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Raids held in **West Bengal over MGNREGS 'fraud'**

KOLKATA

The Enforcement Directorate has conducted raids across West Bengal in connection with a probe into alleged embezzlement of MGNREGS funds. » PAGE 2

Leave us out of your conflict, says Naga body

Claiming that the Nagas are increasingly becoming victims of an ethnic conflict they are not involved in, the United Naga Council has asked the Meiteis and Kuki-Zos to insulate them community from the violent clashes erupting in the State. » PAGE 2

Uttarakhand tables UCC Bill in Assembly

The UCC covers live-in relationships, divorce however, STs have been kept out of its ambit

Men, women to have equal rights in matters related to divorce; 'Halala' and 'Iddat' to end

Opposition says it has failed to understand the logic behind the urgency in tabling the UCC Bill

<u>Ishita Mishra</u> NEW DELHI

what he called a "historic moment", and the Opposition slammed as a "poll gimmick", Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami tabled the State's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the Assembly on Tuesday. If the Bill is passed, Utta-

rakhand will become the first State Assembly in independent India to enact a uniform law for all communities with regard to marriage, divorce, succession, and live-in relationships. However, the Scheduled Tribes, which constitutes 2.9% of the State's population, have been kept out of the ambit of this Bill.

In a dramatic start to the proceedings, Mr. Dhami strode into the Assembly with the Constitution of India in hand, accompanied by Finance Minister Prem Chandra Agarwal holding a copy of the UCC Bill whose cover page featured an image of a barefoot Lady Justice carrying the usual balance scales, but without her traditional blindfold, which is usually meant to indicate her impartiality.

'Historic moment'

After Mr. Dhami tabled the Bill, BJP legislators – who hold 47 seats in the 70member Assembly - started chanting slogans such as "Vande Mataram", "Jai Shree Ram", and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai". Calling it a historic mo-

ment, Mr. Dhami said that after the UCC Bill was Uttarakhand passed, would become the first State to implement uniform laws for all, adding that the legislation did not tamper with the traditions and customs of any reli-



Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami arrives at the State Assembly to table the UCC Bill, in Dehradun on Tuesday. ANI

gion, caste, or sect.

In fact, Goa also has a uniform civil code for people from all religions; after its 1961 liberation, it retained the Portuguese Civil

Code of 1867. "Under the UCC, marriages will only take place only between one man and one woman. The age of marriage has been set at 21 years for boys and 18 years for girls," said Mr. Dhami.

In matters related to divorce, men and women would have the same rights, he said, adding that this would end "evil practices" such as 'Halala' and 'Iddat'. The UCC Bill provides for a three-year imprisonment or a fine of ₹1 lakh, or both, for a person found committing 'Halala'.

'Poll gimmick'

CHENNAI

State governments" over finances, and further hoped

to collaborate to address

du faced a revenue short-

fall of ₹20,000 crore per

annum in comparison with

the pre-GST regime, and

that the Union had been re-

fusing to extend the com-

Criticising the "discrimi-

natory and unconstitution-

al attempts" pushed by the

Centre, he said its intent

seemed to be aimed at

"crippling" States' abilities

to raise resources and fund

crucial developmental in-

itiatives. This needs to be

resisted by like-minded

progressive States, he said.

this had been happening

for quite some time, the sit-

uation had rapidly deterio-

rated in the past few years

and there was a clear con-

sensus emerging among

progressive States that

such indirect control over

finances needed to be

'Govt. misusing powers'

Endorsing that public debt

to finance public expendi-

ture of States was within

the exclusive purview of

the State Legislature as per

the Constitution, Mr. Stalin

said the Union govern-

ment, however, had been

misusing its powers under

Article 293 of the Constitu-

removed.

Mr. Stalin said although

pensation regime.

this "crucial challenge". Mr. Stalin said Tamil Na-

Leader of Opposition Yashpal Arya said that he failed to understand the logic behind the urgency being shown by the BJP government in tabling the UCC Bill, calling it a "poll gimmick"."They expect us to read such a lengthy document, which was submitted a couple of days ago, and start the discussion. It looks like the government is trying to hide something," he said. "You have full majority to pass the Bill, but it would have been better to give the Opposition some time," he added.

If one person in a married couple changes his religion without the consent of the other, then the other person will have the full right to file for a divorce and maintenance allowance. It will also prohibit a second marriage if one of the spouses is alive. The Bill will make it mandatory to register marriages and divorces, failing which the couple concerned will be deprived of government facilities. In case of a divorce or domestic dispute the custody of any child up to five years of age will re-

main with the mother. . If a couple does not register their live-in status within a month, they can face a maximum punishment of up to three months imprisonment. Also, if live-in partners share any false information during the registration, they will face imprisonment for up to three months or a not exceeding ₹25,000, or both.

All children equal

The children born out of such live-in relationships will be considered the legitimate children of the couple under the UCC.

The Bill also proposes to give equal rights in property inheritance to sons and daughters for all classes, with no distinctions between legitimate or illegitimate children, biological or adopted children, or children born through sur-

After the death of a person, his wife and children will be given equal rights in his property along with the parents. Previously, only the mother had rights in the deceased's property.

Rahul plays down divisions within **INDIA bloc**

NEW DELHI

There are no desertions from the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive president Nitish Kumar. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Tuesday. He added that Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee was very much of INDIA bloc. » PAGE 5

Hearing for wider Gyanvapi survey on Feb. 15

NEW DELHI

The Varanasi district court on Tuesday fixed February 15 to hear an application seeking a survey by the Archaeological Survey of India in the remaining cellars inside the Gyanvapi mosque. This comes days after the court allowed puja in one of the cellars of the mosque. » PAGE 6

Thinking of the King



With love: Artists from Gurukul Art School in Mumbai greets Britain's King Charles III on canvas. EMMANUAL YOGINI (RELATED REPORT ON PAGE 12)

Massive explosion leaves 11 dead, 149 injured at firecracker factory

Mehul Malpani BHOPAL

At least 11 people died and 149 were injured in a massive blast followed by a fire in a firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Harda district on Tuesday. A rescue operation to find and extract workers still trapped in the debris of the collapsed building was interrupted by continuing explosions, and officials were forced to evacuate at least 100 houses in the vicinity.

A first information report (FIR) has been filed. A senior police officer said that one person has been



Tragic incident: Rescue personnel and residents gathering near a the factory in Harda district following the explosion on Tuesday. AFP

high-level panel to oversee

arrested so far. He said that various teams have been formed to nab the others.

investigations. District officials said that a fire inci-M.P. Chief Minister Modent had previously ochan Yadav has formed a curred at the same factory

two years ago, and that the factory had been shut due to other violations four months ago, though they claimed that it had valid licenses. A State Congress leader said that the factory's owners, who are missing, are being protected by the government. The CM directed efforts

to oversee the rescue and to inspect other firecracker factories in the State. He announced ₹4 lakh in financial aid to the kin of the deceased, who were also promised ₹2 lakh by the Prime Minister's Office; the CM and PM each promised ₹50,000 to the injured as well.

'Trump is not immune from charges in Jan. 6 case'

Reuters WASHINGTON

A federal appeals court on Tuesday ruled that Donald Trump does not have immunity from charges that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat, bringing him a step closer to an unprecedented criminal trial.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rejected Mr. Trump's claim that he cannot be prosecuted because the allegations relate to his official responsibilities as President.

The Hindu Bureau Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin wrote to his Kerala counterpart Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday, appreciating the State for moving the Supreme Court against the Union government's attempts to "stifle

T.N. backs Kerala suit

in SC against Centre's

move to 'stifle' States

tion to restrict the borrowing space of the States.

'The prior consent from the Union government, mandated by this section, has been converted into a restrictive tool to limit deficit financing beyond the limits prescribed by the State FRBMs [Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act]," Mr. Stalin said.

As a result, the fundamental principle of fiscal federalism envisioned by the Constitution makers was under "grave threat", Mr. Stalin said and pointed out how such steps had caused a significant dent in the mobilisation of funds for Tamil Nadu.

The Union government had fixed the GSDP growth for calculating the net borrowing ceiling at a mere 8% for 2023-24, despite Tamil Nadu consistently achieving about 15% nominal growth in the last two years. This had resulted in a loss of ₹6,000 crore in the borrowing space in the current year.

The mandatory condition of funding gross losses of State power distribution companies (Discoms), under the guidelines for additional borrowing for power sector reforms, has forced Tamil Nadu to provide



₹17,111 crore to Tangedco (T.N. Generation and Distribution Corporation) in the current year. "This has severely constrained our fiscal space this year and is likely to affect us in the fu-

ture also," he said. The "intentional delay" in approving the Chennai Metro Rail Phase-II project as a Central sector project had resulted in the "entire debt" of ₹33,594 crore for the project being included within the State's net bor-

rowing ceiling, he said. "These discriminatory and unconstitutional attempts are being pushed by the Union government at a time when the fiscal autonomy of the States has already been seriously curtailed by the implementation of GST," he said.

Mr. Stalin said he stood in full support of the government of Kerala's commitment to preserving fisfederalism. government of Tamil Nadu is ready to extend its cooperation in this regard and we look forward to collaborate and synchronise our efforts to address this crucial challenge."

KARNATAKA TO PROTEST » PAGE 2 **CENTRE FLAYS KERALA**

» PAGE 3

INBRIDE



NCM seeks report from Delhi govt. on mosque demolition

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) took a suo motu cognisance of a news report on the demolition of a mosque in Mehrauli last month, believed to be over 600-years-old. The commission asked the Delhi Chief Secretary to submit a report on the matter by February 15. The Delhi Development Authority on January 30 carried out an "unannounced" demolition of the mosque, with officials citing the action as part of the agency's drive against encroachments. Following the demolition, the Delhi High Court had pulled up the urban body, seeking an explanation for their 'anti-encroachment' drive while addressing a plea by the Delhi Waqf Board.

Rajasthan appoints task force to identify new expressways

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Rajasthan has appointed a task force for identifying new expressways to connect more cities with the network of roads for fast movement of traffic. The new expressways will facilitate seamless transportation of people and goods and enhance tourism and economic development along the routes in the State. The identification and construction of new expressways was one of the promises made in the BJP's manifesto for the 2023 State Assembly election. The task force was appointed after an approval by Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari, who holds the PWD portfolio.

'Assam govt. footed ₹58-crore flight bills of CM and others'

The Assam government spent more than ₹58 crore on hiring helicopters and chartered flights for Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other dignitaries since May 2021. Consumer Affairs Minister Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Tuesday told the 126-member Assembly that the State government incurred an expenditure of ₹58.23 crore on helicopters and chartered flights from May 2021 to January 2024. He provided the details while replying to Raijor Dal chief Akhil Gogoi, who sought to know how much the Chief Minister's aerial travels cost the State. Mr. Gogoi had earlier accused Mr. Sarma of misusing State funds to hire helicopters and chartered planes.

Father of missing tourist from T.N. announces ₹1 cr. reward

Father of a tourist from Tamil Nadu announced a reward of ₹1 crore to anyone who finds his son who has been missing since an accident in in Himachal Pradesh's Kinnaur district, officials said on Tuesday. The car he was travelling in plunged into Satluj river near Pangi Nallah on Sunday. The driver was killed in the incident while one tourist was injured and the other was still missing, they said. Vetri was one of two tourists from Tamil Nadu who fell 200 metres down into the river after the driver lost control over the vehicle. The ill-fated vehicle was on its way to Shimla from Kaza when the accident took place. PTI

ED conducts raids over MGNREGS 'irregularities' across Bengal districts

The action, the agency's first as part of its probe, comes days after Mamata Banerjee announced that her govt. will release wages to 21 lakh workers who worked under the scheme on Feb. 21

Shiv Sahay Singh KOLKATA

he Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted multiple raids across several districts of West Bengal on Tuesday in connection with an investigation into alleged embezzlement of MGNREGS funds.

