

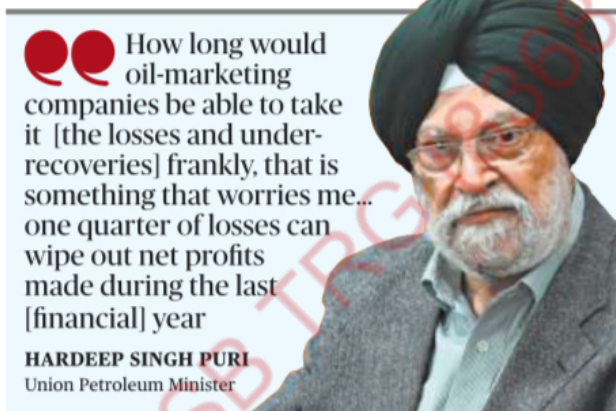
Minister Puri hints at fuel price hike as OMCs' mounting losses cause concern

Saptarno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Tuesday reassured consumers about the adequacy of retail fuels, but indicated that a prolonged West Asia crisis could force the government to pass on the pressure to domestic consumers, even as oil-marketing companies (OMCs) continue to bleed losses from holding petrol, diesel and LPG prices firm.

“How long would oil-marketing companies be able to take it [the losses and under-recoveries], frankly, that is something that worries me,” Mr. Puri said at the Confederation of Indian Industries’ Annual Business Summit,



2026. At the present rate, under-recoveries are being incurred, and “one quarter of losses can wipe out net profits made during the last [financial] year”, the Minister added.

OMCs, as Mr. Puri had also indicated earlier, are staring at under-recoveries of up to ₹2 lakh crore during this quarter, with

losses expected to scale to about ₹1 lakh crore.

As for supply, he said, “[There is] no problem on supply management side, [there is] no shortage anywhere.”

“We have 60 days of crude [oil], which is the maximum we need, 60 days of LNG [liquefied natural gas], and we have 45

days of LPG,” the Union Minister added.

The Petroleum Minister also informed that India has ramped up its daily domestic production of LPG from 35,000-36,000 tonnes to 54,000 tonnes.

PM's appeal

Stressing that Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s call for diligent use of retail fuel amid the West Asia crisis should be taken as a wake up call, Mr. Puri said there must not be a “bizarre construct” on the austerity appeal.

“If you look at the way it is happening, uncertainty is too mild a word. What he [Mr. Modi] has said is that we have to look at our lifestyle as well. There is no lockdown happening tomorrow,” he said.

Rahul records dissent on selection of CBI Director, calls it biased move

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

A high-powered committee chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi met on Tuesday evening to decide on the appointment of the next Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in which Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi submitted a dissent note, accusing the government of "institutional capture" of the agency to target political opponents, journalists, and critics.

The panel, headed by the Prime Minister, includes Chief Justice of India Surya Kant apart from the Opposition leader. The meeting took place at the Prime Minister's residence and lasted over an hour.

The tenure of the current CBI Director, Praveen Sood, is set to end on May 24.



Rahul Gandhi

Mr. Gandhi shared his strongly worded dissent note on his X handle and accused the government of making a "mockery" of the selection process.

"Your government has repeatedly misused the CBI, intended to be India's premier investigative agency, to target political opponents, journalists, and critics. It is to prevent such institutional capture that the Leader of the Opposition is included in the Selection Committee. Regrettably, you have continued

to deny me any meaningful role in the process," Mr. Gandhi said.

Mr. Gandhi said that despite repeated written requests, he was not provided with the self-appraisal reports or 360-degree reports of the eligible candidates.

'Not a rubber stamp'

"Instead, I was expected to examine the appraisal records of 69 candidates for the first time during the Committee meeting. The 360-degree reports were denied to me outright. A detailed review of these records is crucial to assess each candidate's history and performance. This deliberate denial of information, without any legal basis, makes a mockery of the selection process and ensures that only your pre-decided candidate is selected," he said.

