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RACKWARD CLASSES 2011 caste census data not helpful: Kerala in SC STATES » PAGE 3

ECONOMIC AGENDA **Growth mania** can be injurious to society

Growing inequality is a matter of concern

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Jadeja, Rahul ruled out of second Test

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Dictatorship is inevitable if Modi re-elected'

BHUBANESWAR

The upcoming Lok Sabha election will be the last election in India if Prime Minister Narendra Modi is re-elected, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said here on Monday. » PAGE 4

Elections to 56 Rajya Sabha seats on February 27

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission on Monday said that elections to 56 Rajya Sabha seats would be held on February 27. Among the seats that will go to the polls are those held by BJP president J.P. Nadda and nine Union Ministers. » PAGE 4

Opposition mulls impeachment against Muizzu

The Maldivian Democratic Party, the main Opposition party in the Maldives holding a parliamentary majority, is preparing to submit an impeachment motion ag President Mohamed Muizzu in Parliament, stepping up its challenge to the Executive in the legislature. » PAGE 12

Iran, Pakistan to work jointly to improve security

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed to work together to improve security cooperation in the wake of deadly air strikes by Tehran and Islamabad earlier this month that killed at least 11 people, marking an escalation in their fraught relations. » PAGE 12

Soren 'untraced' as ED team visits house

Agency officials camp at Iharkhand CM's Delhi residence for more than 12 hours

it is 'motivated by a political agenda'

Soren sends a letter to the agency saying

Long watch: Tight security outside Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren's Ranchi residence on Monday. PTI

The ED had questioned Mr. Soren at his official residence in Ranchi on January 20 in connection with the case and had issued

fresh summons asking him to confirm his availability for questioning on either January 29 or 31, sources

Officials of the Central probe agency, accompanied by Delhi Police personnel, reached Mr. Soren's residence at Shanti

Officials monitoring Delhi airport, say they will camp at the house till he returns

Niketan in South Delhi around 9 a.m. and were still there after 9 p.m.

They moved out briefly from the premises at 8 p.m. and checked a BMW car parked there before going back inside without replying to queries from the

Meanwhile, in an email to the federal agency on Monday, Mr. Soren alleged that the issuance of summons to him was "wholly vexatious and in colourable exercise of powers given by the statute."

'Reeks of malice'

"Preserve video recording of seven-hour questioning [of January 20] to make available to the Court of Law," Mr. Soren said, while agreeing to record his statement at his residence at 1 p.m. on January 31.

Citing the upcoming Assembly session scheduled between February 9 and 29, Mr. Soren said that, under the circumstances, the ED's insistence to record a further statement on or before January 31 "reeks of malice".

While the Chief Minister's Office refused to discuss the development, Jharkhand Governor Radhakrishnan said he was keeping a watch on the situation in the State.

The case pertains to alleged purchase and sale of tribal land by forging documents between 2020 and

(With inputs from PTI) **» PAGE 14**

Centre pegs GDP growth at 7% in 2024-25

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Interim Budget, a Finance Ministry report on Monday pegged India's real GDP growth at closer to 7% in 2024-25 with "considerable scope" to outpace 7% by 2030, adding that the economy will hit \$5 trillion in the next three years. Prefacing a review of the economy's "journey in the last 10 years", Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran said "not all growth is equal" and marginal utility of 7% growth when the world is struggling to grow 2% is "higher" than 8-9% growth achieved with the global economy rising 4%.

FULL REPORT

War dance

the Delhi airport.

The Hindu Bureau

team of Enforce-

ment Directorate

(ED) officials visit-

ed the Delhi residence of

Jharkhand Chief Minister

Hemant Soren on Monday

for questioning him in con-

nection with a land fraud

case. While the ED team,

which camped at the

house for more than 12

hours, said the CM could

not be located, Mr. Soren

later sent a letter to the

agency saying it is "motiv-

ated by political agenda".

the residence till Mr. Soren

returns, the sources said,

adding that authorities are

also keeping vigilance at

The ED teams will be at

NEW DELHI/PATNA



Yemen's Houthi rebels attend a rally in solidarity with the Palestinian Hamas movement's armed resistance against Israel in the capital

Sanaa on Monday, amid continuing battles between Israeli forces and Hamas in Gaza. AFP

In top court, DGP flays bid to paint T.N. govt. as 'anti-Hindu'

<u>Krishnadas Rajagopal</u> NEW DELHI

In response to a petition alleging that an "oral" order was issued by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to ban the live telecast and conduct of religious events in connection with the consecration of the Ram idol at the Ayodhya temple on January 22, State Director-General of Police Shankar Jiwal on Monday told the Supreme Court that a deliberate attempt was made to portray the State government as

Hindu". The petition was filed by a Chennai resident, Vinoj Pannerselvam, who was represented by senior advocate Dama Seshadiri Naidu and advocate G. Balaji in the court.

In a brief hearing, a Bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna gave the State of Tamil Nadu 15 days



Shankar Jiwal

to separately file a counteraffidavit.

When Mr. Naidu requested permission to file a rejoinder to the State's counter-affidavit, Justice Khanna said the "event [consecration] is already over... do not push it furth-

No interference

Tamil Nadu Additional Advocate-General Amit Anand Tiwari submitted that the case was pending in the Madras High Court

gious events were held across the State without any interference from the police or authorities Mr. Jiwal events, both indoor and outdoor, were held in Tamil Nadu. He said the petitioner was under the influence of an "illusion and

false interpretation of reali-

and the petitioner should \neg

approach it. In his separate

counter-affidavit, Mr. Jiwal told the Supreme Court

that live telecasts of the

temple ceremony, and reli-

"The allegations that the CM had orally instructed not to allow any ceremony or function including the annadhanam, organising bhajans about Prabhu Ram, on the auspicious occasion of January 22, the day of pran pratishtha of Ram Janmabhoomi, are totally baseless and false," the DGP said in his res-

ponse.

Judge vs judge: SC takes over case from feuding Calcutta HC justices

Krishnadas Rajagopal NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday transferred from the Calcutta High Court to itself a case of medical admissions with the help of fake caste certificates in West Bengal, after conflicting orders led to one Calcutta High Court judge

slinging mud on another. A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court, headed by the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and four senior-most judges, had to take suo motu cognisance of the happenings, and convened on Saturday to stay proceedings in the High Court.

The proceedings took an ugly turn when one of the judges, Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, sitting as a A five-judge Bench on Monday directed that the transferred case be listed before it after three weeks

Single Judge Bench, made personal allegations of political bias against Justice Soumen Sen, who presided over the Division Bench which stayed his order to transfer the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The five-judge Bench led by Chief Justice Chandrachud on Monday directed the transferred case to be listed before it after three weeks.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for the West Bengal government, drew attention to fact that Justice Gangopadhyay had made personal comments in his judicial order against Justice Sen. Justice Gangopadhyay

had accused Justice Sen of using his office to "act" in favour of the ruling dispensation in West Bengal. "The learned judge con-

tinues to take matters of this kind. He will continue to do such things in future also... You have to intervene," Mr. Sibal submitted.

The Chief Justice cut short Mr. Sibal, saying, "You have made your point." He said the Bench did not want to comment on the orders of either the Single Judge or the Division Bench of the High Court.

The Chief Justice said restraint was necessary as the dignity of the institution of the High Court had to be protected. "Anything we say here should not impinge upon the dignity of the institution," Chief Justice observed.

Mr. Sibal said Justice Gangopadhyay was even "attending rallies". Senior advocate A.M.

Singhvi interjected to obliquely draw attention to the fact that the top court had to similarly intervene in April 2023 in orders passed by Justice Gangopadhyay in connection with the West Bengal school job-for-bribe scam The Supreme Court de-

clined a plea to intervene in the allocation of cases to Justice Gangopadhyay, saying that was entirely the domain of the Chief Justice of the High Court of Calcut-

INS Sumitra foils hijack attempt on Iranian-flagged vessel in Gulf of Aden

<u>Dinakar Peri</u> NEW DELHI

A swift response by an Indian Navy ship, INS Sumitra, deployed in the Gulf of Aden ensured that a hijack situation was quickly resolved, ensuring safe release of an Iranian-flagged fishing vessel and its crew.

"INS Sumitra, on anti-piracy operations along the East coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, responded to a distress message regarding hijacking of an Iranian flagged Fishing Vessel (FV) *Iman*. The FV had been boarded by pirates and the crew taken as hostages," the Navy said in a statement on Monday.

"INS Sumitra intercepted the vessel, acted in accordance with the established Standard



following INS Sumitra's intervention in the Gulf of Aden. PTI

Operating Procedures to coerce the pirates for safe release of crew along with the boat and ensured successful release of all 17 crew members along with the boat."

The fishing vessel was subsequently sanitised and released for onward transit, the Navy said.

Piracy, which has van-

around 2010, has come back now in the region against the backdrop of the Houthi attacks on commercial shipping. In December, Malta-

ished since the peak

flagged tanker m.v. Ruen, with 18 crew members aboard, was hijacked by Somali pirates approximately 700 miles from the marine commandos secured and safely evacuated all 21 crew members, including 15 Indians, from

the merchant vessel Lila

Norfolk after it came under a hijacking attempt.

Indian coast and the vessel

is currently off the Somali

In the second instance

in the north Arabian Sea in

early January, Indian Navy

Enhanced surveillance In response to these incidents, the Navy has substantially enhanced maritime surveillance efforts in central and north Arabian Sea and augmented force levels. It currently has some 12 warships deployed on anti-piracy and maritime security operations in

the Arabian Sea and Gulf of

Aden.

States



ASHA workers stage protest in support of their demands

Around 2,500 ASHA workers from Mumbai and neighbouring districts of Maharashtra gathered at Mumbai's Azad Maidan on Monday to stage a day-long protest in support of their various demands. The protest was supported by Kamgar Karmachari Sanghatana Sanyukt Kruti Samiti and Gatpravartak Karmachari Kruti Samiti. ASHA workers have been on an indefinite strike from January 12 for salary hike, promised unpaid bonus and timely remuneration. "The strike has affected lakhs of beneficiaries who depend on their services," said D.L. Karad, chief coordinator of Karmachari Sangathan Sanyukt Kriti Samiti.

State-funded MSP scheme for forest produce in Odisha

The Odisha government on Monday announced to launch LABHA (Laghu Bana Jatya Drabya Kraya) Yojna – a 100% State-funded minimum support price scheme for minor forest produces. The decision, which the Cabinet chaired by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik termed historic, is likely to benefit about 1 crore tribals, which is 23% of State's total population. The new scheme may also help the ruling Biju Janata Dal make further inroads into tribal pockets. Under the scheme a primary collector (tribal) will be able to sell minor forest produce at MSP collected at the procurement centres by Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation Limited of Odisha.

Bhujbal's stand on grant of Maratha quota casts a shadow on State govt.

The NCP (Ajit Pawar) leader and a Minister has reiterated that he will continue his fight for the OBCs; Manoj Jarange-Patil says he will challenge the Mandal Commission reservation process

Shoumojit Banerjee

he slanging match between Nationalist Congress Party (Ajit Pawar) faction leader Chhagan Bhujbal and Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil is threatening to cause a rift within the Maharashtra Cabinet with the former warning that he would keep continue his fight on behalf of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Mr. Bhujbal, who is also a Minister in Cabinet, has claimed that he had the support of crores of members of the community not just in Maharashtra but across the country.

In response, Deputy Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Devendra Fadnavis said on Monday that as long as it remained in power in the State no injustice would be done to the OBCs.

"It is the view of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and myself that the rights of the OBC community must be safeguarded. As



Devendra Fadnavis

long as the BJP is part of the State government, we will not permit any injustice to the OBCs. In case a situation does arise that we cannot safeguard their rights, I will myself go and talk to my superiors," Mr. Fadnavis said.

Draft notification

The Maharashtra government had issued a draft notification on January 27 recognising that blood relatives of those Maratha community members, for whom Kunbi OBC caste records had been found, would be given Kunbi OBC certificates as well.

Fadnavis says government had taken a balanced view and was ensuring that "no injustice" was being done to the OBCs

Speaking in Beed on Monday Mr. Jarange-Patil said he would challenge the Mandal Commission reservation process itself if Mr. Bhujbal went too far.

Mr. Bhujbal reiterated that the activist was trying to secure a quota for the Marathas through the back

Mr. Bhujbal also threw down the gauntlet before his own party and the Eknath Shinde-led 'Mahayuti' government, and demanded whether they would support him on the issue.

Responding to this, Mr. Fadnavis said, "I will personally speak to Mr. Bhujbal and listen to all his grievances. In case any injustice is being done to the OBC community, we will certainly take note of

it. Prima facie, we are clear that the decision [on the Maratha quota] we have taken is not ad hoc. It is merely to facilitate ease of reservation for those Marathas whose proofs have been submitted."

Mr. Fadnavis further stressed that the government had taken "a balanced view" on the matter and was ensuring that "no injustice" was being done to the OBCs while expediting the process for granting reservation to the Marathas as well.

Speaking in Kolhapur on Monday, Ajit Pawar said he, along with Mr. Fadnavis and Mr. Shinde would sit together and speak with Mr. Bhujbal on the issue.

Responding to Mr. Bhujbal's statement that the NCP and the government has to decide whether it was with him, Mr. Pawar said "it was an internal matter". Meanwhile, Mr. Bhujbal said that the blanket acceptance of Mr. Jarange-Patil's demands potentially signalled the end of OBC reservation.

Will form LS poll alliance at right time: AIADMK

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

Senior AIADMK leader D. Jayakumar on Monday said that there was still a lot of time for the Lok Sabha election, and that the party would make announcements on its alliance and the number of seats it would contest at an appropriate time. He reiterated that the AIADMK would not ally with the BJP.

The AIADMK's seatsharing and election campaign committees for the Parliamentary election held their first meeting at the party headquarters in Chennai on Monday.

Addressing the media, Mr. Jayakumar claimed that many parties were in talks with the AIADMK for an alliance. Taking a dig at the ruling party, he said that there were a lot of contradictions in the DMK's alliance, and that it would be shattered just like the IN-DIA bloc.

Highlight BJP's failure

Mr. Jayakumar said that the AIADMK would highlight the failures of the BJP government at the Centre as well as the DMK government in the State. The DMK, despite having pre-



D. Jayakumar

viously been a part of the ruling dispensation at the Centre, did not take measures to bring Education under the State List and abolish the post of Governor, he said.

He said that BJP State president K. Annamalai was giving more importance to himself than to his party. Mr. Annamalai was making statements about events that never happened in order to divert people's attention, but this ploy would not work, he added.

Mr. Jayakumar said that expelled AIADMK coordinator O. Panneerselvam was "acting like a slave" of the BJP.

In view of the Lok Sabha election, AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami recently announced the constitution of four committees.

'AAP poaching blame a lie, party tried the same trick in Punjab'

Vikas Vasudeva CHANDIGARH

While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Keiriwal recently alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was trying to poach his party's MLAs in Delhi. Opposition parties in Punjab cornered AAP, accusing it of making a similar attempt in Punjab almost a year ago.

Terming AAP's allegation that the BJP attempted to buy the allegiance of seven of its MLAs in Delhi for ₹25 crore each as a blatant lie, the BJP's chief spokesperson, Colonel Jaibans Singh (retired), said there was no such thing as "Operation Lotus".

"The propagandist media machinery of AAP always attempts to divert attention by playing the victim card when its leaders come under the scanner on grounds of corruption. This time, the leader involved is none other than their supremo, Arvind Kejriwal, and hence, the des-



peration is much more. It is for this reason that AAP has played the deceitful "Operation Lotus" card in Delhi," Col. Singh said.

'Deceitful narrative'

"A similar deceitful narrative was attempted in Punjab earlier but it did not succeed since AAP could not provide any evidence to support its false claims. Now, the party has attempted to do the same in Delhi, but people have already seen through its lies," he said. Senior Congress leader Pargat Singh also hit out at AAP, questioning the outcome of the police investigation on the alleged poaching attempt in Punjab.

INDIA bloc will gain from Nitish's exit, says Kejriwal

The Hindu Bureau

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Monday said that Janata Dal (United) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was wrong in leaving the opposition's INDIA bloc and joining the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

"I feel Nitishji should not have gone. What he did is wrong. This kind of conduct is not good for democracy. My understanding is that this will heavily negatively affect the NDA in Bihar and the INDIA alliance will gain from it," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The AAP chief also said he is hopeful that the news of the first victory of the IN-DIA bloc will come from

Chandigarh on Tuesday. On Sunday, Mr. Kumar took oath as the Bihar Chief Minister for a record ninth time, returning to the BJP-led NDA just 18 months after he left it, in his fifth switch in political loyalties since 2015.

FIRs registered over 'scams' during Cong. rule in Chhattisgarh

Shubhomoy Sikdar

The Chhattisgarh Economic Offence Wing/Anti-Corruption Bureau (EOW/ACB) has filed separate FIRs related to two alleged scams that occurred during the previous Congress administration in the State

The FIRs – one each in connection with the alleged District Mineral Foundation (DMF) and custom rice milling scams have been registered based on a complaint by the Enforcement Directorate which was probing corruption in both cases. A senior ACB official said the FIRs were registered earlier this month.

Official in custody

Several civil servants, besides contractors, businessmen and others have been named. These include Ranu Sahu, a bureaucrat who is in judicial custody for her alleged involvement in the coal levy scam, a widely discussed case of purported

Several civil servants, besides contractors, businessmen and others have been named in the FIRs

corruption. On January 17, the EOW/ACB lodged two tion with the alleged coal levy and liquor scams, naming around 100 people, including several Congress leaders.

In the case pertaining to DMF – a trust, set up as a non-profit body in all districts of Chhattisgarh to work for people and sites affected by mining - the ED has alleged large-scale financial irregularities in the allotment of tenders by the DMF in Korba district.

In the other case, the central agency's report documents alleged irregularities identified in the process of depositing rice with the State Civil Supplies Corporation and the Food Corporation of India by rice millers after custom milling of rice.

BJP supporters clash with police in Bengal's Barrackpore over law and order situation

The Hindu Bureau KOLKATA

Clashes erupted between supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the local police on Monday in West Bengal's Barrackpore during State BJP president violation programme.

BJP activists engaged in a pitched battle after they were stopped from marching to Barrackpore Police Commissionerate in protest against alleged deterioration of the law and order situation in the area.

Supporters injured

Hundreds of BJP supporters had joined the protest march and tried to breach the barricade when the police stopped them. As tensions escalated, protestors resorted to throwing stones, leading police to fire tear gas shells to restore order, resulting in chaos. Some BJP supporters had sustained injuries in the clash. Vehicular traffic was also disrupted.



Police use water cannons to disperse BJP workers. ANI

"While the West Bengal Police fails to apprehend a fugitive Trinamool Congress leader [Sheikh Shahjahan] who attacked ED officials during a raid and subsequently evades arrest, they demonstrate their audacity by attacking women BJP members engaging in peaceful protests, inflicting serious injuries upon them," Mr. Majumdar said.

Sit-in by State BJP chief Mr. Majumdar later staged a sit-in in front of Titagarh police station on BT Road demanding action against police personnel who were allegedly involved in the "brutal attack" on BJP supporters which led to the disruption of traffic movement in the area.

The BJP had won the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Barrackpore after Arjun Singh defected from Trinamool and contested the election on the saffron party ticket.

However, Mr. Singh has returned to the Trinamool and the seat is likely to witness an interesting clash in the upcoming Lok Sabha poll.

(With PTI inputs)

As saffron flag removal row intensifies, Karnataka CM accuses BJP, JD(S) of inciting people

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU/KERAGODU

Keragodu village in Karnataka's Mandya district remained on edge on Monday, a day after a row broke out over the removal of a saffron flag from a government ground. Protesters led by BJP leaders took out a padayatra amid chants of "Jai Sri Ram" from the village to the Deputy Commissioner's office in the district, demanding that the flag with a portrait of Hanuman Lord reinstated.

The saffron flag flying atop a 108-feet-high flagpost was replaced by the district administration with the national flag, citing rules that do not permit hoisting of any flag other than the national flag on government property. The incident has triggered intense protests. Chief Minister Siddara-

maiah accused the BJP and

the Janata Dal (Secular) of trying to instigate people on the issue with an eye on the upcoming Lok Sabha election. He clarified that the

authorities had to intervene as permission was taken to hoist the national and State flags only. Stating that the Congress

government has no problems with the hoisting of saffron flags per se, Mr. Siddaramaiah said, "They [local youth] had taken per-



padayatra from Keragodu to Mandya on Monday. M.A. SRIRAM

mission to hoist the national flag and they should have done that. The district administration has taken steps only in this

regard."

He also hit back at the BJP for calling him "anti-Hindu", and asserted he is a Hindu who loves people

from all religions. "The secular principles propounded in the Constitution intolerance and peaceful coexistence. We believe in the Constitution," he said, adding that the leader of the Opposition R. Ashok and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy were instigating people by visiting Keragodu village.

"Why are they instigating people there? They are doing it because the [Lok Sabha] election is nearing. There was no need for the intervention of the district administration if they had followed the guidelines," the Chief Minister added.

Accusing the BJP of trying to deliberately disrupt communal harmony in Karnataka, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge alleged that the BJP was "starting its experiments of communal politics" Mandya like the way it did in the coastal region. "The BJP and Sangh Pa-

rivar cannot digest the fact that there is peace in the society. By spreading the communal fire, the BJP is warming itself up. BJP leaders have stooped low," Mr. Kharge posted on X (formerly Twitter). He said that like the

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh that opposed the national flag, the BJP is also showing intolerance towards it.

"Instead of respecting the national flag, the BJP is showing anger."

Security intensified

Meanwhile, security remained tight in Keragodu with the deployment of 11 battalions of Karnataka State Reserve Police (KSRP) in addition to the local police.

BJP leaders C.T. Ravi and Preetham Gowda besides former Minister K.C. Narayanagowda participated in the padayatra from Keragodu to Mandya comprising activists from various pro-Hindutva outfits sporting saffron flags. Former Minister Janardhan Reddy, too, made a brief appearance at Keragodu, located about 12 km from Mandya.

The BJP activists from surrounding regions, who had turned up for the padayatra, said JD(S) leaders and workers were also extending their support to the agitation. The police erected a circle of barricades around the flagpost while shops around the area remained closed on Monday morning as the padayatra began.

In Bengaluru, the BJP staged a protest at Mysuru Bank circle under the leadership of Jayanagara MLA C.K. Ramamurthy and other leaders. They were detained and taken away by the police. Officials said no permission was granted to stage a protest at the site.

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School headmaster arrested for 'pledge against Hindu deities'

The Hindu Bureau RAIPUR

A 60-year-old government school headmaster in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district was arrested on Sunday for allegedly hurting religious sentiments by administering a pledge to people "not to worship Hindu gods" and to embrace Buddhism.

On January 22, Ratalal Sarovar, the headmaster of a primary school in Bharari village, allegedly administered the pledge to a group of people. A clip of the incident surfaced online prompting a complaint by a Bajrang Dal activist, and the subsequent police action. In his complaint, the activist said Mr. Sarovar's actions hurt the sentiments of followers of Sanatana Dharma.

Mr. Sarovar was booked under Sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups grounds of religion, race, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) and 295A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class) of the Indian Penal Code.

Mr. Sarovar's family said the pledge was part of the 22 oaths prescribed by B.R. Ambedkar for conversion to Buddhism, and that the issue had been blown out of proportion. "My father was only reiterating the pledge at a community event and those who joined did so of their own free will. There was no coercion. He did not intend to hurt anyone's feelings," Manoj Sarovar, his son, said.

Banked on 2011 caste census report to revise BC list: Kerala

Govt. tells SC that data were not helpful; State is facing contempt proceedings for 'disobeying' judicial orders to revise its Backward Class list to ensure equitable distribution of benefits

Krishnadas Rajagopal NEW DELHI

he Kerala government told the Supreme Court on Monday that it had pinned its hopes on a caste census held by the Centre in 2011 to identify socio-economic Backward Classes in the State, but the data proved "not at all helpful".

The State is facing contempt proceedings in the Supreme Court for "wilfully disobeying" judicial orders to periodically revise its Backward Class list in order to ensure equitable distribution of the benefits of reservation in public employment.

While States like Bihar have held its own caste sur-



vey ahead of the Lok Sabha

election, Kerala, through

its Chief Secretary Venu V.,

recounted about months

spent waiting for a copy of

the report from the Centre

and even blamed the tough

months of COVID for not

conducting its own caste

survey and revision of

State, represented by advo-

In its response, the

Backward Class list.

Socially and **Educationally Backward** classes in Kerala. It doesn't contain any socio-economic data KERALA'S RESPONSE IN SC cate Nishe Rajen Shonker, socio-economic

for identification of

The report was

not at all helpful

said that since the data on classes were already compiled by the Centre in 2011, "The State government was of the opinion that the same be collected from the Centre". The Centre was equally bound to conduct a caste survey and identify Backward Classes.

The response said the

State had requested the Centre on November 4. 2022, for a copy of the 2011 caste survey data report in order to identify Backward Classes in Kerala. The report was forwarded to the Kerala State Commission for Backward Classes chairman only in May 2023.

"The report was not at all helpful for identification of socially and educationally backward classes within the State of Kerala. The report does not contain any socio economic caste data. whatsoever," it said. The response came in a contempt plea filed by an NGO, Minority Indians Planning and Vigilance Commission Trust.

The case is coming up for hearing on February 6.



Modi to visit Tiruppur in Feb. to launch BJP's poll campaign

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu at the end of February to launch the BJP's campaign for the Lok Sabha election, according to the party's Tiruppur unit. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tiruppur is confirmed. The Prime Minister will take part as the chief guest in the last public meeting marking the culmination of the 'En Mann En Makkal' padayatra of Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai. The meeting will serve as the launch pad for the Lok Sabha election," a press release issued by the Tiruppur unit of the BJP said. A meeting to discuss the arrangements for the Prime Minister's visit was conducted by the party on Monday. The BJP's State general secretaries, A.P. Muruganandham and Malarkodi, and other senior functionaries of the party took part in the

SC dismisses A.P. govt. petition against Naidu's bail

The Hindu Bureau

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to intervene in the Andhra Pradesh High Court decision to grant bail to the TDP chief and former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, in the Amaravati Inner Ring Road scam case.

A Bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta, with an eye on parity, noted that an appeal against another accused in the same case was dismis-

sed by the court in 2023. Citing that order, the Bench then dismissed the State government's plea in which it had challenged the High Court order of January 10 giving relief to Mr.

'Likely to prejudice'

The State government, represented by advocate Mahfooz A. Nazki, in its appeal had argued that the High Court had unnecessarily, in a bail matter, "delved deep into facts of the case and rendered findings that were not only



N. Chandrababu Naidu

factually incorrect but are also likely to prejudice the court below during the

The State said the case involved the "elaborate scheme set up by Mr. Naidu, a former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, and the second accused who was the State Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development between 2014 and 2019".