This is the first time the agency has conducted searches in connection with the MGNREGS irregularities. Funds to the scheme were stopped in December 2021 over 'irregularities'.

The ED searched the residence of a former block development officer (BDO) at Salt Lake, a former BDO's home at Dhaniakhali in Hooghly district, and the office of a businessman in Chinsurah in Hooghly district.

Wages imminent

The searches come days after West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced that her go-



Members of Trinamool Mahila Congress taking part in a *dharna* against the Centre in Kolkata on Tuesday. PTI

vernment would release wages to 21 lakh MGNREGS workers on February 21. The Centre and West Bengal government have been at odds over release of MGNREGS wages.

State Minister and senior Trinamool Congress leader Sashi Panja said the raids follow Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari's visit to Delhi. Mr. Adhikari was in Delhi on Sunday.

"This is an attempt to divert public and media at-

tention from the Trinamool Congress's ongoing dharna demanding clearance of dues to the State. This is a clear example of vendetta politics," Dr. Panja said.

The Trinamool Congress leadership is staging a dharna near the statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on Red Road to press for immediate clearance of West Bengal's dues by the Centre. Trinamool Congress chairperson and Chief Minister Mamata Ba-

nerjee took part in the sitin on February 2 and 3. Party members will continue the demonstration until February 13.

Mr. Adhikari said a large number of BDOs, MGNREGS supervisors and Trinamool Congress panchayat members are involved in MGNREGS irregularities.

'Mired in graft'

"The reality is that the Trinamool Congress is deeply mired in corruption, with nearly every leader facing corruption allegations." BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya said.

With the raids, the central investigation agencies have opened a new front against the Trinamool Congress leadership.

On Monday, the agency moved the Calcutta High Court, seeking transfer of investigation of all cases pertaining to an alleged Rs 10,000-crore ration distribution scam in West Bengal from the state police to the CBI.

Siddaramaiah to lead 'Chalo Delhi' protest today

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

The Karnataka Congress government led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will lead a 'Chalo Delhi' protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday against the Centre's "disparity" in devolution of funds, non-release of compensation for implementing drought-relief work and denial of permission to implement irrigation-related projects in the State.

Off to Delhi

Mr. Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar, Ministers and legislators of the Congress of the State left Bengaluru on Tuesday evening to stage the protest on Wednesday at 11 a.m. Perhaps, this is for the first time the entire team of State government is protesting against the Centre at the national capital.

Mr. Siddaramaiah termed the protest as "apolitical" and wrote to members of both the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, and Union Ministers from Karnataka, to take part in the protest to "fight for financial justice". Karnataka in-



curred losses of ₹1.87 lakh

Siddaramaiah

crore from 2017-18 by denying its due share in devolution of funds, special grants and under the centrally sponsored schemes, the government said. The letter also appealed to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who denied any discrimination in allocation of funds to Karnataka on Monday, to participate in the protest. The protest will aim at drawing the attention of the Union government and the people of the country to protect the interests of the State. "We were waiting patiently for the Union government to provide justice in the federal system. We were waiting for them to act as they promised in last year's Budget," the Chief Minister said.

Homes razed in Mumbai in demolition drive by BMC

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) carried out a demolition drive at Govandi's Panchsheel Nagar near Tata Nagar in Mumbai on Tuesday.

Residents of the slum area said 150 homes were razed without any prior notice. Yashodhara Salve, a member of Jan Haq Sangharsh Samiti, a collective of activists in the neighbourhood, said that the demolition work began at 2 p.m. and continued till 6.30 p.m.

'Land for hostel'

Officials said that the slums encroached on land owned by the BMC and that the unauthorised structures were removed for a proposed hostel in the area. Affected residents said they have lived in the area for many years.

UCC to be introduced in U.P. at 'appropriate time', says Maurya

Mayank Kumar LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya on Tuesday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is one of the core ideological issues for the BJP and it will be brought in the country's most populous State at an "appropriate time".

His statement came on a day the ruling BJP in Uttarakhand tabled a Bill on it in the State Assembly.

Bringing uniformity in personal laws such as on marriage, divorce and inheritance regardless of people's religion has been a core agenda of the BJP for long. The introduction of the Bill in the Uttarakhand Assembly has led to speculations that other partyruled States may follow suit

Mr. Maurya in post on X also recounted the core

The Uttarakhand Bill has led to talks that other BJP-ruled States may come up with similar laws

agendas of his party implemented by the Narendra Modi-led Centre.

"The BJP government abolished Article 370 [abrogation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir], constructed a grand temple at Shri Ram Janmabhoomi [Ayodhya], and now the UCC has come in Uttarakhand," he said.

'States can't bring UCC' Meanwhile, Amroha Lok Sabha member Kunwar Danish Ali said the Uttarakhand government tabled the Bill in view of the Lok Sabha poll. "States have no right to bring the UCC. It comes under the purview

of the Centre," said Mr. Ali.

Akhilesh finally gets Cong. invite, will join U.P. leg of Rahul *yatra*

The Hindu Bureau

The Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday confirmed the participation of its president Akhilesh Yadav in the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyaya Yatra when it reaches Uttar Pradesh, either in Amethi or Raebareli.

"Our national president Akhilesh Yadav received an invitation from Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge to join the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of Rahul Gandhi. Mr. Yadav, while congratulating the Congress, accepted the invitation for the Yatra which will enter U.P. on February 16 and is likely to participate when it reaches Amethi or Raebareli," read a statement issued by the

The statement added the *yatra* in U.P. will successfully dovetail with the social justice movement and the PDA (Pichda, Dalit



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav

and Alpsankhyak, i.e. backwards, Dalits and minorities) plank of the SP.

Earlier, Mr. Yadav had said that he was yet to receive an invitation for the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. "The problem is that many big events take place, but we don't get an invite," he said last week, a statement that the Congress promptly responded to by saying that the *yatra*'s programme in U.P. will be shared with INDIA bloc constituents as soon as it was finalised.

'CWC better placed to decide on Mekedatu'

T. Ramakrishnan CHENNAI

Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA) chairman S.K. Haldar on Tuesday defended the decision to refer back the Vennar sub-basin improvement project and the Mekedatu balancing reservoir project to the Central Water Commission (CWC) for further action.

Mr. Haldar told *The Hindu* that the move was based on a decision taken at a previous meeting of the CWMA[held in December 2022] that "as a matter of principle", both the Vennar and Mekedatu projects or any other project would be treated "on the same footing".

Besides, the CWC, with its multi-disciplinary machinery, was wellequipped to examine any irrigation project from all angles.

Leave us out of your conflict, Naga organisation tells Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities

Rahul Karmakar GUWAHATI

Claiming that the Nagas are increasingly becoming victims of an ethnic conflict they are not involved in, an apex organisation of the Nagas in Manipur – the United Naga Council (UNC) – has asked the Meiteis and Kuki-Zos to insulate the community from the violent clashes erupting in the State.

The UNC made the request to the two communities while issuing a list of atrocities committed against the Nagas both in the Meitei-dominated Imphal valley, as well as the hills, which are primarily inhabited by the Kuki-Zo people.

The Meiteis, Nagas, and Kuki-Zos form the principal communities in Manipur. The Nagas, since the conflict between the Meiteis

and Kuki-Zos broke out on May 3 last year, had decided on a "position of neutrality", declining to take a side.

Caught in crossfire

The first instance of the community being caught in the crossfire, however, took place on May 24, when four Naga women from Ukhrul were attacked by a mob in Imphal.

A Liangmai Naga house was burnt down at Leimakhong on June 18, while a Maring Naga woman was shot dead in Imphal on July 16, the UNC said in a statement on February 2.

A Liangmai farmer was beaten on Imphal-Tamei Road on September 5 for refusing to pay illegal tax, and a Naga leader was fired at in Kangpokpi on September 27, said the UNC, adding that three Tangkhul Naga men were beaten up





FOR DUR HERS AND SONS WITH 1 105 STREET STRE

Several houses, including those of migrants from Bihar, Haryana, and Naga people, were set on fire by miscreants in Imphal last year. (Right) Kuki students staging a protest demanding justice as the conflict in Manipur entered its ninth month, in New Delhi on February 3. FILE PHOTOS

by armed groups in Imphal on December 3.

On December 11, two Rongmei Naga girls were thrashed in Bishnupur Bazaar in Imphal Valley, and a Naga driver from Tamenglong received a similar treatment in Imphal. A week later, four Naga girls working at a beauty parlour in Imphal were abducted, the statement alleged.
Within the space of two

Within the space of two days in January, a Tangkhul boy and two Zeliangrong men were kidnapped from Imphal's Mantripukhri and Bishnupur districts, respectively, the UNC said.

If that were not enough, roads leading to Naga villag-

es have been cut off or blocked, and armed extremists and women have been checking, frisking, and extorting from Nagas along the National Highways in the hills. Radical groups and women vigilantes have been similarly frisking, looting, abducting, and extorting from Nagas in the Imphal Valley, the UNC pointed out.
"Churches have been

burnt and demolished, and sacrilegious acts committed inside religious places of worship by radicals in the name of waging war against a community," it said.

The organisation said

the "common admission of mistaken identity" had been cited in all these acts of "violence, intimidation, disrespect, and insult".

Call for restraint"In the interest of peace

despite the extreme provocations, Nagas have addressed the many sensitive situations and sought to resolve them through customary laws and practices. Yet time and again, our people have been attacked with impunity, making a mockery of the many agreements and resolutions for restoration of peace and good relations," the UNC said.

The apex body added that Meitei legislators, by answering the radical group Arambai Tenggol's call to attend a meeting at the Kangla Fort in January 24, could not claim any more to represent the entire State of Manipur. "Not to speak of reining in the non-State actors, it has allowed itself to be dictated and co-opted into a radicalised organisation," alleged the UNC.

The organisation urged the Meiteis and Kuki-Zo communities to immediately desist from targeting, provoking, and attacking the Nagas, their homes, and properties in the Imphal Valley and the peripheral hill areas.

"Should this appeal go disrespected, we will have no option but to call upon the Nagas to vacate the Imphal Valley to take up appropriate measures thereafter," the UNC said, adding that if their community continued to be targeted in the hills, free access to Naga towns and villages, and free passage across Naga areas would "have to be prohibited".

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States

Top court fixes appeals in Lavalin graft case in May

CHENNAI

Krishnadas Rajagopal NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday fixed the appeals in the SNC Lavalin corruption case against the discharge of Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan from May 1.

Appearing before a Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan, Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, appearing for the Central Bureau of Investigation, sought an early date, possibly in March or April.

When the Bench said its calendar was chock-a-block for both the months, Mr. Raju even said the Central agency could take a chance for a hearing or even file written submissions of its arguments to save time for the court.

One of the appellants said the case had been listed 30 times since 2017, and adjourned every time.

The CBI counsel said the agency was not to blame for the adjournments.

Mr. Vijayan was discharged as an accused by both the Special Court, CBI, in Thiruvananthapuram, and the Kerala HC.