The Opposition leader

reminded Mr. Modi that he had recorded his dissent in the previous meeting on May 5 and also written to him on October 21, 2025, suggesting measures for a fair and transparent process.

"By denying the Selection Committee crucial information, the government has reduced it to a mere formality. The Leader of Opposition is not a rubber stamp. I cannot abdicate my constitutional duty by participating in this biased exercise. I therefore dissent in the strongest terms," Mr. Gandhi said.

The key committee is responsible for finalising the selection of next CBI Director. The selection is done from a panel of shortlisted officers. Sources indicated that several senior IPS officers from different states are part of the list of officers being considered for the top CBI post.

NEET-UG 2026 cancelled after question paper leak

Inquiry after whistle-blower's message led to the decision, says NTA Director-General; re-test to be conducted in 'minimal possible time'; CBI to probe the leak; Maharashtra police arrest one suspect

Maitri Porecha

NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday cancelled the National Entrance-cum-Eligibility Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) conducted on May 3 after evidence emerged that the paper was leaked.

The NTA is expected to announce the schedule for the re-test in seven to 10 days.

The re-test will be conducted in the "minimal possible time", NTA Director-General Abhishek Singh said. No new registration will be required, and no fee will be charged for the re-test; in fact, the NTA has promised to refund fees already paid.

Almost 22 lakh students appeared for this year's



Students' Federation of India members protest against cancellation of NEET-UG 2026 in New Delhi on Tuesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

NEET-UG, which is the gateway examination for admission to undergraduate medical programmes across the country.

Four days after the exam was held, a whistle-blower's message led investigators to a "guess paper", which included a significant number of ques-

tions in the question paper.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has registered a case to probe the alleged paper leak, following a reference from the Department of Higher Education under the Ministry of Education, the agency said on Tuesday. The Mah-

arashtra Police said on Tuesday that one suspect has been arrested from Nashik after receiving a request from the Rajasthan Police about an accused involved in the paper leak.

"The exact point where the leak happened will only be disclosed when the CBI inquiry is completed. We have complete footage of up to 1,50,000 CCTVs in strongrooms on the date of exam and post exam," Mr. Singh said. "However, a whistleblower complaint on May 7 led us to inquire into a hand-written note circulating digitally on messaging groups which matched the NEET main exam question paper."

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NEET-UG cancelled after question paper leak

“The inputs received by NTA, taken together with the findings shared by the law enforcement agencies, established that the present examination process could not be allowed to stand,” the NTA Director-General said. “We verified the PDF circulating and found part of allegations true, that of similar questions having appeared in the guess paper. That violated our commitment [of zero error],” Mr. Singh explained.

“The question is not whether the leak was localised or not, it is that if integrity of the process was violated, it was violated. However, we will conduct re-exam in minimal possible time, and we will ensure that nothing of that sort is repeated,” he said. The NTA came to the conclusion that the present exam was compromised, Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*. “Any move short of cancelling exams would signal that those who are trying to beat the system, scam the system would have succeeded,” he explained.

The CBI has constituted special teams, which have been dispatched to various locations to follow up on leads. It has invoked provisions related to criminal conspiracy, cheating, criminal breach of trust, theft, and destruction of evidence under the Prevention of Corruption Act and the Public Examination Prevention of Unfair Means Act.

The Rajasthan Special Operations Group was previously investigating the case. Preliminary inquiry indicated that a handwritten “guess” paper was circulated in Rajasthan’s Sikar a couple of days before the examination and most of its questions allegedly matched the actual paper.

The NTA added that though a re-test will cause significant inconvenience to candidates and their families, “the alternative would have caused greater and more lasting damage” to public trust.