It argued that contracts

for preparation of the master plan for the capital city and capital region, which included the Inner Ring Road (IRR) in the capital region of Andhra Pradesh, were "awarded to a foreign private entity on a nomination basis, fraudulently making it appear that it was based on a government-to-government memorandum of understanding". "The alignment of the IRR was manipulated in such a way that certain close associates of the respondent (Naidu) received windfall pecuniary gains, on a quid pro quo basis and at the expense of the State exchequer with the respondent being the ultimate beneficiary," the appeal

'Corruption evident' The State had argued that the actions of the accused persons "very evidently amounted to corruption, as well as offences such as cheating and criminal breach of trust by public servants". The prosecution argued in the Supreme Court that Mr. Naidu was the "primary architect of the entire scam, and is the ultimate beneficiary of all the windfall gains being made by parties as a result of his manipulation of the alignment of the IRR".

"Being the former Chief Minister, he is taking steps to derail the investigation," the criminal appeal in the Supreme Court said.

154 doctors died of COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu, says IMA

A total of 154 doctors died of COVID-19 during the first and second waves of the pandemic in Tamil Nadu, according to data published by the Indian Medical Association (IMA). The IMA is observing January 30, 2024 as 'COVID Martyrs Day'. In view of this, the association published State-wise data on the number of doctors who died of the infection.

According to the data, a total of 1,596 doctors died of COVID-19, including 757 during the first wave and 839 in the second wave. In Tamil Nadu, 90 doctors died during the first wave and 64 during the second wave - among the highest in the country, after Bihar (155), Delhi (150), Uttar Pradesh (145) and West Bengal (145). The IMA has already submitted a representation to the Central government urging it to extend assistance to the families of such doctors in the private sector as

On the mend



on Monday. Tourists are unable to get a full-size view of the monument at present. NAGARA GOPAL

Court to consider plea to ban Netflix documentary based on Jolly Joseph case on Feb. 3

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u>

A court here will consider on February 3 a petition moved by the second accused in the Koodathayi serial murder case, M.S. Mathew, to stop the screening of the documentary Curry and Cyanide -The Jolly Joseph Case on Netflix.

The hearing, expected to begin on Monday, was postponed by judge S.R. Syamlal. Mathew moved the plea on January 16 alleging that the circulation of fake information related to the case in the form of serials and TV reports was unfair and illegal even be-

Circulation of fake information on case even before verdict in the form of serials unfair, says accused

fore the verdict was pronounced. In his petition, he argued that a Malayalam TV channel and a few online media channels were largely involved in telecasting false and objectionable content related to

the case. A few months ago, a team of forensic experts too had expressed similar concerns over the featuring of key witnesses and investigating officers in the Netflix series, ignoring the trial. According to them, it was setting a wrong prece-

The team behind the production is, however, maintaining silence.

In a similar complaint, the Kerala High Court had earlier stayed the telecasting of a Malayalam serial based on the incident.

It was between 2002 and 2016 that the chain of six suspected murders took place in Koodathayi in Kerala. Jolly Joseph is the prime accused. On October 5, a SIT arrested Jolly and two others who were accused of murdering the six by serving them poisonlaced food.

TTD approves its budget for 2024-25, pegs revenue at ₹5.141.74 crore

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u> TIRUMALA

The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), on Monday, approved its budget for 2024-25, projecting an estimated revenue of

₹5,141.74 crore. The temple hundi topped the table with an estimated income of ₹1,611 crore followed by the interest earned on investments which was pegged at ₹1,167 crore. While the sale of prasadam is likely to fetch an income of ₹600 crore, the revenue income earned via the sale of darshan tickets is estimated at ₹338 crore, arjitha seva amounts up to ₹150 crore, other capital receipts ₹128 crore, Kalyanakatta receipts ₹151.5 crore, loans and advances to employees, earnest money deposit (EMD), security deposits amount up to ₹246.39 crore, trust receipts ₹85 crore, rent, electrical and water charges receipts ₹60 crore, and publications ₹35.25 crore. Besides this, an income of ₹203.5 crore via sale of agarbattis, toll fees and educational institution receipts is also expected.

On the expenditure front, a major chunk of ₹1,733 crore was allocated for human resource payments, followed by material purchases at ₹751 crore, corpus and other investments at ₹750 crore, engineering capital works at ₹350 crore, maintenance works at ₹190 crore, loans and advances to employees, EMD, security deposits at

₹166.63 crore, among oth-

Expenditure allocation

Narsa Reddy, APCC ex-chief, passes away

The Hindu Bureau HYDERABAD

Senior Congress leader and former Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) chief P. Narsa Reddy passed away in Hyderabad on Monday. He was 92.

Reddy hailed from Nirmal in erstwhile Adilabad district. He entered the Assembly of undivided Andhra Pradesh in 1962. He won again in 1967 and 1972 from the Nirmal consti-

He was the Irrigation Minister in the Jalagam Vengal Rao Cabinet in 1977-78 and also held the Revenue and Legislative Affairs portfolio. Reddy also had a stint as the MP for Adilabad from 1989 to 1991.



Speaking on his contributions, the Telangana Congress leaders recalled how the 1/70 Act to provide lands exclusively for the tribals in Agency areas was a key contribution of Reddy.

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy said the veteran's demise was a big loss to the party.

Tiki Rajwi THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal will seek to balance

expectations in Kerala Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal with measures aimed at driving economic growth and revenue inflow in the face of fiscal constraints while preserving the pace and breadth of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government's social welfare commitments.

Mr. Balagopal, in a pre-Budget chat with The Hindu on Monday, said the public can expect steps aimed at enlivening the economy and the job market in the new fiscal. He also hinted at announcements designed to bolster



the government's commitment to draw private investment to key sectors.

Mr. Balagopal is scheduled to present the Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal in the Kerala Legislative Assembly on February 5. "The LDF government has already been promoting private investment, but would like to step up the pace. For instance, the Viz-

promoting private investment, but would like to step up the pace... We believe confidence level [of investors] has improved K.N. BALAGOPAL

Govt. has been

Kerala Finance Minister hints at steps in Budget

to energise economy, attract private investment

has improved," he said. The Budget is likely to

hinjam international seaport is going to open up a world of opportunities. You have here a port that will be one of the biggest, and you need people to invest. We believe the confidence level [of investors]

explore measures for raising additional revenue for the State, Mr. Balagopal in-

tuted a high-level panel with the mandate of exploring "innovative measures" to mobilise additional resources. Liquor, petrol cess

dicated. The State govern-

ment had recently consti-

In the 2023-24 Budget, Mr.

Balagopal had announced cesses on liquor and petrol and diesel for a 'social security seed fund' to help meet its social security pension commitments. The levies are likely to continue, given the fiscal pressures on the government. On whether the Budget

would see an increase in the social welfare pensions, Mr. Balagopal said the LDF government can hike them from the month-

ed the Centre restored approximately ₹57,400 crore, the annual cut, on an average, suffered by the State in Central transfers and loan approvals. Mr. Balagopal noted that

ly ₹1,600 to ₹2,500 provid-

the Union government's attitude towards Kerala will continue to be the "biggest challenge" in the new fiscal. "It is evident that Kerala's problems are not on account of poor financial management. Since 2017, the State has been deprived of ₹1.07 lakh crore in its gross borrowing limit," he said.

Mr. Balagopal also said that the Centre should announce a stimulus package to energise the national economy.

Stay on survey of Shahi Idgah complex to continue: SC

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday ordered the continuance of the interim stay on the operation of the Allahabad High Court order for a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah Mosque complex adjoining the Janmabhoomi Krishna temple in Mathura.

A Bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta posted the plea filed by the Committee of Management Trust Shahi Masjid Idgah for further hearing in the first half of April.

The court said all petitions pending before it on the issue will be taken up for hearing together in

The top court had on January 16 stayed the operation of the December 14, 2023 order of the Allahabad High Court which allowed a court-monitored survey of the Shahi Idgah Mosque complex.

It had also stayed the order of the High Court by which it agreed to the appointment of a Court Commissioner to oversee the survey of the mosque premises, which the Hindu side claims hold signs suggesting that it was once a

The top court, however, made it clear that the pro-



A view of the Sri Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple at Mathura in Uttar Pradesh

ceedings before the high court in the dispute, including the maintainability of the suit under Order 7 Rule 11 of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC), will continue.

It had said there are certain legal issues which have arisen and questioned the "vague" application made before the High Court for appointment of a Court Commissioner for the survey.

The top court had issued notice to the Hindu bodies and sought their response to the mosque committee's plea.

The mosque committee, in its plea, has submitted that the High Court ought to have considered its petition challenging the maintainability of the suit before deciding any related applications.

ED questions Lalu for over 8 hours in land-for-job case

Modi government is harassing Opposition parties through investigative agencies, says RJD MP Misa Bharti; supporters and legislators gather outside ED office in Patna in show of support

The Hindu Bureau

day after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar severed ties with Mahagatbandhan (grand alliance) in Bihar to align with the Bharatiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal chief Lalu Prasad on Monday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate for questioning in the land-for-job scam.

Mr. Prasad reached the ED office in Patna at 11 a.m. and was questioned by officials for more than eight hours. The ED officials, said sources, presented a set of more than 50 questions in the case, which involves alleged sale of properties at throwaway prices or given as "gifts" to Mr. Prasad's relatives during his term as Railway Minister in the 2004-09 United Progressive Alliance government.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is investigating the allegations of bribery in the case, while the ED is probing the money-laundering trail.

Mr. Prasad was accompanied by his elder daughter and Rajya Sabha member, Misa Bharti.



questioning in Patna on Monday. ANI

A large number of RJD supporters, leaders, and present and former legislators gathered outside the ED office to show their support for their party leader and express their opposition to the Centre.

The security was tightened with the deployment of Central security force personnel at the ED office. Convicted in several fodder scam cases, Mr. Prasad is currently out on bail on health grounds. He underwent a kidney transplant in Singapore in December

"This is nothing new for our family. Whenever our family members are summoned for questioning, we cooperate; though I must say that Mr. Prasad's health is not good," Ms. Bharti told presspersons outside the ED office.

'Inhuman behaviour'

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has become scared with the upcoming 2024 Lok Sabha election and is harassing all those who are opposing the BJP through the might of the investigating agencies. This is true of the Opposition in Patna, West Bengal, Maharashtra as well as other places," she added.

Ms. Bharti's sister, Rohi-

ni Acharya, in a post on X, said, "If something happens to my father, I shall bring the worst to 'them'. If something happens to my father today, the chameleons [an oblique reference to CM Nitish Kumar] along with the CBI and the ED will be held responsible. The Lion [Mr. Prasad] walks alone and is not

"Everyone knows about the poor health of my father, but ED officials did not allow any medical assistant to accompany him. It's inhuman behaviour... shame on you [ED officials] and on your boss," she said.

The ED had issued summons to Mr. Prasad and his son, Tejashwi Yadav, on January 19 to appear on January 29 and 30, respectively. The summons were handed over to former CM Rabri Devi, Mr. Prasad's wife, at her residence in Patna.

In March 2023, the ED had conducted searches at premises linked to Mr. Prasad and his family members in the case.

Mr. Prasad, his wife, daughters Ms. Bharti and Hema Yadav, and son Tejashwi Yadav are among the 12 accused persons in the case.

Centre extends ban on SIMI for 5 years for fomenting terrorism

National

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has extended the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) for five

The organisation was declared an "unlawful association" under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for the first time in 2001. The Ministry, in a post

on X, said, "SIMI has been found involved in fomenting terrorism, disturbing peace and communal harmony to threaten the sovereignty, security and integrity of Bharat." It said that 17 cases had been registered against former SIMI cadres in the past five years and in 11 instances, SIMI members had been convicted by courts of law for various crimes committed between 2006 and 2014.

The fresh cases include two first information reports (FIR) registered at the Gangapur police station in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan on August 25, 2019 for "throwing stones from the top of Jama Masjid on the rally of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)" on the VHP's Foundation Day.

Some of the cases do not mention if the suspects are connected with SIMI.

The notification said the

Agency (NIA) registered a case against Athar Parvej and Mohammed Jalaluddin of Phulawari Sharif, Patna in 2022 "relating to conspiracy of disrupting the visit of Prime Minister in July 2022. Both the accused were arrested and chargesheeted under various provisions, including Sections 17, 18, 18A, 18B 38 and 39 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967"

Investigation

Another case mentioned in the notification pertains to 2023 when the NIA registered a case against Saquib Nachan, exnational general secretary of SIMI. "He was the main conspirator and was radicalising Muslims for violent 'Jihad' or 'Hijarat'. He was giving 'Baith' [pledge and allegiance to IS] to Muslim youth. Further, he motivated other persons to take 'Baith' of the Islamic State. He is alleged to have established 'Al Sham' like area in Padga village, wherein sharia law is followed," the notification said.

It said the governments of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Uttar Pradesh recommended that SIMI be declared an "unlawful association".

Dictatorship is inevitable if Modi is re-elected: Kharge

The Hindu Bureau BHUBANESWAR

The upcoming Lok Sabha election will be the last election in India if Prime Minister Narendra Modi is re-elected, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said here on Monday. He was addressing a Congress workers' convent

'Whether you acknow-

ledge it or not, one of our leaders from INDIA departed vesterday... The current government's modus operandi involves serving notices on leaders one after another, instilling terror, and issuing threats. Individuals are abandoning friendships, alliances, and parties out of fear. The question arises: Can the country, democracy, or Constitution survive if so many cowards persist?" he asked.

'Last chance'

"This is the last opportunity before people to cast their votes decisively. Following this, no further vot-



ing will be possible as there will be no more elections. Elections will be held akin to election of Russian President Vladimir Putin. They will run the government on basis of accumulated authority and keep returning to power. They will get 200 seats, 300 and 400. They will even increase number of seats beyond 600," he said.

"It is people's responsibility to safeguard Constitution and democracy and ensure that elections are held recurrently... If you desire it, the democracy will stay on. However, if you choose to remain subservient, that is a decision

"Former PM Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi had sacrificed their lives for people while Mr. Modi is taking lives... He is running government by this terror mechanism," the Congress leader said.

"We administered the government with love, emacing each other. Progress in education, health, industry, and the establishment of various visible institutions today can be credited to the contributions of Congress. The present government seems to derive pleasure from causing discord and conflict among the people."

On Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar leaving the INDIA bloc, Mr. Kharge said, "Does the country weaken when one person exits? No... We will emerge even stronger.'

He said the the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Biju Janata Dal had long been in an undeclared alliance aimed at looting money by selling mineral resources.

Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train route to get earthquake sensors

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Twenty-eight seismometers will be installed along the proposed bullet train route between Mumbai and Ahmedabad to ensure the safety of passengers and critical infrastructure during earthquakes, a spokesperson from the National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited said.

This 'early earthquake detection system', based on the technology of Japanese Shinkansen bullet trains, will detect earthquake-induced tremors through primary waves and enable an automatic power shutdown on the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Rail Speed Corridor (MAHSR). "Emergency brakes will be activated when the power shutdown is detected and the trains running in the affected area shall stop," the spokesperson said.

The areas near the

MAHSR alignment, where earthquakes greater than 5.5 magnitude have occurred in the past 100 years, were surveyed by Japanese experts. After a detailed survey and soil suitability study through a micro tremor test, the installation sites selected.

Of the 28 seismometers, 22 will be installed along the alignment. Eight will be in Maharashtra – Mumbai, Thane, Virar, and Boisar - and 14 will be in Gujarat – Vapi, Bilimora. Surat, Bharuch, Vadodara, Anand, Mahemdavad, and Ahmedabad. Seismometers will be installed in traction sub-stations and switching posts along the alignment.

The remaining six seismometers, termed inland seismometers, will be installed in quake-prone areas - Khed, Ratnagiri, Latur, and Pangri in Maharashtra, and Adesar and Old Bhuj in Gujarat.

CAA will be implemented in a week, reiterates Minister

Shiv Sahay Singh KOLKATA

Union Minister of State for Shipping Shantanu Thakur on Monday reiterated that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) would be implemented across the country in a week.

The BIP MP for Bangaon ment at a rally in South 24 Parganas district of West Bengal on Sunday.

In November 2023, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Kumar Mishra had said that the CAA rules would be framed by March 2024.

The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 was passed by Parliament in December 2019. It seeks to grant Indian citizenship to Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who entered India before December 31,

The remarks made by Mr. Thakur assume signifi-

Elections to 56 Rajya Sabha seats on Feb. 27



cance ahead of the Lok Sabha election. The delay in framing rules for the CAA had irked a section of Matuas, including MLAs from the community representing the BJP. After the 2019 polls, a number of BJP leaders have been trying to allay the fears of Matuas regarding the delay in the implementation of the

Mr. Thakur, a descendant of the founders of the Matua sect, was elected in 2019 on the promise of implementation of the CAA.

Matuas, constituting a large chunk of the State's Scheduled Caste population, had been migrating to West Bengal since the

ligious persecution in erstwhile East Pakistan which later became Bangladesh. It is believed that the Matua community will benefit the most from the implementation of the CAA. The remarks by the MP

1950s, primarily due to re-

evoked a strong response from the political circles.

ter Mamata Banerjee advised people in Cooch Behar, particularly those from the Rajbanshi community, to ensure that their names were on the voters' list to "protect themselves" from the Act. Ms. Banerjee has maintained that there was no need for implementation of the CAA in the State.

"Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has clearly said that CAA won't be implemented in West Bengal. The BJP leaders are attempting political gimmickry by making such false promises before the Lok Sabha election," Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said.

CBI conducts searches in J&K power project case

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has conducted searches in Delhi, and Jammu and Kashmir, in the case related to alleged irregularities in the award of tender for civil works of the Kiru Hydroelectric Project being executed by the Chenab Valley Power Projects (P) Limited (CVPPPL).

The agency seized digital devices, computers, property documents, and ₹21 lakh in cash.

The CBI had registered the case based on a reference received from the J&K government.

'Deeply anguished by the murder of Indian student in Georgia'

The Hindu Bureau **NEW DELHI**

The Consulate General of India in Atlanta on January 29 expressed deep anguish over the "brutal and heinous" murder of an Indian citizen in Georgia, U.S.A, last week.

Vivek Saini, a student from Haryana, was hammered to death by a man in an incident that was recorded in close-circuit TV cameras.

'Remains in touch'

"We are deeply anguished by the terrifying, brutal and heinous incident that led to the death of Indian national/student Vivek Saini and condemn (the) attack in the strongest terms. It is understood that the U.S. authorities have arrested the accused and are investigating the case," said the Consulate General of India in Atlanta.

The video of the murder went viral over the last few days. The clip shows a Caucasian man hitting Saini with a hammer till he apparently became lifeless.

'The Consulate got in touch with the family of Saini immediately after the incident, provided all consular assistance in sending the mortal remains back to India and remains in touch with the family," the Indian mission stated.

The Election Commission

The Hindu Bureau

on Monday said that elections to 56 Rajya Sabha seats would be held on February 27. Among the seats that will go to the polls are those held by BJP president J.P. Nadda, nine Union Ministers, and former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The elections will not change the balance between the Treasury benches and the Opposition in the Upper House of Parliament drastically. While the BJP is expect-

ed to keep its tally, the Opposition ranks will be further diminished by a few seats. The seats held by Union

Railway Minister Ashwini

Vaishnaw, Education Mi-



highest number of vacancies of 10 seats. FILE PHOTO

nister Dharmendra Pradhan, Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav, and Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya will also fall va-With the BJP taking a po-

sition that its Ministers should take the Lok Sabha route instead of the Rajya Sabha, many of these Ministers may not return to the Upper House.

The BJP-led National De-

mocratic Alliance (NDA) is likely to gain around six seats – two each in Maharashtra, Bihar and Gujarat – after the February 27 elections, with the Janata Dal (United) and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) faction led by Ajit Pawar having joined the ruling coalition. The NDA's current strength in the Upper House stands at 114, in-

cluding 93 of the BJP. **Depleting numbers**

The Opposition ranks will be depleted, especially in Maharashtra, where of the six seats falling vacant, three are held by the BJP and one each by the NCP, the Shiv Sena (UBT) and the Congress. The three parties that together form the Maha Vikas Aghadi will only be able to send one nominee.

the highest number of vacancies of 10 seats. Here, currently, the BJP holds nine seats and the Samajwadi Party (SP) one. The Opposition will make up for its loss in Maharashtra here with the SP expected to gain two additional members, as it is likely to win three of the 10 seats up for grabs and the BJP For renomination to the

Uttar Pradesh will have

Rajya Sabha, Mr. Nadda will have to look for a seat outside his home State of Himachal Pradesh as the Congress is in power there. In Bihar, Rashtriya Jana-

ta Dal members Manoj Kumar Jha and Ahmad Ashfaque Karim, members Aneel Prasad Hegde and Bashistha Narain Singh, BJP member Sushil Kumar Modi, and lesh Prasad Singh are completing their tenures in the Rajya Sabha. The Congress can also

Congress member Akhi-

look forward to sending its nominees to the Upper House, from Karnataka and Telangana – where it came to power last year. In Karnataka, four Rajya Sabha members are retiring, and in Telangana three. The nomination process

will begin on February 8. February 15 is the last date for filing nominations and February 20 the last date to withdraw candidature. Separately, four nomi-

nated members are retiring in July, while two nominated seats are vacant. The nominated members retiring in July are Mahesh Jethmalani, Sonal Mansingh, Ram Shakal and Rakesh Sinha of the BJP.

Nitish holds first Cabinet meeting of new NDA govt.

The Hindu Bureau

Chief Minister Nitish Kumar convened the first Cabinet meeting of the new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in Bihar on Monday.

The meeting decided to reschedule the Budget Session, which will now begin on February 29 instead of February 5. A letter seeking approval to reschedule the session has been sent to the Raj Bhavan.

Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha and other Ministers were present at the meeting.

Sources in the government said the Cabinet would be expanded in two or three days keeping the social equation in mind.

'Change Speaker'

Senior BJP MLA Nand Kishore Yadav has issued a notice for a no-confidence motion against Assembly Speaker Awadh Bihari Choudhary, who is an RJD

The notice states that since a new government has taken power, the House does not have confidence in the present Speaker. The notice has signatures of several MLAs, including Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi.

After the Cabinet meeting, Mr. Samrat Choudhary and Mr. Sinha addressed a press conference where they thanked the BJP for the opportunity to become Deputy Chief Ministers.

With JD(U) back, NDA will have to balance seat aspirations of allies

Unlike in 2019, the alliance has more players in the mix, including Hindustani Awam Morcha, Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal, 2 factions of Lok Janshakti Party; BJP assures them of promised seats

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sobhana K. Nair Nistula Hebbar NEW DELHI

he re-entry of the Janata Dal(U) into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in Bihar changes the equations in the BJP-led front, with smaller parties such as the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) led by Chirag Paswan expected to get fewer Lok Sabha seats in the Lok Sabha election. Bihar has 40

In 2019, the BJP and the JD(U) contested 17 seats each, while six were allotted to the LJP. However, this time, with the Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular), led by Jitan Ram Manjhi, the Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal (RLJD) of Upendra Kushwaha, and two factions of the LJP in the mix, the allies could feel the squeeze.

BJP president J.P. Nadda has assured allies which had been part of the NDA before Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar switched sides for the fifth time, that commitments made to them will be honoured.

According to sources, before agreeing to participate in Mr. Kumar's swearing-in on Sunday, Mr. Pas-



Delicate balance: The JD(U) had been allotted 17 seats in the 2019 elections; this time around, the BJP might expect it to make some concessions to accommodate other allies. PTI

wan, who flew in with Mr. Nadda from Delhi to Patna, insisted that the BJP give him a clear assurance that his faction of the LJP will be given the six seats that the party contested in the 2019 election. He also sought to reserve the Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency for himself. The BJP, however, will have to strike a balance between Mr. Paswan and the breakaway faction headed by his uncle and Union Minister, Pashupati Nath Paras.

Speaking to The Hindu, Mr. Paswan, whose politics in the past five years had been centred on opposition to Mr. Kumar, said he was happy that the NDA government was in power and expressed hope that the vision of the allies would also be incorporated in the government's policy. "In 2019 too, we had the JD(U) on board and we managed to amicably fix the seat-sharing formula between us. The conversation on the division of seats has started on a positive note and I believe it will be finalised soon," he said. Yet, he sounded a word of caution, saying if Mr. Kumar were to pursue the "policies" that he was critical of under the new go-

not hesitate to speak out. According to senior sources in the BJP, the party has said that the RLJD will be given three Lok Sab-

vernment, then he would

ha seats, the same number as in 2014, when Mr. Kushwaha, as president of the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party, had been an NDA ally.

The HAM has already been accommodated at the State level with Mr. Manjhi's son Santosh Suman Manjhi being made Minister. "Another Ministry may be offered to the party and perhaps one Lok Sabha ticket as well," a source said.

The appointment of two of Mr. Kumar's detractors Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha – as Deputy Chief Ministers indicated that the BJP will push for concessions from the JD(U) to balance the equa-

Conspiracy to end SC, ST, OBC quota: Congress

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday demanded the resignation of University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar over the now-withdrawn draft guidelines for de-reservation of posts in higher education for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in a post on X (formerly Twitter), called it a conspiracy to end reservations for these groups.

"In the new draft of the UGC, there is a conspiracy to end the reservation given to SC, ST and OBC categories in higher education institutions. Today, out of approximately 7,000 reserved posts in 45 Central universities, 3,000 are vacant, and of which only 7.1% are Dalit, 1.6% are tribal and 4.5% are backward class professors. The BJP-RSS, which have even talked about reviewing reservation, now want to snatch the jobs of the deprived classes from such higher education institutions," he alleged.

Mr. Gandhi's post was contrasted with the 'clarification' from Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan that not a single post would be de-reserved. "There is no scope for ambiguity about reservations after the introduction of the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Teachers' Cadre) 2019," he added.



Narwekar gets more time to rule on disqualification pleas

The Supreme Court on Monday extended the deadline for the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar to decide on the disqualification petitions against the breakaway Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) faction headed by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar from January 31 to February 15. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Speaker's office, informed a Bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud that the tribunal would conclude disqualification proceedings on January 31 and would need three weeks to "dictate" its order. Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for petitioner Sharad Pawar loyalist Jayant Patil, said three weeks for dictation of an order was just too much. "My Lords may give the Speaker a week," Mr. Singhvi suggested. The Supreme Court gave the Speaker time till February 15.

Manesar land case: ED takes statement of ex-Haryana CM

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday recorded the statement of former Harvana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda in connection with the Manesar land scam case. The ED investigation was based on a First Information Report (FIR) registered by the Gurugram police, which was later re-registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 2015. It was alleged that in conspiracy with some Haryana government officials, private builders had acquired about 400 acres of land at throwaway rates, which caused a loss of about ₹1,500 crore to the previous owners in Manesar, Naurangpur and Lakhnoula villages.

UCC committee will submit report on February 2: Dhami

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Monday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) committee formed by the State will submit its final report to the government on February 2 and soon after, the State will table it in the upcoming Assembly session."The committee formed to prepare the draft of the UCC will submit the same to the State government on February 2. We will implement the UCC in the State by bringing a Bill in the upcoming Assembly session," Mr. Dhami wrote on X. He also mentioned that his UCC in accordance with the vision and principles of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

NHRC issues notice to Telangana government

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Monday issued a notice to the Telangana government over an incident in which a policewoman dragged a girl student by her hair. The matter came to light when the video clip of the purported incident in Ranga Reddy district went viral on social media.

