

Daily Briefing: A death in Abujhmad

In today's edition: Who was CPI (Maoist) chief Basavaraju; an interview with Sebi chief Tuhin Kanta Pandey; the shift from EVs to hybrids; and more

Good morning,

The clock's ticking on the 90-day pause before the Donald Trump administration's reciprocal tariffs kick in. India is staring at a steep 26 per cent duty, while a 10 per cent baseline tariff remains in place for all countries. The good news is that India is set to avert the former. India and the US will likely sign an interim trade deal announcing the concession by July 8. Moreover, according to reports, trade negotiations are expected to materialise in three tranches. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff will likely remain in place.

On that note, let's get to today's edition.

In a significant breakthrough for India's internal security forces, 27 Maoists were killed in a recent encounter in the Abujhmad area of Chhattisgarh's Narayanpur. Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavaraju, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), was among the casualties. The death of the 70-year-old insurgent leader is considered a significant setback for the outlawed group, as he served as a critical link between its northern and southern commands.

The history: Security forces recently ramped up their fight against Left Wing Extremism (LWE). The movement traces its origins to the 1967 peasant uprising in Naxalbari, West Bengal. What began as a grassroots rebellion in the Siliguri district evolved into one of India's most persistent internal security challenges. At its peak in the mid-2000s, the Maoist insurgency spanned large swathes of eastern, western, and central India.

The man: Basavaraju's path to extremism began far from the jungles, on the college campus. Once the students' union president at the Regional Engineering College in Warangal, he had a promising start, even representing the country as a national-level volleyball player. But he would soon join CPI (ML) People's War, and in 1985, he went underground. When the CPI (ML) merged with the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in 2004, he emerged as the CPI(M)'s second-in-command. In 2018, he succeeded the elusive leader Ganapathy as the outfit's top commander. Basavaraju is believed to have engineered some of the most audacious and brutal attacks in the history of the Maoist movement. My colleague, Deeptiman Tiwary, chronicles this transformation of Basavaraju. [Read](#).

Three months ago, Tuhin Kanta Pandey took over as the chief of the markets regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). His most important task would perhaps be to dispel the 'conflict of interest' narrative surrounding the post after the controversial three-year term of his predecessor, Madhabi Puri Buch, who was facing allegations of links to the Adani Group. Buch has denied the charges. But Pandey admits to *The Indian Express* that there was "virtually no public disclosure" for those at the helm when he took over. [Read his interview](#).

Cut! Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of the Film and Television Institute, Arunachal Pradesh (FTI AP), eight years ago. The school is only the third such in the country, after the prestigious Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI), Kolkata, and the Pune-based Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). However, as the first batch of students entered FTI AP this March, they discovered the institute was far from ready to welcome them.

The zealot: There is much more to Pakistani Army Chief Asim Munir's elevation to Field Marshal than martial grandeur. Columnist Amitabh Mattoo argues that it hides the "chronic political, institutional, and ideological breakdown" of the country.

Switching gears: One of the oldest automakers in the world and Japan's second-largest, Honda Motor Co., is pivoting from electric vehicles (EVs) towards hybrids. The company insists that its ambitious electrification goal (30% of vehicle sales) remains in place but "pushed back in time". Honda's move is part of a larger, global trend amid high costs and waning sales for EVs.

There's barely any shock value to Trump's showdown with other Presidents after his public spat with embattled Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier this year. On Wednesday, Trump's meeting with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa went off track as the former brought out purported images and videos of white farmers being "executed". While Ramaphosa admitted that his country had a crime problem, he argued that it wasn't specific to one race.

Before you go, tune in to today's episode of the '3 Things' podcast, where we discuss the two fatal tiger attacks in Ranthambhore, the cool and wet summer of 2025, and Banu Mushtaq's literary win.

That's all for today, folks! Until tomorrow, Sonal Gupta

Sonal Gupta is a senior sub-editor on the news desk. She runs The Indian Express's weekly climate newsletter, Icebreaker. Apart from this, her interests range from politics and world affairs to art and culture and AI. She also curates the Morning Espresso, a daily briefing of top stories of the day, which won gold in the 'best newsletter' category at the WAN-IFRA South Asian Digital Media Awards 2023. ... [Read More](#)