Asked whether the NTA would consider holding computer-based tests (CBTs) instead of the paper-and-pen format with an optical mark recognition(OMR)-based answer sheet used in the latest exam – given that the examination has previously been leaked in 2024 as well – Mr. Singh said this was a decision for the Union Ministry of Education alone. “It is a big policy call as nearly 22 lakh medical aspirants appear for exams and we have the capacity to conduct CBTs only for 1.5 lakh students on any given day. This would mean administering exams over multiple days, for instance, say 22 days, introducing different question papers and then normalising scores over multiple variations of question papers. It is a massive task,” Mr. Singh added.

(With inputs from Devesh K. Pandey and Snehal Mutha)

Experts say NTA needs to be structurally reformed

As mix-ups recur, the agency faces charges of lax operational capacity, porous cybersecurity, poor crisis communication; experts suggest transition to digital test and decentralisation of admissions

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

With the cancellation of the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) held on May 3, the National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts it for undergraduate medical admissions, has yet again come under the scanner for its alleged lax operational capacity, porous cybersecurity, and poor crisis communication, according to experts.

Since its introduction in 2013, the NEET is now for the first time facing a full-scale cancellation and re-test, though it has had a rocky run with a limited re-test in 2024 for 1,563 candidates who had received grace marks for loss of exam time at certain centres. There have been allegations of impersonation every year in various States; candidates and coaching institutes paying large sums to obtain leaked question papers and answer keys; photos of papers taken and circulated with gangs distributing prepared answers for students to quickly memorise them; suspiciously high scores and inflation in ranking; and “organised cheating centres”.

The NEET is a nationwide entrance exam for admission to over 10 undergraduate medical courses



National Students Union of India members protest over the alleged NEET paper leak in New Delhi on Tuesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

in India. It is one of the world's largest entrance exams with 20-24 lakh candidates taking it annually for over 2.5 lakh seats across all courses. In 2013, NEET-UG was conducted for the first time. In 2014-15, admissions to medical courses temporarily went back to separate State and private medical entrance exams, but a year later the Supreme Court revived NEET and the exam is now conducted by the NTA, which took over from the Central Board of Secondary Education in 2019.

'Weak link'

Speaking of several risks in the NEET-UG system, Rajeesh Jayadevan, former president of the Indian Medical Association (Kochi), said, “While anti-cheating security measures at examination centres have kept up with

the times, the old school mode of pen-and-paper examination itself appears to be the weak link in the chain. The question paper has to be physically printed, distributed, stored, and transported to individual centres – each is a point of vulnerability where a leak can occur. Even a single photo of the question paper is sufficient to breach the system. Given the high demand and potential for illegal monetary gains, such leaks will likely occur again unless the system is changed.”

With numerous other examinations already in the digital format, it's time to upgrade the NEET-UG system to a computer-based platform so that potential points of breach are plugged and the distribution is encrypted, Dr. Jayadevan added. Students of the present generation are

far more digitally literate, and a transition to a digital format should not be difficult, he said. Other experts have called for stronger digital security, decentralisation of admissions, allowing multiple attempts per year, and a hybrid tally, which includes aptitude and school scores.

Merely cancelling the exam cannot be the final solution to such a massive scam, Lakshya Mittal, chairperson, United Doctors Front, said. “Repeated incidents over the years clearly indicate the existence of a deep-rooted nexus and systemic failure which cannot be ignored any longer,” Dr. Mittal said.

Doctors and healthcare experts demand a high-level, time-bound, and transparent investigation into the matter.

Previously, following the controversy around the 2024 paper leak and irregularities, the Centre and the NTA introduced a series of reforms, including the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024, which criminalises paper leaks, cheating syndicates, impersonation, and organised exam fraud; the creation of a high-level reform committee to review the functioning of the NTA and recommend structural reforms; and a proposed shift to digital/hybrid exams and enhanced cybersecurity measures.

Himanta takes oath as Assam Chief Minister for second successive term

The Hindu Bureau

GUWAHATI

Himanta Biswa Sarma was sworn in on Tuesday as the Chief Minister of Assam for the second successive term, a first for a non-Congress leader in the State.

Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office and secrecy to Mr. Sarma at the College of Veterinary Science playground on the southern edge of Guwahati.

Four others – Rameswar Teli and Ajanta Neog of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) president Atul Bora, and Bodoland People's Front (BPF) leader Charan Boro – were also sworn in as Ministers.

The AGP and the BPF are other constituents in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Himanta Biswa Sarma after the swearing-in in Guwahati on Tuesday. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and other Union Ministers, the Chief Ministers of 22 NDA-ruled States and Union Territories, BJP national president Nitin Nabin, top industrialists, and religious leaders, including the seers of 17 Vaishnav monasteries across Assam, at-

tended the swearing-in ceremony.

Among the foreign delegates present on the occasion was Sergio Gor, the U.S. Ambassador to India.

"May the blessings of Maa Kamakhya and Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev (15th-16th century saint-reformer) illuminate the lives of everyone in Assam and open new path-

ways to peace, progress and prosperity. Assam will scale new heights of development in the coming days with their blessings," Mr. Sarma posted on social media platform X ahead of the swearing-in.

'Golden period'

"The NDA's third term will be a golden period for Assam," Mr. Bora said, assuring the people of accelerated development.

This is the NDA's third consecutive term in Assam. It swept the April 9 Assembly election by bagging 102 of the State's 126 seats. The BJP won 82 of these, and the AGP and BJP 10 each.

Sarbananda Sonowal, now a Union Minister, was the Chief Minister for the first NDA term from 2016. The BJP entrusted the reins of the State to Mr. Sarma in 2021.

What trade deals promise are far from reality: CEA

There is a 'substantial' gap between what FTAs promise and what regulations currently permit, warns CEA Anantha Nageswaran, days after EU envoy's similar statement on compliance issues

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) create value only once they are implemented not when they are signed, Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran asserted on Tuesday, warning that there is a "substantial" gap between what the trade deals promise and what the regulatory frameworks actually allow.

Mr. Nageswaran's comments come days after the European Union's Ambassador to India too warned that compliance issues could still derail the benefits of the India-EU FTA.

During his speech at the Confederation of Indian Industry's Annual Business Summit 2026, Mr. Nageswaran said that the nine trade agreements and comprehensive economic



Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran at the CII's Annual Business Summit 2026, in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

partnerships that India had entered into in the last five years "represent the most concentrated burst of trade diplomacy in independent India's history".

Statements of intent

He added that the frameworks with the United Kingdom, European Union, EFTA, U.S., Oman, New Zealand and Australia

were not merely commercial arrangements.

"They represent a diversification of economic relationships that is simultaneously a statement of strategic intent that India will expand its economic footprint across multiple geographies, reducing dependence on any single market or corridor," he said. However, he also not-

ed that such agreements created value only at implementation, not at signing.

"The gap between the frameworks we have concluded and the depth of integration they would actually permit if the regulatory standards and procedural barriers on both sides were seriously addressed remains substantial," Mr. Nageswaran noted.

"The imperative is to close that gap with the same urgency that was brought to the conclusion of the agreement themselves," he added.

At a separate industry event last week, the EU's Ambassador to India Hervé Delphin pointed out that customs procedures or conformity requirements should serve their purpose and not be used as trade barriers.

Data and justice

As courts adopt AI, care must be taken on the potential for abuse

In the latest step in a long-standing effort to digitise the judiciary, Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant announced two initiatives from the Bench, called 'One Case, One Data' (OCOD), a unified judicial data platform, and 'Su-Sahayak', an AI-powered chatbot on the Supreme Court of India website. OCOD promises a unified digital trail for a dispute as it moves through various courts, linkages between court records and litigant actions (such as appeals), easier access to various documents, lower need for manual verification, reciprocal access to High Courts and other courts, and more accurate judicial statistics. It is notable considering the wide variation in software practices and records quality across India's thousands of district and subordinate courts. If the programme succeeds, standardised data could also allow administrators to determine where cases are held up and ease procedural bottlenecks, and improve data-based decision-making overall. 'Su-Sahayak' has been integrated into the Court website's front-end to help users navigate case status, cause lists, orders and judgments, e-services, and frequently asked questions. As with any major state-backed technology rollout in India, questions about interoperability, integrity of legacy records, restricting access to private information, and staff skilling remain. By aspiring to a centralised digital fingerprint for each case, OCOD also bears the risk of misuse.