The incident happened on January 24 during an agitation by some students of Professor Jayanshankar Telangana State Agricultural University against the State government's decision to allocate 100 acres of land belonging to the university for construction of a new High Court complex.

In Bihar leg of yatra, Rahul slams Modi, stays mum on Nitish switching sides

Amit Bhelari

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on Monday reached Bihar, where he addressed a rally in Kishanganj district. In his speech, he slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and demanded a caste-based census across the country but failed to speak about Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's shift to the BIP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

Mr. Gandhi termed Bihar "the land of social justice", and said the country was "looking at the people of Bihar" because no one else understood social justice better than the people of the State.

"At the time when the BJP and RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] talk about dividing the country on basis of caste and religion, apart from spreading

hatred, the Congress party is focusing on spreading love, respect and brotherhood," he said.

Mr. Gandhi said he added the word "nyay" (justice) to the name of the yatra because the poor in the country were unable to get economic and social justice. He said the country's economy "has been handed over to a few billionaires" under Mr. Modi's "Airports, leadership. ports, infrastructure, hospitals, and universities... everything is being handed over to two or three industrialists," he said.

He said the Central government did not help the poor, labourers, or farmers and that the doors of banks were closed for the poor "but they are always open for industrialists at the behest of the Prime Minister's Office".

He stressed that everyone had the right to know the exact population of OBCs, minority communities, tribal and general classes, and for that, caste-based census was a "revolutionary step". The yatra in Bihar start-

ed from Seemanchal region, currently a stronghold of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress. The yatra will cover 425 km over four days in the State before heading to Jharkhand.

Seemanchal, situated in north Bihar, comprises four districts: Purnea, Katihar, Kishanganj and Araria. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the NDA won three seats and the Congress one. Then, the JD(U) had been a part of the NDA.

The Katihar and Purnea Lok Sabha seats are now with the JD(U), Araria with the BIP and Kishanganj with Congress. It is significant that the Seemanchal region has a 47% Muslim population, which augurs well for the Congress and RJD. The four districts represent 24 Assembly constituencies and Seemanchal therefore holds significance for the 2025 Assembly election too.

Patna court summons Udhayanidhi on Feb. 13

The Hindu Bureau

The Special Court for MP/ MLA cases in Patna has directed Tamil Nadu Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin to appear before it on February 13 in connection with the Sanatana Dharma case.

A complaint was filed against him before the Chief Judicial Magistrate Court in Patna on September 4, 2023, by an advocate. It said Mr. Udhayanidhi's remarks had hurt the religious sentiments of Hindus. At a conference in Chennai on September 2, he said, "Just like dengue, mosquitoes, malaria or coronavirus need to be eradicated, we have to eradicate Sanatana [Dharma]."

Nitish's exit will have no impact on INDIA bloc, says Jairam

The Hi<u>ndu Bureau</u>

Taking a swipe at Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for his frequent switching of loyalties, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Monday joked that the Bihar Governor was surprised to see Mr. Kumar within 15 minutes of his swearing-in.

"When he came back halfway, the Governor was shocked as not even 15 minutes had passed. However, this time it was to collect his muffler that the Chief Minister had forgotten in the Raj Bhavan," Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X.

Interacting with reporters in Bihar's Kishanganj after the Bharat Jodo Nyay

Yatra entered the State, Mr. Dal(U) chief as "Aaya Kumar, Gaya Kumar".

Mr. Ramesh said that Mr. Kumar's exit won't have any impact on the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA). "It will not have any impact on INDIA alliance...absolutely no impact. This is typical of Nitish Kumar," he said.

He said that Mr. Kumar's "betrayal was masterminded by the Prime Minister." "A large number of people participated in the padayatra held in Araria [Bihar] today under the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. The people of Bihar are welcoming the Yatra with great enthusiasm," he said.

Governors of T.N., Kerala and Telangana competing for media attention: Minister

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

DMK leader and Law Minister S. Regupathy on Monday alleged that there was an indirect competition among the Governors of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Telangana to hog the media limelight. He accused them of functioning like spokespersons of the BJP, forgetting that they were

In a statement, he said that Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi was suffering from "media mania" disease and functioning in a manner aimed at getting media coverage on a daily basis. "There seems to be an indirect competition

Governors.

among Mr. Ravi, Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan to get the attention of the media. They are continuously criticising the State governments only to get media attention," he alleged.

Reacting to Mr. Ravi's allegation of corruption in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana in Nagapattinam district, Mr. Regupathy said that if the Governor needed any clarification on the issue, he could have approached the government. "Is it fair on the part of the Governor to air his criticism through the media? What is the basis for his al-



S. Regupathy

legation," he asked.

To Mr. Ravi's claim that a concrete structure among huts in Keezhvenmani was a symbol of shame, Mr. Regupathy said that it was constructed by the CPI(M) in memory of 44 Dalits who were burnt to death by casteist forces. "What fault has the Governor found in the structure? Does he want to remove the huts around the memorial," he asked.

The Minister said that the Governor should visit Ayodhya, where the BJP government had spent thousands of crores of rupees to construct a temple for Lord Ram, to see firsthand the living conditions in the area. "The people of the country have not forgotten the green screen used by the BJP government to hide the dwellings of the poor in Gujarat when global leaders visited the State. Let the Governor concentrate on his job," he said. Mr. Regupathy recalled how the Governor retracted his remarks on 'Tamilagam' and Mahatma Gandhi's role in India's freedom movement, in the face of criticism.

"Though he is the Governor of Tamil Nadu, he has not done anything worthwhile for the State. He has not used his powers to get any schemes for the State. Instead, he is creating problems for the Chief Minister, who is doing everything he can to help the people of his State," the DMK leader said.

He said that the Governor's efforts to 'save' the Vice-Chancellor of Bharathiar University, and his delay in granting assent to the Bill banning online rummy had raised doubts over his functioning.



Committee examining Bill on marriage age gets extension

A parliamentary committee examining a Bill seeking to raise the age of marriage of women from the present 18 to 21 has been given another extension to table its report. The Budget Session of Parliament beginning January 31 is the last session of the present Lok Sabha before the election is announced. The committee will now finalise its report by May, following the four-month extension, while the term of the 17th Lok Sabha ends on June 16. The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021, which was introduced in the Lok Sabha and remains pending there, is likely to lapse when the tenure of the House ends in June. PTI

Gujarat HC should properly train magistrates: top court

Having termed as "grossest of contempt" the police remand of a businessman granted anticipatory bail, the Supreme Court said on Monday it will ask the Gujarat High Court to impart proper training to magistrates. Voicing displeasure over the police remand of the Gujarat-based businessman, the top court on January 10 issued notice to police officials and a judicial magistrate of Surat on a contempt petition filed by the man. The top court was informed it had on December 8 last year granted anticipatory bail to Tusharbhai Rajnikantbhai Shah but was remanded in police custody from December 13 to 16, 2023 in a cheating case. PTI

Stop mentioning religion or caste of litigants in cases: SC

The practice of mentioning caste or religion of litigants in court cases must be shunned, the Supreme Court has said while directing its registry and all other courts to stop it forthwith. A Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah directed all High Courts to ensure that the caste or religion of a litigant does not appear in the memo of parties in any petition before HCs or subordinate courts under their jurisdiction. "We see no reason for mentioning the caste/religion of any litigant either before this Court or the courts below," the Bench said, while allowing a transfer petition in a marital dispute pending before a family court in Rajasthan. PTI

Ahead of JEE, student found dead at her home in Kota

An 18-year-old student was found dead at her home in Kota, a coaching hub in Rajasthan, on Monday. She was to give the Joint Entrance Examination for admission to the IITs and the NITs. She was facing study-related stress and found herself unable to tackle the exam, Deputy Superintendent of Police Dharmveer Singh said. Her father is a security guard at a private bank in the city, he said. The family hails from a village in Jhalawar district and has been staying in the city for the past three years. On January 23, a 19-year-old was found dead in his hostel room in Kota. (Those in distress can reach out to Sanjivini for help at 011-4076 9002) PTI

Across

1 Fact: Hard to follow faith without slightest self-doubt (5)

Tiny tiger represented completeness (9)

10 Broadcast attack on King and feel nauseated (7)

Letter - English, sounds like a gun (7)

11 Conservative and smart, not bold (5)

15 Like small donkey (3)

16 Brews IPS drink (3)

13 This lesson ban could be abnormal! (5)

Setting sun, evocative tunes set the mood

President, Vice-President, and PM among top leaders in attendance for Beating Retreat where music bands of the Army, Navy, and IAF played 31 foot-tapping Indian tunes; for the first time, the CRPF had a women-led band; celebrations ended with the popular tune of Sare Jahan se Acha

Samridhi Tewari NEW DELHI

s the sun began to set on Monday, the Raisina echoed with enthralling Indian tunes played by military and paramilitary bands during the Beating Retreat ceremony in the national capital.

"Beating retreat" is a military tradition which dates back from the days when troops disengaged from battle at sunset. The drumbeats recall the days when troops, billeted in towns and cities, were recalled to their quarters at an appointed time in the evening.

The ceremony creates a mood of nostalgia for the times gone by. It marks the culmination of the Republic Day celebrations.

The music bands of the Army, Navy, Indian Air Force and Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) played 31 foot-tapping tunes.

The ceremony began af-



Military bands perform during the Beating Retreat ceremony at Vijay Chowk in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

ter the President and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, Droupadi Murmu, arrived in a traditional colonial-era horsedrawn buggy. The tri-service chiefs welcomed the President. Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, several Union Ministers, and senior officials were present.

It all began with the band's Shankhnaad tune, followed by enthralling tunes such as Veer Bharat, Sangam Dur, Deshon ka

Sartaj Bharat, Bhagirathi, and Arjuna by pipes and drums band. The public clapped to every beat, while some recorded the moment on their phones.

Akshay and Ritu have travelled all the way from Bengaluru and Mumbai to attend the Republic Day ce-

lebrations. "The ceremony is something we have been seeing for a very long time, and every time we did, it felt unreal. The energy cannot be matched," Mr. Akshay said.

Women-led band

For Mr. Akshay, the highlight was the CRPF's women-led band, which was a

"The tri-services formations were beautiful, especially the lighthouse and the symbol of Indian Army, with crossed swords - it was powerful," he said.

Delhi resident Parampara Sharma said: "The Navy had a formation of Mission Chandrayaan. It was unexpected. The beats were all Indian and were new, that too was a surprise. I am attending the ceremony after a gap of eight years, sitting here with my family I felt nostalgic. It brought back so many memories," Ms. Sharma said.

The CAPF bands played Bharat Ke Jawan and Vijay *Bharat* among others. The Indian Air Force band played Tiger Hill, Rejoice in Raisina and Swadeshi.

The Navy band played several tunes, including INS Vikrant, Mission Chandrayaan, Jai Bharati and Hum Tayyar Hain.

With new and unique formations, the Army band played Faulad Ka Jigar, Agniveer, Kargil 1999 and Taqat Watan among others. The massed bands then played the tunes Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon and Drummers Call.

The event ended with the ever-popular tune of Sare Iahan se Acha. The public sang the National Anthem, and the National Flag was taken down.

Residents of Tilak Nagar in Delhi, Shalini, and her nine-year-old daughter, Madhuri, visited the ceremony for the first time. "It has been a dream to see this, and finally I am here. It was magical," she said. The mother-daughter duo said it was beautiful to see the Rashtrapati Bhawan lit up in different colours.

Make yourself able to withstand pressure, PM advises students

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with students, teachers, and parents at the Bharat Mandapam here on Monday during the 7th edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha.

The programme is a movement driven by Mr. Modi's efforts to bring together students, parents, teachers, and the society at large to foster an environment where each child's unique individuality is encouraged and allowed to

Dania Shabu from a private CBSE school in Oman and Mohammed Arsh from government-run Sarvodaya Bal Vidyalaya, Burari in Delhi raised the issue of addressing external factors such as cultural and societal expectations contributing to added pressure on students.

Mr. Modi highlighted the role of teachers in mitigating the impact of added pressure from external factors upon students, and also pointed out that parents have experienced this from time to time. He sug-



Rapt attention: Narendra Modi interacts with students at Pariksha Pe Charcha 2024. ANI

gested making oneself capable of handling pressure and preparing for it as a part of life. He also suggested assessing stress levels and moving forward by gradual increment so that the student's ability is not hampered by it.

'Avoid comparison'

During the interaction, he addressed the issue of competition and challenges during a student's life.

The Prime Minister pointed out that often the seeds of unhealthy competition are planted in the family situations leading to perverse competition among siblings. He asked parents to avoid comparison among their children.

Foreign Secretary arrives in Bhutan amid focus on India's neighbours

<u>Suhasini Haidar</u> Kallol Bhattacherjee NEW DELHI

Close on the heels of the appointment, or "Dakyen", ceremony for Bhutan's new Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and his Cabinet on Sunday, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra arrived in Thimphu on Monday for a three-day

The visit comes amid other moves by the Modi government within the neighbourhood, including hosting the new Bangladesh Foreign Minister in Delhi next week, hosting the Indian Ocean Conference with Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, issuing visas for Pakistani diplomats ahead of elections on February 8 in Pakistan, as well as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Nepal earlier this month.

Mr. Kwatra is expected to discuss bilateral ties with his counterpart, meet Mr. Tobgay and the newly appointed Foreign Minister D.N. Dhungyel, and call on King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

Mr. Tobgay, who was



Nimble diplomacy: Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra with Bhutan Foreign Secretary Aum Pema Choden in Paro, Bhutan. PTI

last in office from 2013 to 2018, was elected with a big majority in elections this month. In particular, retary will discuss how best to take India-Bhutan cooperation forward on the Gelephu mega 'Mindfulness City" project, the site for which Mr. Kwatra had previewed in July 2023. Discussions on the progress expected between Bhutan and China on the border talks, after they signed a 'Cooperation Agreement' on the delimitation and demarcation of their boundary in October 2023, are on the agenda, and Mr. Kwatra is also expected to invite Mr. Tobgay to visit India in the next few weeks.

"The visit is in keeping with the tradition of regular high-level exchanges between Bhutan and India." the Ministry of External Affairs stated, announcing Mr. Kwatra's visit on Monday.

New Delhi is also expecting a visit from Bangladesh Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud on February 7, the first high-level visit from Dhaka since the reelection of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League for a record fourth term. Senior Awami League leaders, including Minister of Road Transport Obaidul Quader, have "appreciated" India's support to Bangladesh during the elections. Both countries are also expected to dis-

cuss security issues along the Bangladesh-Mizoram border as well as the situation in Myanmar's Rakhine province and the future of Rohingya refugees taking shelter in Bangladesh. After the visit, Dr. Jaish-

ankar will fly to Perth, Australia for the Indian Ocean Conference, organised by the India Foundation and hosted by India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and other regional countries, where Sri Lankan President Wickremesinghe, Prime Minister S.L. Rabuka, and several Foreign Ministers are among the speakers

Meanwhile, confirmed that India and Pakistan exchanged assignment visas for dozens of diplomats, diplomatic staff and family members to serve at each other's High Commissions in Islamabad and Delhi on Monday as well. India had sent its Charge D'Affaires (CDA) Geetika Srivastava to Pakistan in August 2023, and has now accepted the appointment of Saad Warraich as Pakistan's CDA, to replace Aizaz Khan, who is currently officiating as Deputy High Commissioner.

TH CROSSWORD+ 14084 (set by Vidwan)

get across to our crossword site. @ https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn

To solve this puzzle online,



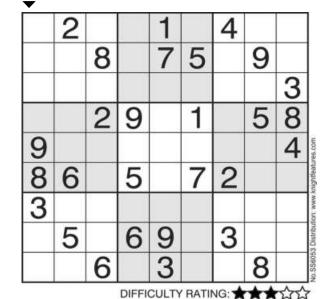


- Sounds like tick? East European one! (5) Bear's bendy weapon (5)
- 23 Large place like Mahe provides cotton fibre (5) Man's address is possibly royal (3)
- 25 Endlessly press for discharge (3) **26** A longer route avoiding Panama Gulf (5)
- Small, firm and mostly fresh cake (5)
- 29 Small picture about ultimate material (7) 31 One serving coffee in Zanzibar is Tanzanian (7)
- Said to be first rule (9)
- 34 University replaces very device that controls flow rate (5)

1 Philosophers toss their curls (9)

- 2 Foolishly suing Indian state can be exhausting (5,2)
- Hot sex is a rage (3)
- One light kind of structural element (1-4)
- Drink and eat liberally (3)
- Having circular movement during high-energy rallies (5) Ape a friend having sex (7)
- Expression of fear? Yes...of an ex-USA President (5) Try and sample to evaluate basically (5)
- Ancient German characters go with emphases on both sides (5) Almost complete place of calm (5)
- Malt and this game could be matchless (5)
- Patronise this derby perhaps for operations research (5,4) Staple batsman, mostly playing as opener for India (7)
- No principle backing the marriage ceremony (7) Appear suddenly, quietly with ordinary young dog (3-2) One with tact makes room at the top (5)
- Small fit for fur (5) Exceed limit (3)
- - Title in some measure for evangelists (3)

SUDOKU



Solution to previous puzzle Solution to yesterday's Sudoku 5 1 8 7 9 6 4 2 29436157 5961278 4 3 5 9 8 7 6 1 68743925

Tyagaraja's Rama bhakti

Internalising Rama, as shown by Saint Tyagaraja, by focusing one's faculties upon Him and chanting his nama, is guaranteed to help realise the Lord and attain moksham, said Suchithra Balasubramanian in a discourse. He lived his entire life exemplifying Rama bhakti. Born in Tiruvarur, not a day passed without his immersing himself in Rama's stellar qualities.

He had no other ambition but to serve the Lord, sing His praises and chant His name: he chanted Rama nama 96 crore times. For Tyagaraja, life on earth was not defined by material quest, but by the spiritual goal of total supplication to the highest power.

Throughout the ages, the average person is governed by basic wants, but Tyagaraja strongly believed that one's mission should be to conduct oneself in such a manner as to receive Rama anugraham. His musical compositions were a free flowing river of devotion, appealing to Him for His grace. In the famous kirtanai, Patti viduva radhu, he makes a fervent appeal, Aputtina nade nija bhaktini meda katti guttu cederaka brociceyi. (Having constrained me, like a knot in the neck, with true devotion to You from the day I was born, and having protected my honour from being compromised, it is not proper to leave the hand of this Tyagaraja, Your servant, having held it). One might wonder if devotion alone is enough to get by in this world, and Tyagaraja proved it to be so. His life continues to teach ordinary people to walk the path of a virtuous life, despite trials and tribulations, by invoking the name of Rama.

What is Humboldt's enigma and what does it mean for India?

While we expect diversity to decrease away from the tropics, mountains are an exception. This is the essence of Humboldt's enigma. But scientific evidence has been hard to acquire, requiring the use of complex analytical methods and large datasets, but is still incomplete

V.V. Robin Naman Goval

here is biodiversity concentrated? Explorers and naturalists have been asking this question for centuries. Many have also been curious why some areas are more biodiverse than others.

One of them was Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) - a polymath who recorded observations on various natural phenomena across the fields known today as geography, geology, meteorology, and biology.

Once, when exploring South America, he recorded the distribution of plants on a mountain. He also noted how climates were similar across various mountains in different parts of the world - but where specific features occurred on a mountain varied with elevation.

From his various studies, Humboldt suggested there was a relationship between temperature, altitude, and humidity on one hand and the occurrence patterns of species - or their biodiversity - on the other. His example of choice was the Chimborazo mountain in Ecuador, which has today become an important illustration of mountain diversity.

Two centuries later, a group of biogeographers - scientists who explore the relationship of diversity with geography - used modern tools to take another look at the drivers of biodiversity.

Based on their findings, they proposed their own version of the link between biodiversity and mountains and called it Humboldt's enigma.

What is Humboldt's enigma?

The world's tropical areas receive more energy from the Sun because of the earth's angle of inclination. So the tropics have greater primary productivity, which then facilitates greater diversity: more ecological niches become available, creating more complex ecosystems and greater biological diversity.

The proponents of Humboldt's enigma have held that the earth's tropical areas by themselves don't contain all the biodiverse regions, that many areas outside the tropics are highly biodiverse. These places are mountains.

Indeed, while we expect diversity to ecrease away from the tropics mountains have been an important exception. This is the essence of Humboldt's enigma. But scientific evidence has been hard to acquire, requiring the use of complex analytical methods and large datasets of various taxonomic groups - and even then remains an incomplete exercise.

A simple way to think of Humboldt's enigma in India is to consider the biodiversity in our tropical areas, south of the Tropic of Cancer passing through Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. These areas are supposed to be the most diverse in the country. The Western Ghats plus Sri Lanka biodiversity hotspot lies in this

However, the eastern Himalaya are much more diverse. Some scientists have even suggested this part of the mountain range is the second-most diverse area of perching birds in the world. For river birds, the eastern Himalaya may be the most diverse.



A view from one of the Shola Sky Islands. PRASENJEET YADAV/WWW.SKYISLAND.IN (SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT)

To understand how this might be possible, let's turn to the modern understanding of Humboldt's enigma.

What drives biodiversity?

The history of the earth, its geography, and the climate are the main drivers of mountain diversity. And different biodiversity at different locations is the result of changes in how these factors have intermingled over time and space.

We know mountains host two processes that generate biodiversity. First: geological processes, like uplifts, result in new habitats where new species arise, so the habitats are 'cradles'. Second: species on some climatologically stable mountains persist there for a long time, so these spots are 'museums' that accumulate many such species over time.

Coastal tropical sky islands (mountains urrounded by lowlands) like the Shola Sky Islands in the Western Ghats, are a good example. Here, old lineages have persisted on the mountain tops as climates and habitats fluctuated around them in the lower elevations. This is the reason some of the oldest bird species in the Western Ghats, such as the Sholicola and the Montecincla, are housed on the Shola Sky Islands.

Sometimes, the same mountain can be both cradle for some species and museum for others, depending on the species' ecologies.

The northern Andes range - including Chimborazo - is considered the most biodiverse place in the world. If we start from the foothills of the Andes and climb, we're going to encounter different temperatures and rainfall levels that support everything from tropical evergreen biomes in the lower elevation to the alpine and tundra biomes near the top. Such a large variation over short distances supports the immense



The more heterogeneous the geological composition of mountains is, the more biodiverse they are.

biodiversity found in mountain regions and worldwide.

Another critical force in biodiversity formation is geology. The foundations on which mountains are erected often differ from those on which low-elevation regions rest.

Scientists have found that the more heterogeneous the geological composition of mountains is, the more biodiverse they are. Around the world, all mountains with high biodiversity have high geological heterogeneity as well, especially in the tropics. Even in tropical regions, where we expect higher biodiversity, some mountains with a lower variety of rocks are relatively less biodiverse. We also know plants are influenced by the type of soil, which depends on the type of rocks in that area. So high geological heterogeneity often produces unique habitat patches on mountains within similar climate regimes, and promotes diversification.

Against this backdrop, what drives biodiversity in the eastern Himalaya? Climate dissimilarity is still one crucial factor, something Humboldt also indicated based on his observations of the Chimborazo and understood to be a paradigm. Researchers have also found some groups of birds to have evolved elsewhere and dispersed to the Himalaya, resulting in higher diversity there.

What do we still not know?

Multiple factors drive diversification and the Humboldt's enigma in different

parts of the world. Then again, scientists have also advanced more than a hundred different hypotheses on how diversity varies in different parts of the world, and they contend with the enigma in different ways. This article simply presents the big picture.

An important limitation of scientists' attempts to explain biodiversity patterns is the lack of fine data on where species occur. For now, birds are the best-described group around the world, and their diversity patterns suggest mountains play a defining role.

We need more research. In India in particular, several areas are under-studied. We can't expect to understand a place's true biodiversity unless we also use modern tools like genetics. For example, why don't the Eastern Ghats have any endemic nasserine hirds? The most likely a is that scientists haven't studied them for more than a century, especially with modern tools.

Some national programmes are trying to address these gaps, including the National Mission on Himalayan Studies, the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem, and the National Mission on Biodiversity and Human Wellbeing. They need to be strengthened, bolstered by the will to support basic research on diversity.

Humboldt's enigma is perhaps one of many puzzles of mountain biodiversity and our backyards are excellent places to study them, to find answers to global problems of climate and landscape

(V.V. Robin is an associate professor studying bird ecology using genetics and bioacoustics, and Naman Goyal is a PhD student working on the diversification patterns of birds - both at IISER Tirupati.)

Please send in your answers to

science@thehindu.co.in



Image manipulation had been used to enhance results. GETTY IMAGES

Research fakery is uncovered at cancer centre

Associated Press

Allegations of research fakery at a leading cancer centre have turned a spotlight on scientific integrity and the amateur sleuths uncovering image manipulation in published research.

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, a Harvard Medical School affiliate, announced January 22 it's requesting retractions and corrections of scientific papers after a British blogger flagged problems in early January.

The blogger, 32-year-old Sholto David, of Pontypridd, Wales, is a scientist-sleuth who detects cut-and-paste image manipulation in published scientific papers.

He and other champions of scientific integrity are keeping researchers and science journals on their toes. They use special software, oversize computer monitors, and their eagle eyes to find flipped, duplicated and stretched images, along with potential plagiarism.

In a January 2 blog post, Mr. David presented suspicious images from more than 30 published papers by four Dana-Farber scientists, including CEO

When a journal retracts an article, that usually means the research is so severely flawed that the findings are no longer reliable

Laurie Glimcher and COO William Hahn.

Many images appeared to have duplicated segments that would make the scientists' results look stronger. The papers under scrutiny involve lab research on the workings of cells. One involved samples from bone marrow from human volunteers.

The blog post included problems spotted by Mr. David and others previously exposed by sleuths on PubPeer, a site that allows anonymous comments on scientific papers.

Dana-Farber said it already had been looking into some of the problems before the blog post. By January 22, the institution said it was in the process of requesting six retractions of published research and that another 31 papers warranted corrections.

Retractions are serious. When a journal retracts an article that usually means the research is so severely flawed that the findings are no longer reliable.

Barrett Rollins, research integrity officer at Dana-Farber, said in a statement: "Following the usual practice at Dana-Farber to review any potential data error and make corrections when warranted, the institution and its scientists already have taken prompt and decisive action in 97% of the cases that had been flagged by Sholto David."

Microbiologist Elisabeth Bik has been sleuthing for a decade. Based on her work, scientific journals have retracted 1,133 articles, corrected 1,017 others, and printed 153 expressions of concern, according to a spreadsheet where she tracks responses to her reports.

Technology has made it easier to root out image manipulation and plagiarism, said Ivan Oransky, who teaches medical journalism at New York University and co-founded the Retraction Watch blog.

Others doing the investigative work remain anonymous . Together, they have "changed the equation" in scientific publication, Mr. Oransky said.

"They want science to be and do better," Mr. Oransky said. "And they are frustrated by how uninterested most people in academia - and certainly in publishing - are in correcting the record."

For feedback and suggestions

for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

COVID-19 pandemic brought out the best in scientists

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak to be a 'public health emergency of international concern'. Name the rules, first adopted in 1969, that require the WHO's member states to respond swiftly in response to such a declaration.

