

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Tough times ahead; youth, small traders to be worst hit: Rahul in Raebareli

RAEBARELI (UP), MAY 19: Congress Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday claimed that an "economic shock" is coming and it will not hit "Adani, Ambani, or Modi," but the youth, labourers, and small traders.

"Very, very tough times are coming," the leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha told reporters here.

Gandhi said a major economic "storm" not seen for many years is on the way.

He also accused the prime minister of not following his own call for austerity.

"Instead of taking action, Narendra Modi is telling the country not to go on foreign trips, and Narendra Modi is making rounds across the world. This is the state," he said. Gandhi also alleged that "Ambani-Adani structure" will not last long.

"The structure, which he



(Modi) has made — the one of Adani and Ambani, it will not remain intact, and will crumble. And, sadly, the loss will be felt by the common people. In other words, they will remain in their palaces, and the entire shock will be

experienced by the youth and people of UP," he said.

On Tuesday, Gandhi, the Lok Sabha MP from Raebareli, landed at the Lucknow airport and left for his constituency straight from there.

He was received by UP Congress chief Ajay Rai and Congress Legislative Party leader Aradhana Mishra at the airport. Gandhi is on a two-day visit to the party bastions of Raebareli and Amethi. (PTI)

New Zealand's government plans to cut 14 pc of public sector jobs to slash spending

WELLINGTON, MAY 19: New Zealand's Government will lay off nearly 9,000 workers, amounting to 14 per cent of public sector jobs, by mid-2029 as part of a bid to slash billions in spending, Finance Minister Nicola Willis said on Tuesday.

Willis said her administration would also enact three consecutive years of budget cuts for most public agencies, "significantly reduce" the number of departments, and demand faster uptake of AI technology across the sector. The cutbacks would save 2.4 billion New Zealand dollars (USD 1.4 billion) during that period, the minister told a business audience in New Zealand's biggest city, Auckland.

Many public servants live and work in the capital city, Wellington. Their numbers would be cut to 55,000, a drop of 8,700 from December 2025 figures, Willis said.

That would reduce the number of public servants to 1 per cent of New Zealand's population of 5.3 million people, she added, down from 1.2 per cent.

"That's unsustainable, it's unaffordable, and it's out of



step with international trends," she said Tuesday. The military, teachers and doctors would be among those exempt from the job losses, Willis said.

The measures would also reduce the number of government departments and agencies from the current 39 to an unspecified figure.

The layoffs won't happen right away, however, and Willis didn't detail a plan for deciding who would lose their jobs. Her centre-right government, which has been in power since 2023 and campaigned then on downsizing the public sector, faces a fresh election in November.

Unions and opposition political parties decried Tues-

day's announcement.

"There is no way you can reduce that many people working for our public service without reducing front-line services," said Labour Party and opposition leader Chris Hipkins. Duane Leo, spokesperson for the union representing thousands of public servants, said the measures were "an act of willful destruction."

The Government, led by the National Party, blames what it says was fiscal recklessness by the previous centre-left administration led by Labour for growing public servant numbers, which increased from 48,000 to 63,000 during Labour's time in office. In 2018, Labour

had revoked a cap on public sector jobs imposed by the last National government, saying that it had prompted ballooning spending on contractors and consultants by agencies avoiding new full-time hires.

Most Government agencies will have their funding trimmed by 2 per cent in the government's budget at the end of May, Willis said. Cuts of 5 per cent per year would follow for each of the next two years if the government were reelected. The public sector "hasn't been keeping pace" with advances in AI and digital technology and would be required to adopt them, Willis said.

The pledge of public sector cutbacks comes as growth in New Zealand's economy remains sluggish and Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, who sold himself as a better fiscal manager than his opponents, seeks to show evidence of economic recovery before November's vote. Luxon said Tuesday that the prospect of a more efficient public sector was "exciting."

"The public service is not a make-work function," he said. (AP)

SC Refuses To Recall Order On Stray Dogs Sterilisation, Cites Right To Live With Dignity

NEW DELHI, MAY 19: The right to live with dignity encompasses the right to move freely without the threat of harm from dog bite attacks, the Supreme Court said on Tuesday while dismissing pleas seeking a recall of its earlier order on the relocation and sterilisation of stray canines.

"The court cannot remain oblivious to harsh ground realities where children, international travellers and old age people have fallen victim to dog bite incidents," a bench of Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta and N V Anjaria said in response to the petitions by animal rights activists and others.