While the CJI said that these new tools will improve "access to justice", their introduction risks deepening the digital divide. OCOD may require lawyers to maintain digital scanners, cloud backup options, and updated software. Metropolitan corporate firms can easily absorb these costs but independent practitioners in the district and taluka levels will lack the capital. The system may also introduce digital middlemen to help litigants who cannot navigate the e-filing portal, potentially creating a new layer of unregulated costs. While the government has launched assistants with voice-first capabilities, such as Jan Sahayak, 'Su-Sahayak' is primarily text-based and could exclude people who are not comfortable typing or navigating complex website menus. The state and the judiciary must ensure that the AI model is not biased against marginalised communities who were historically disproportionately arrested or denied bail. India's courts have generally been more comfortable with AI for assistance than for substantive reasoning. 'Su-Sahayak' follows SUVAS, to translate judgments, and SUPACE, which processes facts and legal precedents. The line must continue to hold as the judiciary adopts more powerful tools that have already tempted practitioners in other domains to abuse them.

China's Foreign Minister set to skip BRICS meet in Delhi

Beijing cites 'scheduling reasons' and states that Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong will be present; it expresses readiness to work with all BRICS members to support India as the Chair

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING

There will be no high-level representation from Beijing at Thursday's meeting of BRICS Foreign Ministers in New Delhi because of "scheduling reasons", the Chinese Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

The May 14-15 meeting coincides with the visit to China by U.S. President Donald Trump, who lands in the Chinese capital on Wednesday. Foreign Minister Wang Yi will be in Beijing for Mr. Trump's visit. China will not be sending any other high-level official for the meeting, the Foreign Ministry indicated.

"Due to scheduling reasons, Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong will represent Foreign Minister Wang Yi at this Foreign Ministers' Meeting," the Foreign Ministry said, adding that "China attaches great importance to and actively



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing on July 14, 2025. AP

participates in BRICS cooperation, and is always committed to deepening the BRICS strategic partnership and consolidating the positive momentum of unity and cooperation among BRICS countries."

"We stand ready to work with all BRICS members to support India, as the Chair, in successfully hosting the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting and promoting the high-quality development

of 'BRICS Plus' cooperation," the statement said.

Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal said on Tuesday at a weekly press briefing that the meeting scheduled for May 14-15 will be chaired by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. Visiting Foreign Ministers and heads of delegations from member and partner countries, including Russian Foreign Minister Ser-

gey Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, will also call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The discussions will focus on pressing global and regional issues of mutual concern among member states of BRICS," Mr. Jaiswal said, adding that the second day would see discussions on reviewing the group's evolution and future direction, and reforms of global governance and the multilateral system. The gathering this week takes place against the backdrop of the crisis in West Asia and divisions within the grouping, leading to doubts over whether the meeting will yield a joint statement. A meeting in New Delhi last month of Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys of the 11-nation BRICS grouping ended without a joint statement, as delegates from the United Arab Emirates and Iran sparred over the war in West Asia.