QUESTION 2

The virus that causes COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, is a positive-sense single-stranded RNA virus. The 'positive-sense' refers to a genome that functions as a ____ molecule. The virus uses this molecule as a template based on which a cell, like in the human body, can 'manufacture' more copies of the virus. Fill in the blank

QUESTION 3

Name the two scientists who won the Nobel Prize for medicine/physiology in 2023 for the work that laid the foundations for the fastest vaccine development programme in history to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

QUESTION 4

Name the Chinese pulmonologist who recorded a cluster of pneumonia cases on December 26 and reported it to the Chinese Centres for Disease Control (CCDC) the next day. Based on her report. one company sequenced genomes from these patients and reported a "novel coronavirus" to the CCDC.

QUESTION 5

As COVID-19 spread in waves worldwide, researchers considered repurposing existing drugs to treat infections. Of these, four popular ones were

hydroxychloroquine, ivermectin, and ritonavir. None of them have a proven ability to treat COVID-19. Fill in the blank with the name of a drug whose primary purpose is treating hepatitis C.

Answers to January 25 quiz: 1. Collective name for chains of carbon atoms

- Ans: Polymers 2. India's national adhering organisation for chemistry - Ans: Indian National Science

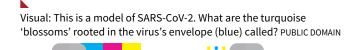
3. Famous example of a aromatic hydrocarbon first synthesised by August Kekulé – Ans: Benzene

4. Organic compound with the IUPAC name pyridine-3-carboxylic acid - Ans: Vitamin B3 (nicotinic acid) 5. Name for the moiety of a molecule that

- Ans: Functional group Visual: Technetium sestamibi First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Tadar Sahi |

Priyamvada Verma | Shiva Nigam

influences its behaviour in a chemical reaction





Changing partners

Nitish Kumar's unedifying volte-faces are an insult to voters of Bihar

deological infidelity is not a rare affliction among career politicians. Power, wealth and the many vices that often motivate political actors are not unfamiliar to Indian voters. Even by these low standards, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar appears to be plumbing new depths with his recurrent somersaults. He has changed partners multiple times, with little more reasoning than satisfying his desire for power. Mr. Kumar's about-turn in 2017 betrayed the mandate of 2015 and in 2022, he betrayed the mandate of 2020. In 2020, Mr. Kumar's Janata Dal (United) had won the election in alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), but two years later he broke from it to form an alliance with the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Congress. That was a clear insult of the mandate. He has now made yet another turn, this time returning to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. Within the day, he resigned as Chief Minister, claimed the post again with new partners, and was sworn-in again as Chief Minister. Only a few weeks ago, Mr. Kumar was fashioning himself as the leader of the anti-BJP Opposition alliance. It might be true that politics makes for strange bedfellows, but Mr. Kumar has turned his acts of disloyalty into a familiar script. Meanwhile, his claim of being a champion of good governance appears so distant in the past, and completely unfamiliar.

Until the moment of the turnaround, the BJP was loudly proclaiming that it would never again align with Mr. Kumar and the JD(U). There is no explanation from either side on their sudden change of heart. Mr. Kumar had tried to corner the BJP on the question of caste, in alliance with the RJD and the Congress. The socio-economic survey of castes in Bihar that his previous government ordered did not turn out to be a watershed moment as Mr. Kumar perhaps hoped. At the same time, the BJP felt insecure enough to look for a rapprochement with the JD(U), which commands considerable following among non-Yadav Other Backward Classes in Bihar. The opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya marked a new phase of Hindu consolidation behind the BJP, but the party is always watching out for erosion triggered by caste mobilisation. By redrafting Mr. Kumar, the BJP has defanged the limited potency that was left in his social justice politics. The BJP is the biggest beneficiary of the realignment in Bihar, while the biggest loser might be Mr. Kumar himself. His political base is being raided, and his legacy stands besmirched. But, he is still the Chief Minister, and nothing else seems to matter to him. It is not exactly future perfect, but it is happily present continuous.

The best of Tests

Test cricket showcases skill better, but is not short of excitement

yderabad and Brisbane are split by an aerial distance of 9,443 kilometres and yet on Sunday, the two cities were seemingly fused together through some cricketing magic. The old sporting trope of the underdog toppling the fancied rival was again in play as England at Hyderabad and the West Indies at Brisbane, respectively humbled their potent hosts India and Australia. Test cricket, often lost in the stardust and breathless hype that permeates its younger and faster siblings, ODIs and T20Is, found its mojo and again reiterated its durability and the potential to alter scripts and presumptions. At Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, England conceded a 190-run first innings lead to India and on a surface tipped to aid spin, it was deemed that Ben Stokes and his Bazball troops were down for the count. However, in the second innings tussle, Ollie Pope's splendid 196 and left-arm spinner Tom Hartley's seven for 62 left India stranded by 28 runs while chasing a target of 231. Pope's sweeps, both conventional and reverse, employed against the Indian spinners were effective, and debutant Hartley, whose first ball in Test cricket was hammered for a six by Yashasvi Jaiswal, made a stirring comeback in the second dig to hoodwink Rohit Sharma's men. England now leads the five match series at 1-0.

The absence of Virat Kohli, due to personal reasons, did leave a vacuum in the middle order even as the other batters, including K.L. Rahul, tried hard to bridge that gap. England spinners choking Indian batters in their backyard is not new as Phil Edmonds and Pat Pocock showed in 1984, and Graeme Swann and Monty Panesar in 2012. As the series shifts to Visakhapatnam, India will have to find a method to reiterate its dominance. Meanwhile at Brisbane's Gabba, it was the turn of another debutant to prosper. Despite an injured toe, Shamar Joseph's fiery pace and his second innings tally of seven for 68 blew away the Australians, who pursued a target of 216. The eight-run triumph helped the West Indies draw level the two-Test series at 1-1. The stalemate hinted at the need for a minimum of three Tests to judge teams and find the real victor. The men from the Caribbean have floundered in the past, but the latest result hints at a turnaround. The West Indies had its sunshine phases in limited overs cricket, winning the ICC Champions Trophy in 2004 and the ICC T20 World Cups in 2012 and 2016. Sunday's Test victory offers a fresh path laden with hope for the West Indies.

Growth mania can be injurious to society

he nation's media, present in full force at the annual conference of the World Economic Forum (WEF), dutifully relayed back to India sound bytes uttered by the allies of the world's giant corporations. Among these was the laudatory statement by the WEF's President that India was a \$10 trillion economy in the making. This is only the most recent of a spate of predictions on the future size of India's economy. At least it can be said for them that it is India's own leaders who were the first to make these. Thus, in 2019, upon returning to office, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that India aimed to become a \$5 trillion economy by 2024, which would have been the end of his current term.

That this has not materialised as yet has not deterred other political leaders from making predictions of, or expressing an aspiration for, a \$1 trillion economy for their States. This includes the Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Though these leaders represent political parties with widely differing social agendas and ideologies, they seem united in their economic goals. From Davos to Lucknow and Chennai, never before has growth dominated the economic agenda in democracies. This bears mentioning, as a democracy is also meant to deliver other things.

Growth is a legitimate aspiration in India where the majority of the population is yet to attain a reasonable standard of living. Indeed, it should remain on the table so long as this is the case. The point, though, is that going all out for economic size may not do much by way of levelling the income of the presently excluded even as it may generate outcomes that are undesirable to all. Such outcomes are already in evidence in India, and an economic policy that privileges growth could exacerbate them.

Growth plus rising inequality

The first thing to note about the recent growth in India is that it has been accompanied by growing inequality. It is important to recognise that this trend is not new. Having commenced in the 1980s, it picked up in the next decade, after which it has been unstoppable. It has, by now, reached levels that make India one of the more unequal societies in the world. With government agencies appearing reluctant to supply data, it is difficult to provide precise estimates of this inequality, but the world's leading inequality



Balakrishnan is an economist

researchers are very likely right in describing India as "a poor country with an affluent elite' ('World Inequality Report', 2022). This augurs badly for the country. It is not just that the growth we are witnessing is unequalising, it is that it appears to be making little difference to the income levels of the poorest. The rising tide may not be lifting all boats after all.

Rural wage rates

A simple exercise would cast light on how unequal recent growth in India has been. I rely on what is one of the more reliable sources of data on wages - that on rural wage rates published by the Labour Bureau. These are based on actual market quotations rather than responses given to surveys. Also, unlike data gathered from income-tax records, which have value in determining the distribution of income, the wage data can convey information on the level of living at the bottom of the pyramid. A weakness of the Labour Bureau data, however, is that it presents data on wages of male workers alone. The absence of data on women workers is a serious omission as women have historically constituted approximately half the workforce in the cultivation of certain crops. We are left to assume that the agricultural wage rate for women has moved alongside that of men, so that we may rely on the latter alone.

Once the data have been adjusted for inflation, we find the following trends in the real wage rate. With respect to agricultural labour, there is a mild increase. To be precise, the real wage rate has grown by 4.6% over the nine years from 2014 to 2022-23. However, even this bare movement is truncated. The real wage rate peaks midway through the period and has remained stagnant since. Nevertheless, it is higher on average since 2014. Compared to the wages of the agricultural workers, the real wage rate of non-agricultural and construction workers, respectively, is actually lower at the end of the period studied. The Sixth Economic Census of India (2013-14) reports that 51.7% of the employed are in rural India, and, of these, the overwhelming majority (68.9%) are non-agricultural workers.

This implies that for about 35% of India's workforce, real wages have not grown since 2014. So, even though there is growth of the economy, per capita income at the bottom of the pyramid is not rising. Even for the section of the rural workforce for which data show an increase in the real wage rate, the increase is dwarfed by the growth of per capita income in the economy as a whole. Over the period 2014-23, real per capita income in India has increased by 37% while the real wage of agricultural labour has increased by less than 5%.

Why inequality does matter

Should it matter to us that the growth in India is unequal? We can think of at least two reasons why it does. First, as has been carefully documented, unequal societies are subject to the worst forms of social pathology. These range from violence to disease and mental health disorder. The rich are not immune from the pathologies, for they must now build moats around their urban castles to protect their riches – which is what the gated communities of India in effect are. Second, inequality stands in the way of achieving collective action at a time when it is most needed. It does so by lowering trust between groups for they stand differently in their valuation of some public goods. Think of India's challenge at achieving total sanitation, which is what the Swachh Bharat Mission ostensibly aims for. The rich, who have all their basic needs and more met, want clean public spaces, while the poor, whose basic needs are unmet, are not as motivated to contribute towards this. The persistence of open defecation, which reflects an unwillingness to shift to practices that contribute to the greater public good, is an example of this. Inequality can defeat attempts to build public goods in spheres as diverse as the conservation of natural capital and urban waste management to lowering the threat from climate change, for those excluded from economic growth have less of a stake in these goals.

However, whatever its pernicious effects, the reduction of inequality ought not to be seen merely in terms of its instrumentality in overcoming some of our most pressing challenges. India is a democracy, as the Prime Minister constantly reminds us, and it is not in the spirit of democracy to have such divergent economic outcomes. India has not, historically, given enough space in its economic policy to the gross inequality of opportunity across its population. If at a time of an already unequal distribution of income the preoccupation of political parties is how to maximise the size of the economy, it is unlikely that we will ever bridge

Populism does not help public health

n the heart of India's bustling cities and tranquil villages, there is a silent but significant fight raging on the public health front. It is not the dramatic triumphs of curative medicine that dominate this story but the quiet victories of preventing diseases such as smallpox (though eradicated, it is still under surveillance), polio, neonatal tetanus, and measles, through improved sanitation and vaccines. These are unsung wins where the absence of illness speaks volumes. Yet, in a democratic setup, leaders often chase tangible achievements and, inadvertently or otherwise, overlook these vital preventive

In particular, political leaders across the spectrum have leaned towards initiatives that promise immediate results, such as new hospitals, subsidised treatments in private hospitals, emergency response (over preventive response), and populist health policies. Many of these measures do not have much of an impact because of a lack of action beyond public announcements, which is almost always due to budgetary constraints. But even before being implemented, these schemes and the focus of our leaders on them divert attention from critical areas such as sanitation, disease surveillance, and public health education, which are important to maintain population health and prevent disease outbreaks.

The case of dengue

Consider the story of dengue, a disease that has only symptomatic treatments, and no definitive cure. When cases surge, political leaders often mobilise the State machinery to set up immediate relief camps at the expense of long-term strategies such as understanding vector bionomics or developing effective vaccines. We need both, yet, dengue stands out as a classic example of prioritising immediate response over sustainable prevention.

The focus on providing emergency relief also sidelines the availability of public attention for the root causes of dengue and its long-term prevention, and the research required in vector control, vaccine development, and improvement in public health infrastructure. As a result, the current approach fails to prevent future outbreaks and strains the health-care system.

Research and development in these areas are crucial. For example, despite its limitations and restrictions, the existing dengue vaccine underscores the need for more research. Climate



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Dr. C. Aravinda

is an Assistant Department of Thanjavur Medical College, Tamil Nadu

change is also affecting mosquito breeding and movement patterns, and public health strategies need to adapt to these changes.

To borrow an idea from the architecture of India's judicial setup and also the space programme, health care will benefit from being separated from political processes. Public health decisions should be based on scientific evidence and long-term goals rather than short-term political interests. This separation will ensure public health policies are driven by data and expertise, not electoral cycles.

Civil servant Joseph Bhore's insights from 1946, into the economic and human cost of neglecting preventive health measures, still ring true. Investments in nutrition programmes, while not immediately visible, have far-reaching implications for health and productivity.

The contemporary Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme For Holistic Nourishment (POSHAN) Abhiyan Scheme plans to reduce stunting by 2%, undernutrition by 2%, anaemia by 3%, and low birth weight by 2% every year. But the fifth National Family Health Survey found 35.5% of children under five were stunted and 32.1% were underweight in 2019-21. The prevalence of anaemic children aged 6-59 months increased from 58.6% to 67.1%, and 54.1% to 59.1% among women aged 15-19 years. This disparity between prevalence and policy targets highlights

a significant gap in public health efforts. The influence of the pharmaceutical industry in public health is undeniable. While instrumental in advancing curative medicine, its profit-driven nature often sidelines areas such as public health. For instance, despite having the same medicines to fight tuberculosis (TB), India reported 21.4 lakh TB cases in 2021, an 18% increase from 2020, translating to an incidence of 210 cases per 1,00,000 population. In contrast, the United States reported only 8,331 TB cases in 2022, about 2.5 cases per 1,00,000 persons. This disparity is not merely a matter of the availability of medical treatment but is deeply linked to socio-economic factors such as poverty, sanitation, and overcrowding (as a result of poorly organised urban housing) prevalent in

Behavioural change is key to managing public health challenges. Yet, it can be challenging in political environments influenced by populist tendencies. The absence of specialised courses

such as public health engineering in India's educational institutions points to a gap in the multidisciplinary approach required in public health management.

Public health is not just about treating diseases. It is about preventing them, requiring expertise from various fields such as environmental science, sociology, urban planning, and economics. The current physician-centric focus of India's public health system often fails to capture this comprehensive

A degree of autonomy is needed

Effective public health management should encompass preventive measures, policy formulation, community health, and environmental health, among others. In public health, adopting a separation of powers approach is essential. A fair and effective health system requires freedom from political influence, focusing on policymaking and implementation driven by scientific evidence and long-term objectives. While prioritising health decisions based on scientific evidence and overarching public health goals are crucial, there is a risk of disconnecting from the immediate health concerns of the general populace.

To address this, an ideal solution would be to place Health Ministries directly under the leadership of elected officials, such as the Chief Minister or the Prime Minister, similar to the management of the space and the atomic energy departments. This structure would not only provide a degree of autonomy but also ensure that health policies are aligned with the people's immediate and practical needs, striking a balance between expert-driven decisions and public aspirations.

In sum, democracy is not inherently harmful to public health but the way public health is managed within democratic systems often leads to significant shortcomings. Infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, health-care access, mental health, and misinformation pose challenges that demand a more holistic, long-term approach in public health policy. A separation of health-care decision-making from short-term political goals is crucial to develop sustainable health strategies that address both the immediate and future health needs of the population.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Operation Bihar

Are elections held to serve the people or political parties? It is painful that Governors support these actions.

Further, to see the Bharatiya Janata Party, which says that it is a party with a difference, indulge in this unethical power game,

especially after the consecration of Lord Ram temple in Ayodhya, is saddening.

The political developments in Bihar are a dark shadow and do make right-thinking people lose confidence in the electoral system (Page 1, "Nitish switches sides yet again, takes oath as CM",

January 29). Kshirasagara Balaji Rao, Hyderabad

A fair and

political

influence

effective health

system requires

freedom from

It is appalling that Mr. Kumar still continues to call the shots. His latest political 'turnaround' demolishes the much touted

prospects of the 'INDIA' bloc.

'secular-communal' rhetoric and also the electoral

the electorate of Bihar will definitely give a befitting reply to Mr. Kumar in the It is fervently hoped that

Corrections & Clarifications

The report, "3-D Ramayana shows will be on display for devotees in Ayodhya" (January 28, 2024), erroneously said a three-storey museum at the Ram Katha Park in Ayodhya would be built over an area of 30,000 sq km. It should have been 30,000 sq ft.

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elections. B. Suresh Kumar, Coimbatore

Old is gold

Rohan Bopanna's win, as the oldest number one in doubles history, shows that age is just a number. C.G. Kuriakose, Kothamangalam, Kerala

THE HINDU

Early nutrition impacts cognitive development

tunting irreversibly affects not just the height, but also the cognitive development of a child. While the long-term impact of early childhood stunting on educational levels is recognised, the processes by which it results in lower educational achievements, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, are not well understood. A deeper insight into the underlying mechanisms is crucial for formulating effective policies to enhance educational outcomes in these contexts.

Challenge in research

A significant challenge in research on the effects of early human capital investments, such as nutrition, on cognitive development is their focus on specific cognitive-achievement test scores in areas such as math, reading, and vocabulary. Moreover, achievement tests, which assess knowledge acquired through schooling, may not fully reflect inherent cognitive skills. This is because they depend on both cognitive abilities and access to education. For instance, stunting might influence learning outcomes due to behavioural factors, such as delayed school enrolment, rather than purely cognitive deficits. Consequently, while cognitive skills are malleable and less dependent on educational investments, their assessment through traditional achievement tests remains complex and potentially misleading. In the case of India, NCERT's National Achievement Test and Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report also look at the status of children's enrolment and learning outcomes only.

However, a recent study by Sánchez et al. (2024) in 'World Development' examines the link between early under-nutrition and four key cognitive skills developed later in childhood: working memory, inhibitory control, long-term memory, and implicit learning. The first two measure executive functioning.



is Officer on Special Duty, Research, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime

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The study done in Ethiopia and Peru provides an understanding of how stunting really affects cognitive ability. It found that stunting at approximately age 5 is negatively related to executive functions measured years later. This relationship remains strong even when accounting for household fixed effects. These are a statistical technique used to control for unobserved factors that are constant within a household but differ between households. This method allows researchers to focus on the effects of variables like stunting on outcomes such as cognitive development by comparing individuals within the same family.

The findings also suggest that the impact of stunting on working memory might occur as early as age 5, influenced by vocabulary development. These results add to the body of literature that connects early nutrition with educational achievement.

Empirical studies have shown that women's height and educational attainment are strong predictors of child stunting in India. Interventions that improve these can indirectly contribute to better nutritional outcomes in their children.

These findings have implications for India as they underscore the critical importance of early childhood nutrition as a determinant of cognitive development and later educational outcome. India is addressing stunting in two ways. First, Poshan Abhiyaan and Integrated Child Development Services have played a significant role in addressing the issue of stunting. With the objective of reducing malnutrition in districts with the highest burden, Poshan Abhiyaan focuses on enhancing the utilisation and quality of Anganwadi services to ensure holistic development and adequate nutrition for pregnant

women, mothers, and children. Second, studies, including those by Spears (2013), found that improved sanitation reduces the

incidence of diarrhoea and stunting. Investments in clean water and sanitation infrastructure are crucial. India has been addressing these with the Jal Jeevan Mission and the Swachh Bharat Mission.

Three key strategies To markedly improve child nutrition and combat under-nutrition in India, three key strategies can be the largest needle movers. First, promoting early breastfeeding, along with continued breastfeeding for two years, coupled with appropriate complementary feeding starting at six months, is essential. This not only prevents stunting but also fosters optimal child development. Government initiatives, such as the Mother's Absolute Affection Programme, need expansion to provide comprehensive lactation support and create breastfeeding-friendly environments. Leveraging mobile technology to educate mothers about the criticality of exclusive breastfeeding in the first six months is also vital. At the same time, improving maternal

Second as children grow, diversifying their diet becomes crucial. India should implement and scale up community-based complementary feeding programmes. These can educate parents about the importance of adding a variety of foods to their child's diet after six months of age, focusing on locally available, nutrient-rich food options.

nutrition is crucial, as healthier

mothers have healthier babies.

Finally, adding an extra Anganwadi worker to each Anganwadi centre could help. Studies, including a randomised trial in Tamil Nadu, have shown that extra staff can double preschool instructional time and improve math and language scores and reduce child stunting and severe malnutrition. This approach promises better developmental outcomes for children and creates substantial employment opportunities.

Garnering votes, statue by statue

Jagan Mohan Reddy is leaving no stone unturned to fetch votes

STATE OF PLAY

G.V.R. Subba Rao subbarao.gavaravarapu@thehindu.co.in

ndhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy unveiled a 206-foot-tall statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar at Swarajya Maidan in Vijayawada on January 19, in what is being seen as an attempt to attract the votes of the Scheduled Caste (SC) population in the Assembly and parliamentary elections due later this year.

"This towering statue reflects Ambedkar's immense contribution to India's social, economic, political and gender landscapes," Mr. Reddy said while inaugurating the Statue of Social Justice. "Even a century later, his visionary words echo, steering the nation towards progress. Recognising his enduring principles, our government has woven them into our 'Navaratnalu' initiatives," he added.

The SC community constitutes about 19% of Andhra Pradesh's population. The YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) contested the general elections for the first time in 2014. It won 13 seats from the SC segment out of the total 29 it contested. In 2019, the party won 33 SC and ST seats. In comparison, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) managed to win only one SC seat in 2019. Despite its success with the SC community over the years, the YSCRP is leaving no stone unturned, especially given the alliance between the TDP and the Jana Sena Party.

While inaugurating the statue, Mr. Reddy said, "Untouchability doesn't mean mere physical distance but disinterest and unwillingness in hand holding the oppressed people as well. The Opposition's unwillingness to support the YSRCP government's endeavours for socio-economic change in society, as perceived by Dr. Ambedkar, was

nothing but untouchability in

another form," he said.

ANDHRA

PRADESH

There have been several attempts in Andhra Pradesh to garner votes by installing statues. Politics too has been played over the installation of such statues. In 2011, the statue of a Chief Minister of combined Andhra Pradesh, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, was installed near the Police Control Room in Vijayawada. The base of the structure was a replica of the Polavaram Project. The cost of installing the statue was borne by the Rajagopal Foundation, which was then headed by Vijayawada MP from the Congress, Lagadapati Rajagopal. He was one of the participants of the padayatra taken out by Reddy, which is said to have brought the Congress back to power in 2004. In 2015, the statue was removed by the then TDP government, which claimed that it was obstructing traffic. After returning to power, the YSRCP reinstalled the statue.

Earlier, in 1995-96, Rajasekhara Reddy visited Vijayawada as Congress Legislature Party leader to unveil the statue of Congress MLA Vangaveeti Mohana Ranga Rao (Vangaveeti Ranga). Vangaveeti Ranga was seen as a champion of the dominant Kapu com-

munity. The cost of installing the statue was borne by his followers in the Congress. However, Vangaveeti Ranga's widow, Ratnakumari, who was a TDP MLA, opposed this. She even preempted Reddy by getting her son Radhakrishna, then a teenager, to unveil the statue. Vangaveeti Ranga's statues can be seen not just in Vijayawada, but as far as composite East and West Godavari districts. Ranga's statues are fewer in number in the city compared to those installed in the rural areas of Krishna and Godavari districts.

When N. Chandrababu Naidu planned to install a statue of former Chief Minister N.T. Rama Rao on the Godavari ghats, it led to a controversy. Mr. Naidu also planned to construct a 125-feet Ambedkar statue at Amaravati and laid the foundation stone for it in April 2016. The TDP government planned to construct an Ambedkar memorial, comprising a statue, a park, a convention centre, a Buddhist meditation hall, and a library. But when the government changed, the project was shifted to Vijayawada. As sentiments were running high in Amaravati, a statue of Buddha came up overnight in the city soon after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh.

Installing statues does not ensure victory, however. In Telangana, for instance, when the previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi government installed a statue of Ambedkar in Hyderabad, it did so with much fanfare. But it lost the elections soon after. To compete with the YSRCP, the Opposition parties in Andhra Pradesh are now promising to install statues of N.T. Rama Rao across the State, if voted back to power. This, they hope, will fetch them Kamma votes.

Majority use Digi Yatra unknowingly or under compulsion: survey

Only 15% of the survey respondents said that they used the facility knowing the benefits of it

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

majority of air travellers who flew out of Delhi using Digi Yatra, the biometric boarding system that helps in processing passengers at select airports, did so unknowingly or were compelled to use it. A relatively small number of people signed up for the system knowing the benefits it offered. Moreover, a significant share also said that they had not signed up for the service and always took the normal queue.

These conclusions are based on a survey conducted by LocalCircles on its online portal. The portal received 21,000 responses from citizens who flew out of Delhi airport in the last six months. Over 60% of the respondents were men and the rest were women. Only Indian citizens who were registered with LocalCircles were allowed to participate in the survey, which was published on January 27.

The Digi Yatra facility has come under severe criticism in recent days. Last month, many passengers complained on social media about how their biometric data was collected without their consent at various checkpoints in airports. The scheme was rolled out in December 2022 as a voluntary programme. However, 15% of the respondents in the LocalCircles survey said that they signed up for the facility as there was no "regular queue", as shown in Chart 1. Chart 1 shows answers to the following question in the survey: 'When you travelled by air in the last six months, how did you sign up for the Digi Yatra programme?'

Last week, responding to a letter from Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale raising the privacy concerns of travellers, the Minister for Civil Aviation, Jyotiraditya Scindia, said that the process is voluntary and the consent of the passenger a prerequisite. Survey data show that 29% signed up for it

without knowing that the queue was meant for Digi Yatra. Among the rest of the passengers, 41% did not use the app, while 15% used it knowing the benefits it offered.

Though Digi Yatra was first launched in Delhi, along with Bengaluru and Varanasi, over a year ago, 85% of the passengers who flew out of Delhi in the last six months said that the organisations responsible for Digi Yatra are not doing an effective job of educating citizens about the app. Chart 2 shows answers to the following question in the survey: 'Are the Ministry of Civil Aviation and its affiliated organisations doing an effective job of educating citizens on Digi Yatra (information shared by citizens, its usage, risk and benefits) before they sign up?' Only 15% said that they were aware of the risks and the benefits of the scheme.