The CBI had, in its appeal, contended that Mr. Vijayan should face trial in the case.

The corruption case concerns the loss of ₹86.25 crore in the Kerala State Electricity Board's contract with Lavalin for the renovation and modernisation of hydroelectric projects in Idukki district. Mr. Vijayan was Kerala's Power Minister then.

Kerala is one of the most financially unhealthy States in country: Centre

Centre blames the State government's lack of proper management of public finances for its poor fiscal condition; it says financial resources have been provided to Kerala over and above the amount recommended by 15th Finance Commission

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

he Centre has told the Supreme Court that Kerala was "one of the most financially unhealthy States" and debts run by States affect the credit rating of the whole country.

A note submitted by Attorney General R. Venkataramani in the Supreme Court said the "fiscal edifice of Kerala has been diagnosed with several cracks".

The Centre said the poor financial indicators of Kerala point to a "lack of proper management of its public finances".



Any financial stress that the Kerala government is facing is purely due to its own financial mismanagement UNION GOVERNMENT

The Union government said "substantial financial resources" were provided to the Kerala government from 2020-21 to 2023-24 over and above the amount recommended by the 15th Finance Commis-

One of these was the payment of ₹14,505 crore as "back-to-back loan to

meet GST compensation

shortfall".

"Despite the devolution of substantial resources from central taxes and duties, highest share of postdevolution revenue deficit grant, financial support over and above the Finance Commission's recommendations and transfer of funds under centrally sponsored schemes, any financial stress that the Kerala government is facing is purely due to its own financial mismanagement," the Centre said in the 46-page note.

The Centre said a State that indulged in "reckless borrowing to finance unproductive expenditure and poorly targetted subsidies" was courting trouble. "Increase in State debts as a consequence of high borrowing will reduce availability of development funds, impoverishment of people and loss of State income, hence, also the loss of national income."

The note is a response

to an original suit filed by the State of Kerala against the Centre for violating the federal structure of governance and causing "severe damage to the economy of a small State with meagre resources".

The State urged the court to protect the federal system of governance in which the State has the exclusive power to regulate its finances through the preparation and management of its budget and borrowings. Kerala said recent actions, like imposing a Net Borrowing Ceiling in an arbitrary manner, were calculated to reduce it to a "state of penury".

Second FIR against Islamic preacher for 'hate speech'

The Hindu Bureau
AHMEDABAD

A day after his arrest in Mumbai by Gujarat's Anti Terrorist Squad (ATS), Gujarat Police on Tuesday registered a second FIR against Mumbai-based Islamic preacher Mufti Salman Azhari for allegedly delivering a provocative speech at a religious event at Samakhiyari in Kutch

district.

Mr. Azhari was arrested on Sunday in connection with a separate hate speech case lodged at Junagadh on Saturday, and brought to Ahmedabad on Monday. He was then taken to Junagadh, where a local court sent him to pol-

The case was
registered against
Azhari for his
provacative speech at
a religious event

ice custody for a day. "An FIR has been registered against Mufti Salman Azhari for delivering a provocative speech at a religious function organised at Samakhiyari on January 31. Police permission was granted for the event, but the content of the speech was similar to that of the Junagadh event which was also held the same day," Kutch (East) Superintendent of Police Sagar Bagmar said.

Maharashtra Minister seeks support from all parties to 'safeguard' OBC quota

Shoumojit Banerjee

Amid the verbal sabre-rattling between Other Backward Classes (OBC) leader and Minister Chhagan Bhujbal and Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil, the former on Tuesday said the focus of the OBC community was to secure support across the political spectrum for halting the onslaught on the community's reservation.

"Our objective currently is how to safeguard our reservation. We will be doing

it through courts, through the government, by raising public awareness... In the [OBC] rallies that we are holding, OBC leaders from all parties, both the ruling and Opposition are coming together and speaking on the need to save OBC reservation," said Mr. Bhujbal, a senior leader of the NCP (Ajit Pawar faction).

He added that the need of the hour was for the OBC leaders to harness the strength of the community. "Our focus is to stop this aggression on the rights of the OBC.I feel it is



Chhagan Bhujbal

the duty of OBC leaders to harness the full strength of the community at this moment," Mr. Bhujbal said.

Mocking the activist, Mr. Bhujbal said Mr. Jarange-Patil had been claiming to now fight for the reserva-

tion of the Dhangar community as well. "But it is you [Jarange-Patil] and your Maratha confederates who are decimating the quotas of various OBC communities and others like the Dhangars."

Meanwhile, Mr. Jarange-Patil said he remained firm on resuming his agitation from February 10 while demanding that the Eknath Shinde-led government make good its promise of granting OBC caste certificates to blood relatives of Marathas whose records proved them as Kunbis.

Maharashtra resident doctors to begin indefinite strike today

Purnima Sah MUMBAI

Nearly 8,000 resident doctors under the banner of the Maharashtra State Association of Resident Doctors (MARD) will begin an indefinite strike from 5 p.m. on Wednesday against inadequate accommodation as well as delayed and stagnant stipend.

MARD general secretary Rahul Vitthal Munde on Tuesday said the strike will impact outpatient department services across hospitals, where resident doctors tend to

70,800-80,000 patients daily. "But we will not let it affect emergency services," he added.
For the last two years, MARD has been raising

MARD has been raising three key demands: adequate hostel facilities for junior and senior resident doctors; prompt stipend payment and clearance of outstanding dues; and increment in stipend.

Hockey player Varun Kumar booked under POCSO Act

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

Indian National team hockey player Varun Kumar, 28, has been booked by the Bengaluru Police under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, for allegedly sexually assaulting a 17-year-old minor girl in 2019.

Varun Kumar is an Arjuna awardee and was part of the Indian team that won gold medal at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

BRIEF



Another setback to BRS as Peddapalli MP joins Congress

In another setback to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), its MP from Peddapalli Lok Sabha Constituency Borlakunta Venkatesh Netha joined the Congress party in New Delhi on Tuesday in the presence of Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy and Deputy Chief Minister M. Bhatti Vikramarka. About five years ago Mr. Venkatesh quit the Congress to join the then Telangana Rashtra Samithi. He was welcomed back into the Congress by the AICC general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal.

Police arrest Nigerian national, seize drugs worth ₹8 crore

The Telangana State Anti-Narcotics Bureau and the Panjagutta police arrested a Nigerian national and seized from his possession several forms of contraband drugs worth about ₹8 crore. Police said the seizure includes 557 grams of cocaine, 902 ecstasy pills weighing about 390 grams, 105 LSD blots, 215 grams of charas, 21 grams of heroin, seven grams of Amphetamine, 45 grams of OG weed and 190 grams of weed. The accused, Iwuala Udoka Stanley, 43, hailing from Anambra, in Nigeria, is a drug peddler who made North Goa his place of residence, the police said.

Male leopard hit by vehicle on NH-44; shifted to Tirupati zoo

In a freak mishap, a full-grown male leopard was critically injured after being hit by an unidentified vehicle on NH-44 on the outskirts of Penukonda in Sri Sathya Sai district of Andhra Pradesh in the early hours of Tuesday. According to the information, the leopard injured in the hit-and-run case was sighted by motorists in the morning. The forest officials rushed to the spot and shifted the leopard to the veterinary hospital at district headquarters Puttaparthi. Later, they shifted the leopard to SV Zoo Park in Tirupati for critical care.

Stage show



Artists enacting a play as National School of Drama's Bharat Rang Mahotsav, a theatre festival, reaches Vijayawada on Tuesday. The festival will be on till February 11 in Vijayawada. The event, launched on February 1, will continue for 21 days in 15 cities across the country. K.V.S. GIRI

'Unruly' TDP MLAs suspended for a day from Assembly

The Hindu Bureau VIJAYAWADA

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) legislators were on Tuesday suspended for a day for "disrupting the proceedings" of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

Speaker Thammineni Seetharam suspended them for their "unruly behaviour" such as displaying placards and blowing whistles inside the House.

Trouble broke out soon after the Speaker disallowed the adjournment motions moved by the TDP leaders. They wanted the government to allow a discussion on spiralling prices of essential commodities

and steep hike in power tariffs.

When the Speaker disallowed their adjournment motions, they rushed to the podium and raised slogans against Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy and the government. They tore the agenda copies and Bills and threw the pieces

on the Chair.

The ruling party leaders took objection to the behaviour of the TDP leaders.

Even as the TDP MLAs resorted to sloganeering, two Amendment Bills – Andhra Pradesh Advocates' Welfare Fund Act, 1987, and Advocates' Clerks' Welfare Fund Act, 1992 – were moved and passed.

SFI raises concerns over foreign, private universities in Kerala

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u> THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A day after the Budget indicated plans to permit private and foreign universities to set up campuses in Kerala, the Students Federation of India, left-wing student organisation, has raised concerns over the move.

SFI State president K. Anusree said the organisation opposed the decision to allow foreign universities in the State. Besides, it sought stringent norms to regulate the functioning of private universities.

Higher Education Minister R. Bindu defended the government's decision and

Minister R. Bindu says the government has taken the decision to enhance quality of education

claimed it was the outcome of extensive deliberations and careful thought. Dr. Bindu said the government had been working to enhance the quality of higher education by expanding the scope of the sector.

She said nearly 80% of higher education institutions have been functioning in the private sector and they have been maintaining high standards.

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

Observing that public roads are ordinarily not meant for agitations, the High Court of Karnataka on Tuesday declined to quash criminal case registered in 2022 against Congress leaders, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and four others, for causing disturbance to public, movement of vehicles and maintenance of law and order by suddenly resorting to dharna/protest on public road.

Also, the court imposed a cost of ₹10,000 each for making a woman police sub-inspector Jahida as a respondent to their petitions in her personal capacity even though she had lodged the complaint against them in her official

Karnataka HC refuses to quash criminal

case against Cong. leaders in 2022 case

capacity.

The court directed Mr. Siddaramaiah, Ministers Ramalinga Reddy and M.B. Patil, Rajya Sabha member Randeep Singh Surjewala, and MLC Saleem Ahmed to personally appear before the Special Court of Magistrate set up for the trial of cases against MPs/MLAs/MLCs in Karnataka, in response to the summons issued to them.

The petitioner-political leaders had questioned the criminal case registered against them by the High Grounds police in the city on April 14, 2022, for re-



The High Court directed the petitioners to appear before the special court.

sorting to protest on Race Course Road. They had also questioned the chargesheet filed against them under the Karnataka Police

The petitioners, along with a group of 35-40 persons, had resorted to prot-

est in a bid to lay siege to the then Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommmai's residence, seeking resignation of the then Minister K.S. Eshwarappa of the BJP. Apart from the five petitioners, the case was registered against 31 others, including the present Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar.

Refusing to accept the

petitioners' claim that they had not obstructed free flow of traffic on the public road or disturbed law and order, as claimed by the police, and that the charges were politically motivated, the High Court noted that they had not produced any material in this regard.



Open border: Houses built on the Myanmar side are seen along the banks of Tiau river, GETTY IMAGES

Myanmar border will be fully fenced: Shah

Vijaita Singh NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Tuesday that the government had decided to construct a fence along the 1,643-kilometre border with Myanmar.

Mr. Shah said that the "Modi government is committed to building impenetrable borders". In a post on X, the Minister said, "It (government) has decided to construct a fence along the entire 1,643-kilometre Indo-Myanmar border.To facilitate better surveillance, a patrol track along the border will also be paved."