WASHINGTON

Pakistan parked Iranian planes on its airfield to escape U.S. air strikes'



AP

Pakistan, which is playing a mediator role to end the U.S.-Iran war, allowed Iranian military aircraft to park on its airfield to shield them from American air strikes, according to a U.S. media report. The CBS News report prompted Republican Senator Lindsey Graham to call for dumping Pakistan as mediator in the conflict. PTI

BEIRUT

Hezbollah chief says group's arms not part of Israel-Lebanon talks



AFP

Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem said on Tuesday that his Iran-backed group's weapons were not part of upcoming negotiations between Lebanon and Israel, and vowed his fighters would turn the battlefield into "hell" for Israeli forces. Mr. Qassem on Tuesday called for a "withdrawal from the direct negotiations". AFP

Recovery fuelled by worker remittances, Sri Lanka remains wary of West Asia conflict

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Heavily reliant on worker remittances from West Asia for its economic recovery, Sri Lanka has expressed “grave concern” over the escalating conflict in the region.

Migrant workers sent a record \$8 billion in remittances last year, boosting foreign reserves and helping recovery from the country’s 2022 economic crash. A total of 3,10,915 Sri Lankans left for foreign employment in 2025, according to Central Bank data, working mainly in domestic service, caregiving, construction, and agriculture. The UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia were the largest sources of remittances, along with the U.K., which included funds routed through other countries.

“Sri Lanka expresses its grave concern regarding the recent hostilities in the West Asian region,” the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment & Tourism said on May 6. Pointing to a large Sri Lankan expatriate population whose safety is a “matter of paramount concern,” the Ministry called for “maximum restraint” from all parties, without naming any party to the conflict.

Since late February, when the U.S.-Israel combine launched its war on Iran, triggering a series of retaliatory attacks, Sri Lanka’s migrant workers have been living in precarity. Even so, they contributed \$815 million in remittances in March, recording a year-on-year growth of 17.5%. “Cumulatively remittances during the first quarter

of the year recorded a notable growth of 26.5% on a year-on-year basis,” the Central Bank said. Despite tensions and grave risks in the West Asian region, workers’ remittances in this period far exceeded earnings from the exports and tourism sectors, two other key foreign exchange earners.

In April 2026, the International Monetary Fund, which steers the island’s recovery programme, including through painful austerity measures, noted that Sri Lanka’s “ambitious reform agenda” continued to deliver “commendable outcomes”. It pointed to 5% growth in 2025, positive inflation, and an increase in gross official reserves to \$7 billion at end-March 2026.

Overseas jobs

Although hostilities in West Asia are impacting Sri Lanka “directly and indirectly” – such as fuel price hikes, soaring air ticket prices – they have not affected remittances from workers, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Employment Arun Hemachandra told *The Hindu*. “We sincerely hope there is stability in the [West Asian] region and workers can continue going overseas. We also hope there are no huge job losses like we saw during the pandemic,” he said.

Sri Lankan missions in the region have been instructed to offer more support and emergency assistance to workers through helplines. “We are also engaging closely with our multilateral partners such as the International Labour Organization and the



The Sri Lankan government is trying its ‘level best’ to motivate workers abroad, says Arun Hemachandra. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

International Organization for Migration,” he said, adding that the government was trying its “level best” to motivate workers abroad and those seeking employment overseas.

The Anura Kumara Dissanayake administration aims to send 4,00,000 workers abroad this year, continuing its predecessor government’s policy of encouraging labour migration to bolster foreign reserves amid the tentative recovery. With the conflict in West Asia persisting, however, it remains unclear if it may be “practically possible” to meet that target, the Deputy Minister said. As of May 5, as many as 82,302 people have registered for overseas employment, officials said. Since the 2022 economic crisis, Sri Lanka has seen a sharp increase in passport applications as families try sending a member abroad, hoping their earnings will help with the rising living costs at home.

Asked why tens of thousands of workers are scrambling for jobs overseas, leaving behind their families and enduring exploitative working conditions, while the government claims it has

stabilised the economy, Mr. Hemachandra said the government was presently focusing on “macroeconomic stability”.