While the above data is limited to the passengers who flew from Delhi, as the facility has now been expanded to 13 more airports, the seriousness of the issue has amplified. The number of passengers across airports who have used the facility has surged since its introduction in December 2022. As shown in Chart 3, the total number of passengers who used the facility increased from 1.6 lakh by February 2023 to 17.5 lakh by June 2023 to over 90 lakh by December 2023.

The total number of downloads of the Digi Yatra app also shot up from just 10 lakh in June 2023 to 35 lakh in December 2023 (Chart 4). Recent news articles also show that the Civil Aviation Ministry is thinking about using Digi Yatra for international travel as well.

There have been reports of heavy traffic in busy airports such as Delhi. This has led to chaos at the terminals. This validates the need for a hassle-free, paper-less system such as Digi Yatra. However, it is a matter of concern that a high share of passengers were compelled to use it or were unaware of the process.

Convenience at a cost

The data for the charts are sourced from a Local Circles survey and the Ministry of Civil Aviation



Chart 1: When you travelled by air from the Delhi airport in the last six months, how did you sign up for the Digi Yatra

Signed up not knowing that the queue I was in was a Digi Yatra queue

Signed up for Digi Yatra because there was no regular

Signed up knowingly because of the benefits it offered

Have not signed up for Digi Yatra yet and always found the regular queue

Chart 3: The chart shows the total number of passengers who have used the Digi Yatra process since December 1, 2022

10

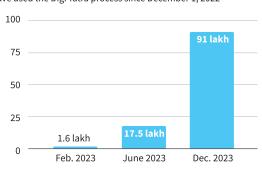


Chart 2: Are the Ministry of Civil Aviation and its affiliated organisations doing an effective job of educating citizens on Digi Yatra (information shared by citizens, its usage, risk and

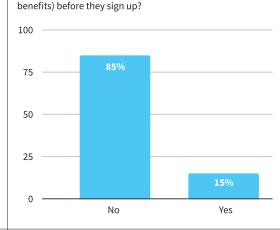
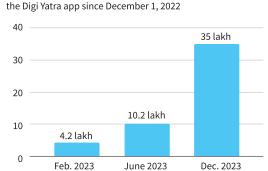


Chart 4: The chart shows the total number of downloads of the Digi Yatra app since December 1, 2022 35 lakh





FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 30, 1974

Indo-Sri Lanka accord on the stateless

New Delhi, Jan. 29: India and Sri Lanka have finally settled the problem of the people of Indian origin in the island by agreeing to divide equally the remaining 150,000 persons not covered by the 1964 Shastri-Sirimavo Pact.

The joint communique issued to-day at the conclusion of Mrs. Bandaranaike's visit disclosed that Sri Lanka will confer its citizenship on 75,000 of these persons, while India will take back the other 75,000.

The two Prime Ministers, Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs. Bandaranaike, who had detailed discussions on all aspects of this long-standing problem noted with satisfaction that with the full implementation of the 1964 agreement and the present one relating to the remaining 150,000, India and Sri Lanka would have finally settled the question of all persons of Indian origin there. The wording of the communique fully reflected the feeling of relief on either side that the most serious irritant in Indo-Sri Lanka relations had been removed at last.

The joint communique also stated that "satisfactory progress" had been made during these discussions on Kachativu and other related issues. It was agreed at the talks that a decision would be taken "in the very near future" regarding the sea limit in the historic waters dividing India and Sri Lanka between the Palk Straits and Adam's Bridge.

Though it has not yet been officially disclosed, it is generally known that the two Prime Ministers have agreed to resolve the question of Kachativu of the basis of a fresh delimitation of the territorial waters which would automatically settle the issue without going further into the historical claims of either side to this disputed

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 30, 1924

Third expedition to Everest

Leafield (Oxford) Mid. Jan 28: Brigadier General Bruce, leaves for India on Wednesday to command the new expedition which will attempt the ascent of Mount Everest in the coming spring. This will be the third assault on the world's highest mountain and it will be the second time that Mr. Bruce has been in command.

l'extacontext

THEMOHINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Mobile subscribers added by Jio in the month of November

📕 in lakh. Reliance Jio cemented its market lead while rival Bharti Airtel gained 17.5 lakh new wireless users, according to TRAI data. Vodafone Idea, however, slipped further by losing 10.7 lakh subscribers in November. PTI

The share of Indians still using biomass for cooking

in percentage. Indians relying on wood, cow dung or other biomass as cooking fuel, emit around 340 million tonnes of carbon dioxide into the environment every year, which is about 13% of India's greenhouse gas emissions. PTI

The U.S. issued record number of visas to Indians in 2023

in million. The U.S. embassy said that there was a 60% increase in visa applications from Indians compared to 2022. Process improvements and investments in staffing have brought down appointment wait times for visitor visas. PTI

The increase in gold imports from April to December

in percentage. India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit, increased to \$35.95 billion during April-December of this fiscal. India is the world's secondlargest gold consumer after China. PTI

The nuclear reactors Ukraine will build as war hits power supply

Ukraine will begin building four new nuclear reactors to compensate for Russia's seizure of the country's largest nuclear plant. The new reactors would be at the Khmelnytskyi nuclear power plant in western Ukraine. AFP COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Pros and cons of simultaneous elections

What are the various benefits of holding Lok Sabha and State elections at the same time? How would simultaneous elections go against the federal character of the Constitution? What are international practices on the same in other Parliamentary democracies?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan.R

The story so far:

High-Level Committee (HLC) headed by Ramnath Kovind, former President of India, was constituted in September 2023 to examine the issue of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and local bodies of all States. The HLC has invited responses from political parties, the Law Commission and other groups on the proposal to hold simultaneous elections.

What is the background?

During the first four general election cycles in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967, the elections to the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies were held simultaneously. However, due to the subsequent premature dissolution of the Lok Sabha on seven occasions and the premature dissolution of legislative assemblies on various occasions, the elections to the Lok Sabha and various State assemblies are held at different times. In 2019, only four States had their assembly elections, along with the Lok Sabha. The idea of simultaneous elections has been mooted in the past by the Election Commission of India (1982) and the Law Commission (1999).

What is the case for simultaneous elections?

The desirability of simultaneous elections can be discussed from the perspectives of cost, governance, administrative convenience and social cohesion. Firstly, it is estimated that the cost of holding general elections to the Lok Sabha is around ₹4,000 crore for the Central government. Each State assembly election would also cost considerable amount of money according to the size of the State. While this is the official expenditure of the government, the expenditure by parties and candidates are manifold times higher. Simultaneous elections would entail a reduction in these costs.

Secondly, there are at least 5-6 State elections that happen every year. This results in political parties, including Ministers, being in 'permanent campaign' mode, which acts as a hindrance to policy making and governance. Further, the Model Code of Conduct that is enforced during the election process ranges usually from 45-60 days where no new schemes or projects can be announced by the Centre and concerned State governments.

Third, administrative machinery in the districts slow down during the election period with the primary focus being the conduct of elections. There are also paramilitary forces that are withdrawn from the locations in which they are posted and deployed to the concerned State for the smooth conduct of elections. Frequent elections every year have an impact on administrative efficiency.

Lastly but very importantly, high-stake elections each year in various States result in polarising campaigns by all parties in order to win the elections. This trend has exacerbated in the last decade with the advent of social media thereby creating and deepening the fissures in our multi-religious and multilingual country.

What are the challenges involved? There are tangible benefits that accrue

due to simultaneous elections. However, there are also significant issues that surround such a proposal both from democratic and constitutional perspectives.

India is a federal country of

India's democratic behemoth

While there are tangible benefits that accrue due to simultaneous elections, there are also significant issues for such a proposal both from democratic and constitutional perspectives

Table 1 shows when the term for the Assemblies of each State ends, and the number of months that would be curtailed if simultaneous elections are held in these States in June 2024.

State	Term ends	No. of months
Karnataka	May 2028	-47
Meghalaya	March 2028	-45
Nagaland	March 2028	-45
Tripura	March 2028	-45
Himachal	Jan. 2028	-43
Gujarat	Dec. 2027	-42
U.P.	May 2027	-35
Goa	March 2027	-33
Manipur	March 2027	-33
Punjab	March 2027	-33
Uttarakhand	March 2027	-33
Puducherry	June 2026	-24
Assam	May 2026	-23
Kerala	May 2026	-23
Tamil Nadu	May 2026	-23
West Bengal	May 2026	-23
Bihar	Nov. 2025	-17
Delhi	Feb. 2025	-8
Jharkhand	Jan. 2025	-7
Haryana	Nov. 2024	-5
Maharashtra	Nov. 2024	-5
Andhra	June 2024	0
Arunachal	June 2024	0
Odisha	June 2024	0
Sikkim	June 2024	0
Chhattisgarh	Jan. 2024	5
M.P.	Jan. 2024	5
Rajasthan	Jan. 2024	5
Telangana	Jan. 2024	5
Mizoram	Dec. 2023	6

Table 2 shows the number of Lok Sabha seats, Assembly representatives, urban local
wards, and elected panchayat representatives for each State

State	seats	seats	wards	representatives
U.P.	80	403	10,440	9,13,417
West Bengal	42	294	2,938	59,229
Maharashtra	48	288	7,489	2,40,635
Bihar	40	243	3,322	1,36,573
Tamil Nadu	39	234	12,448	1,06,450
M.P.	29	230	7,626	3,92,981
Karnataka	28	224	7,125	1,01,954
Rajasthan	25	200	8,160	1,26,271
Gujarat	26	182	1,374	1,44,080
Andhra	25	175	3,903	1,56,050
Odisha	21	147	2,092	1,07,487
Kerala	20	140	3,529	18,372
Assam	14	126	910	26,754
Telangana	17	119	3,587	1,03,468
Punjab	13	117	3,163	1,00,312
Chhattisgarh	11	90	3,234	1,70,465
Haryana	10	90	1,649	70,035
Jharkhand	14	81	1,120	59,638
Delhi	7	70	280	-
Uttarakhand	5	70	1,134	62,796
Himachal	4	68	560	28,723
Arunachal	2	60	59	9,383
Manipur	2	60	306	1,736
Meghalaya	2	60	164	-
Nagaland	1	60	371	-
Tripura	2	60	324	6,646
Goa	2	40	226	1,555
Mizoram	1	40	242	-
Sikkim	1	32	51	1,153
Puducherry	1	30	116	-

	seats	seats	wards	representatives
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Mizoram	1	40	242	-
Sikkim	1	32	51	1,153
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States have their own unique set of issues that are significantly different from one another. The Union and State governments have their respective powers and responsibilities towards the electorate as per the division of powers under the Constitution. Conducting elections simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and all State assemblies would result in national issues overshadowing regional and State specific issues. National political parties would have a significant advantage over regional parties on account of this mechanism. This would be detrimental to the federal spirit of our country which has been declared as a basic structure of the Constitution. Elections also serve as an effective feedback mechanism for governments in power. There have been many policies that have been initiated by

various Central and State governments in

the past due to such electoral feedback. If

sub-continental proportions. Various

elections are held only once in five years, it can affect this process. Apart from the federal and democratic issues discussed above, simultaneous polls will also require constitutional amendments. India is a parliamentary democracy where the governments at the Centre and the State need to enjoy majority in the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly respectively. The duration of these houses is five years but it may be dissolved earlier if the party or coalition in power loses majority, and no alternative government can be formed. It may also be dissolved prematurely by the council of ministers in power to seek an early election. Further, State legislative assemblies can also be dissolved by imposing President's rule under Article 356 of the Constitution. Having a fixed tenure of five years for the Lok Sabha and

State assemblies will therefore require

constitutional amendments to Articles 83, 85, 172 and 174 that deal with the duration and dissolution of Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. It will also require the amendment of Article 356.

What are the various recommendations?

The reports of the Law Commission (1999), and the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice (2015), have dealt with the issue of simultaneous elections. The Law Commission had also submitted a draft report in 2018. The highlights of these discussions and recommendations can be summarised as follows – (a) the elections to the Lok Sabha and nearly half of the State assemblies may be clubbed together in one cycle, while the rest of the State assembly elections can be held in another cycle after two and half years. This will require curtailing or extending the tenures of existing assemblies that will entail amendments to the Constitution and the Representation of the People Act, 1951; (b) any 'no-confidence motion' in the Lok Sabha or Legislative Assembly should be mandatorily accompanied by a 'confidence motion' for the formation of an alternate government. If for any unavoidable reason, the Lok Sabha or State Assembly is to be dissolved prematurely, the duration of the newly constituted House should be only for the remainder period of the original House. This would act as a deterrent for MPs and MLAs pushing for premature dissolution of the House. It would instead encourage the members to explore the possibility of forming an alternate government through feasible realignments; (c) the bye-elections necessitated by death,

resignation or disqualification of

members can be clubbed together and conducted once in a year.

It may be noted that Parliamentary democracies like South Africa, Sweden and Germany have fixed tenures for their legislatures. The elections to the National Assembly and provincial legislatures happen simultaneously in South Africa every five years, with the President of the country being elected by the National Assembly. The Prime Minister of Sweden and the Chancellor of Germany are elected by their respective legislatures every four years. A lack of confidence against the German Chancellor can be moved only by electing a successor.

What can be an ideal solution?

There is a lack of consensus among various political parties about the conduct of simultaneous elections. The ideal middle ground may be to conduct the Lok Sabha election in one cycle and all State assembly elections in another cycle after two and a half years. The rest of the recommendations as discussed in the previous section with respect to the formation of an alternative government in case of the fall of an incumbent government, the duration of the newly constituted houses being only for the remainder period in case of premature dissolution and, the clubbing of bye-elections to be held once every year may be adopted through suitable amendments. This will ensure that the major benefits of simultaneous polls are achieved without compromising on democratic and federal principles. If all political parties are taken into confidence, this may be achieved over the next decade and continued thereafter.

Rangarajan. R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

During the first four general election cycles in 1952, 1957, 1962 and 1967, the elections to the Lok Sabha and State legislative assemblies were held simultaneously.

It is estimated that the cost of holding general elections to the Lok Sabha is around ₹4,000 crore for the Central government. Each State assembly election would also cost considerable amount of money according to the size of the State.

Conducting elections simultaneously to the Lok Sabha and all State assemblies would result in national issues overshadowing regional and State specific issues. National political parties would have a significant advantage over regional parties on account of this mechanism.

THE HINDU -

CACHE



GETTY IMAGES

Improving battery technologies for speedy EV adoption

The projected growth of the Indian Electric Vehicle (EV) market is dependent on advances in battery technology translating to better economics and enhanced user experience. However, today's Li-ion batteries still leave a lot to be desired

Sandeep Rao

ast year was a good year for Electric Vehicles (EV) in India with sales recording a 50% growth compared to 2022. While actual volumes remain small (6% of vehicles registered in 2023), the industry is poised for phenomenal growth with the Indian EV market expected to reach \$100 billion by 2030. The heart of an EV is its battery – with the battery system accounting for 40% of the vehicle cost. The projected growth of the EV market is dependent on advances in battery technology translating to better economics and enhanced user experience (longer range, faster charging and improved safety).

The lithium battery

Almost all EVs on the road today are powered by lithium-ion batteries. It consists of two electrodes (an anode and a cathode) separated by a liquid electrolyte. Lithium atoms in the anode give up electrons which travel to the cathode through an external wire – this stream of electrons provide the current which powers the motor of the vehicle. Simultaneously, lithium ions (now positively charged from loss of an electron) travel through the electrolyte to reach the cathode. During charging, the process is reversed with lithium ions being forced to travel back through the electrolyte to the anode.

There is a good reason why lithium is the material of choice for EV batteries. Lithium, the lightest solid element known to man, has a high propensity to give up its electron. Its small size enables the lithium ion to efficiently travel between

electrodes through the electrolyte. This translates to lighter and smaller batteries with an ability to store large amounts of energy. However, today's Li-ion batteries still leave a lot to be desired. Its energy density while high compared to earlier battery technologies, pales in comparison to petrol. Batteries are still slow to charge (compared to the few minutes it takes to fill petrol at a pump). There is a need to make batteries more affordable and increase their life-span. And then there are environmental concerns primarily related to the mining of lithium and other elements (such as cobalt, nickel).

On improving the battery

The efforts toward improving the EV battery can be broadly classified into three approaches. The first approach retains the basic structure of the lithium-ion battery while making tweaks to the electrodes. An ideal electrode should be light weight; store a lot of lithium; provide sufficient pathways for lithium to easily enter and exit the electrode (=> higher voltages and faster charging); and be made of materials that are cheap, non-toxic and easily available. But invariably there are trade-offs involved. For example, Tesla uses cathodes based on

Nickel-Manganese-Cobalt (NMC) and Lithium Iron Phosphate (LFP) in their batteries. While NMC batteries have high energy density and thus provide longer range, LFP batteries have longer life, better stability, are less toxic and have faster charging times.

Another approach to improving battery performance involves deploying sensing and control infrastructure around the battery to increase safety, extend battery

life and speed-up charging. For instance, a temperature sensor can be installed to detect dangerous conditions and shut down the battery, preventing a fire. Monitoring parameters such as internal temperature, voltage and current and appropriately modulating the charging current and voltage can result in faster charging while maintaining battery life. This can be understood using a simple analogy. Charging a battery involves moving lithium ions from the cathode to the anode. This is akin to moving a bunch of kids from one classroom to another through a common door. Left to themselves the kids are likely to jump across benches and rush to the doorpotentially damaging furniture, resulting in crowding around the door and slowing down movement. A couple of monitors to control the kids can result in faster movement with lesser damage. A Battery Management System (BMS) consists of sensors to measure parameters such as temperature, voltage and current; electronic circuitry to control the battery; and a compute engine to process the sensor data and issue appropriate control commands. Advances in battery management and charging algorithms are generally easier to deploy since they do not involve any fundamental changes to the battery chemistry.

Paradigm shifts

There is considerable effort being invested in approaches that promise quantum jumps in battery performance. One such approach is the Solid-State Lithium Battery (SSB), which seeks to fix two common drawbacks in prevalent batteries. The liquid electrolyte used in EV batteries is highly flammable. The SSB replaces this with a heat resistant lightweight solid electrolyte. Further, the anode of an EV battery consists of a carbon based porous/layered scaffolding (typically graphite) – which houses lithium atoms (a crude analogy is water stored in a sponge). The carbon scaffolding provides the required stability during charging and discharging, as lithium is reactive. However, the solid electrolyte in an SSB provides sufficient structural stability and good separation between the anode and the cathode, that the carbon scaffolding is no longer needed at the anode. This can significantly reduce the weight of battery and also improve charging speed. If SSB's live up to their promise, consumers can expect EVs that travel further with a single charge, are faster to charge and are safer across a wider range of temperatures, sometime before the end of this decade.

India has a good eco-system that can support further progress in EV batteries an expanding market, an environment that supports start-ups, friendly government policies, and successful home-grown EV companies (Ather, Ola Electric). Further, fundamental research in material science at India's premier universities (IIT- Madras and Mumbai) and government research labs promotes innovation. The semiconductor industry in India (Texas instruments included) is also contributing advanced sensors and processors that will power the next generation of BMS. So, if you are an entrepreneur looking for a next start-up idea, or student/researcher looking for an area of specialisation, battery technology

is something that you could consider. (The author is with Texas Instruments)

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily

2. The motto of the SC. Ans: Yato Dharmastato Jayah'

3. The current strength of judges in the Supreme Court.

4. The Supreme Court is shaped as this. Ans: In the

shape of a balance with a pair of the Scales of

5. The black bronze sculpture installed in 1978 in the

Supreme Court portrays this. Ans: It portrays Mother

Ans: The Federal Court of India and the Judicial

Committee of the Privy Council

(Whence Justice, Thence Victory)

Ans: 34 judges including the CJI

quiz: 1. The bodies the Supreme Court replaced in 1950.

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your **English**

K. Subrahmanian

"C. H. Vijayawada wants to know whether the following sentence is correct: 'Both the chief minister as well as his rival attended the meeting'."

"You can say 'Both the chief minister and his rival attended the meeting'. You can also say 'The chief minister as well as his rival attended the meeting'. 'Both' and 'as well as' don't go together. 'Both' means 'the one as well as the other'.

Both Ram and Ahmed came. Both of them came. Both came. They are both fine.

Both Ram and Ahmed are good students. Ram and Ahmed are both good students.

The negative of 'Both of them are good' is not 'Both of them are not good'. It would mean that one of them is good. The negative is 'Neither of them is good'. Neither of them came to the meeting. 'Neither' means 'not one and not the other'. 'As well as' means 'in addition to (being)'.

Ram as well as John came to see me yesterday.

He was kind as well as sensible. Ram as well as John is kind to me.

In 'both' and 'as well as' two things are involved. In 'both', the emphasis is on the two things together; in 'as well as,' you want to emphasise a second thing besides a thing already mentioned. The difference is a difference in emphasis."

"Mr. N. Subramanyam and Mr. P. N. Rao of Berhampur want to know the meaning of the idiom 'Heads I win, tails

"It means you lose in any case. 'Head' here means the picture on one side of a coin. Tail is the other side of the coin. Yo toss a coin to decide which of the two alternatives is to be followed. When you say 'heads' and the coin falls with the head facing you, you win; otherwise, the other person wins. When you say 'Heads I win, tails you lose,' you win all the time. It is a grossly unfair deal."

"Ms. S. Kaur, Ludhiana, wants to know how to use 'worry at'."

"You worry about something.

He is worried over this problem. 'To worry at' is 'to keep attempting to conquer or persuade'. When you worry at a problem, you keep on thinking of ways of solving it.

He worried at the minister to get an LPG dealership."

'Mr. D. K. Bhatnagar, Dibrugarh, wants to know the difference between 'odious'

and 'odorous'." 'Odious' means 'hateful, detestable,

most unpleasant'. He is an odious liar.

I have nothing to do with that odious woman.

'Odorous' means 'having a smell, especially a pleasant one'. This is a literary word.

Published in The Hindu on December 11,

Word of the day

Maelstrom:

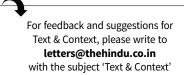
a powerful circular current of water (usually the result of conflicting tides)

Synonyms: Vortex, whirlpool

Usage: She found refuge from the whirling

Pronunciation: bit.ly/maelstrompro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈmeɪlˌstuəm/, /-stupm/



A IN-X

THE DAILY QUIZ

Some significant events occurred on January 30. Here is a quiz on observances, birthdays and everything else that happened on the day

Abhinaya. K

QUESTION 1

A film written, directed and starring Charlie Chaplin premiered on this day in 1931. Often considered his magnum opus, the film marked the first time Chaplin composed a film score for one of his own

QUESTION 2

Across the world every year the last Sunday of January is observed as Day to raise awareness

productions. Identify the film.

about this disease. In India, it is observed on January 30. Identify the disease?

QUESTION 3

An Indian politician and Independence activist who was jailed during the Quit India Movement was born on this day in

Maharashtra and is also one of the individuals credited for ushering in the Green Revolution. Name the politician. **QUESTION 4**

1910. He served as Governor of

The legendary band performed their last live gig, known as the 'rooftop' concert, on this day in 1969 for a limited audience. Last year, they came together for one last song with the help of AI which gained millions of views on YouTube. Which is the band?

QUESTION 5

One of the first memorial museums established in India on Mahatma Gandhi, houses many key artifacts related to the leader including the garment worn by the leader on the day of his death. He was shot and killed on January 30, 1948. Where is the museum located?



Visual question: Identify the man with Former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi who is the inventor of a 3-D combination puzzle. He filed the patent for his famous invention on

this day in 1975.

India sheltering the Republic of India represented by the symbol of a child holding an open book said to uphold the laws of the land

Justice

6. The record the Kesavananda Bharati versus State of Kerala case holds. Ans: With 13 judges it was the largest-ever Bench constituted at the SC Visual: Identify this woman. Ans: Fathima Beevi Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan | Ashraf Basha | Amartya Vikram Singh | Prashant Nain | Vinoth A.R

44011

UKRAINE

Ukraine to build four nuclear reactors as war hits power supply



REUTER

Ukraine's energy ministry said on Monday that it will begin building four new nuclear reactors this year. Energy Minister German Galushchenko said in televised comments that all four new reactors would be at the Khmelnytskyi nuclear power plant in western Ukraine, eventually making it the largest in Europe. AFP

DOHA

Qatar inks 15-year deal with Bangladesh for gas supply



REUTE

Qatar has signed a deal with U.S.-based Excelerate Energy to supply Bangladesh with natural gas for 15 years, state-owned QatarEnergy said Monday. Doha will supply Excelerate with one million tonnes of liquified natural gas a year to be delivered to floating storage units in Bangladesh over the 15-year period starting in January 2026. AFP

RUSSIA

Putin formally registered as presidential candidate



AFP

Russia on Monday officially registered incumbent Vladimir Putin as a candidate for the presidential election in March, a vote that he is all but certain to win. The Central Election Commission said it had registered Putin, who nominated himself, as well as right-wing firebrand Leonid Slutsky as candidates for the vote.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa's ruling ANC suspends membership of ex-President Zuma



Α

South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) said on Monday it had suspended the membership of former President Jacob Zuma after he announced he would vote for another party in this year's general election. Mr. Zuma said last month he would campaign for the new uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party. REUTERS

Maldives main Opposition party mulls impeachment against President Muizzu

The Maldivian Democratic Party, which has 42 seats in the 80-member Majlis, appears to have joined forces with the Democrats, a breakaway faction with 13 seats, against the ruling People's National Congress; Opposition says Muizzu is 'alienating' the country's 'most long-standing ally' India

Meera Srinivasan COLOMBO

he Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), the country's main Opposition party holding a parliamentary majority, is preparing to submit an impeachment motion against President Mohamed Muizzu in Parliament, stepping up its challenge to the Executive in the legislature.

"We have the numbers," Andhun Hussein, deputy leader of the MDP parliamentary group, told *The Hindu* over the phone.

The development coincides with a showdown between Male and New

Delhi, in the wake of controversial remarks made by Maldivian Ministers, and a shrill "Boycott Maldives" call on Indian social media, and President Muizzu issuing a March 15 deadline to New Delhi, for the removal of Indian troops.

On what prompted the move for an impeachment motion, less than three months after President Muizzu was sworn in, the Opposition politician pointed to "two primary reasons".

"The President is putting the Indian Ocean Region in danger with his policies, and he is not letting Parliament function properly, using money power



Bitter hostility: The development coincides with a showdown between Male and New Delhi. REUTERS

and with the backing of the military," Mr. Hussein said, a day after Parliament or People's Masjid witnessed violent clashes between legislators from the ruling camp and the Opposition. They sparred over parliamentary approval of Presi-

dent Muizzu's Cabinet.

The MDP, which has 42 seats in the 80-member People's Majlis, appears to have joined forces with the Democrats – with 13 seats – formed by its breakaway faction, following former President Mohamed Nash-

eed's fallout with President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih last year. In an indication of the two sides finding common cause, the MDP and the Democrats recently issued a joint statement slamming President Muizzu for "alienating" the Maldives' "most long-standing ally". Meanwhile, at least 12 MPs from the MDP have crossed over to the ruling People's National Congress, boosting its presence in the legislature to 16 MPs, Maldivian news portal Avas reported on Sunday.

