortly, the commission also clarified that similar consultative meetings would be organised in other states and Union Territories across India in the coming months.

Lt Gen Balbir assumes charge as Chinar Corps GoC

Army Headquarters. Lt Gen Singh had earlier commanded the Victor Force, which looks after counter-insurgency operations in south and central Kashmir. A statement from the XV Corps, often referred to as Chinar Corps, said Lt Gen Singh is a highly decorated and battle-hardened officer with over 34 years of service.

After assuming charge of the new role, the General Officer Commanding (GoC) paid respects at the Chinar War Memorial, honouring the supreme sacrifice of the nation's bravehearts.

In his inaugural address, Lt Gen Singh reaffirmed his resolve to work in close synergy with the civil administration and the people of Kashmir to further strengthen the foundation of peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

He exhorted all sections of society to join hands with the security forces in overcoming the persistent challenges, the statement said. Lt Gen Srivastava relinquished the command and handed over the reins of the Chinar Corps after 19 months.

"His eventful and challenging tenure was characterised by meticulous execution of OP SINDOOR & OP MAHADEV, which brought the perpetrators of the dastardly 'Pahalgam Attack' to justice, incident-free conduct of the Amarnath Yatra 2025 and multiple initiatives in nation building," the statement said.

In a post on X, the Chinar Corps said that on relinquishing the command, Lt Gen Srivastava paid homage at the Chinar War Memorial, honouring the bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice in service of the nation.

"In his farewell message, he thanked all ranks of Chinar Corps, @JmuKmrPolice, Central Armed Police Forces, Civil Administration and the Awaam of #Kashmir for their steadfast support in fostering peace and harmony," the post said. Chinar Corps is responsible for guarding the Line of Control with Pakistan, besides countering terrorism in the valley.

Prez exhorts ARTRAC to enhance

Army's operational preparedness

nor Kavinder Gupta and Lt Gen Devendra Sharma. "Elaborating on the novel initiatives of the ARTRAC, Lt Gen Sharma brought out the impetus provided towards drone training, steps taken to absorb niche technologies, introduction of the concept of 'Red Teaming' and initiatives towards digitisation and automation in the Indian Army," the ministry said in a statement.

The President acknowledged the fact that ARTRAC had an all-encompassing role of designing concepts of warfare, resource development for the Indian Army and widespread engagements with friendly foreign countries and sister Services, it added.

It is a critical gear in the path to military glory, Atmanirbharta and Viksit Bharat. The ARTRAC, through its 32 premier training establishments, vitalises the domain of professionalism in the Indian Army, which gives it a unique perspective into the art and science of warfighting, the statement said.

Later, President Murmu was accorded a warm sendoff at Annandale Helipad in Shimla, where Governor Kavinder Gupta, Chief Minister Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Minister Anirudh Singh, Chief Secretary Sanjay Gupta, DGP Ashok

Tiwari and other senior civil, police and army officers were also present on the occasion.

President Murmu's itinerary had several programmes but due to inclement weather conditions, she remained confined to Shimla.

GST collections rise to record high of Rs 2.43 lakh cr

After adjusting refunds, net Goods and Services Tax (GST) mop-up was up 7.3 per cent to about Rs 2.11 lakh crore.

Petrol, diesel price hike not ruled out

ers traded barbs amid stalled peace talks. Government sources said the possibility of a petrol and diesel price hike in the near future is not ruled out.

Earlier in the day, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), making a statement on behalf of the industry, said petrol and diesel price as also domestic LPG rates are not being increased despite a surge in international energy cost.

State-owned oil firms hiked prices of commercial LPG, industrial diesel, 5-kg LPG and jet fuel sold to international airlines in keeping with the cost.

Analysts had earlier flagged the possibility of price increases of Rs 25-28 per litre after the end of polling for assembly elections in West Bengal on April 29.

International oil prices spiked after the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28, and Tehran's sweeping retaliation that effectively shut the Strait of Hormuz - one of the world's most critical energy arteries, linking the Persian Gulf to global markets and handling roughly a fifth of global oil trade along with significant volumes of liquefied natural gas.

Last week, a senior oil ministry official told a news briefing that state-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about Rs 20 per litre on petrol and roughly Rs 100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices. Yet there is no plan to increase prices, she had said.