The court also issued a slew of directions to states, union territories and other statutory bodies to augment infrastructure to deal with stray dogs.

On November 7 last year, the court took note of the "alarming rise" in dog-bite incidents in areas such as educational institutions, hospitals and railway stations and directed that stray dogs be relocated to designated shelters after sterilisation and vaccination. Stray dogs picked up shall not be released back to their original place, the court said.

On Tuesday, the apex court rejected petitions challenging the validity of SOPs on dealing with stray animals issued by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI). It observed that there has been a "discernible absence" of sustained efforts on the part of



states and UTs to build infrastructure to deal with the rising population of stray dogs.

Implementation of the Animal Birth Control (ABC) framework, it said, remains largely sporadic, underfunded and uneven across jurisdictions. The framework includes sterilisation, vaccination, sheltering, and overall scientific management of state arms. Prolonged inaction coupled with the absence of institutional commitment to the effective implementation of the ABC framework has led to aggravation of the problem, which has now assumed dimensions "warranting urgent and systemic intervention", the apex court said.

"The right to live with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution of India necessarily encompasses the right of every citizen to move freely and access public spaces without living under a constant apprehension of physical harm, attack, or exposure to life-threatening events, such as dog bites in public ar-

reas," the court ruled. "The state cannot remain a passive spectator where preventable threats to human life continue to proliferate in the face of statutory mechanisms specifically designed to address them," it added. States and union territories, it stressed, are under continued constitutional obligation to ensure the protection of the fundamental right to life and safety of citizens under Article 21a.

"This obligation is not very passive in nature, but casts an affirmative duty upon the states and union territories to take all necessary and effective measures to prevent conditions that pose a threat to public safety, health, and well-being," the bench directed.

The failure to adopt a proactive, structured, and sustained approach to the problem has resulted in a "largely reactive and crisis-driven response necessitated by the escalation of the problem rather than its prevention", the court said.

Such an approach is neither efficient nor capable of yielding durable resolutions, particularly in a matter involving public health, human safety and ecological balance.

The bench said in its three-part order that after reserving judgment on January 29 in the present matter, it has been informed of multiple reports indicating that the incidence of dog bites and stray dog attacks continue to occur across the country with alarming frequency and severity.

It also referred to media reports on dog bite incidents in Rajasthan and other places and said they highlighted deeply disturbing incidents in which young children suffered previous injuries, including mauling of the faces and limbs by the street dogs.

"Such incidents not only endanger the safety and dignity of the citizens and visitors, but also adversely affect public confidence in civic administration and in urban governance. The whole set of figures reveal staggering dimensions of the problem; the harm caused by such incidents is not mainly statistical in nature but has great human societal and public health consequences," the bench said.

Continued non-compliance and non-implementation of the directions issued by the apex court and thereafter by the jurisdictional high court, "shall be viewed seriously".

Japanese PM travels to meet South Korea president for second leg of hometown summits

SEOUL, MAY 19: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi were set to hold their fourth meeting in about six months on Tuesday, underscoring their push to deepen ties between the historical Asian rivals in the face of geopolitical challenges.

Lee will host Takaichi in his hometown of Andong, a southeastern South Korean city famous for a centuries-old traditional folk village that is a UNESCO World Heritage site. In January, the two met in Takaichi's hometown of Nara, an ancient Japanese capital.

The meetings mark the first time sitting leaders of the two countries have visited each other's hometowns.

South Korea's presidential office expressed hope that Tuesday's summit would strengthen mutual trust between Lee and Takaichi. Takaichi told reporters Tuesday morning she hopes the talks will deepen cooperation "under the severe geopolitical conditions such as situations in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific."

The summit's official agenda includes economic and energy cooperation, the Iran war and development of their bilateral ties, which have no current sticking points. Experts say the meeting likely will proceed smoothly and the relation-



ship will remain on a positive trajectory for now.

"The two countries put more emphasis on the agenda for cooperation than on contentious issues," said Choi Eunmi, a Japan expert at the Seoul-based Asan Institute for Policy Studies. "They would now think scenes of constantly fluctuating relationships or eventually negative bilateral ties won't be helpful to anyone now."

South Korea and Japan are both key US allies with vibrant democracies. But their relationship has long experienced severe ups and downs over grievances stemming from Japan's 35-year colonisation of the Korean Peninsula before the end of World War II.