Surveillance system

"Of the total border length, a 10-km stretch in Moreh, Manipur, has already been fenced. Two pilot projects to create a fence using a hybrid surveillance system

(HSS) are under execution. They will fence a stretch of one km each in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur."

Additionally, fencing covering 20 km in Manipur has also been approved, and work will start soon, he said.

Mr. Shah made a similar announcement on January 20 in Assam that the government was reconsidering the Free Movement Regime agreement with Myanmar and would soon end free movement into India. The fresh announcement comes days after Mr. Shah met Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh in Delhi. After the meeting, Mr. Singh said that the Centre was set to take some important decisions in the interests of Manipur.

Fencing of the border will effectively end the Free Movement Regime

Affluent among sub-castes could be omitted from quota list, observes SC

Sub-castes which have done better should compete with general category, says Justice Nath; Constitution Bench examining question of whether States can identify and sub-classify groups within Scheduled Castes who deserve greater reservation

NEW DELHI

seven-judge Constitution Bench on Tuesday questioned why affluent subcastes among backward classes should not be "excluded" from the reservation list and made to compete with the general category.

"Why should there be no exclusion [from the reservation list]? Some of these sub-castes have done better and gone forward. They should come out of reservation and compete with the general category... Why stay there?" asked Justice Vikram Nath, one of the seven judges on the Bench headed by Chief Jusof India Chandrachud.

Justice Nath said that these advanced sub-castes could exit the domain of reservation to make room for sub-castes who were relatively more marginalised or most backward. "The remaining sub-castes who are still backward, let them have reservation," Justice Nath said.

"Once a person gets into IPS or IAS, his children do not suffer from the disad-



vantages of others from his

group who live in a vil-

lage... Yet his family will get

the benefits of reservation

for generations," Justice

B.R. Gavai, on the Bench,

remarked. He added that it

was for the Parliament to

decide whether a "power-

ful or influential" group

should be excluded from

chud indicated that exclu-

sion may be implicit in the

concept of reservation.

The forward classes were

necessarily excluded while

reserving seats for back-

ward classes, but this was

approved by the Constitu-

tion as the nation believed

in substantive equality, the

Chief Justice observed

is examining the question

of whether States can iden-

The seven-judge Bench

Chief Justice Chandra-

the quota list or not.

Some of these sub-castes have done better and gone forward. They should come out of reservation and compete with the general category... Why stay there?

JUSTICE VIKRAM NATH

tify and sub-classify groups within the Scheduled Castes (SC) who deserve greater reservation.

Punjab law

The Punjab government opened arguments by submitting that States were empowered to identify sub-castes within the SC category and grant them more reservation on the ground that they were "relatively more marginalised than the marginalised".

Punjab Advocate-General Gurminder Singh argued that, if communities could be classified into general and backward, the same could be done within the backward communities. The State argued that if sub-classification was permitted within the Socially and Educationally Backward categories, the same

could be permitted for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The State is defending the validity of its law, the Punjab Scheduled Caste and Backward Classes (Reservation in Services) Act of 2006. Section 4(5) of the Act gave 'first preference' quota to Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs. Half of the reservation offered to the SC category went first to these two groups.

In 2010, the State High Court struck down the provision on the basis of a fivejudge Constitution Bench judgment in the E.V. Chin*naiah* case, which held that only the President was empowered to categorise a group as SC under Article 341 of the Constitution. The Constitution Bench had further declared that SCs were a "homogenous group" and that sub-classification would be a violation of the right to equality.

Mr. Singh argued that the sub-classification made in the 2006 Act was not in "breach of equality but as an aid to equality". He said that by giving first preference to the "most backward among the backward or the weakest among the weak", there was no exclusion practised.

"You are saying that in a

federal structure, every State within a nation is peculiarly conversant with the castes and communities in that State. The President, under Articles 341 and 342, has designated castes and tribes for the entire nation. But that does not take away the power of the States to identify more backward sub-castes or groups among them who require special attention and benefits. The Constitution does not prevent it. A State has an obligation to look after all of its people," Chief Justice Chandrachud addressed the Punjab side.

Punjab Additional Advocate-General Shadan Farasat said that efficiency in government needed more diversity. Sub-classification was a mode to deepen the impact of reservation, so that the benefits could reach all the backward groups, he said.

"We have not yet seen what true efficiency is because we are yet to arrive at true equality... The State here is helping the weakest person. The State should be inclusive... After all, the business of the State is its people," he argued.

LS passes Bill for OBC quota in J&K local bodies

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies (Amendment) Bill, 2024, to provide reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBC) in panchayat and municipal bodies in the Union Territory.

Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai said the Bill would introduce three amendments to the existing Acts. There is no current provision for seats to be reserved for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in J&K.

J&K National Conference MP Hasnain Masoodi asked why the Union government was amending a Bill that came under the purview of the Assembly.

Mr. Masoodi said that over the past three months in J&K, 20 security personnel had been killed.

"A commanding officer has never been killed even in times of regular war. J&K has been made into a laboratory and is being marketed to seek votes. Why is there uncertainty in Jammu? Why are people in Ladakh out on the streets in sub-zero temperatures? Introspect on the August 5, decision," questioned.

Modi-headed committee to meet today to select new EC

<u>The Hindu Bureau</u>

A committee headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi will meet on Wednesday to select a candidate for the post of Election Commissioner.

The meeting will be held fill the vacancy that will arise when Election Commissioner Anup Chandra Pandey demits office on February 14, sources said.

This is the first meeting of the committee since a new law for the appointment of the CEC and other ECs came into on January 2. The other members of the panel are a Union Minister nominated by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

Ayush is being integrated with new AIIMS, says Centre

The Hindu Bureau

Following the Union government's initiative to colocate AYUSH facilities at Primary Health Centres (PHC), Community Health Centres (CHC) and District Hospitals (DH) to provide choice to patients for different systems of medicines under a single window, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Bharati Pravin Pawar in her written reply in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday noted that AYUSH services had been allocated at 470 DHs and 3,149 CHCs, among other health centres, as on September 30, 2023.

She added that AYUSH has been integrated with various new and upcoming

"A Joint Coordination Committee comprising members from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Avush has been constituted to work out modalities for effective and expeditious integration of AYUSH in new and upcoming AI-IMS. Wellness-related activities like yoga, cycling and meditation are conducted in Ayushman Arogya Mandirs," she added.

All India Institute of Medi-

cal Sciences (AIIMS)

She noted that as of the end of January 2024, the total number of wellness sessions conducted, including yoga, were 3.10 crore under the Ayushman Arogya Mandir, including the 'Ayushman Melas'.

NIA files case against 24 'operatives' of syndicates

Devesh K. Pandey NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has chargesheeted 24 alleged operatives of international syndicates involved in the trafficking of Bangladeshi nationals and Rohingyas of Myanmar origin into India based on forged Indian identity documents. The syndicates also sold some Rohingya women to older men for marriage.

The accused persons include four Bangladesh nationals and one Rohingya. The NIA had initially arrested 29 persons during the raids conducted across 39 locations in Tripura, Assam, J&K, and West Bengal in coordination with the State police agencies.

Under surveillance



outside the examination centre in Bhopal on Tuesday. ANI

T.R. Baalu's remark against Minister sets off uproar in House

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday witnessed an uproar after Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader T.R. Baalu made a controversial remark against BJP leader and Minister of State L. Murugan during the Question Hour. BJP members accused the DMK MP of insulting a Dalit.

Senior Ministers urged Mr. Baalu to apologise, but he did not accept their demands. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla expunged the exact word. The DMK MPs and their Congress and Left counterparts staged a

The face-off happened during the Question Hour when DMK's A. Raja and Congress's Manickam Tagore were asking supplementary questions related to flood relief for Tamil Nadu. When the DMK and Congress members exdissatisfaction pressed with the reply of Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai, Mr. Baalu got up to ask another supplementary question. At that time, Mr. Muru-

gan said the DMK leader was asking an "irrelevant" question.

Hitting back, Mr. Baalu then questioned his competence as a Minister. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi, his deputy Arjun Ram Meghwal, several other Ministers and BJP MPs protested against the remark by Mr. Baalu.

They claimed a Dalit Minister and the entire Dalit community has been insulted and demanded an

But Mr Baalu remained defiant, prompting the ruling party members to protest again. As the Speaker expunged the remark, the Opposition walked out.

Suhasini Haidar NEW DELHI After months of a pause on

the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) that was launched during the G-20 summit in September 2023 but stalled due to the Israel-Hamas conflict, the government is expected to take talks on the project forward this month, when Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis visits India. Mr. Mitsotakis, who is due to visit as a chief guest at the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)-Observer Research Foundation's (ORF) annual Raisina Dialogue from February 21 to 23, had held initial discussions on building Greece as a regional hub for trade into Europe, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi had

travelled to Athens in 2023. Officials said that in addition to bilateral talks with the Greek delegation, highlevel meetings with U.S.



After five months of pause due to Gaza

war, govt. hopes to move on the IMEC

National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, European Union Secretary-General Stefano Sannino and others on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue could yield some progress on the IMEC's plans as well.

According to diplomatic sources, the visit by Mr. Mitsotakis could kickstart the talks over the next steps for the IMEC, particularly the use of Greek ports like Piraeus for the 3,000 km corridor that starts from India, and is designed to complete connectivity via Israel's Haifa port to Europe, bypassing other routes like the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. Thus far, the eight parties that signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in New Delhi have only held informal consultations, the sources said. They include the European Union, France, Germany, India, Italy, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the U.S.

According to the MoU

signed on September 9, the participants had planned to meet "within the next sixty days to develop and commit to an action plan with relevant timetables". However, after the October 7 terror attacks in Israel and Israel's bombardment of Gaza, countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been unwilling to discuss "normal" ties with Israel, and the IMEC meeting hasn't taken place more than 150 days later, leading experts to suggest that the project is unviable without progress on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

"This is a multilateral effort in which so many countries are involved, but the progress [on the IMEC] so far is very good," Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in response to a question from The Hindu. "There is clarity that this is a very big insurance against any disruptions in the trade routes," he said, adding that the alignment of the route and "missing

links" had been identified. Diplomats and officials The Hindu contacted also insist that the IMEC project would not be paused indefinitely, given the strong commitment by all other parties involved, especially the U.S. and the European Union, that will be required to fund the initiatives through the G-7-led Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), as well as India, which hopes to benefit from the trade lines generated, and the possible railway contracts India might win in the Gulf region.

Porecha .)

(With inputs from Maitri celled] examinations may

Lok Sabha passes Bill to tackle cheating in recruitment exams

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, to check malpractices and organised cheating in government recruitment exams. The Bill proposes a minimum of three years imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹1 crore. Replying to a debate on the Bill that was passed after a brief discussion, Union Minister for Personnel Jitendra Singh said that he wanted to clarify that no candidate will

misuse the system. "There is no attempt to centralise the system. When an examination is cancelled, it affects the students, their years are wasted. While a time-bound completion of such [can-

be harassed as the legisla-

tion is against people who

not be assured, the efforts are on," Mr. Singh said.

Around 70 lakh candidates appear in exams conducted by the Staff Selection Commission (SSC), he said. The Minister stated that the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) conducts examinations in 13 languages and in future they hope to include all the 22 languages. "Punishment itself is a deterrent to prevention. This is the first step towards prevention," the Minister said.