“On the heels of a grave economic crash and dollar shortage, the country may have to encourage overseas employment “in the short term”, he said, insisting this was not the government’s long-term strategy. “When the microeconomic condition becomes normal, subject to the macroeconomic condition becoming normal, we believe there would be a change in this trend. People would opt for foreign employment not owing to a crisis, but as a matter of choice,” he added, suggesting that the ongoing recovery programme prioritised macroeconomic fundamentals over people’s daily hardships.

Rights defenders and labour activists also point to the apparent contradiction in the government continuing to send workers to Israel while pledging support for the Palestinian cause. Some 30,000 Sri Lankan workers are in Israel, employed in construction, as caregivers, and in agriculture.

Queried about the go-

vernment’s position, Mr. Hemachandra said Sri Lanka has historically stood for the Palestinian cause.

“Our party [Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna – JVP or People’s Liberation Front] has also always been in solidarity with Palestine,” he said.

‘No contradiction’

Pointing to Sri Lanka’s past diplomatic relations with Israel and the opportunities for workers, where the “pay is high and working conditions are good”, he said: “This government at no point thought of stopping those things... because already many people were on the waiting list and hoping to go. After we came to power, we addressed concerns of irregularities and fraudulent practices and streamlined the process. On the other hand, we separated our Free Palestine stand and our diplomatic relationship with Israel as two different things. I think any country should have that choice. And when take the opportunity to send workers to Israel, that does not change our stand on Palestine,” he said, adding: “There is no contradiction in that.”

Meanwhile, authorities are also exploring “non-Middle Eastern” markets such as Romania and South Korea and focusing on skilled migration. “When we develop more skilled migration programmes, I am sure that people who go for those jobs will get back in a very reasonable period. Then they could contribute to the Sri Lankan economy directly while being in the country,” he said.

Stung by Iran war & in need of wins, Trump heads to China

Reuters

Beijing, May 12

A YEAR ago, US President Donald Trump predicted that towering trade tariffs would bring America's main economic rival to heel. He heads to China this week with ambition blunted by court rulings, narrowing his goals to a few deals on beans, beef and Boeing jets, and enlisting China's help to resolve his Iran war, political analysts say.

The modest expectations for Trump's May 14-15 meetings with Xi Jinping - the first since they paused a bruising trade war

in October - underscore how Trump's bombastic approach has failed to deliver an advantage ahead of talks, analysts said.

Trump "kind of needs China more than China needs him," said Alejandro Reyes, a professor specialising in Chinese foreign policy at the University of Hong Kong. "He needs a kind of foreign policy victory: a victory that shows that he is looking to ensure stability in the world and that he's not just disrupting global politics," Reyes added.

Since their last brief meeting at an airbase in South Korea where Trump suspended triple-

digit tariffs on Chinese goods and Xi backed away from choking global supplies of rare earths, China has quietly sharpened its economic pressure toolkit aimed at Washington.

Trump, meanwhile, has been preoccupied fighting US court rulings against his tariffs and a war with Iran that has sapped his approval ratings ahead of November's midterm elections.

This week's meeting in the Chinese capital will be a grander occasion, with the leaders set to hold a summit at the Great Hall

of the People, tour UNESCO-heritage site Temple of Heaven, dine at a state banquet and take tea and lunch together.

But the anticipated economic deliverables amount to a handful of deals and mechanisms to manage future trade, while it remains unclear

whether the leaders will even agree to extend their trade truce, officials involved said.

Trump will be joined by CEOs including Tesla's Elon Musk and Apple's Tim Cook, though the business delegation is smaller than when he last

visited Beijing in 2017.

Aside from trade, Trump said on Monday he will discuss arms sales to Taiwan and the case of jailed media tycoon Jimmy Lai with Xi. Families of two Americans imprisoned in China for more than a decade are also urging Trump to seek their release.

"We used to be taken advantage of for years with our previous presidents, and now we're doing great with China," Trump said. "I respect him (Xi) a lot, and hopefully he respects me."

The mood music has changed dramatically since

Trump declared in a Truth Social post in April 2025 that his tariffs would make China realise that the "days of ripping off" the United States were over.