With parliamentary elections scheduled for March 17, President Muizzu has a crucial test ahead. Without adequate Parliament backing, he will not be able to pass legislation or implement policies.

The MDP's parliamentary primaries are scheduled to be held on February 3. "We will decide the date of submission of the [impeachment] motion against the President once the primaries are over," Mr. Hussein said. "We cannot change our geography, we cannot bring China closer to us. India is our closest neighbour, friend, and family. Whether it's about sourcing food or medicines, we cannot do without India. We live in peace because of India's neighbourhood first policy."

Fierce battles in Gaza after Jordan attack kills three U.S. troops

Agence France-Presse GAZA CITY

Deadly fighting and air strikes rocked besieged Gaza on Monday, a day after an attack that killed three U.S. troops in Jordan heightened fears of a wider regional conflict.

Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip killed 140 people overnight, including 20 members of one family, said the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory.

The Israeli Army said its troops had "encountered and killed dozens of armed terrorists in battles in central Gaza". Ground forces backed by tanks have focused combat operations on the coastal strip's main southern city of Khan Yunis.

In the latest efforts to broker a new ceasefire, CIA chief William Burns met top Israeli, Egyptian, and Qatari officials in Paris on Sunday, but no breakthrough was reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the talks were "constructive" but pointed to "significant gaps which the parties will continue to discuss this week".

U.S. President Joe Biden sent Burns to try to negotiate the release of remaining hostages in exchange for a ceasefire, a security source has confirmed.

On Sunday, a drone attack on a remote base in Jordan, near the borders with Iraq and Syria, killed three U.S. troops and wounded 25 others, the U.S. military said.

⁺ Is Biden's policy towards the Israel-Hamas war working?

NEWS ANALYSIS

Stanly Johny

The drone attack by Iranbacked Shia militias on a U.S. military logistics hub in Jordan, along the border with Syria, in which three American service persons were killed and dozens more injured, is the deadliest assault on U.S. forces in West Asia since the Hamas-Israel war broke out on October 7.

When Israel launched an all-out attack on Gaza, after Hamas's cross-border raid killing at least 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, the Joe Biden administration adopted a two-fold approach – to let Israel continue its war with America's military assistance and diplomatic protection while simultaneously working to prevent the crisis from escalating into a regional conflict. Three and a half months later, Israel's war is far from over, while the crisis has already spread across the region.

Support for Israel

Even when casualties rose in Gaza and international pressure mounted on Israel to halt the attacks, the Biden administration continued to back Israel's war. It vetoed a UN Security Council Resolution that called for a humanitarian ceasefire and voted against back-to-back resolutions in the UN General Assembly that were critical of Israel's war and occupation.

Israel's war has killed over 26,000 Palestinians (mostly women and children), wounded more than 60,000 and displaced roughly 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million population. The International Court of Justice, the UN's top court,



Joe Biden

last week ordered Israel to take measures to prevent genocidal acts by its forces in Gaza. Yet, the Biden administration hasn't even called for a ceasefire.

On the other side, to prevent the crisis from escalating, Mr. Biden sent his top diplomat Antony Blinken several times to the region. Mr. Blinken held multiple rounds of talks with Arab leaders with whom the U.S. has substantial diplomatic leverage. However, the problem the U.S. faced was that it lacked a similar diplomatic leverage with Iran. And the main security challenge came from Iran-backed militias in West Asia.

The U.S. faced two kinds of attacks. One, the Islamic Resistance Forces, the Shia militias based in Iraq and Syria, carried out at least 150 attacks against U.S. forces and bases in the region since October 7. Two, Houthis, the Shia rebels of Yemen, started attacking commercial vessels in the busy shipping lanes of Red Sea, directly challenging the U.S.'s ability to provide security to global shipping. America's response was typical - it carried out retaliatory airstrikes in Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

The U.S. has conducted at least half a dozen strikes in Yemen, targeting Houthi positions. But the Houthis still attack ships in the Red Sea. Airstrikes alone hardly deter home-grown militias. The Houthis have survived seven years of Saudi bombing and are controlling swathes of Yemen's territories, including its Red Sea coast. According to a report in the International Crisis Group, Houthis' attacks on the Red Sea in "solidarity with the Palestinians" are popular among their base in Yemen and help them recruit new fighters.

Chances of escalation

The U.S. strikes on Shia militias in Iraq and Syria were also not immediately effective as the drone attack in Jordan showed. America's airstrikes are spreading the fire instead of boosting its own deterrence. The U.S. has some 2,000 soldiers in Iraq, 3,000 in Jordan and up to 1,000 in Syria, who are close targets for the vast network of Shia militias, which Iran has built across the region, from Iraq to Syria to Lebanon and Yemen.

Three and a half months since the Israel-Hamas war began, Israel is far from meeting its declared objectives – dismantling Hamas and freeing hostages. U.S. intelligence estimates that only 20-30% of Hamas fighters were killed in three months, while 80% of Hamas's vast tunnel networks in Gaza remain intact, according to American media

As long as the war continues, the chances of further regional escalation are high, with the U.S. being drawn deeper into the West Asian vortex at a time when it wants to pivot away from the region to focus on its more conventional challenges in the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe.

Fiery spirit



People dressed up as demons brandish a stick with fireworks during the traditional Correfoc festival in Spain. The festival is a night of revelry in which people in demon and devil costumes run through the streets scaring people with fire and fireworks. AFP

Iran, Pak. to work jointly to improve security after tit-for-tat air strikes

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan and Iran on Monday agreed to work together to improve security cooperation in the wake of deadly air strikes by Tehran and Islamabad earlier this month that killed at least 11 people, marking an escalation in fraught relations between the neighbours.

The development came after the top Iranian diplomat, Hossein Amirabdollahian, held talks in Islamabad with his Pakistani counterpart, Jalil Abbas Jilani. The Iranian Foreign



Moving together: Iranian diplomat Hossein Amir-Abdollahian (left with his Pakistani counterpart Jalil Abbas Jilani in Islamabad. AFP

Minister also met with Pakistan's caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-Haq-Kakar.

kar. ern Baluchistan province.
Iran-Pakistan ties were dramatically imperilled on strikes, Pakistan recalled

January 17, when Iran

launched air strikes in Pa-

kistan's restive southwest-

strikes against alleged militant hideouts inside Iran, in the Sistan, and Baluchestan province.

At a news conference,

its ambassadors from Teh-

ran and launched air-

estan province.

At a news conference,
Mr. Amirabdollahian and
Mr. Jilani said they would
work through existing
channels in their leadership, diplomatic, and military levels. Mr. Jilani said
the two countries were
able to bring the "situation
back to normal in the shortest possible time" after the
airstrikes because both
sides had agreed to resume
dialogue to resolve all
issues.

won't end strife, warns rights activist

Pak. election

Agence France-Presse
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's pre-eminent rights activist describes the upcoming election as a messy melodrama staged by an emboldened military, unlikely to bring down the curtain on a cast of crises plaguing the

Millions of people will vote in polls in less than two weeks, in a campaign marred by allegations of pre-vote rigging with the Opposition heavily suppressed.

"I don't see Pakistan's problems going away after this election," said Munizae Jahangir, co-chair of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. "We're headed towards the next mess that nobody will know how to fix."

The lacklustre election campaign feels like a sideshow compared to the backstage drama between jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan and the military kingmakers who once backed him. Mr. Khan was ousted in 2022 in a parliamentary no-confidence vote he claims was orchestrated by the country's powerful generals.

"They have a schizophrenic relationship with Imran Khan," Ms. Jahangir said of the military brass.

"Nobody can predict what the military is going to do because they first make up all these leaders and then they demolish them."

Despite the drawbacks, Jahangir is clear about the need for an election, with polling day already delayed by months under a caretaker government considered a puppet of the military.

YK



Rishi Sunak's government also plans to gradually raise the minimum age to buy cigarettes. AFP

U.K. to ban vapes, control e-cigarettes aimed at children

Associated Press

The British government says it will ban the sale of disposable vapes and limit their cornucopia of flavours in an effort to prevent children from becoming addicted to nicotine. It also plans to stick to a contentious proposal to ban today's young people from ever buying cigarettes.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is due to announce details of the plan on Monday.

It is currently illegall to sell vapes or tobacco to children under 18 in the U.K., but officials say that youth vaping has tripled in the past three years, and that cheap, colourful disposable vapes are a "key driver."

As well as banning disposable vapes, the government says it will "restrict flavours which are specifically marketed at children" and ensure that manufacturers put vapes in "less visually appealing packaging." "As any parent or teacher knows, one of the most worrying trends at the moment is the rise in vaping among children, and so we must act before it becomes endemic," Mr. Sunak said.

"The long-term impacts of vaping are unknown and the nicotine within them can be highly addictive, so while vaping can be a useful tool to help smokers quit, marketing vapes to children is not acceptable.

Mr. Sunak's government also said it will push on with a plan announced last year to gradually raise the minimum age to buy cigarettes, so that no one born after Jan. 1, 2009 can ever legally buy

The plan is modeled on a proposal in New Zealand that was scrapped late last year after a change of government in that country.

ASEAN cautiously hopes for progress on Myanmar, South China Sea conflicts

Foreign Minister of Laos, which has taken over this year's leadership of the Association of South East Asian Nations, says it is a good sign that the Myanmar junta chose to send a high-level representative to attend the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the bloc for the first time since seizing control

Associated Press LUANG PRABANG

hina's increasingly assertive posture in the South China Sea and escalating violence in Myanmar topped the agenda for Southeast Asian diplomats at their meeting in Laos on Monday, with the Laotian Foreign Minister expressing guarded optimism that progress could be made this year on both acrimonious issues.

Laoatian Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith told presspersons that Thailand was moving ahead with plans to provide more humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, where more than 2.6 million people have been displaced by civil war.

He said it was a good sign that the military leaders who seized control of Myanmar in February 2021 from the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi had for the first time sent a high-level representative to attend the meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers in the historic city of Luang Prabang in Laos.

"We feel a little bit optimistic that the engagement may work, although we have to admit that the issues that are happening in Myanmar will not resolve overnight," Mr. Saleumxay said. "I think there is probably a small light at the end of the tunnel.

Myanmar has been pro-



Permanent Secretary Marlar Than Htaik in Luang Prabang on Monday. AFP

hibited from sending its Foreign Minister or any political representative to high-level ASEAN meetings since the end of 2021, when it blocked the group's envoy from meeting with Ms. Suu Kyi. Instead, it has sent non-political representatives to lower-level working meetings but has refused to send anyone to high-level meetings.

In Laos, however, it sent a Foreign Ministry civil servant, ASEAN Permanent Secretary Marlar Than Htike, which Mr. Saleumxay called "a positive sign."

Landlocked Laos, which has taken over this year's rotating ASEAN leadership, is the bloc's poorest nation and one of its smallest, and many have expressed skepticism about how much it can accomplish while the crises mount.

Different perspective Still, it is the first ASEAN

country that shares a border with Myanmar to serve as chair since the military took control of the country, giving it a perspective different from that of previous chairs.

Laos has already sent a special envoy to Myanmar for meetings with the head of the ruling military council and other top officials in an attempt to make progress on ASEAN's "fivepoint consensus" plan for peace.

The plan calls for the immediate cessation of violence in Myanmar, a dialogue among all concerned parties, mediation by an ASEAN special envoy, provision of humanitarian aid through ASEAN channels, and a visit to Myanmar by the special envoy to meet all concerned parties.

The military leadership in Myanmar has so far ignored the plan, and the violence and humanitarian crisis has been growing at a rapid pace.

Singaporean Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan told presspersons after the meeting that it was "helpful" to have a representative from Myanmar attend again, but that he would not say he was optimistic that Myanmar would take concrete steps to implement the plan.

"If you take reference from the past, it can sometimes take a very long time for positive change to occur," he said. "I do not want to raise hopes or expectations unrealistically."

Mr. Saleumxay said ASEAN would continue to push for full implementation of the consensus while also increasing humanitarian support.

"We think humanitarian assistance is the priority for the immediate period of time when implementing the five-point consensus," he said. "We welcome in this regard the efforts by the Thai government to ... try to create a humanitarian corridor where support and assistance can be provided to all Myanmar people."

Communist Laos is one of the ASEAN countries with the closest ties to China, and some have speculated it may look to its giant neighbour for help in dealing with the crisis in Myanmar, where Beijing also wields considerable influence.

China has said it will not interfere in the internal affairs of other states, however, and it is also unknown whether it taking on such a role would be acceptable to other ASEAN members.

Maritime dispute

ASEAN members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei are locked in maritime disputes with China over its claims of sovereignty over the South China Sea, one of the world's most crucial waterways for shipping. Indonesia has also expressed concern about what it sees as Beijing's encroachment on its exclusive economic

An estimated \$5 trillion in international trade passes through the South China Sea each year, which has led China into direct confrontations, most notably with the Philippines and Vietnam.

The ASEAN meeting in Laos came on the same day that Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, was meeting with officials in Vietnam, among other things to discuss the ongoing tensions in the South China Sea.

The Philippines has been looking for more support from its ASEAN neighbours amid increasingly tense hostilities with China, which many worry could escalate into a broader conflict that could involve Washington, Manila's longtime treaty ally.

China and ASEAN agreed in 2002 and 2012 to a declaration on conduct in the South China Sea, seeking to "enhance favorable conditions for a peaceful and durable solution of differences and disputes," but there has been little sign of adherence to that in recent years.

In Luang Prabang, the group "underscored the importance of the full and effective" implementation of the declaration, according to a statement issued by Laos after the talks.

Hong Kong to allow recognition of China rulings

Agence France-Pres HONG KONG

A new law which will allow Chinese courts to enforce their rulings in Hong Kong in commercial and civil cases took effect on Monday in the finance hub.

The arrangement will allow for the two-way recognition of court judgments in Hong Kong and China for civil or commercial lawsuits - should the parties apply for it. The former British colony has a common law system distinct from China.

But observers have said the legal firewall between Hong Kong and China has gradually eroded as Beijing tightens its grip on the city after the enactment of a national security law in 2020 designed to quell dissent. The new measure would lead to "a higher degree of certainty and predictability", officials have said. Major exemptions to the new arrangement include judgments about insolvency as well as maritime and arbitration matters.

Officials have stressed that crossover recognition is optional and the decision is up to the parties to a lawsuit.

"Mainland judgments will not automatically take effect in Hong Kong, and assets in Hong Kong will not be confiscated by the mainland directly after the arrangement has come into operation," a Department of Justice spokesperson said last week.

The new arrangement was the product of a 2019 agreement between Hong Kong's Department of Justice and the Supreme People's Court of China, officials said.

Contaminated catch



Spilling over: People fish next to a drainage that flows into the Paraguay River in Asuncion, Paraguay on Sunday. AP

Italy unveils plans to curb migration while investing in energy at Africa summit

Agence France-Presse

African leaders gathered at a Rome summit on Monday to hear Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's much-hyped plan for the continent, aimed at transforming Italy into an energy hub - and stopping migration.

Far-right leader Meloni, who came to power in 2022 on an anti-migrant ticket, has vowed to reshape relations with African countries by taking a "nonpredatory" approach inspired by Enrico Mattei, founder of Italy's stateowned energy giant Eni.

The so-called Mattei Plan hopes to posit Italy as a key bridge between Africa and Europe, funnelling energy north while exchanging investment in the south for deals aimed at curbing migrant departures across the Mediterranean Sea.



President Azali Assoumani at the Senate in Rome on Monday. AFP

Ms. Meloni said the plan would initially be funded to the tune of 5.5 billion euros, some of which would be loans, with investments focused on energy, agriculture, water, health and education.

Representatives of over 25 countries attended the summit – dubbed "A bridge for common growth" - on Monday at the Italian senate along with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and representatives of UN agencies and the World Bank. Ms. Meloni told them that Europe and Africa's "destinies" were interconnected and she was determined to cooperate "as equals - far from any predatory temptation, but also from that charitable approach to Africa that is ill-suited to its extraordinary potential for development".

There was no reference to Italy's colonial past in Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea and what is now Somalia.

Japanese moon probe back to work after sunlight reaches its solar panels

Associated Press

A Japanese moon explorer is up and running on Monday after several tense days without the sunlight it needs to generate power.

Japan's first lunar mission hit its target in a precision touchdown on January 20, but landed the wrong way up, leaving its solar panels unable to see the sun.

But with the dawn of the lunar day, it appears that the probe has power.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) said on Monday that it successfully established communication with the probe on Sunday night, and the craft has resumed its mission, taking pictures of the moon's surface and transmitting them to the earth.

Engine failure

After a last-minute engine failure caused the Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) to make a rougher-than-planned landing, JAXA used battery



Rise and Shine: The Smart Lander for Investigating Moon seen on the lunar surface in an image released by JAXA on Jan. 25. REUTERS

power to gather as much data as possible about the touchdown and the probe's surroundings. The

craft was then turned off to wait the sun to rise higher in the lunar sky in late January.

With power, SLIM has continued work to analyse the composition of olivine rocks on the lunar surface with its multi-band spectral camera, seeking clues about the moon's origin and evolution, the agency said.

Earlier observations suggest that the moon may have formed when the earth hit another planet.

A black-and-white photo posted by JAXA on social media showed the rocky lunar surface, including a rock the agency said it had

seeing it in initial images. The probe is analysing six rocks, all of which have been given the names of dog breeds.

named "Toy Poodle" after

Slim chances

SLIM is expected to have enough sun to continue operations for several earth days, possibly until Thursday. JAXA said it's not clear if the craft will work again after another severe-

ly cold lunar night. The SLIM landed about 55 metre away from its target, in between two craters near the Shioli crater, a region covered in volcanic rock. Previous moon missions have typically aimed for flat areas at least 10 km wide.

SLIM carried two autonomous probes, which were released just before touchdown, recording the landing, surroundings and other lunar data.

The landing made Japan the world's fifth country to reach the moon surface, after the U.S., the Soviet Union, China and India.



GAIL net profit jumps 10-fold in Q3 as all engines fire

State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd. on Monday reported a 10-fold jump in third-quarter net profit as all engines of its business – from gas transportation to marketing and petrochemicals fired on all cylinders. Standalone net profit of the the nation's largest gas transmission and marketing firm came at ₹2,842.62 crore in October-December, the third quarter of the current fiscal year, as compared with ₹245.73 crore a year earlier, the company said. PTI

Wabag inks MoU with PEAK to set up 100 bio-CNG plants

VA Tech Wabag Ltd. (Wabag) has entered into an MoU with Peak Sustainability Ventures (PEAK) to establish 100 bio-CNG plants at sewage treatment facilities across India and other mutually agreed upon locations in the GCC, Africa and European countries. The firms aim to harness the unutilised potential of sewage treatment plants and generate bio-CNG, which can be used for mobility application in heavy duty vehicles, and for industrial applications, Wabag said.

LatentView Analytics' Q3 net dips 11% to ₹46.5 crore

LatentView Analytics' consolidated third quarter net profit contracted 11% to ₹46.5 crore from the year earlier. Revenue from operations increased 14% to ₹166 crore, the global data analytics firm said. "We continue to see robust momentum for our value-led offerings across geographies. We remain committed to proactively delivering strategic business outcomes through our value-proposition led and domain-focused approach," said CEO Rajan Sethuraman.

FinMin says economy likely to grow closer to 7% in 2024-25

Ministry adds growth could outpace 7% by 2030 and the economy will hit \$5 trillion in three years, making India the third largest in the world

NEW DELHI

head of the Interim Union Budget, the Finance Ministry in a report on Monday pegged India's real GDP growth at closer to 7% in 2024-25 with 'considerable scope' to outpace 7% by 2030, adding that the economy will hit \$5 trillion in the next three years, making it the third largest in the world

Prefacing a picture-perfect review of the economy's "journey in the last ten years", Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran stressed "not all growth is equal" and the marginal utility of 7% growth when the world is struggling to grow 2% is "much higher" than 8-9% growth achieved with the global economy rising 4%.

"One unit of growth in the latter circumstance is qualitatively superior to the former," the CEA wrote in a report titled 'The Indian Economy: A Review' released by the Department of Economic Affairs, which also offered a "brief sketch of the outlook for the economy in the coming years".

The prognosis of 7% growth in the coming year, if actualised, would mean 7% or higher growth for four years in a row. Mr. Nageswaran emphasised that

Bullish report

FinMin contends the state of the Indian economy today is far better than when Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014

- CEA says 7% growth when the world struggles to grow 2% is better than 8-9% growth when the world grows at 4%
- Structural reforms since 2014 have strengthened macroeconomic fundamentals, the Finance Ministry argues
- FinMin outlines reforms such as the GST and IBC but only makes passing mention of demonetisation in 2016

this review was not 'the Economic Survey of India which will come before the full Budget and after the general elections'.

Two phases

The review split India's growth story into two phases-1950 to 2014 and '2014-2024: Decade of transformative growth'and noted that despite some positive developments, the state of the Indian economy was far from encouraging when Prime Minister Narendra Modi 'assumed power in his first term in office'. The economy

growth of GDP at factor cost at constant prices for two consecutive years, 2012-13 and 2013-14, food inflation was high, and structural constraints such as difficulties in quick decisions on projects, ill-targeted subsidies cramping fiscal space for public

clocked lower than 5%

investment, and a large informal sector, were denting growth, the Finance Ministry said.

"Since then, the Indian economy has undergone many structural reforms that have strengthened its macroeconomic mentals. These reforms have led to India emerging as the fastest-growing economy among G20 economies," the ministry said, noting that the economy is generating jobs and an impressive post-pandemic recovery has seen urban unemployment rate decline to 6.6%.

While the 64-page report outlined key reforms such as the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, along with the push to build infrastructure, it only refers to Demonetisation in passing, noting that it led to a surge in the use of noncash forms of payment.

Sensex rebounds 1.8% as Reliance soars almost 7% to a record

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

The benchmark S&P BSE Sensex rebounded 1.8% on Monday, lifted by an almost 7% surge in heavyweight Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) that lifted the diversified company's stock to an all-time high.

The Sensex gained 1,240.9 points to 71,941.57 led by RIL and other blue chips including HDFC Bank, which rose 1.4%.

RIL climbed 6.86% to a record ₹2,896.15 amid talk of a possible demerger of units. "There was a rumour of demerger of diffe-

There was a rumour of demerger of different businesses of Reliance and that jacked up the price'

rent businesses of Reliance (Jio and Reliance Retail) and that jacked up the price," said Ambareesh Baliga, an independent stock market analyst.

Other gainers included Tata Motors (3.62%), Power Grid (3.4%), L&T (3.25%), Kotak Bank (3.18%) and NTPC (3.11%). The NSE Nifty-50 index too surged 1.80%, to 21,737.6.

China's He urges more support for listed firms amid stock rout

Reuters

Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng on Monday called for greater support for listed firms in an effort to help stabilise capital markets, the Xinhua News Agency reported, amid a protracted stock market rout.

"Listed companies are an important micro foundation for high-quality economic development," He said at a video conference on promoting the development of listed companies.

"Promoting high-quality development of listed companies helps to achieve high-level technological self-reliance, accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system and enhance market confidence."

'Boost confidence'

Government departments should step up support for high-quality listed firms to lift confidence and stabilise capital markets, the vice premier said. He also addressed pro-

perty financing at the conference, noting that localities should seize the opportunity to establish and efficiently operate urban real estate financing coordination mechanisms.

	MONDAY	% CHANGI			
Sensex	71,942	1.70			
JS Dollar	83.16	-0.0			
Gold	63,100	0.0			
Brent oil	91 77				

1196.65...

pollo Hosp		
sian Paints		
kis Bank		
ajaj Auto		
ajaj Finserv		
ajaj Finance		
harti Airtel		
PCL	492.65	18.25
ritannia Ind		
ipla		
oal India		
ivis Lab		
r Reddys Lab		
cher Motors	3669.05	52.60
rasim Ind		
CL Tech		
DFC Bank		
DFC Life		
ero MotoCorp		
indalco		
ind Unilever		
ICI Bank	1016.40	6.45
dusInd Bank	1526.80	14.80
fosys		
C	449.80	-5.85
SW Steel		
otak Bank	1822.90	54.50
&T		
IMindtree Ltd	5448.35	-46.30
&M	1640.00	4.50
aruti Suzuki	9991.40	110.40
estleIndia		
TPC	324.55	9.80
NGC	252.50	18.45
owerGrid Corp	253.95	8.45
eliance Ind	2896.10	189.95
BI Life	1418.40	37.50
tate Bank	622.95	10.20
un Pharma	1400.85	32.55
ataConsumerPro-		
uct	1141.05	4.30
ata Motors	841.00	29.15
ata Steel	135.00	1.25
CS		
ech Mahindra	1314.35	7.70
tan	3866.65	96.45
ItraTech Cement	10274.05	304 70

EXCHANGE RATES

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CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
JS Dollar	82.93	83.25
uro	89.70	90.05
British Pound	105.31	105.72
Japanese Yen (100)	56.11	56.33
Chinese Yuan	11.55	11.59
Swiss Franc	96.17	96.55
Singapore Dollar	61.81	62.06
Canadian Dollar	61.71	61.95
Malaysian Ringitt	17.51	17.59
Australian Dollar	54.73	54.94
Source:Indian Bank		

..539.65...

on sales, throughput

The Hindu Bureau HYDERABAD

Bharat Petroleum Corporation (BPCL) reported a more than 73% YoY jump in third-quarter standalone net profit to ₹3,397.27 crore, even as revenue from operations at the state-owned firm slid marginally to ₹1,29,975.6 crore, from ₹1,33,331.46 crore.

BPCL attributed the higher profit to better market sales and refinery throughput. While the throughput was 9.86 million tonne (mt) (9.39 mt), market sales rose 0.86% to 12.92 mt (12.81 mt).

"BPCL has delivered another quarter of resilient performance with strong operating fundamentals amid a challenging operating environment," said



Chairman and Managing Director G. Krishnakumar. "Our focus remains on driving competitive volume growth and achieving operational excellence, whilst stepping up investment towards our longterm strategic priorities."

Gross refining margin for April-December was \$14.72/barrel (\$20.08) before factoring in special additional excise duty, road and infrastructure cess.

BPCL Q3 net soars 73% | Delhi HC upholds anti-profiteering clause of GST laws

Shishir Sinha

In a setback for some 50 companies such as Hindustan Unilever and Nestle the Delhi High Court on Monday upheld the anti-profiteering provisions of the GST laws.

With this, orders pronounced by the erstwhile National Anti-Profiteering Authority (NAA) have been upheld by the High Court. Complaints, which were earlier filed with the NAA, are now handled by the Competition Commission of India.

Section the CGST Act deals with anti-profiteering measures and prescribes that any reduction in the rate of tax on supply of goods or services or the benefit of input tax credit should be passed on to the recipient by way of a commensurate reduction in prices.

Dismissed

107 petitions were filed against the NAA's order in the Delhi High Court. In its judgement, a two-judge bench led by acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma disposed of all petitions.

According to Abhishek A. Rastogi, founder of Rastogi Chamber, the Bench also said no fixed formula can be laid down to determine profiteering.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)



Gainwell may invest ₹1,000 cr. in group entities

The Hindu Bureau

Gainwell Group is planning to invest ₹1,000 crore over the next few years in group companies, Group Chairman Sunil Chaturvedi said in a statement.