Crude, which was USD 70 per barrel last year, averaged over USD 114 this month.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have remained frozen since early April 2022 - a period during which oil prices rose in some months and fell in other times.

When prices fell, state-owned oil firms made handsome profits, which they used to set off losses when rates rose.

Petrol is currently priced at Rs 94.77 a litre in Delhi, and diesel comes for Rs 87.67.

Gouraha takes charge as NHPC head for J&K, Ladakh

pany's power stations and projects across the two Union Territories, an official spokesperson said.

Soon after assuming office in Jammu, Gouraha interacted with officials of Salal Power Station and the Sawalkote project.

He stressed the need for operational excellence and urged employees to work with commitment towards sustainable energy development in the region, the spokesperson added.

A seasoned professional with nearly 29 years of experience, Gouraha is an electrical engineering graduate from GEC Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh, and also holds an MBA in human resources, he said.

He joined NHPC in 1997 at the Salal Power Station and has since held several key assignments, including postings at the Tattapani geothermal project and the design (E&M) division at the corporate office, he added.

EC orders repollat 15 polling stations in Bengal

ing an on-the-spot visit to Diamond Harbour in South 24 Parganas district.

The ECI said the repoll order was based on reports received from returning officers and observers of the two constituencies and "material circumstances".

The BJP too alleged that the party symbols on EVMs were covered with tapes or ink in certain booths during the second and final phase of West Bengal Assembly elections on Wednesday.

The EC had deputed its special observer, Subrata Gupta, to fact-check the allegations from the ground.

According to an order issued by West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Agarwal, the Election Commission had reviewed all relevant circumstances.

The Commission declared the poll at certain specified polling stations void under Section 58(2) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. A fresh poll for these stations would be held on May 2, 2026, the order stated.

MHA notifies Citizenship (Amendment) Rules

the Citizenship Act, 1955, in 2005. The scheme allows registration of Persons of Indian Origin as Overseas Citizens of India, provided they were citizens of India on or after January 26, 1950, or were eligible to become citizens on that date. However, individuals who are or have been, or whose parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents were citizens of Pakistan or Bangladesh, are not eligible under the scheme.

In recent years, the MHA has also tightened norms governing OCI registration. On August 11 last year, the Ministry issued a notification stating that OCI registration shall be liable for cancellation if an individual is sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more, or is charge-sheeted for an offence punishable with imprisonment of seven years or more.

The notification was issued in exercise of powers conferred under clause (da) of Section 7D of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by the clause (da) of section 7D of the Citizenship Act, 1955 (57 of 1955), the Central Government hereby states that an Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) registration shall be liable to get cancelled when a person has been sentenced to imprisonment for term of not less than two years or has been charge-sheeted for an offence entailing punishment of imprisonment for seven years or more," the notification stated.

The latest rules are aimed at streamlining OCI application processes while reinforcing compliance and security-related provisions under the citizenship framework.

2 labourers killed, another rescued: 1 still feared trapped

Now, the process of strengthening its foundation was underway. After a part of it collapsed, the authorities concerned closed the road to movement of vehicles.

Officials said the incident occurred when labourers were carrying out repair work on a retaining wall near the bridge that was damaged in last year's flash floods.

While the work was in progress, a section of the bridge suddenly gave way, burying workers engaged at the site under the rubble.

Police, Army and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) teams launched rescue operations to extricate those buried under the debris. They pulled out one injured labourer and shifted him to a hospital, officials said.

Later, two dead bodies were also retrieved from the debris by the rescuers, officials said.

Family members of the labourers present at the site said around six workers engaged at the site at the time of the incident came under the debris when the structure col-

lapsed. They said while two of the labourers managed to escape, four got trapped.

The rescue operation was in progress at the time of going to print after midnight.

Terrorist hideout busted in Chatroo woods

curity forces came across the hideout during searches in Bajmandoo woods of Chatroo.

Its search led them to the recovery of a cache of arms & ammunition, including one carbine gun with a magazine, one pistol with a magazine, one sling, one Under Barrel Grenade Launcher (UBGL) with one 51 mm rocket and four detonators, 97 live rounds of 9 mm, 18 rounds of 7.62 mm, one pull-through, one kilogram of explosive, one Kenwood radio set and two Motorola radio sets, officials said.

The hideout, which was later destroyed, belonged to a terrorist commander who was eliminated in an encounter by troops some time back.