He also added that the Bill will gradually push for conducting exams in more regional languages given the rising use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI). To critique that the proposed legislation is redundant and should be a part of the existing Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Dr. Singh said that the offences are not specifically mentioned in BNS.

THE HINDU

Ajit Pawar faction the real NCP: EC

Poll body gives NCP name, clock symbol to the group; tells Sharad Pawar that he can claim a name for his faction by today; commission says 'test of legislative majority' clinched the symbol for Ajit faction in view of disputed organisational elections

Sreeparna Chakrabarty NEW DELHI

n a setback to veteran politician Sharad Pawar, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday held that the faction led by his nephew, Ajit Pawar, was the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and was entitled to use the party name and symbol.

Making a concession to the faction led by Mr. Sharad Pawar, who is one of the founders of the NCP, the commission allowed it a "one-time option" to claim a name for his political outfit and provide three preferences by Wednesday in view of the upcoming Raiva Sabha election.

The EC order came after more than 10 hearings over

In July 2023, Mr. Ajit Pawar had walked away with a majority of the NCP



Final word: Ajit Pawar with NCP leaders Praful Patel and others during a meeting in Mumbai. ANI

MLAs to support the BJP-Shiv Sena government led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde in Maharashtra. Over 40 out of NCP's 53 MLAs sided with him.

In its order on Tuesday, the commission said: "The faction led by petitioner Ajit Anantrao Pawar is the Nationalist Congress Party and is entitled to use its name and reserved symbol 'Clock' for the purposes of the Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment), Order 1968".

Three tests

The commission said it had examined the applicability of all three tests – the test

'Invisible power' behind decision, says Supriya Sule

The Hindu Bureau MUMBAI

In a subtle jab at the BJP, Baramati MP Supriya Sule, who is the daughter of Sharad Pawar, said an "invisible power" was behind the EC's decision to recognise the Ajit Pawar faction as the real NCP.

of aims and objectives of

the party's constitution,

the test of the party's con-

stitution, and the test of

majority - to adjudicate

In the end, it was the

'test of legislative majority'

that clinched the symbol

for the Ajit Pawar faction in

view of disputed internal

the dispute.

organisational elections.

"What is happening is

not good for democracy...

'ICE' (Income Tax, CBI,

ED) is being used by this

government to cause a rift

ers were with Mr. Sharad

Pawar and that they would

challenge the EC order in

She said the party work-

in parties," she said.

the Supreme Court.

"The Commission provides a one-time option to the respondent [Mr. Sharad Pawar] for the purpose of forthcoming election to the Rajya Sabha in Maharashtra to claim a new name to its new political formation," the poll body

Cong. ranks want senior leaders to contest LS polls a similar demand that Mr. Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

With the Lok Sabha election around the corner, there is growing pressure from the Congress ranks on senior leaders, including former Chief Ministers Ashok Gehlot and Bhupesh Baghel, to lead from the front by contesting the election.

In 2019, the Congress won 52 seats across the country, However, out of the 184 seats it contested in the nine northern States -Punjab, Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh – it got only

According to sources, at a recent meeting of party functionaries in Rajasthan, former Speaker C.P. Joshi exhorted all senior leaders, including Mr. Gehlot and party State president



Ashok Gehlot

Govind Singh Dotasra, to contest the Lok Sabha election. "Last time, Ashok Gehlot's son, Vaibhav, contested from Jodhpur and lost the seat by a margin of 2.74 lakh votes. Instead of the son, we would like the father to contest, so that we can wipe out the ignominy of not winning a single seat in two consecutive general elections," a Congress leader from Rajasthan said. However, Mr. Gehlot has been keeping

the cards close to his chest. In Chhattisgarh, there is

Baghel should contest, so that the party can improve its 2019 tally. But Mr. Baghel, according to sources, is not amenable to the idea, arguing that contesting the Lok Sabha polls would prevent him from campaigning for the party across the country. In Haryana, Rajya Sabha MP Deepender Hooda is bracing for the election from Rohtak which he represented thrice. In 2019, he lost by a margin of 7,500 votes. However, there has been no official announcement so far.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party has made it clear to the Congress that if it fields "serious" candidates prodding the party to field senior leaders, it could consider increasing their share.

In Himachal Pradesh, the party is trying to convince its Cabinet Ministers to contest the election.

Congress to reach out to lakhs of Agnipath scheme aspirants

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Promising a rollback of the Agnipath scheme, the Congress, as part of the Jai Jawan campaign, is planning to reach out to more than 35 lakh young men and women who, on average, appear for recruitment rallies every year.

Under the scheme, men and women in the age group of 17.5-21 years are recruited for the Army, the Navy and the Air Force for a four-year period. Only 25% personnel of a retiring batch would be selected permanent

commission.

The Congress has assured that it would press for a rollback of scheme if it came to power

"Each year, 35-40 lakh personnel appear for the recruitment rallies. But since the Agnipath scheme has been launched, this number has drastically reduced. In 2023-24, only 10 lakh persons appeared for the rally. It clearly shows the simmering discontent and a feeling of betrayal," a source in Congress said.

On January 31, during the course of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, former Congress president Rahul Gandhi met a group of aspirants in Bihar.

The Congress uploaded a short video of the interaction, where Mr. Gandhi assured that, if his party came to power, they would press for a rollback of the scheme, and if not, then at least ensure that Agniveers received the same benefits as the permanent cadres, which is currently denied.

While the party insists

that this outreach is not aimed at electoral gains alone, by the Congress's own estimates, the scheme could help them target first-time voters.

Rahul plays down the divisions within INDIA bloc The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

on Tuesday.

There are no desertions from the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) other than Janata Dal (U) president Nitish Kumar, Congress

leader Rahul Gandhi said

He added that Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee was very much part of the Opposition bloc. Addressing a press conference at Gumla in Jharkhand, before the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered Odisha, he tried to play down the trouble

within the INDIA bloc. "If you look at Mamata ji's statement, Mamataji is very much part of the IN-



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra at Simdega in Jharkhand on Tuesday. ANI

DIA alliance and most of the other members, who were part of the INDIA alliance, are still in it," he said.

"Of course, Mr. Nitish Kumar has left the INDIA alliance and he has gone to the BIP. You can guess what the reasons are for him leaving. It's fine, we will fight in Bihar as the IN-DIA alliance. So, I don't agree that a lot of our partners are not part of the

alliance," Mr. Gandhi said.

He also played down the differences over seat sharing by asserting that negotiations were going on.

Mr. Gandhi also talked about creating a new financial model for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and industries with special focus on backward classes, the Dalits, the Adivasis, and the poor.

'Quota cap unfair'

Responding to a question on removing the 50% cap on reservation, the former Congress chief said it was an unfair cap. He said the 50% cap would be removed while protecting the reservation rights of the Dalits and Adivasis. This would benefit the economically weaker sections from the general category. Mr. Gandhi also reiterated that caste census will be conducted in the country.

He also responded to the attacks by BJP leaders, including Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, over a viral video. In the video, Mr. Gandhi can be seen offering a biscuit to a dog and then passing it on to a man. "The dog was nervous and shivering-...When I gave it a biscuit, the dog got scared. Then, I gave the biscuit to the owner, saying it will eat from your hand. Then, the owner gave it and the dog ate the biscuit. So, what is the issue?" Mr. Gandhi said. adding, "I don't understand what is the BJP's ob-

session with the dog?"

In meet with Kovind panel, CPI(M) objects to 'one nation, one election'

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

A three-member delegation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) met the high-level committee looking into the prospects regarding the "one nation, one election" idea. The party reiterated its serious objection to the proposal to conduct simultaneous elections, accusing the committee of working on a "pre-decided and predestined" agenda.

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, along with Polit Bureau member Nilotpal Basu and Central Secretariat member Muralidharan, met the committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind.

The CPI(M) delegation broadly raised four issues. "This exercise has been conducted at least thrice before, including once by the Law Commission, and it has been found that holding simultaneous polls is not feasible. The mandate of this committee is pre-decided on how to implement it, which is highly objectionable," Mr. Yechury said.

Mr. Yechury said "one nation, one election" was anti-democratic, since extending or shortening the terms of the Assemblies went against the people's mandate. It was also "antifederal" because this could inhibit the regional parties.

Amid protests in Jammu, LS passes | Minister slams Yatra for giving Bill to include Paharis in J&K's ST list

<u>Abhinay Lakshman</u> Peerzada Ashiq NEW DELHI/SRINAGAR

Amid street protests led by the Scheduled Tribe Guijar-Bakarwal community in Jammu against the inclusion of the Pahari ethnic group in the Union Territory's Scheduled Tribes list, the Lok Sabha on Tuesday passed the Bill to include this community in the UT's ST list.

Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda asserted that benefits meant for the existing STs in the UT will not be disturbed by the latest



Union Minister Arjun Munda speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament. ANI

The Lok Sabha passed the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order Amendment Bill, 2023, through voice vote with support from across party lines even as Anantnag MP Hasnain Masoodi sought guarantees from the government on its

specific strategy to ensure the quota for existing STs is protected. Other Opposition MPs questioned the government over its delay in processing requests for inclusion from other communities in other states.

In addition to the Pahari ethnic group, the Bill also adds the Gadda Brahman, the Paddari Tribe, and the Koli communities to the ST list of Jammu and Kashmir. Together with this, Lok Sabha also discussed and passed a Bill to add the Valmiki community to the Scheduled Castes list of the UT, along with its synonyms.

Birsa Munda's birthplace a miss

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda on Tuesday targetted the Indian National Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which recently passed through his constituency in Jharkhand's Khunti district, for giving tribal icon Birsa Munda's birthplace in Ulihatu village a miss, saying this showed how the party viewed the nation and its

people. While replying to the discussion on Bills to amend the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list for Jammu and

Kashmir, Mr. Munda took aim at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi without specifically naming him.

This came after Congress leaders, during the discussion, tried to corner the government over the widespread protests in Ladakh seeking statehood and Sixth Schedule status.

In his reply to the discussion, Mr. Munda said, "We are seeing this Yatra being done. Today, I was informed that the persons leading this effort were passing through Khunti district in Jharkhand. While they did express their political agenda, they could not even take the trouble to visit Bhagwan Birsa Munda's birthplace in Ulihatu. This is the same village where PM Modi visited and put soil from its earth on his head as a sign of respect before launching the ₹24,000 crore PM-JANMAN package for PVTGs."

The Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra had stopped in Khunti district for the night on Monday, leaving for Gumla from there on Tuesday morning.

Before proceeding to Gumla district, Mr. Gandhi had garlanded a statue of Birsa Munda in Khunti's Shaheed Bhagat Singh Chowk.

AIADMK MP meets PMK founder; no statement from both parties

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

AIADMK Member of Parliament and former Law Minister C.Ve. Shanmugam met PMK founder S. Ramadoss at the latter's residence in Thailapuram near Tindivanam on Monday.

The meeting that lasted nearly 45 minutes was, in political circles, considered "a preliminary or an exploratory" event. Though there was no public statement from either of the parties, the meeting assumed significance in view of the upcoming Lok

Sabha election. At its gen-



S. Ramadoss

eral council meeting on Thursday last, the PMK resolved to contest the election as part of an alliance with other parties, and authorised Dr. Ramadoss to decide on the alliance. A picture of the meeting between Mr. Shanmugam, who hails from Villupuram district, and Dr. Ramadoss has been doing the rounds on social media since Tues-There were reports in

sections of the media that the PMK had sought eight Lok Sabha seats. The PMK, which was an

ally of the AIADMK during the 2019 Lok Sabha election and the 2021 Assembly poll, walked out of the alliance during the 2021 local bodies' election. It did not secure any seat in 2019, but won five in 2021. The party polled around 5.4% in 2019 and 3.8% two years later.