Those levies prompted Beijing to restrict exports of rare earths, brutally exposing the West's dependency on elements vital to the manufacturing of everything from electric cars to weapons, and eventually led to Trump and Xi's fragile truce.

Since then, Trump has faced countless other battles: capturing Venezuela's leader, threatening to annex Greenland and waging a war on Iran.



Pricey food, dining out push retail inflation to a 13-month high of 3.5%

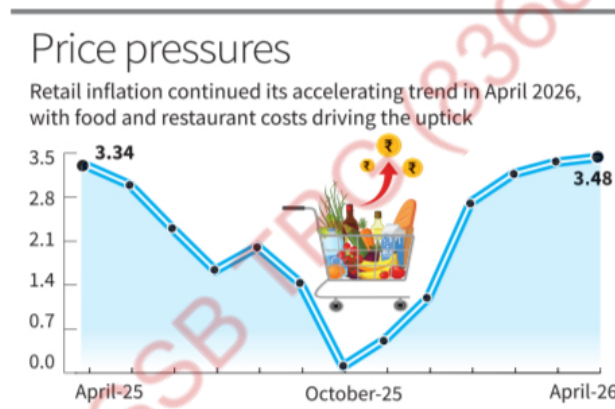
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

Retail inflation quickened to a 13-month high of 3.5% in April 2026, although still coming in lower than what was expected by most economists. The price rise was largely driven by higher food inflation as well as higher prices at restaurants as they passed on higher fuel prices to consumers.

Data on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for April showed that inflation quickened from the 3.4% registered in March, the first month following the start of the war in West Asia.

“The April inflation reading came in softer than expectations.” Unas-



na Bhardwaj, chief economist at Kotak Mahindra Bank, said, a sentiment echoed by Madan Sabnavis, chief economist at the Bank of Baroda as well as Rajni Thakur, chief economist at L&T Finance.

“However, the outlook remains clouded with upside risks amid sunnly side

disruptions from geopolitics and El Nino,” Ms. Bhardwaj said.

Inflation in the food and beverages category climbed to 4% in April from 3.7% in March.

Simultaneously, inflation in the restaurant and accommodation services sector quickened sharply

to 4.2% in April from 2.9% in the previous month.

Ease in transport

Notably, inflation in the transport sector stood at -0.01% in April as compared to 0% in the previous month.

This, according to Ms. Thakur, was more because of the passenger transport services sector rather than the price at which goods were transported.

“While food prices have gone up by around 30 basis points, overall transportation prices have actually eased,” Ms. Thakur said. “This is largely on account of easing prices for the services sector, while prices of transport of goods have increased by 7.6% in the month.”

Indices slide almost 2%, rupee touches new low on West Asia

Ashokamithran T.

MUMBAI

India's equity investors dumped stocks for the fourth consecutive day, pulling Nifty 50 and Sensex down by over 1.8% closing at 23,379.55 and 74,559.24 respectively on Tuesday. The rupee, meanwhile, closed at a new low of ₹95.6 a dollar.

PM Narendra Modi had appealed to the citizens to cut down on foreign travel, reduce use of petroleum products by working from home and pausing gold purchases by an year. Brent Crude futures meanwhile increased 3.7% to \$107.4 on Tuesday.

The market rout was broad-based with 2,750 stocks declining on the Nif-



Market mayhem: FIIs have sold more than ₹2 lakh crore worth Indian equities as of Tuesday. REUTERS

ty 50 and just 590 advancing. Further, all 21 sector-based indices declined with many of them crashing by more than 2%.

Foreign Institutional Investor interest in Indian equities, measured by net outflows, has been hitting new lows, crossing over ₹2 lakh crore as of Tuesday.

“Unless there is any meaningful progress in talks or signs of de-escalation in West Asia conflict, volatility and weakness in domestic equities are likely to persist,” according to Siddhartha Khemka, head of research, wealth management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.