TMC moves SC against order to use only central staff for WB vote counting

The high court, in its observations, held that such appointments were within the ECI's discretion and not illegal. The court rejected the apprehension that central government staff would act under political influence.

Allegations were mere apprehensions without evidence. Any grievance can be raised via an election petition (Section 100, RP Act, 1951), the court observed.

Welcoming the dismissal of the plea, West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer Manoj Kumar Agarwal said, "The writ petition has been dismissed. We have received a copy. No political party can decide who has to be included and who is not to be included. It is the discretion of the Returning Officer; he/she can include whoever he/she wants in counting or the entire election process."

West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC candidate from Bhabanipur, Mamata Banerjee had on Wednesday alleged that "observers from outside" and police officers unfamiliar with Bengal were being deployed in a manner that was targeting Trinamool Congress workers during the ongoing phase two of Assembly polling.

She alleged that her party's youth block president was arrested in the morning, prompting her visit to Chetla, while also claiming that CRPF personnel had entered a TMC councillor's residence late at night without local police and assaulted family members.

Also, in a dramatic escalation of the electoral battle for West Bengal, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has been filed in the Supreme Court of India seeking the immediate removal of Ajay Pal Sharma, a high-profile UP-cadre IPS officer, from his position as a Police Observer.

Iran offers new proposal amid stalled US peace talks

said. "We do not welcome war in any way; we do not want war, we do not want its continuation," he added.

The lack of fighting has not assuaged markets, with oil prices still more than 50 percent above their prewar levels as traders confront a prolonged closure of Hormuz, while the European Central Bank held interest rates amid fears of soaring inflation.

Washington, meanwhile, was gripped by a legalistic debate over whether Trump had passed a deadline for requesting congressional approval for his war with Iran.

Administration officials, including defence secretary Pete Hegseth, insisted that the ceasefire meant that the clock was paused on a 60-day deadline requiring the president to seek war powers authorisation from Congress.

"For War Powers Resolution purposes, the hostilities that began on Saturday, February 28 have terminated," a senior administration official said.

Trump is under increasing domestic pressure over the war, with no clear victory in sight, inflation spiking due to the conflict and midterm elections due in November.

On Thursday, the US government data showed slower than expected growth and inflation hit 3.5 per cent.

In Iran, meanwhile, the economic consequences of the war, which come on top of years of fierce international sanctions, were beginning to bite.

On Thursday, the US military said its blockade had stopped Iran from exporting \$6 billion worth of oil, while inflation, already above 45 percent before the war, reached 53.7 percent in recent weeks, according to the national statistics centre.

"For many people, paying rent and even buying food has become difficult, and some have nothing left at all," 28-year-old Mahyar told an AFP reporter based outside Iran, saying the company he worked for had laid off 34 people - nearly 40 percent of its staff.

Trump has repeatedly lashed out at Washington's international allies for failing to join efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

France and Britain have led efforts to bring together an international coalition of dozens of countries that would help reopen the strait, but only once peace is secured.

But on Thursday, a US official confirmed to AFP that Washington was launching its own international coalition to restart shipping, dubbed "the Maritime Freedom Construct".

That prompted French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot to insist that the two missions would complement and not compete with each other.

The US mission is "not of the same nature as the one we established... it comes as a sort of complement", Barrot said on a visit to the Gulf.

Above-normal heatwave days likely in May: IMD

and adjoining areas of peninsular India and southern parts of northeast India, are likely to experience normal to below-normal minimum temperatures," he said.

The IMD also said that rainfall in May is most likely to be above normal over India, barring some parts of east, north-east and east central India, where below-normal rainfall is likely.

'Unity in diversity' India's greatest strength: Kavinder

mutual respect and understanding among people from different regions of the country.

The governor honoured the guests by presenting them with traditional Himachali caps and mufflers as a gesture of warmth and hospitality.

Addressing the gathering, he said, "Such programmes further strengthen the feeling of belongingness and national unity."

He remarked that despite having multiple languages and diverse cultures, the people of India are united as one nation, which is the country's greatest strength.

He said that the spirit of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" is deeply embedded in Indian culture, and celebrations like State Foundation Days reflect this noble philosophy.

He added that such events at Lok Bhavan provide an opportunity for people to understand each other better and be grateful for the diversity that enriches the nation.

Governor's secretary Sandeep Bhardwaj was also present on the occasion.