Vengaivayal case, says NCSC director The Hindu Bureau

PUDUKOTTAI

The director of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, S. Ravivarman, on Tuesday said that Adi Dravidar residents of Vengaivayal, Dalit organisations and political parties wanted a CBI probe into the mixing of faeces with water in an overhead tank that supplied drinking water to Dalit families.

The incident was reported in December 2022, and is being investigated by the Crime Branch-CID for more than a year.

Mr. Ravivarman con-



Dalits favour CBI investigation into

Spot visit: NCSC Director S. Ravivarman interacting with Adi Dravidar residents in Vengaivayal on Tuesday. M. MOORTHY

ducted an inquiry at Venin the village, inspected the overhead tank which had gaivayal in connection with the case and spoke to been shut and barricaded. the affected Adi Dravidar Addressing the media, families. Mr. Ravivarman, he said that the Adi Draviwho spent nearly an hour dars felt that the case was

not proceeding in the right direction. They had filed a complaint based on suspicion after the incident, but no action was taken. When asked why it took

more than a year for the Commission to visit Vengaivayal, Mr. Ravivarman said that the Commission had been in touch with the Tamil Nadu government. It had received a communication when the DNA tests began as part of the CB-CID probe. Since nothing fruitful emerged from the tests, the Commission's Chairman had instructed him to visit the village, Mr. Ravivarman added.

News



IRCTC launches Ramavana circuit tourist train service

Following the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has designed a comprehensive tour programme based on places of pilgrim importance as cited in the *Ramayana*. The first of such tours began on February 4, and a group of 122 tourists from the United Kingdom (60), Portugal (52), and India (10) are touring multiple sites, including the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, the Bharat-Hanuman temple in Nandigram, the Janaki Mandir in Nepal's Janakpur, the Punaura Dham in Sitamarhi, the Rameshwar Nath Temple in Buxar, the Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi and so on.

HC calls CBI arrest of Chanda Kochhar, her husband illegal

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday ruled the arrest of ICICI Bank's former Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Chanda Kochhar, and her husband Deepak Kochhar by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Videocon loan case as illegal. Justice Anuja Prabhudessai and Justice N.R. Borkar granted the couple interim bail on January 9, 2023. Giving the verdict, the Bench rejected the reasons given by the CBI – non-cooperation and non-disclosure of true facts of the case – in its arrest memo in December 2023. The couple was arrested by the CBI for alleged irregularities in a loan of ₹3,250 crore granted to the Videocon Group in 2012.

New science research board, ANRF, comes into effect

The Centre on Monday said the provisions of the newly constituted research board, the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), had come into effect and announced the appointment of Abhay Karandikar, Secretary, Department of Science and Technology, as interim CEO of the body on Tuesday. The ANRF aims to be a research funding organisation that will have a corpus of ₹50,000 crore with nearly ₹36,000 crore projected to come from the private sector. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has provisioned ₹2,000 crore for the ANRF for 2024-25. It subsumes the existing Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB).

₹258 cr. refunds released to depositors from Sahara portal

The Union government informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday that around 1.21 crore applications have been registered on the "CRCS-Sahara Refund Portal." It said that ₹258.47 crore had been released to 2.77 lakh depositors of Sahara Group of Cooperative Societies until January 31. The portal was launched in July 2023. A written reply by Cooperation Minister Amit Shah said that State-wise distribution of applications is not available. "Presently, only upto ₹10,000 is being disbursed to each genuine depositor of the Sahara Group of Cooperative Societies against verified claims through Aadhaar seeded Bank account," the reply said.

ED searches premises of Kejriwal's aide, AAP MP

Central agency alleges corruption in award of ₹38.02-cr. contract in Delhi Jal Board: Delhi CM says 16-hour search did not yield anything, while Revenue Minister alleges Centre is trying to scare AAP

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

he Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday searched the premises linked to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant Bibhav Kumar, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) treasurer and Rajya Sabha MP N.D. Gupta, and others in connection with a Delhi Jal Board (DJB) case.

The premises of former DJB member Shalabh Kumar was also searched.

development comes days after the ED arrested Jagdish Kumar Arora, who was the DJB chief engineer, and one Anil Kumar Aggarwal on graft charge.

The ED probe is based on a first information report registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation alleging that Mr. Arora awarded a DJB contract worth over ₹38.02 crore to NKG Infrastructure Limited, which allegedly did not



In the dock: Security personnel at AAP MP N.D. Gupta's house in New Delhi on Tuesday when ED search was under way. R V MOORTHY

meet the eligibility criteria. The ED alleged that NKG

Infrastructure got the bid by submitting forged documents. Mr. Arora allegedly knew that the company was not eligible for the tender involving the supply and installation of electromagnetic flowmeters.

It was also alleged that NKG Infrastructure subcontracted the work to Integral Screws, a proprietorship firm of Mr. Aggarwal. On receipt of the funds, he transferred about ₹3 crore to Mr. Arora. "...bank accounts of close associates of Jagdish Kumar Arora and their relatives were used to transfer the bribe amounts," the ED had said.

'Political malice'

Reacting to the searches, Mr. Kejriwal said in a post on X: "My PA's house was raided by 23 ED officers for 16 hours today, but they found nothing. They raided [former Deputy CM] found nothing. They raided [ex-Minister] Satyendar Jain's place and found nothing. They raided [MP] Sanjay Singh's place and found nothing. Can ED enter someone's home without any reason? Isn't this hooliganism by the government? It is clear that all these raids and arrests are being done only out of political malice, to crush the AAP. People will never tolerate this kind of hooliganism." AAP senior leader and

Manish Sisodia's place and

Delhi Revenue Minister Atishi said the BIP-ruled Central government is trying to scare the AAP. "I want to tell Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP, and their CBI and ED that AAP is not going to be scared of your threats," she said at a press conference.

The Delhi BJP welcomed the ED searches, stating that the AAP-led government had turned the DJB into a den of corruption and nefarious activities.

Court to hear plea for ASI survey of all cellars in Gyanvapi

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Varanasi district court on Tuesday fixed February 15 to hear an application seeking a survey by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) in the remaining cellars inside the Gyanvapi mosque.

This comes days after the court allowed puja in one of the cellars of the mosque.

The petitioner, Rakhi Singh, is also one of the main petitioners in the Shringar Gauri case, which led to the survey of the mosque complex by the ASI last year. Ms. Singh maintained that the religious character of the structure will be fully confirmed with the survey of all cellars.

The Hindu petitioners claim the mosque is a part of the adjacent Kashi Vishwanath temple. Saurabh Tiwari, the pe-

titioner's counsel, said the acting District Judge, Anil Kumar, has admitted the case. "In the application, my client has maintained that within the Gyanvapi



The Gyanvapi mosque and the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi, PTI

premises, cellar no. N1 to N5 (in the north) and S1 to S3 (in the south) exist and cellars nos. N1 and S1 are completely not accessed because their entrances are blocked. Hence, survey of the unaccessed area of the mosque should be done by removing the blocked entrance and debris, through a safe methodology," he added.

HC stricture

Meanwhile, the Allahabad High Court asked the petitioners and respondents to avoid giving statements to the media.

The court will continue hearing the case on Wednesday.

Rajya Sabha passes Bills to add PVTGs of Odisha, A.P. in ST lists

Abhinay Lakshman NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Tuesday passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order Amendment Bill, 2024 and Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Sche-Tribes) Order Amendment Bill, 2024.

The passage of the Bill cleared the way for the addition of many new communities to the ST list of Odisha and the inclusion of synonyms and phonetic variations of existing tribes in the ST lists of both Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. Both Bills got support from MPs across party lines.

Among the additions were notably seven Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) (a subset of STs) - four in Odisha and three in Andhra Pradesh – whose independent names had been specifically added as synonyms or sub-tribes of communities already on the ST lists of these States.

While replying to the discussion on the Bills for

desh, which were taken up together, Union Tribal Affairs Minister Arjun Munda took a dig at previous non-NDA governments for considering the most vulnerable STs - the PVTGs - as tribals just in name but never thinking about including them as entries in

Odisha and Andhra Pra-

Mr. Munda claimed that at least nine of the 75 designated PVTGs were never explicitly included in the States. "But it is our government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that is bringing legislation like this," he said.

In Odisha, the PVTG communities added are Pauri Bhuyan and Paudi Bhuyan as synonyms of Bhuyan tribe; the Chuktia Bhunjia as a synonym of Bhunjia tribe; the Bondo as a sub-tribe of Bondo Poraja tribe. In Andhra Pradesh, the PVTG communities included were Bondo Porja and Khond Porja as synonyms of Porja tribe.

Flyers break into song with drum, raise safety concerns

<u>Jagriti Chandra</u>

A video went viral on social media on Tuesday showing a passenger aboard an IndiGo aircraft singing a devotional song on Lord Ram and playing the dholak (drum) as others joined him, leading to calls from pilots to end displays of "religious fervour" during flights as it could become a safety issue. Pilots point out it would be difficult to make vital announcements and possibly create dangerous conflict

In the viral video, a male passenger is seen playing the *dholak* placed in his lap and singing a version of the hymn, Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram. He is also joined by others, some of whom are clapping along. The one minute and 25-secondlong video ends as the singing approaches a crescendo. All this while, the seatbelt sign is on. It is not known how long the singing continued, or on what route the aircraft was flying.

"Good order and discipline must be maintained



Pilots point out the need to curb such activity inside a confined space. FILE PHOTO

as per the DGCA's regulations. If someone complains about a song of a particular religion being sung, or about disturbance being created onboard, things could easily spiral out of control," said Amit Singh, Founder of Safety Matters Foundation dedicated to aviation safety.

'Communication hit'

He added that in such a situation it would also be difficult for the cabin crew to communicate important safety instructions to passengers, say if there was a turbulence. The DGCA did not res-

pond to a query on whether it condoned such conduct. A response from IndiGo was awaited till the time of going to press.

"I would be concerned about such incidents onboard my flight. This kind of mass hysteria or religious fervour where passengers are in a state of excitement is completely avoidable," said another senior pilot who flies for an Indian low-cost airline.

Another pilot said: "There is a need to impress on people that such displays of religiosity publicly, especially inside a confined space such as a train an aircraft is unacceptable." Though the singing

dent of Tuesday can't be deemed as disruptive behaviour as per the DGCA's rules on unruly passengers, all pilots The Hindu spoke to were unanimous in their view that it could easily escalate into an altercation mid-flight given the sensitivities around reli-The DGCA's rules cate-

gorise unruly behaviour into three types – verbally abusive, physically abusive and life threatening – and could result in a ban on flying for a period of three months to a lifetime.

Jamiat slams Uttarakhand govt. move to impose UCC

Ziya Us Salam NEW DELHI

The oldest Muslim body in the country, Jamiat Ulama-I-Hind, has strongly opposed the Uttarakhand government's move to usher in the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), calling it "discriminatory in nature" and "an attempt to curtail religious freedom of the citizens".

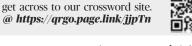
"The Uniform Civil Code has been tabled in the Uttarakhand Assembly and the Scheduled Tribes have been exempted from the new law under sub-section 342 of Chapter 25 of Article 366 of the Constitution. It has been argued that their rights are protected under Article 21 of the Constitution. What about Muslims and the rights given to the minorities," asked Jamiat president Arshad Madani. "If it is actually a uniform civil code, then why this distinction between citizens?"