The announcement follows the group acquiring controlling stake in Kolkata-based listed entity TIL (formerly Tractors India Ltd.) last week via its unit Indocrest Defence Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

TIL is Gainwell's first listed entity within the group. To fund capital expenditure, the group is planning at least two IPOs of group companies soon.

Gainwell Engineering, which has operations in the U.S, he said. This company makes

chines with technology

Tractors India Private Limited (TIPL), a 100% subsi-

'10% raise in allocation for duty remission plan may help cover more sectors'

<u>Amiti Se</u>n NEW DELHI

for the popular export benefit scheme, Remission of Duty and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP), is likely to get a 10% increase in 2024-25, over the ₹15,069 crore allocated last fiscal, which may allow the Commerce Department to extend the scheme for iron and steel, pharmaceuticals and chemical sectors for

The budgetary allocation

sources said. Unlike most other sectors that get covered under RoDTEP on a permanent basis, the scheme incorporates iron and steel items. pharmaceuticals chemicals on a piecemeal basis depending on the

availability of funds.

the entire financial year,

"The Commerce Department is expecting a 10% increase in allocation for the RoDTEP scheme in 2024-25. As exports are not likely to increase steeply because of the strained geopolitical conditions, it can be anticipated the RoDTEP amount will be enough to meet the demand of the additional three sectors as

One of them would be well. So, one could hope the scheme will be extended to iron and steel, pharma and chemicals for the entire fiscal year," a person tracking the matter told

> businessline. At present, benefits under the scheme are available till June 30, 2024 for the three identified sec-

tors. It will lapse after the date if not extended. The RoDTEP scheme, announced in January 2021 as a replacement for the

WTO-incompatible MEIS

scheme, remits embedded



Conforming to norms: RoDTEP was announced in January 2021 as a replacement for the WTO-incompatible MEIS scheme. REUTERS



At present, benefits under the scheme are available till June 30 for the three identified sectors; it will lapse after the date if not extended

duties/taxes on inputs to exporters.

These include VAT on fuel used in transportation, mandi tax and duty on electricity used during manufacturing, and input taxes not rebated under other schemes.

Outlay constraints

During inception, the scheme covered 8,731 items from most export sectors with the exception of organic and inorganic chemicals, pharmaceuticals and iron and steel.

"The only reason these sectors were excluded was outlay constraint as they qualify for substantial benefits due to relatively high

exports." said the source. The Commerce Department later extended the

India's exports during April-December shrunk 5.7% to \$317.12 billion compared with the same period last year on adverse geopolitical conditions, including the Red Sea crisis that disrupted India's exports to the EU, U.S. east coast and parts of West Asia and Africa.

scheme to the remaining

three sectors as well, but

for a limited period, retain-

ing the flexibility to take an

appropriate decision on

"It was not the Depart-

ment of Expenditure

which directed the scheme

should be extended for the

three identified sectors for

a certain time. The Com-

merce Department itself

did so to ensure that Bud-

get-imposed restrictions

were not breached," the

Allocation for the RoD-

TEP scheme in FY2023 was

increased by 10% to

₹13,699 crore in 2022-23.

source pointed out.

₹15,069 crore,

Exports shrink

further extension later.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

2.3% to ₹19,337.84 crore from ₹18,901.76 crore a year earlier. Revenue from operations rose 2.43% to ₹19,484.5 crore, up from ₹19,020.65 crore in the

ITC Q3 net profit rises 6.5% to ₹5,400 crore

Press Trust of India

Diversified entity ITC Ltd. on Monday reported a 6.51% increase in Q3 consolidated net profit to ₹5,400.51 crore.

The company had posted a consolidated net profit of ₹5,070.09 crore in the year-earlier period, ITC said in a regulatory filing.

Gross revenue from sale of products inched up year-earlier period.

Goa attempts to woo industries, aspires to be a 'logistics hub'

Lalatendu Mishra DONA PAULA, GOA

Goa, known for its pristine beaches and fun-loving culture is attempting to change gear from being a tourism revenue-led State to an industry destination.

Assuring political stability to investors, the State government led by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant unveiled a new industrial policy that includes easing land allotment procedures for potential investors.

Considering that it lacks vast stretches of land and given the State's ecologically sensitive regions, the administration said it was only inviting investments from 'green industries',



which include logistics and warehousing, IT/ITeS, food processing, pharmaceuticals and biotechnology and electronics manufacturing to name a few.

The western State on Monday organised its first ever investors' meet, "Invest Goa 2024". It was a modest beginning at a con-

the State's biggest industrial house announced it would set up a 200 room five-star hotel and said it would get into power cogeneration. Rasna International announced setting up a Goan cashew based food processing unit.

invest ₹125 crore, the larinvestment announced at the summit with employment potential for 250 people. (The writer was in Goa

ference hall of a five-star hotel without the presence of top guns like the Ambanis, Adanis, Tatas or Birlas. Dempo Group, which is

TVS Industrial and Logistics Park committed to

at the State government's invitation)

underground mining mafrom Caterpillar. Through this unit, the group caters to customers in the U.S., Australia, Singapore, China and other countries. The group started off as

diary of TIL (Tractors India Ltd.) with Mr. Chaturvedi as MD. TIPL acquired a Caterpillar unit in 2016 and took over its business and its technology.

Brokers divided on extended trading hours'



Close look: Deliberations are still underway on extended trading hours, says Ms. Buch. PTI

Ashley Coutinho MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is looking at segregation of settlement of retail and proprietary trades to ensure there is no netting of the two categories.

Brokers are permitting access to clients through the prop account for a variety of reasons including wanting to fund their margin, SEBI Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said on Monday. "The industry has made a representation to us that that there are different revenue models that brokers have and some of them may look like they are misused but they are not. We will analyse this in a balanced way to separate the wheat from the chaff," she said.

With respect to extended trading hours for the market, SEBI said that there were divergent views among the broking community and there was a lot of deliberation that was still going on. "It's a divided house and we have not yet reached the stage of getting views from investors," she said.

The NSE had planned to extend trading hours by three hours for index derivatives by March, as per reports. SEBI was moving towards offsite inspections for brokers that would be automated.

She said the Industry Standards Forum (ISF), which was in the pilot stage, would eventually be made part of the permanent regulatory architecture. She said the Brokers ISF had done a commendable job in the past four months in giving implementable recommendations on standards and guidelines of implementing regulatory directives.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

China's growth model pushes Beijing into more trade confrontations

China's overcapacity fuels trade tensions, says former WTO chief; low household demand in China pushes goods into other markets; rising debts, export reliance hurt growth potential, according to analysts; European Union worried about credit being funnelled towards China's manufacturers

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters BEIJING/FRANKFURT

wiss solar panel maker Meyer Burger is facing the brunt of competition from China and is warning it may have to close its loss-making production plant in Germany unless the government steps in with financial support.

"Chinese manufacturers are deliberately selling goods in Europe far below their own production costs," Chief executive Gunter Erfurt told Reuters.

"They can do this because the solar industry in China has been strategically subsidised with hundreds of billions of dollars for years."

Growing alarm over Chinese industrial overcapacity flooding the European Union (EU) with cheap products is opening a new front in the West's trade war with Beijing, which kicked off with Washington's import tariffs in 2018.

Brussels' trade policy is also turning increasingly protective against the global ramifications of China's production-focused, debtdriven development model. Throughout last year, China's policymakers flagged their intention to make domestic demand a more prominent growth driver to wean the world's



Clear intent: 'Beijing's resource reallocation is likely for pushing exports up the value chain.' REUTERS

second-largest economy off its decades-long reliance on infrastructure and the property sector.

Diversion of resources

But China has diverted financial resources from real estate to manufacturers rather than households, raising overcapacity concerns, deepening factorydeflation, and prompting a EU investigation into EV sector.

China's path leads to more trade conflicts, warns Pascal Lamy, former head of the World Trade Organization (WTO), now distinguished professor at China Europe International Business School.

"This is not sustainable," Mr. Lamy said. "Overcapacity will inevitably lead to a problem."

Growing alarm over Chinese industrial overcapacity flooding the EU with cheap products is opening a new front in the West's trade war with Beijing

"We have come to the realisation that this is a structural problem and it stems from the fact part of the Chinese production system is not driven by market behaviour, but by Chinese Communist Partydirected investment."

That model has led to industrial overcapacity in China's major sectors such as steel, and more recently, in EV and high-tech goods. China's trade partners are

hitting back. U.S. has imposed trade tariffs on China, and wants to cut off Beijing from high-tech chips to slow its technological and military advances. It is also ramping up infrastructure and industrial investment at home.

The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) forecasts China's battery manufacturing capacity outpacing demand by a factor of four by 2027, as its EV industry continues to grow.

Outside the auto industry, Brussels is seeking to cut reliance on China for materials and products needed for its green transition. Beijing is conducting its own anti-dumping probe into EU brandy.

India imposed antidumping duties on some Chinese steel in September

2023, adding to other trade barriers and investment curbs that have halted planned projects from Chinese automakers.

Michael Pettis, senior fellow at Carnegie China, estimates that if China were to grow 4-5% annually in the next decade while maintaining current economic structure, its share of global investment would rise to 38% from 33%, while its share of global manufacturing would rise to 36%-39% from 31%.

To accommodate that, other major countries would have to allow their economies to lose some of their investment and manufacturing share, he

wrote in a December note. "Even without the geopolitical tensions of recent years and policies in the United States, India and the European Union ... this

would be highly unlikely. Moreover, given more borrowing would be needed to sustain China's high investment levels for another decade, China's total debt ratio would have to rise to 450-500% of GDP from about 300% currently, Mr. Pettis estimated.

"It is hard to imagine that the economy could tolerate such a substantial increase in debt," he said.

To be sure, China's rebalancing goal has been stymied in part by a faltering economic recovery as transferring resources to households would bring even more near-term pain.

However, George Magnus, research associate at Oxford University's China Centre, says China's inability to increase domestic consumption means it relies on other countries importing more of its goods.

"It's a zero-sum game. If imports go up, then that's substituting for domestic production," Mr. Magnus said, adding the West have "become more politically feisty about that."

Some economists argue Beijing's resource re-allocation towards the manufacturing sector is aimed primarily at moving exports up the value chain rather than merely selling bigger volumes of goods.

Xia Qingjie, economics professor at Peking University, says European and U.S. attempts to re-industrialise economies would be expensive due to higher labour and capital costs and "take a long time."

"But they cannot restrict China's technological advance."

William Hurst, professor of Chinese development at the University of Cambridge, doubts China is making the right bet in this regard. He argues Beijing's push to advance sectors such as aviation, biotech and artificial intelligence has not been sufficiently successful to either push technological boundaries in those industries or generate more employment.

+ Unhealthy confrontation?



Testing patients: A man rides a bicycle past a placard which reads "Taxi driver, a job, a passion, not an option", as taxi drivers take part in a demonstration against a health insurance project law of "patient carpooling" by blocking access to the airport in Toulouse, southwestern France. Cab drivers blocked several major roads across France in a bid to secure renegotiation of patient-transport conditions from the French health insurance system, with traffic moving at a snail's pace in Paris, Marseille and Bordeaux. AFP

'S&P could cut Israel's credit rating if ⁺ conflict expands beyond Gaza'

Reuters

Israel's sovereign credit rating could be cut if the war with Palestinian Islamist group Hamas expands to other fronts, but if this does not happen it should be able to weather the war's economic fallout if it makes needed budget changes to offset higher spending, an S&P Global Ratings director said.

S&P in October affirmed Israel's 'AA-' rating but revised Israel's outlook to "negative" from "stable", citing risks that the Israel-Hamas war could spread more widely with a more pronounced impact on the economy and security situation in the country.



Note of caution: If Israel's security and geopolitical risks increase that could lead to a downgrade, says S&P's Rybnikov. AFP

"The negative outlook on the ratings implies that we currently see at least a one-in-three chance of a downgrade over the next one to two years," Maxim Rybnikov, director of EMEA Sovereign & Public

Finance Ratings at S&P. told Reuters in e-mailed comments.

He said that if Israel's security and geopolitical risks increase due to an escalation of the conflict – a direct confrontation with Hezbollah in Lebanon or Iran – that could lead downgrade.

"We could also lower the ratings if the impact of the conflict on Israel's economic growth, fiscal position, and balance of payments proves more significant than we currently project," Mr. Rybnikov said. He said S&P projects Israel's economy will grow by just 0.5% in 2024 with a cumulative budget deficit of 10.5% of GDP in 2023-2024 "but there are downside risks to the assumptions." The cabinet this month passed a disputed 2024 budget with amendments adding 55 billion shekels (\$15 billion) of spending. It still needs Parliamentary approval.

HK court orders Evergrande to liquidate as \$300-bn debt plan fails

Associated Press HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court ordered China Evergrande, the world's most heavilyindebted real estate developer, to undergo liquidation in the wake of a failed effort to restructure debt of \$300 billion owed to banks and bondholders that fuelled fears about China's rising debt burden.

Judge Linda Chan said it was appropriate for the court to order Evergrande to wind up its business given a "lack of progress on the part of the company putting forward a viable restructuring proposal" as well as Evergrande's insolvency.

China Evergrande Group is one of the biggest of a series of Chinese deve-

lopers that have collapsed since 2020 under official pressure to rein in surging debt the ruling Communist Party views as a threat to China's slowing economic

But a crackdown on excess borrowing has tipped the property industry into crisis, making it a drag on the economy, as scores of other developers ran into trouble, their predicaments rippling through financial systems in and outside China.

Containing risks

Global financial markets were rattled earlier by fears an Evergrande liquidation could cause global shockwaves. But Chinese regulators said risks could be contained. Only a few billion dollars of Ever-



Reality bites: Real estate drove China's economic boom, but developers borrowed heavily as they turned cities into forests of apartments and office towers. AFP

grande's debt was owed to foreign creditors.

It's unclear how the liquidation order will affect China's financial system. Evergrande's Hong

Kong-traded shares plunged almost 21% early Monday before they were suspended from trading. But Hong Kong's benchmark Hang Seng index was

up 0.8% and other property developers saw gains in their share prices. China's largest real es-

tate developer, Country Garden, gained 2.9% and

Sunac China Holdings jumped 4%. Some other property companies logged moderate declines.

The Shanghai Composite index dropped 0.6% while Shenzhen's A-share index fell more than 2%.

Attempt at 'refining'

Evergrande gained a reprieve from the Hong Kong court in December after it said it was attempting to "refine" a new debt restructuring plan of more than \$300 billion in liabilities. It could appeal the ruling. Fergus Saurin, a lawyer representing an ad hoc group of creditors, said Monday he was not surprised by the outcome.

"The company has failed to engage with us. There has been a history of last-minute engagement

which has gone nowhere." Evergrande CEO Shawn Siu told Chinese news outlet 21Jingji that the compa-

ny feels "utmost regret" at the liquidation order. He emphasised the order affects only the Hong Konglisted China Evergrande unit. The group's domestic and overseas units are independent legal entities, he said. Mr. Siu said Evergrande will strive to deliver properties to buyers.

Asset disposal

"If affected, we will still make every effort to ensure the smooth advancement of risk resolution and asset disposal, and still make every effort to ad-

vance all work fairly and in accordance with the law." Evergrande first defaulted on financial obligations ter Beijing clamped down on lending to property developers in an effort to cool a property bubble. It's also unclear how the

in 2021, just over a year af-

liquidation order will affect Evergrande's vast operations in the Chinese mainland. As a former British colony, Hong Kong operates under a legal system that is separate, though increasingly influenced by, communist-ruled China's.

Real estate drove China's economic boom, but developers borrowed heavily as they turned cities into apartments and office towers. That pushed total corporate, government and household debt to the equivalent of more than 300% of annual economic output, unusually high for a middle-income country.

BIG CUSHION

Gill should capitalise on his chances, says Kumble



Anil Kumble feels that Shubman Gill has been given the kind of "cushion" that Cheteshwar Pujara never got and he needs to make it count in the second Test against England. Kumble said the youngster needs to adjust his technique slightly for the second Test starting on February 2.

NOT DONE

Bumrah reprimanded for Code of Conduct breach in Hyderabad Test



India pacer Jasprit Bumrah has been reprimanded and handed a demerit point for deliberately stepping in England player Ollie Pope's way as he went for a run which led to "inappropriate physical contact" during the first Test at Hyderabad. Bumrah's offence is a Level 1 offence under the ICC code of conduct.

PASSION REIGNITED

Shamar a saviour in the purest form of the game: Steve Waugh



Legendary Steve Waugh heaped rich praise on young sensation Shamar Joseph, calling him a 'saviour in the purest form of the game'. "Cinderella stories are rare in sport but this was truly epic from a young man who has single-handedly reignited the passion of followers in the Caribbean and all over the world." Waugh said

CRUCIAL WIN

Steelers get the better of Warriors, boost their qualification chances



Haryana Steelers boosted its chances of qualifying for the playoffs with a 41-36 win over Bengal Warriors in the Pro Kabaddi League at Patna on Monday. Shivam Patare (12 points) and Siddharth Desai (11 raid points) shone for Steelers. Patna Pirates put on a defensive masterclass to beat Gujarat Giants 32-20 in another match.

Bazball has not only travelled, but transcended boundaries too

Though their tenure began only a year-and-a-half ago, McCullum and Stokes have been able to produce quite a few great Test victories, the most recent one coming against India in Hyderabad in a dramatic finish on Sunday

ENGLAND IN INDIA

P.K. Ajith Kumar

live Lloyd changed Test cricket back in the 1970s with his decision to play four fast bowlers in the West Indies team. That was a significant moment in the game's history.

The West emerged as the world's most entertaining, and feared, cricket team. Imagine the plight of the batters facing Malcolm Marshall, Michael Holding, Andy Roberts and Joel Garner one after another.

The West Indies' domination was complete. It won successive World Cups, and triumphed in most of its Test series; the odd ones were drawn.

Few decisions, since Lloyd's, have impacted Test cricket as the one that Rob Key took a couple of years ago as the managing director of England men's cricket. He made Brendon McCullum coach of England's Test team.

Though he had coached white-ball teams, including Kolkata Knight Riders, McCullum had never trained a Test team. And it



Verve and vigour: England's enterprising brand of cricket has come as a whiff of fresh air. K.V.S. GIRI

was at a very difficult time for England that he assumed charge: England was beaten in its last four series, among them a 4-0 thrashing by Australia. Captain Joe Root and coach Chris Silverwood had resigned.

Ben Stokes took over from Root and the all-rounder would form with McCullum one of cricket's captain-coach greatest partnerships.

What McCullum con-

ceives, Stokes executes. Their latest success came here on Sunday, as England defeated India in the first Test after conceding a lead of 190. Remember, beating India in India has, for years, been arguably the hardest thing to do in Test cricket.

Stokes termed it England's best win since he became the skipper. That is a bit like saying Vertigo is Alfred Hitchcock's best film, Hamlet is William

Shakespeare's best play, or *Roja* is A.R. Rahman's best album. Those three geniuses have several other great works to their credit.

The victory against India may be the best - given the conditions and the sitnation of the match (England trailing by 27 runs with only five wickets in hand in the second innings at one stage) - but McCullum and Stokes have been able to produce quite a few great Test wins, though

their tenure began only a year-and-a-half ago.

In the English summer of 2022, England won four Tests – three against New Zealand and the one against India - all by chasing targets in excess of 270. The team attacked with bat and ball.

Bazball created a buzz. Test cricket had never been played like that before, though there have been batters like Virender Sehwag and Adam Gilchrist who have displayed similar spirit and fearlessness, but that was more of an individual thing.

England, however, lost to South Africa later that summer in the first match of a three-Test series.

The host still took the series 2-1.

The bigger test was always going to be the overseas tours, especially in the sub-continent. And Bazball succeeded spectacularly in Pakistan, whitewashing the host 3-0.

The highlight was the 74-run victory in the first Test at Rawalpindi, England won on the flat track by making 657 in just 101

Still, the question remained: Will Bazball work in India?

Injured Rahul and Jadeja ruled out of second Test



Getting his due: Sarfaraz has broken through on the back of prolific scores. FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

P.K. Ajith Kumar HYDERABAD

Virat Kohli's absence was felt in India's 28-run defeat to England in the first Test. Now, the team has to cope with the unavailability of two other stars in the second Test starting at Visakhapatnam on Feb. 2.

K.L. Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja have been ruled out because of injuries. According to a statement from the BCCI, Jadeja sustained a hamstring injury on the fourth day of the first Test, while Rahul complained of a right quadriceps pain.

Kohli, it may be recalled, had withdrawn form the first two Tests citing personal reasons. Rajat Patidar joined the team as

his replacement. The selection commit-

tee has added three others to the squad: Sarfaraz Khan, Sourabh Kumar and Washington Sundar. Saransh Jain will replace

Washington in the India-A squad for the third 'Test' against England Lions, which begins at Ahmedabad on Feb. 1. Avesh Khan, who had been released from the Test squad, will continue to travel with Madhya Pradesh for the Ranji Trophy tournament; he could return to the Test squad if required.

Saurabh, a left-arm spinning all-rounder from Uttar Pradesh, and Sarfaraz, a prolific run-getter for Mumbai, are uncapped. They both are in form: Sarfaraz scored 161 off 160 balls for India-A against England Lions in the second Test at Ahmedabad, while Saurabh made 77 and took five wickets in the second innings.

Washington has played four Tests, but the last of them came in 2021. Interestingly, it was against England, in the fourth Test at Ahmedabad. He made 96 not out in India's only innings. He had also taken the wicket of Ben Stokes. current England captain.

India squad (for second Test): Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer, K.S. Bharat, Dhruv Jurel, R. Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Sirai, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah, Avesh Khan, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Washington Sundar and

Nominations for the Club/State team of the year honours



Sports Bureau

Indian sports had many moments to cherish in 2023. It is time to celebrate these landmark moments and achievements at the Sportstar ACES Awards.

Here are the nominees for the Club/State team of the year award:

It was an incredible season for Saurashtra as it won two titles, first the Vijay Hazare Trophy, followed by the Ranji Tro-

Under the leadership of Jaydev Unadkat and Arpit Vasavada, the side dominated the others despite the absence of its star batter Cheteshwar Pujara. This was Saurashtra's second Ranji Trophy title win in three years.

The M.S. Dhoni-led Chennai Super Kings

won the Indian Premier League for the fifth time. becoming the joint-most successful team in the CSK players impressed

for the national teams as well, with Ruturaj Gaikwad leading India to a gold medal at the Asian Games and Ravindra Jadeja playing a crucial role with bat and ball in India's inspiring journey in the ICC ODI World Cup 2023. Mohun Bagan Super Giant, then ATK Mohun Bagan, held its nerve in a tightly contested Indian Super League final to beat

It then won its 17th Durand Cup trophy after a 1-0 win over arch-rival East Bengal in the final of the 2023 edition.

Bengaluru FC 4-3 on pe-

nalties and lift its maiden

The team's success extended beyond national competitions as it overcame formidable opponents, including ISL 2021-22 champion Hyderabad FC and Abahani Dhaka from Bangladesh, to qualify for the AFC Cup.

Gokulam Kerala Women's football team has firmly established itself as the most successful women's side, exemplified by securing a hat-trick of Indian Women's League titles, including the 2023

Gokulam Kerala also displayed resilience, finishing as runner-up in the fiercely competitive 2022-23 Kerala Women's League.

Ahmedabad Defenders emerged as champion in the Prime Volleyball League 2023. This impressive turnaround solidified its status as the joint-most successful team in the league.

Notably, the team's influence extended beyond the league as three of its players, including captain Appavu, Muthusamy made a significant impact representing Team India at the Asian Games. The voting lines

the 2034 Aces Awards will close on January 31.



Gallant Gukesh loses the title in tie-break

Sports Bureau

After Leon Mendonca won the Challengers title, D. Gukesh battled brilliantly to tie Tata Steel Masters crown before losing the title-deciding tie-break blitz game to eventual champion China's Wei Yi at Wijk aan Zee on Sunday.

The teenaged Indian won his final round against Iranian Parham Maghsoodloo to be part of a fourway tie for the top spot at 8.5 points, with Wei Yi, Anish Giri and Nordirbek Abdusattorov. Wei prevailed over Vidit Gujrathi in the final round.

However, to decide the champion, as per tournament regulations, blitz semifinals were played involving all four toppers. Two blitz games, where each player received three minutes plus two-second increment for each move, followed. In case the tie persisted, the players were to play 'sudden-death' games till the winner was found.

As it turned out, Wei defeated Abdusattorov in the second blitz game after the first ended in a draw, to reach the final. Gukesh lost the opening



Gukesh... narrow miss. FILE PHOTO: B. VELANKANNI RAJ

game with white to Anish but bounced right back to win the second with black. In the first sudden-death game, Gukesh prevailed with white pieces.

In the final, the first game ended in a draw but in the second, Gukesh came under time-pressure while playing from the black side, eventually blundered a rook and resigned in 59 moves.

Final standing (after 13 rounds):

Masters: 1-4. Wie Yie (Chn, 8.5), D. Gukesh (8.5), Anish Giri (8.5), Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb. 8.5), 5-7. Alireza Firouzja (Fra, 7.5), Vidit Gujarathi (7.5), R. Praggnanandhaa (7.5), 8. Ian Nepomniachtchi (FIDE, 6.5), 9. Ding Liren (6), 10-13. Ju Wenjun (Chn. 4.5), Alexander Donchenko (Ger, 4.5), Jorden van Foreest (Ned, 4.5), 14. Max Warmerdam (Ned, 4).

Sanjana rewrites her record; TN second in medals table

KHELO GAMES

Sports Bureau CHENNAI

Weightlifter A. Sanjana of Haryana was the toast of the sixth Khelo India Youth Games here on Monday as she broke her own National record in snatch, clean and jerk and total in the girls' 76kg category. She had created the record at the Asian Youth and junior championships in Greater Noida in August last year.

Maharashtra continues to lead the medals tally with 37 gold, 32 silver and 40 bronze medals, while Tamil Nadu is in second position with 29 gold, 18 silver and 30 bronze.

The results: Swimming: Boys: 4x100m medley: 1. Maharashtra 3:56.99; 2. Karnataka; 3. TN; 100m freestyle: 1. Rishabh Anupam Das (Mah) 52.06; 2. Tirthank Pegu (Asm); Lucky Ali Khan (Raj); 100m butterfly: 1. Jananjoy Jyoti Hazarika (Asm) 55.56s; 2. Salil Prashant Bhagwat (Mah): 3. Heer Sunil Pitroda (Gui): 400m freestyle: 1. Yug Chelani (Raj) 4:05.23s; 2. Gotteti Sampath Kumar Yadav (AP); 3. Ronak Nitin Sawant (Mah); 50m backstroke: 1. Rishabh Anupam Das (Mah) 26.49s; 2. Akash Mani (Kar); 3. Nithik Nathela (TN).

Girls: 100m freestyle: 1. S.