Relations began improving in 2023 when Lee and Takaichi's predecessors took steps to move beyond history disputes and strengthen cooperation, saying they faced

common challenges like the US-China strategic competition, supply chain vulnerabilities and North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal.

When Lee and Takaichi each took office as new leaders last year, observers worried about Takaichi's reputation as a right-wing security hawk and the anticipation that Lee, a political liberal, would tilt toward North Korea and China and away from the US and Japan. But they have maintained cooperation, even in some unprecedented ways.

In August, two months before Takaichi's inauguration, Lee became the first South Korean leader to choose Japan as his first destination for a bilateral summit. At the end of their meeting in January, Lee and Takaichi

drummed to K-pop hits such as BTS's "Dynamite" in a jam session arranged by the Japanese leader, a heavy metal fan who was a drum-

mer in her college days.

Lee has said he and Takaichi share a view that national leaders must act differently from ordinary politicians. But many observers say the two leaders also likely feel the need to tighten cooperation because they have more grave geopolitical difficulties than their predecessors, such as US President Donald Trump's America-first policy and global economic damage caused by the Iran war.

South Korea and Japan both have pledged hundreds of billions of dollars in US business investments. Trump's tariff war and his transactional approach to security threaten the trust in the US held by many South Koreans and Japanese.

Ties between Seoul and Tokyo are so delicate that they could suffer unexpected setbacks if they fail to formulate coping measures for explosive issues such as Japan's colonial-era mobilisation of Koreans as forced labourers and sex slaves, according to experts, who say wrangling over those issues has eased as the two governments try to avoid public discussions.

"Both countries aren't talking about how to resolve and prevent recurrences of conflicts over those issues, and we don't know when they could occur again," Choi said. (AP)

14 months after marriage, woman dies in Greater Noida; Family alleges dowry murder

NEW DELHI, MAY 19: A 24-year-old woman, Deepika Nagar, allegedly died after being harassed for more dowry at her matrimonial home in Jalpura, Greater Noida, just 14 months after her marriage.

Deepika, who was considered among the most beautiful and educated girls in her village, was a postgraduate and had completed her BA and B.Ed. Her father had raised her with great care and affection, but her life at her in-laws' house lasted only 14 months.

Deepika was married around one-and-a-half years ago to Hritik, son of Manoj, a resident of Jalpura village in Greater Noida.

Her father, Sanjay Nagar, a resident of Kudi Kheda village, alleged that nearly Rs 1 crore was spent on the wedding, including gifting a Scorpio vehicle and around Rs 50 lakh worth of gold.

According to the victim's family, soon after the marriage, Deepika's husband



and in-laws allegedly started torturing her for more dowry. They allegedly demanded Rs 50 lakh in cash and a Fortuner car.

The family claimed that she was continuously harassed because the demands were not fulfilled and alleged that she was ultimately killed over dowry greed.

Deepika's death under suspicious circumstances in Jalpura has shocked everyone.

While the victim's family has accused the in-laws of murdering her for dowry, police said that their preliminary investigation suggests that Deepika, allegedly distressed over dowry harassment, jumped from the roof

on the night of May 17, resulting in her death on the spot.

Based on the complaint filed by the deceased woman's father, a case has been registered.

Police have arrested Deepika's husband Hritik and father-in-law Manoj in connection with the case. (UNI)

Rescuers search for 3 missing after German building collapse possibly caused by gas explosion

GORLITZ (GERMANY), MAY 19: Rescue teams in eastern Germany searched on Tuesday morning for three people who were missing after a building collapsed in the eastern city of Gorlitz near the Polish border.

Police said a gas explosion may have been the cause of the collapse of the building, which took place Monday night.

Emergency responders proceeded with great caution at the scene in case of gas leaks, German news agency DPA reported.

After unsuccessful attempts to locate the missing under the rubble with the help of search dogs, rescuers began clearing debris with an excavator and by hand around 2 am Tuesday.

Initial concerns that up to five people may have been buried under rubble turned out to be wrong, police said.

A man who feared his wife and cousin might be trapped under the rubble said Monday that they had ar-



rived that day for a vacation in the rented house. While shopping at a nearby supermarket, he heard an explosion and returned to the house to find nothing but a large pile of rubble, DPA reported.

The collapsed building in the historic

Wilhelminian style contained rental and vacation apartments, police said. Gorlitz is Germany's easternmost city with a population of 57,000. The historic, undamaged old town district is a popular location for international film productions. (AP)