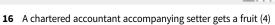
the Bill after which a decision will be taken to approach the judiciary.

The Jamiat is studying

TH CROSSWORD+14091

@ https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn





To solve this puzzle online,

Order stout with Washington (5) 18 Send explicit message: "Gel around 10 or 12 in daytime" (4)

19 Check. Tutor is walking around railway terminus (3,3)

Poster showing Chinese army vehicle with leaders of defeated

Mad United Nations editor consumed asafoetida (8) 26 European college head's den makes pastry (6)

27 Live adders coiled around swashbucklers (10)

28 Baker's equipment from Coventry (4)

1 Insane military officer from Turkey gets Mark in African country

2 Doctor Hakim, sir? He probably lives in Srinagar (8)

For example, diamonds covering a small length top (6)

4 Meditates after mates leave? Correct! (4) 5 Building kraals in Ceylon (3,5)

After removing tip of rapier from broken rib cage, get equipment for cold compression (3,3) Partially destroyed city (4)

Obese soldier returned by end of June wearing American battle

Spanish cries about four fruits (6) Disinclined academician gets a bit of poetry (6)

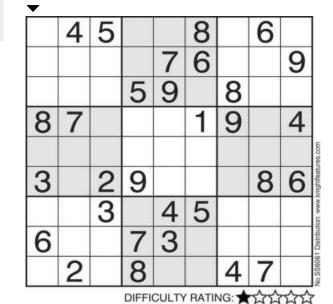
Hundred retiring skywards and still sleeping (3,2)

Cabbie arrived wrongly around 11... behind time... (10)

Male horse "Number One" returned at back of part of stable (8)

Next to body removed from bone-yard (4)

SUDOKU



Solution to previous puzzle Solution to yesterday's Sudoku 15968273 5 9 4 6 7 2 8 3 1

Morals from Dhruva's life

The young child Dhruva went to see his father King Uthanapadha when the child's cousin sat on the king's lap.

Sri Damodara Deekshithar asked in a discourse: "Why should Dhruva go at that time? Why should he yearn to sit on his father's lap? Why should his stepmother drive him away with harsh and intolerable words? Why should Dhruva's mother not pacify him? Why should sage Narada cross before the child head to the forest?" All these took place at the will of God.

Various sages underwent penance for thousands of years but couldn't realise God. Dhruva had undertaken it for just five months. Pleased with it, Lord Vishnu appeared before him.

Dhruva had no formal education – not even aksharabhyasa – but composed 12 slokas on Lord Vishnu. It was sage Narada's blessings that taught him the Dwadasakshara (12-lettered) mantra.

Our penance and devotion are disturbed by two main factors – lustful desire and anger.

Sage Vishwamitra lost the power of his penance, practised for about 2,000 years, on seeing the damsel Menaka. Again, after undergoing penance for about 4,000 years, he became angry upon seeing the damsel Rambha, censured her, and lost all the effects of his penance.

The steadfastness of Dhruva can be understood from the fact that he had not opened his eyes initially when Lord Vishnu appeared before him.

Stress, "Below 20!" (10)

10 6 feet of water. Understand? (6) 11 Damaged ball placed amongst playthings in dressers (8)

12 Father Brown consumes half of kissel in South Asian country (8)

14 Things shaking? Dark times! (6)

Spiritual leader from Central America (4)

25 Intravenous feed for boring person (4)

SCIENCE

In zodiacal dust mystery, PRL Ahmedabad study points to a familiar source

Zodiacal light — visible from the earth as a faint, diffuse glow on completely dark nights — is sunlight scattered by interplanetary dust. This light is present throughout the path along which the Sun moves in the sky over a year. The source of this is an open question in astronomy

Unnati Ashar

ay you send a spacecraft into the outer reaches of the Solar System on a scientific mission. But on its way, somewhere around Mars, fast-moving dust particles hit its body, including the solar panels, chipping off little pieces. Fortunately the spacecraft is robust and it continues its journey towards Jupiter relatively unfazed. But the solar panels have suffered significant damage.

This is the fate that befell Juno, a spacecraft that NASA launched in 2011 to study the gas-giant Jupiter and its moons. Juno entered a polar orbit around the planet on July 5, 2016. But before it did, according to data reported in a 2021 paper by a group of researchers from Denmark and the U.S., dust particles struck the solar panels attached to the Juno spacecraft.

A pocket of dust

A scientist at the Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, decided to make the best of Juno's situation.

In a paper published in the *Monthly* Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, Jayesh P. Pabari used the data in the 2021 paper to calculate the number of dust particles Juno might have encountered between 1 and 5 AU.

'AU' stands for 'astronomical unit', which is the distance between the earth and the Sun. Mars is at a distance of 1.52 AU and Jupiter at 5.2 AU from the Sun.

The 2021 paper reported a peak in the number of dust particles impacting Juno at 1.5 AU. Dr. Pabari used this data to calculate the flux of dust between 1 and 5 AU. (The flux is the number of dust particles flowing through a given area per second.) He found the flux at 1.5 AU to be 10-times higher than at other distances.

Scientists have known that this dust is the source of zodiacal light. Zodiacal light is sunlight scattered by interplanetary dust. From the earth, it is visible as a faint, diffuse glow on completely dark nights. Zodiacal light is present across the entire path of the ecliptic, which is the path along which the Sun moves in the sky over the course of a year.

Where could this dust be coming from? This is an open question in astronomy. In his paper, Dr. Pabari compared the flux of dust in the vicinity of Mars, and the number of particles escaping the two moons of Mars and concluded that these moons could be the dust source. He also found no other phenomenon in the neighbourhood of this area that could release as much dust.

Gods of dread and panic

Mars's two moons are called Deimos and



The Submillimeter Array radio telescopes at the summit of Mauna Kea, Hawai'i, with zodiacal light in the background. STEVEN H. KEYS (CC BY 4.0)

Phobos. Mars in Greek mythology is the god of war and the planet's moons are named for his twin sons, the gods of dread and panic, respectively. The American astronomer Asaph Hall discovered both of them in 1877.

Phobos is the bigger of Mars's two moons. It is drifting closer to Mars at a rate of six feet per century. Eventually, astronomers expect it will either crash into the planet or break up into a ring around it.

The most prominent feature on Phobos is a 10-km-wide crater named in honour of Hall's wife Angeline Stickney. In 1877, Hall had almost given up studying Mars's surroundings when Stickney – a mathematician – encouraged him to continue. He did so and spotted Phobos the next day and Deimos six days later. Stickney crater is in fact half as wide as the entire moon.

On its day-side, the temperature on Phobos is around -4 degrees C, while just a few kilometres away on the night side, the temperature often drops to an even-lower -112 degrees C. This large temperature difference (around 108 degrees C) arises because the surface of Phobos is covered with fine dust that lacks the ability to hold heat. Phobos also has no atmosphere that can trap heat.

Deimos is quite different: astronomers believe its actual surface is buried under

Juno launched by NASA in 2011 to study Jupiter entered orbit around the planet on July 5, 2016. But before it did dust particles struck the solar panels attached to the spacecraft. Data from the incident is being used to calculate the number of dust particles encountered

almost 100 metres of dust.

Dusty welcome

In his study, Dr. Pabari incorporated the shapes of the two Martian moons along with the gravitational effects of Mars, incoming and outgoing dust particles, the effect of spacecraft ejecta on the velocities of dust particles, and other parameters in his models of dust. Based on their output, he estimated the net rate of mass influx at Deimos and Phobos.

This in turn he combined with observational data and finally found a mechanism that could explain how Deimos and Phobos could be contributing to the zodiacal dust.

Micrometeorites are very small dust particles. They weigh no more than

one-ten-thousandth of a gram. But they can move really fast, and when they do they can pack a punch. Dr. Pabari found that such micrometeorites fly into Mars's moons just as they do into the earth. In the latter case, they burn up and disintegrate in the atmosphere. But Deimos and Phobos don't have atmospheres, which means most micrometeorites slam into their surfaces and kick up small clouds of dust.

These dust particles can easily escape Phobos and Deimos because of the moons' low gravity. (The more gravity a planetary body has, the more spherical its shape. Deimos and Phobos are not at all spherical.) In this way, Phobos has lost more dust.

The smaller of these dust particles escape into space whereas Mars's gravity pulls in the larger ones. The latter collect in the form of a dust ring around Mars. Over time, they drift closer towards or away from the planet but stay in orbit.

According to Dr. Pabari's work, a future pission to Phobos and Deimos could confirm his study's findings - especially whether they are really losing more mass than they are gaining and whether his calculations are correct. We can only hope the mission spacecraft's solar panels will be strong enough to withstand the moons' dusty welcome.

(Unnati Ashar is a freelance journalist.)

THE GIST

The study compared the flux of dust near Mars, and the number of particles escaping the two moons of Mars and concluded that these moons could be the dust source. No other phenomenon in the neighbourhood was found that could release as much dust

The study incorporated the shapes of the two Martian moons along with the gravitational effects of Mars, incoming and outgoing dust particles, the effect of spacecraft ejecta, and other parameters in models for the dust. From this the influx at Deimos and Phobos was estimated. This combined with observational data led to a mechanism that could explain how Deimos and Phobos could be contributing to the zodiacal dust

These dust particles can easily escape Phobos and Deimos because of the moons' low gravity. The smaller of these particles escape into space whereas Mars's gravity pulls in the larger ones

BIG SHOT

A locality of Asaichi Dori which was destroyed by fire in the city of Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture after a 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck Japan's Noto region in January. AFP

OUESTION CORNER

Mist-free wind screens

.....



Q: When a piece of cloth soaked in a washing detergent is used to wipe

the inside of a

vehicle's windscreen during rains, the windscreen does not become misty even if the windows are closed. Why?

A: Mistiness is caused by tiny droplets of water that scatter light and make the glass opaque.

Wiping the glass with a cloth which is soaked in a detergent leaves a residue which lowers the surface tension of the water droplets – enough to allow them to spread as a thin

The effect can be seen using a

bar of soap to write on a dry bathroom mirror, according to an article in New Scientist magazine. Once the message is written on the mirror, it can be wiped dry to remove the excess soap and the writing then disappears. However, when the steam from a hot bath or shower

condenses on the mirror, the areas of writing do not mist up whereas the background does, and the message becomes visible again.



Mistiness is caused by tiny droplets of water that scatter light. GETTY IMAGES





A travesty

Manipulation of Chandigarh mayor poll has grave implications for democracy

he Supreme Court of India's stinging remarks on the manner in which the Mayor of Chandigarh was elected has confirmed suspicion that the victory of Manoj Sonkar, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate was obtained through manipulation. After viewing footage of the videographed electoral process, the Chief Justice of India found it appalling that the presiding officer himself appeared to be defacing the ballots, and termed it a "mockery of democracy". Many had noted as soon as the election was called in favour of the BJP that it was a travesty that took place on January 30, as eight votes cast by elected councillors were declared invalid. The election held on January 30 itself was based on a direction from the Punjab and Haryana High Court. Earlier, it was due to be held on January 18, but it was deferred to February 6 at the last minute as it was disclosed that Anil Masih, a nominated councillor and a BJP minority wing functionary, fell ill. However, thanks to the court's intervention, it was advanced to January 30. The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) allege that the election was put off only because two parties, which were contesting jointly, were set to win. AAP has 13 members and the Congress seven in the Corporation, but the AAP candidate Kuldeep Kumar polled only 12 votes, with eight votes being declared invalid. Mr. Sonkar, with 16 votes, was declared the winner.