Scaling a new peak: Sanjana created a National record in the girls 76kg category. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rujula (Kar) 59.27s; 2. Saleh Dhansura (Mah); 3. Jahnabi Kashyap (Asm); 50m backstroke: 1. Rujuta Prasad Raiadnya (Mah) 31.04s; 2. Aarushi Agarwal (Kar); 3. Deeksha Sivakumar (TN); 400m medley: 1. Thanya Shadakshari (Kar) 5:10.24s; 2. Sreenithi Natesan (TN); 3. Raghvi Ramanujam (Mah). Weightlifting: Girls: 76kg: 1. A. Sanjana (Har) snatch (90) (OR: 86kg); clean & jerk (116) (OR: 113kg); 206kg (OR: 198kg); 2. Greshna Thorat (Mah); 3. M.A. Hasinashrin (TN); 71Kg: 1. Chelsi (Del); 2. Manju (Har); 3. J. Devisri Men: 96kg: 1. Parv Chaudhary

(UP) 160kg; 2. A. Arunesh Babu (AP): 3. Aditva (Har). Tennis: Girls: Singles: 1. Wani Sayali (Mah); 2. Soha Nandini (WB); 3. Vartikar Pritha (Mah); **Doubles:** 1. Vartikar Pritha & Wani Savali (Mah): 2. Kotecha Tan & Mirchandani Subhankrita (WB): 3. Syndrela Das & Subhankrita

(WB). Shooting: Skeet: Boys: 1.

Gurfateh Singh Sandhu (Pun); 2. Zorawar Singh Bedi (Pun); 3. Harazeez Singh Atwal (Pun). Girls: Devvani Rathore (Rai): 2. Yashasvi Rathore (Raj); 3. Venkat Lakshmi Lakku (Tri). Wrestling: Boys: Freestyle: 51kg: 1. Soham Sunil Kumbhar

(Mah): 2. Anui Yadav (UP): 3. Abhishek (Har) & Chirag Dahiya (Del); **65kg:** 1. Sagar (Del); 2. Tanishq Pravin Kadam (Mah); 3. Harsh (UP) & Mohit Kumar (Del) Greco Roman: 71kg: 1. Sahil (Chd); 2. Sohamraj Jagannath More (Mah); 3. Sunil Kumar (Del) & Mahesh Rathore (MP); 80kg: 1. Abhay (Har); 2., Anuj Dahiya (Har); 3. Sunny Baisla (UP) & Akarsh Mishra (Uttr). Girls: 49kg: 1. Naina (Har); 2.

Nandani Verma (MP); 69kg: 1. Tanu Sharma (Har); 2. Manisha (Har); 3. Palak Yadav (Raj) & Trupti Narayan Bhavar (Mah). Football: Boys: Semifinal: Punjab 1 (Dharamvir Singh) bt Odisha 0.

Kanak (Del); 3. Ritika (Har) &

THE HINDU



Nadal's 2007 French Open racquet sells for \$118k

Rafael Nadal's championship point-winning racquet from his 2007 French Open final victory over Roger Federer was sold for more than \$118,000 at an auction on Monday, ranking among the highest-priced such memorabilia. Nadal beat Federer 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the 2007 final in Paris to win his third Grand Slam title. It was previously housed in the Australian Tennis Museum prior to its recent closure. Previous highest individual tennis racquet auction sales include Nadal's 2022 Australian Open racquet at \$139,700, Billie Jean King's 'Battle of the Sexes' racquet at \$125,000, and Djokovic's 2016 French Open racquet sold for \$107,482.

India makes FIH Hockev5s World Cup quarterfinals

Maninder Singh struck four goals as India mauled Jamaica 13-0 in its third and final pool match to enter the quarterfinals of the FIH Hockey5s Men's World Cup in Muscat on Monday. Maninder's goals came in the second (two strikes), 28th and 29th minutes. Manjeet (fifth, 24th), Raheel Mohammed (16th, 27th) and Mandeep Mor (23rd, 27th) struck a brace each while Uttam Singh (fifth), Rajbhar Pawan (ninth) and Gurjot Singh (14th) were the other goal-scorers.



Jangra wins intercontinental super featherweight title

Mandeep Jangra, a 2014 Commonwealth Games silver medallist, won the US-based National Boxing Association (NBA)'s intercontinental super featherweight title after defeating American Gerardo Esquivel with an unanimous decision at Toppenish City, Washington.

Korda beats Ko in playoff to win LPGA Drive On title

Reigning Olympic golf champion Nelly Korda parred the second playoff hole to defeat New Zealand's Lydia Ko and win the Drive On Championship in Miami on Sunday for her ninth career LPGA title. Korda closed her round eagle-birdie for the second consecutive day to force a playoff, then outlasted Ko.

LIVE TELECAST

Men's U-19 CWC: India vs New Zealand, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1.30 p.m.

PKL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8 p.m.

Premier League: SS Select 1, 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1.15 a.m. (Wednesday)

TN has turned it around and is sitting pretty

Jagadeesan's spell-binding double and triple tons in the last two games, along with fine showing by the bowling unit, have catapulted the Sai Kishore-led team to the top of its group

RANJI TROPHY

S. Dipak Ragav

ollowing its compre-hensive innings vicollowing its compretories in the last two matches against Railways and Chandigarh, Tamil Nadu finds itself on top of Elite Group-C at the midpoint in the Ranji Trophy campaign after four games, tied on 15 points with Karnataka.

It is a good turnaround for the team after losing to Gujarat from a position of strength in the opening fixture and having only one point after the first two encounters.

In the two matches at home in Coimbatore, N. Jagadeesan came up with spellbinding knocks – with a double and triple century - against Railways (245 n.o.) and Chandigarh (321), respectively.

With Pradosh Ranjan Paul and B. Indrajith also scoring tons in the last game, the TN batting lineup appears in good shape.

Standout performer

On the bowling front, pacer Sandeep Warrier has been the standout performer.

Guest pacer Kuldeep Sen, who played for the first time this season against Chandigarh, was in nice rhythm. The team will hope the former MP player, alongside M. Mohammed, can support Warrier in the remaining fixtures.

Similarly, spinners – skipper Sai Kishore and Ajith Ram - showed their potential on helpful surfaces at home.

However, in an evenly matched group where only the top two teams will qualify, Sai Kishore's men can ill-afford any slip-up starting from its next game against Goa.

Fortunately, the team will play two tough opponents – Karnataka and Punjab – at home in Chennai and Salem, respectively, which should give it an

Momentum

"We got the much-needed momentum in these last two matches. I think confidence in cricket is important and allows you to express yourself. Going into the next half, how we show up in difficult moments will define the campaign," said Sai Kishore.

If Tamil Nadu can continue the form it showed in the last two outings, it looks well-placed to qualify for the knockouts of the country's premier domestic tournament for the first time since 2016-17.



RANJI TROPHY SCORES, ROUND 4, DAY 4

ELITE: Group A: At Ranchi: Vidarbha 204 & 374/9 decl. bt Jharkhand 150 & 120 (Umesh Yadav 4/43). Points: Vidarbha 6 (19), Jharkhand 0 (3). Rohtak: Haryana 195 & 211/6 decl. in 67 overs (Nishanth Sindhu 70, Ashok Menaria 59, P.C. Dadhe 5/60) drew with Maharashtra 194 & 96/2 in 18 overs (A.R. Bawane 50 n.o.) Haryana 3 (17), Maharashtra 1

Delhi: Services 536/7 decl. drew with Saurashtra 462 in 139.5 overs (Kevin Jivrajani 52. Vishvarajsinh Jadeja 88 Cheteshwar Pujara 91, Arpit Vasavada 71, Chirag Jani 48, A.P. Sharma 4/105). Services 3 (9), Saurashtra 1 (10).

Group B: Mumbai: Mumbai 198 & 320 in 88.1 overs (Shivam Dube 117, Shams Mulani 63, Mohit Avasthi 49, Aaqib Khan 4/58) lost to U.P. 324 & 195/8 in 69.5 overs (Aryan Juyal 76, Karan Sharma 67 n.o., Tanush Kotian 5/58), U.P. 6 (11), Mumbai 0 (20). Raipur: Andhra 431 & 150/2 decl.

bt Chhattisgarh 262 & 193 in 59.4 overs (Kd. Eknath 76, Amandeep

Khare 67). Andhra 6 (15),

Chhattisgarh 0 (11). Patna: Kerala 227 & 220/4 in 61 overs (Sachin Baby 109 n.o.) drew with Bihar 377. Kerala 1 (5), Bihar 3 (5).

Group C: Agartala: Karnataka 241 & 141 bt Tripura 200 & 163 in 55.2 overs (Sudip Chatteriee 82.

Vidwath Kaverappa 4/44). Karnataka 6 (15), Tripura 0 (8). Group D: Cuttack: Odisha 138 & 425/8 decl. bt Himachal 176 & 149 in 57.4 overs. Odisha 6 (9),

Himachal 0 (3) Mohali: Delhi 147 & 264/9 decl. bt Uttarakhand 239 & 165 in 79.3 overs (Akhil Singh Rawat 63, Himanshu Chauhan 5/39). Delhi 6 (7), Uttarakhand 0 (7).

Vadodara: J&K 457 & 193/7 in 76.4 overs (Shubham Khajuria 40, Sahil Lotra 63 n.o., Mahesh Pithiya 5/82) drew with Baroda 383. J&K 3 (11), Baroda 1 (20). PLATE: Vallabh Vidyanagar:

Mizoram 359 & 237/9 decl. in 56 overs bt Meghalaya 281 & 124 in 58.4 overs (K.C. Kariappa 4/48). Mizoram 6 (15), Meghalaya 0

Head of State security for Indian Davis Cup team

Press Trust of India ISLAMABAD

A bomb disposal squad will sanitise the Islamabad Sports Complex every morning, and two escort vehicles will shadow the Indian Davis Cup team during its travel as part of the multi-layer security arrangement, which is usually accorded to the Head of State.

The Indian squad has travelled to Pakistan for the first time in 60 years, and the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) is keen to

ensure that there are no security issues. The PTF is following the security plan that has been approved by the International Tennis Federation (ITF).

The Indian contingent, which has five players, two physios and two AITA officials, arrived here on Sunday night. Ageel Khan, one of the

finest tennis players from Pakistan, said the Indians should explore the city, if they are comfortable. "If they can't move out and see the city, they can visit the restaurants," he said.

India will look to continue its winning ways when it takes on New Zealand

UNDER-19 WORLD CUP

Press Trust of India BLOEMFONTEIN

Defending champion India, off to the best possible start with three wins on the trot, will look to keep the juggernaut rolling when it takes on New Zealand in the super-six match of the U-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

Having qualified for the super-six stage as Group-A leader, India will also have the advantage of playing at the Mangaung Oval on Tuesday – the same venue that it has played all its

three matches so far.

from East London and will have to adapt quickly to the conditions.

India notched up easy wins against Bangladesh, Ireland and USA. The best thing about the

Indian team is that at least one or two batters had raised hands and taken responsibility to score runs.

Skipper Uday Saharan has played impactful innings and will look to continue in the same vein.

New Zealand finished second in Group-D with two wins from three

The Kiwis' batting line-New Zealand, on the up has struggled in the other hand, move here tournament. While they were able to eke out a narrow one-wicket win over Afghanistan while chasing a modest 91, they succumbed to a 10-wicket loss to Pakistan after being bowled out for 140.

> Against a formidable India line-up, the onus will be on the Kiwi batters to complement the bowling department.

> Both sides will also keep an eye on the Net Run Rates as each of the teams will carry forward the points and NRR earned against fellow Super Six qualifying teams.

Martinez's strike helps Inter go back on top of Serie A

EURO LEAGUES

Reuters

Inter Milan reclaimed the top spot in Serie A as it beat fifth-placed Fiorentina 1-0 on Sunday courtesy of an early header from Lautaro Martinez.

Inter, crowned Italian Super Cup last week, now has 54 points, one ahead of second-placed Juventus which has played one game more.

Fiorentina thought it had taken the lead when forward M'Bala Nzola nutmegged visiting goalkeeper Yann Sommer in the 11th minute but the Angola striker was ruled to be off-

Prithvi claims singles title at the

Australian Open Deaf championship

Martinez put Inter ahead three minutes later, nodding in a corner from a

tight angle.

Barren run Fiorentina has not won any of its Serie A games in 2024, losing two and drawing one.

Lazio's four-game Serie A winning streak came to an end as it was held to a 0-0 draw by champion Napoli as both teams struggled to create opportunities in a clash between last

season's top two sides. In the LaLiga, Samuel Lino and Memphis Depayin each half to give Atletico Madrid a comfortable 2-0 home win over Valencia, which moved Diego Simeone's side to third in the standings.

Atletico with 44 points is level with Barcelona but ahead on goal difference. Real Madrid is second on 54 points, one behind Girona which has played a game more than its nearest rivals.

The results: Serie A: Fiorentina 0 lost to Inter Milan 1 (Martinez 14); Lazio 0 drew with Napoli 0: Monza 1 (Colpani 31) bt Sassuolo 0; Verona 1 (Suslov 45+2-pen) drew with Frosinone 1 (Kaio Jorge 58). LaLiga: Cadiz 0 lost to Athletic Bilbao 0: Sevilla 1 (Romero 24) drew with Osasuna 1 (Budimir 55); Atletico Madrid 2 (Lino 45+5,

Depay 57) bt Valencia 0. Bundesliga: Union Berlin 1 (Hollerbach 62) bt Darmstadt 0: Borussia Dortmund 3 (Fuellkrug 6-pen, 72, 90+1-pen) bt Bochum 1 (Schlotterbeck-og).

Sonam shoots air rifle silver as Janssen tops the chart

Sports Bureau

Sonam Maskar finished with silver in women's air rifle after being edged out by Germany's Anna Janssen by 0.9 points in the shooting World Cup in Cairo on Sunday.

Nancy Mandhotra also made the final with an impressive qualification score of 633.1 but missed the chance to win a medal by 0.2 points.

In the women's 25metre sports pistol final on Monday, Simranpreet Kaur Brar ended fifth after topqualification with

Rhythm misses final Rhythm Sangwan shot 582 and missed the final by one point while Manu Bhaker, the Olympic quota winner in the event, shot 580 for

the 14th spot. In men's skeet, Munek



Battula shot 74 out of 75 to be among the leaders. Three shooters had a perfect 75 and Munek was on par with four others.

Abhay Singh Sekhon (72) was in the 19th place while Anant Jeet Singh Naruka, was in 53rd spot with

In women's skeet, Raiza Dhillon (68), Areeba Khan (67) and Ganemat Sekhon (67) were lying in the 17th to 20th spots.

The results: 10m air rifle: Women: 1. Anna Janssen (Ger) 253.0 (632.5); 2. Sonam Maskar 252.1 (632.7); 3 Aneta Stankiewicz (Pol) 230.4 (633.2); 4. Nancy Mandhotra 209.5 (633.1); 33. Tilottama Sen 627.6. RPO: Ramita Jindal 632.0; Shrivanka Sadangi 627.3.

25m sports pistol: Women: 1. Doreen Vennekamp (Ger) 39 (585); 2. Anna Korakaki (Gre) 37 (584); 3. Veronika Major (Hun) 33 (583): 5. Simranpreet Kaur Brar 23 (586); 9. Rhythm Sangwan 582; 14. Manu Bhaker. RPO: Abhidnya

Paris Masters indoor tennis to have a new venue

Associated Press

The Paris Masters indoor tennis tournament will move to a new location starting from next year, the French tennis federation said on Monday.

The tournament is moving from its long-standing home at the Bercy Arena to a larger venue at the Paris La Défense Arena, increasing the capacity from just under 17,000 to 23,000. The FFT said the courts

will be bigger and better than at the Bercy Arena, where the smaller courts were criticized by players last year. Jannik Sinner, who won the Australian Open on Sunday, pulled out during the Paris Masters last November in a scheduling protest.

TENNIS Kamesh Srinivasan NEW DELHI India's Prithvi Sekhar had a

memorable outing in the Australian Open Deaf Championships, winning the singles title and finishing runner-up in doubles, partnering Glen Flindell, in

Melbourne on Sunday. "It was great to win the singles title beating Gabor Mathe of Hungary, to whom I had lost in the semifinals last year. I had a shoulder injury then. This time I was better prepared and very motivated," said Prithvi.

It could have been a double crown for Prithvi and partner Glen, but for them missing their chances from being up 6-0, 5-2 against Mathe and Esah



with his reward.

"We had a match point on deuce, and a few other chances but we made mistakes", recalled Prithvi, about the 6-0, 5-7, [7-10] loss in the second league match. The duo won the third league match easily to take the runner-up trophy.

"I prepared well and played with superb intensi-



Hyat in a league match. Prithvi, who witnessed a lot of matches featuring top players at the Australian Open, also watched Rohan Bopanna, Sumit Nagal, Anirudh Chandrasekar and Vijay Sundar Prashanth in action. "I had five days of training before my event in Mel-

bourne with other Indian players," said Prithvi, who could not watch Bopanna

mentum to win all my sin-

gles matches," said Prithvi

who dropped one set in

five matches.

and Matthew Ebden playing the doubles final, as he was busy with his own matches.

Prithvi, who competes in

the regular ITF men's circuit, is confident of performing better in the future thanks to the morale-boosting accomplishment in Melbourne.

Better performance

Singles: Final: Prithvi Sekhar bt

Gabor Mathe (Hun) 6-1, 6-3; semifinals: Prithvi bt Mike Laurent (Fra) 6-2, 6-2; league: Prithvi bt Esa Hyat (GBr) 6-7(4) 6-2, [10-7]; bt Oliver Grave (Fra) 6-0, 6-3;bt Marino Kegl (Slo) 7-6(3), 6-4

Doubles (league): Prhtivi & Glen

Flindell (Aus) bt Marino Kegl (Slo) & Oliver Grave (Fra) 6-0, 6-1; Prithvi & Glen lost to Gabor Mathe (Hun) & Esa Hvat (GBr) 6-0. 5-7, [7-10]; Prithvi & Glen bt Mike Laurent (Fra) & Andy Vasquez (Ecu) 6-2, 6-3

Her roots in Puducherry, Prithika is France's top hope in Paris 2024

I want medals in the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles at the Worlds and Olympics and want to do something great; I want to be one of the best players in history; I love this sport, and I think I can do something good, says the 19-year-old paddler

Jonathan Selvaraj

ith some of the world's top players featuring, there are no easy matches at the WTT Star Contender in Goa. Playing her first match in the women's singles category, Prithika Pavade looked to be making an early exit. Prithika was down two games before she held her nerve and fought back with a 9-11, 9-11, 10-12, 11-7, 11-3 win. It's a result that set Prithika out for a clash against South Korea's Nayeong Kim with a place in the quarterfinals up for grabs. Prithika eventually lost 6-11, 11-9, 9-11, 9-11.

The win is an important one for Prithika. It's her first at the WTT Star Contender in Mapusa. She had competed at the 2023 edition of the tournament but had lost out in the qualification first

It's not just Prithika who hopes she does well in India. It's all of France's table tennis fraternity. With the Paris Olympics just a few months away, much is expected of Prithika, born and raised in the Parisian suburb of St. Dennis, who at World No. 33, is France's top-ranked women's singles player. Still only 19 years old, Prithika has had a solid start to the year. She made the round of 32 at the WTT Star Contender in Doha and is coming off a quarterfinal win at the Europe Top 16 – a knockout competition for Europe's top players.

But while she has wins elsewhere, there's more reason for Prithika to value the victory in Goa. Although she was born and raised in Paris, Prithika has Indian roots. "I'm very happy to be in India. It is a special place for me," she says.

It's not uncommon to have players of Chinese origin rise to the top ranks in their adopted countries. At the European Top 16 tournament, for instance, six of the 16 entrants are of Chinese descent. The tournament incidentally was won by Prithika's compatriot Jia Nan Yuan, who learnt her sport in China before migrating to France. As a player of Indian descent, Prithika is a bit of an oddity.

Prithika's parents are from Puducherry, an erstwhile territory of France in India. "They moved to France in 2003, and I was born in 2004," she

Prithika picked up the sport of table tennis when she was about six years old. And it was almost inevitable that she did Although her father Vijayan Pavade worked at the George V Hotel in Paris, he had been a table tennis player in his youth in Puducherry. "My father wasn't a national-level player, but he still had good skills. When I was six, he took me to a gymnasium that was about two minutes from our apartment. There was a table there. My dad was the one who first chose table tennis for me. But he never forced me to stick to it, and later on, it became my choice because I just fell in love with the sport," she says.

She was a precocious talent. "I think within a year, I was starting to beat my dad. Of course, he wasn't a serious player





at that time because he had to do his job and work to provide for his children, at that time. But I got my foundation from him. He never told me, but I think he was happy. He always tried to push me to be a better player. At first, I was playing for fun, but I realised I was good at it when I was about 11 years old, and I first won the (Under 14) French Championships. Then it slowly became clear that it is what I wanted to do," she says.

Olympic dreams

According to local news reports around that time, there were over 70 journalists who were crammed in Prithika's apartment looking to interview the young Indian-origin girl who had just won a national title. But Prithika's graph has only risen steadily ever since. At 16 years old, she won the European U-21 title and the same year, became one of the youngest-ever French Olympians when she qualified for the Tokyo Olympics.

"That was probably the greatest moment of my life," she says. A close second, she says, was when she became the senior French national champion in

With a lot more experience now,



I'm super excited. It's the biggest event in almost every sport. I think our generation is very lucky because it's crazy to have the Olympics at

Prithika has high hopes for the Paris 2024 Games. "I'm super excited. It's the biggest event in almost every sport. I think our generation is very lucky because it's crazy to have the Olympics at home. My first school and my first club in the same city. I will be a little nervous, but the most important thing is to enjoy the moment,"

While Prithika, as her nation's top women's singles player and with France guaranteed a team quota, will almost certainly be a part of the singles tournament in Paris, perhaps her best chance of a medal is in the mixed doubles. She is paired alongside fellow teenager Felix Lebrun, who at 17 and world-ranked eight, is considered one of the most promising prospects in the

French allegiance, so-so Tamil

While her future is fairly determined at this point, with her Indian origins and the fact that she is higher ranked than any player from India (India's top-ranked women's singles player Manika Batra is ranked 38th in the world), Prithika admits she's been asked about switching allegiances to the land of her father's

The thought never crossed her mind though. "I was born in France. I've lived there all my life. Of course, India will always have a special place in my heart, but I've spent all my life in France," says Prithika, who's currently studying

Chemistry and environmental science at

university. That doesn't mean she doesn't stay in touch with her Indian heritage. "I've been to India twice for holidays with my family. My grandma and grandfather are still in Pondicherry (Puducherry). I went last summer to Pondicherry, and I even trained in the club my father played at. And of course, I played a tournament in Goa last year," she says. She thinks she could do more though.

"I can understand a little Tamil. My parents still speak to me in Tamil, but I answer in French. I'd like to think I'm fluent in French. I can speak English, and my Tamil is so-so. I can probably learn some more," she says.

While language can be hard, the one thing she's completely at home in India is the food. "The thing I loved the most in India is the food. My mom is a great cook. In France, she cooked a lot of Indian food. I've even started to learn how to cook Indian food. My favourite food to cook is mutton biriyani," she says.

There are other characteristics about her that Prithika feels are Indian. "I'm a bit introverted and calm. I've always felt that was the Indian part of me," she says. Where her personality comes through though is on the table. There, Prithika doesn't want to be seen as a great 'Indian-origin' player but just as someone exceptional.

"This Olympics is special, but I am still quite young. I have a long career, and I want to win medals in the European championships. I want medals in the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles at the Worlds and Olympics. I want to do something great. I want to be one of the best players in history. I love this sport, and I think I can do something good. It's in my hands," she says.

THE GIST

With the Paris Olympics just a few months away, much is expected of Prithika, born and raised in the Parisian suburb of St. Dennis, who at World No. 33, is France's top-ranked women's singles player

Prithika has had a solid start to the year, making the round of 32 at the WTT Star Contender in Doha after coming off a quarterfinal win at the Europe Top 16 — a knockout competition for Europe's top players

While Prithika, as her nation's top women's singles player and with France guaranteed a team quota, will almost certainly be a part of the singles tournament in Paris, perhaps her best chance of a medal is in the mixed doubles

Meghalaya in the process of building a vibrant sports ecosystem

M.R. Praveen Chandran

medalless campaign in the 37th National Games in Goa last year was a reality check for Meghalaya. The poor show ruthlessly exposed the limitations of the North Eastern State where sports always took a backseat. As neighbouring States like Manipur, Assam and Sikkim became visible entities on the sporting map of the country, Meghalaya was not even a tiny speck.

Other than football, the State didn't have much of a sporting pedigree and failure to win a single medal in the multi-discipline event in Goa wasn't surprising.

Sports in Meghalaya was centred around Shillong where facilities were pretty much basic. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) doesn't run any of its elite training schemes in the State. The



lack of resources, combined with shortage of coaches and non-existent grassroot-level development, saw the State lag far behind the neighbouring Manipur where SAI runs many of its

successful schemes. The Meghalaya government, under Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, has finally woken up to the need to build a solid sports ecosystem in the State. The government, as a first step, decided to give priority to sports and increased the budgetary allocation for it. The State government, along with Meghalaya State Olympic

Association (MSOA), has tied up with Edge 10, a sports firm run by former Australian Olympians Ian Campbell and Robert Kabbas, to identify and nurture talent. The government also realised the need to develop infrastructure in other districts.



The fifth Meghalaya Games which was held in Tura recently was an important milestone in the history of the State. It was for the first time that a multi-discipline games was held away from the capital Shillong. Tura, which is the district headquarters of West Garo Hills, became only the second district in the State to have a synthetic track. The P.A. Sangma Sports Complex, built at a cost of ₹127.7

crore, houses a

State-of-the-art football

stadium where the

opening and closing

ceremony of the Meghalaya Games were held. The complex will also have two indoor stadiums, a gymnasium, a swimming pool besides facilities for conducting table tennis, squash and badminton events. "Meghalaya will be

hosting the 40th National Games which we were supposed to hold this year. But States who have been allotted the 38th and 39 Games haven't hosted it, so we have time to get the infrastructure in place. We have used Meghalaya Games to test our

infrastructure in the Tura district which will also host a big number of events in the National Games. We are working closely with the State government to improve the standard of sports. The government has agreed to most of our proposals. The government has raised the cash incentives for sportspersons winning medals in nationals and international events. It has also increased the budget allocation for sports. We have tied up with Edge 10 to nurture talent and it will be a game-changer for us," said John F. Kharshiing, the Working

capability and to improve

President of MSOA. The elite pathway programme to nurture talent was devised by the former Olympians from Australia. Around 15,000 children between the ages of 10 to 18 from 12 districts underwent a test battery. A dozen kids who passed

the eligibility test were inducted into the programme.

Schooling, boarding and lodging of the children were taken care of by the government. SAI and the government provided coaches and, with backup of the analytic team, the children will receive year-round training in Shillong. Campbell will oversee the progress of trainees for three years. Weightlifting, boxing, taekwondo, judo, football and athletics are identified as some of the core sports where Meghalaya can excel. Already a couple of athletes from the programme showed promise by winning medals in the North East Olympic Games held recently in Manipur.

"We are trying to build quantity and only through it quality will come. It is a long-term process and we may see results in 10 years," said Kharshiing.