The Mayor is chosen by the 35 elected Councillors and the Member of Parliament for Chandigarh. A simple method for a comparatively small elected body choosing its mayor is by a show of hands or the members rising in support of the respective candidates. That they had to record their preferences through voting slips indicates that there was suspicion of possible cross-voting. What made the process dubious was that Mr. Masih, who presided over the election, was accused of not showing the 'invalid' ballot papers to the candidates. As a result, no one knew why exactly these votes, presumably those that ought to have gone to the AAP candidate, were declared invalid. The apex court has done the right thing in ordering the ballots and the records be handed over to the High Court's Registrar-General and the proposed Corporation meeting postponed until further orders. The development may concern only one municipal corporation in the country, but the idea that an election can be so brazenly rigged has grave implications for democracy. A political party seeking to be re-elected for a third consecutive term at the national level cannot be seen as manipulating any election in this manner. Only a verdict invalidating the election and ordering a fresh one, with safeguards against manipulation, will be in the interest of justice.

Mint Street musings

The interim Budget gives the central bank some more room to manoeuvre

he latest bi-monthly meeting of the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), whose outcomes will be revealed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday, is widely expected to result in a status quo on interest rates yet again. At its last review in early December, five of the six MPC members had voted to persist with the 'withdrawal of accommodation' stance and the panel had raised its GDP growth forecast for the year to 7% from 6.5%. Hopes of a stance shift to 'neutral' are slim, but it would be instructive to see if the growth estimate is revisited in light of the National Statistical Office projection of a 7.3% uptick in 2023-24. The US Federal Reserve held interest rates for the fourth straight review last week, and chairman Jerome Powell was vague about the proximity of much-anticipated rate cuts this year, seeking more data to establish that inflation had been reined in sustainably. India's policymakers may not take a direct cue from the US Fed, but the concerns are similar as Governor Das had articulated in December. The 4% inflation target remains elusive for now – December's inflation rate hit a four-month high of 5.7%. The RBI expects inflation to average 5.2% in this quarter, which it only expects it to cool to 4% in the July-September phase, providing a window for a rate cut consideration if the monsoon is normal.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's interim Budget for 2024-25, however, could give the central bank some more room to ease liquidity constraints in the economy. While the government did not provide a prop for weak consumption trends, it is also not adding to inflation pressures. A stronger than expected pursuit of fiscal consolidation in this year and the next, and a promise to lower gross market borrowings from ₹15.4 lakh crore this year to a tad over ₹14 lakh crore in 2024-25, should help. The Minister asserted that this will free up more credit for the private sector now that industry is beginning to invest 'at scale'. Gross market borrowings as a share of the fiscal deficit will also drop below 84% from 89% this year. With foreign capital inflows into Indian government bonds likely to spike following their inclusion in global bond indices, banks which are the major holders of these securities and are facing elevated credit to deposit ratio growth rates, should get more space to lend. Economists expect this to help lower borrowing costs for the entire economy. Yields on government bonds have already dropped from 7.14% ahead of the Budget to about 7.05% and could drop further, even as systemic liquidity has improved a tad. For Mint Street hawks, that is no small comfort.

Union government's reins on financial transfers to States

ver since the start of the Fourteenth Finance Commission award period (2015-16), the Union government has been reducing financial transfers to States. This is particularly strange given that the Fourteenth Finance Commission recommended devolving 42% of Union tax revenues to States, which is a clean 10 percentage points increase over the 13th Finance Commission's recommendation. The Fifteenth Finance Commission retained this recommendation of 41%, excluding the devolution to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh, which were recategorised as Union Territories. If we include the shares of J&K and Ladakh, it should be 42%. The Union government not only reduced the financial transfers to States but also increased its own total revenue to increase its discretionary expenditure. The discretionary expenditures of the Union government are not being routed through the States' Budgets, and, therefore, can impact different States in different ways.

Some basic math on tax revenue

The Finance Commissions recommend the States' share in the net tax revenue of the Union government. The difference between the gross and the net tax revenue includes collection costs, tax revenue to be assigned to Union territories, and cess and surcharges. Though the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Finance Commissions recommended 42% and 41%, respectively, of the net tax revenue to be the shares of States, the share of the gross tax revenue was just 35% in 2015-16 and 30% in 2023-24 (Budget Estimate). While the gross tax revenue of the Union government increased from ₹14.6 lakh crore in 2015-16 to ₹33.6 lakh crore in 2023-24, the States' share in the Union tax revenue increased from ₹5.1 lakh crore to ₹10.2 lakh crore between these

In other words, the gross tax revenue of the Union government more than doubled while the share of States just doubled. Grants-in-aid to States is another statutory grant recommended by the Finance Commission. The grants-in-aid to States declined in absolute amount from ₹1.95 lakh crore in 2015-16 to ₹1.65 lakh crore in 2023-24. Thus, the combined share of the statutory financial transfers in the gross tax revenue of the Union government declined from 48.2% to 35.32%.

One of the reasons for the States' share in gross revenue declining during this period is that the net tax revenue is arrived at after deducting the



J. Jeyaranjan

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R. Srinivasan

The Union

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is Member, State Planning Commission, Government of Tamil Nadu

revenue collections under cess and surcharge, revenue collections from Union Territories, and tax administration expenditure. Among the three factors, revenue collection through cess and surcharge is the highest and increasing. The cess and surcharge collection in 2015-16 was 5.9% (₹85,638 crore) of the gross tax revenue of the Union government, and this ratio increased to 10.8% (₹3.63 lakh crore) in 2023-24. This calculation is excluding the Goods and Services Tax (GST) cess that is collected to compensate for the revenue loss of the States due to implementation of GST till June 2022. The Union government is increasing tax collection under cess and surcharge categories mainly to implement its own schemes in specific sectors, and at the same time, the revenues so raised need not be shared with the States.

More centralisation of public expenditure When the financial transfers to States either as tax devolution or grants-in-aid decline on the one hand, or do not increase at least proportionately to increase in gross revenue of the Union government on the other, the resultant effect is the availability of larger discretionary funds for the Union government to spend. This could affect the equity in distribution of financial resources among States. The Union government has two other routes of direct financial transfers to States, i.e., Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and Central Sector Schemes (CSec Schemes). The Union government influences the priorities of the States through CSS wherein the Union government provides partial funding and another part is to be committed by States. In other words, the Union government proposes the schemes and States implement them, committing their financial resources as well. Between 2015-16 and 2023-24, the allocation for CSS increased from ₹2.04 lakh crore to ₹4.76 lakh crore through 59 CSS. Thus, the Union government compels the State to commit more or less an equivalent quantum of financial resources. Moreover, the actual financial transfers to States under CSS is only ₹3.64 lakh crore (2023-24), retaining nearly ₹1.12 lakh crore of CSS allocation for other

An important aspect of CSS shared schemes is that the States that can afford to commit matching finances from the State budgets alone can avail of the matching grants. This creates two different effects in terms of inter-State equity in public finances. Wealthy States can afford to commit equivalent finances and leverage Union

finances inwards through the implementation of CSS. Less wealthy States will have to commit their borrowed finances in these CSS, thus increasing their own liabilities. These differential trajectories of the public finances of States accentuate inter-State inequality in public finances, the major reason being CSS.

The CSec Schemes are fully funded by the Union government in sectors where the Union government has exclusive legislative or institutional controls. The allocation for CSec Schemes increased from ₹5.21 lakh crore in 2015-16 to ₹14.68 lakh crore in 2023-24 to implement more than 700 schemes. Thus, it is clear the Union government allocates a larger share of the finances to CSec Schemes. It is quite likely that the Union government can allocate financial resources with a motive to benefit specific States or constituencies through the CSec Schemes. Since the CSec Schemes are directly implemented by the Union government, only ₹60,942 crore is devolved to States under this scheme in 2023-24. The combined allocation for CSS and CSec Schemes in 2023-24 is ₹19.4 lakh crore and only ₹4.25 lakh crore is devolved to

Scope for anti-federal fiscal policies

The financial transfers through CSS and CSec Schemes are non-statutory transfers as they are based on neither any legal provisions nor any formula determined by the Finance Commission. This non-statutory grant forms 12.6% of gross tax revenue. Together with statutory grants, the total financial transfers as a proportion to gross tax revenue were only 47.9% in 2023-24. Further, the non-statutory grants are tied grants, i.e., they have to be spent on specific schemes for which the grants are allocated. This reduces the freedom of States in conducting public expenditure. In addition to retaining more than 50% of gross tax revenue, the Union government incurs a fiscal deficit to the extent of 5.9% of GDP. Thus, the Union government wields enormous financial powers with limited expenditure responsibilities.

Further, the Fifteenth Finance Commission noted that the Union government had argued for the downward revision of States' share in Union tax revenue from 42% and the Commission retained the share at 41%. Citing higher expenditure commitments, the Union government may repeat the argument before the Sixteenth Finance Commission. So much for cooperative federalism!

Understanding the nuances of the liberal arts

iberal arts degree programmes are on the rise in the context of Indian private higher education. At the same time, liberal ideologies are gravely misunderstood and viewed with scepticism in contemporary popular and right-wing articulations. As a faculty in a liberal studies school, I find that a greater understanding of the value of liberal arts education and what it offers to future citizens are extremely essential for a more harmonious future. By better understanding the nuances of what a liberal arts education can offer, students who opt for this degree can better respond to their contemporary problems – whether it is the on-going Israel-Palestine war or the politics of merging the state and religion.

The importance of context

A liberal arts education seeks to enable students and future leaders to understand contemporary social problems in context. This is to suggest that to understand and respond to any situation, we must engage with the historical, sociological, economic, and psychological contexts. Such an approach would necessitate openness, require an ability to comprehend a problem from multiple perspectives, and recognise the complexity of the issue at hand. No quick answers or solutions would be possible. Another important aspect of a liberal arts education is to learn how to historicise our contemporary problems. This can enable us to have a view of the present in a way that does not ignore the past but instead teaches us how historical events have led to contemporary crises.

This is why a historian may have a stronger and clearer opinion about present crises than someone in a non-liberal arts field. A nuanced perspective, fertile with critical thinking, would



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A greater understanding of the value of liberal arts education is essential for a more harmonious future – a point being lost sight of in contemporary popular and right-wing articulations

require us to recognise how and why we do have a problem or a conflict. Is there a context to the crises at hand? What are the larger geopolitical issues that affect the issue? Who is being affected and what is at loss?

For example, any armed conflict is not about a battle for physical resources or religious dominance, but represents multi-dimensional fault-lines over culture, language, perceptions of truth and justice. The construction of the idea of 'sovereignty' is itself often hinged on subjective perceptions of historical claims and injustices. Geopolitical and military interests add to the complications of a narrative of conflict. A liberal approach at the very minimum should recognise these complexities before denouncing any particular voice or narrative.

The subject of identity

People's identities are intrinsically linked to regional, national, religious, gender, and other markers. There is nothing reductive about recognising identities of people. No social scientist or historian or economist is, as often labelled as doing so, trying to reduce identities to characteristics. This would be a grave misunderstanding of these liberal disciplines. Instead, recognising identities means acknowledging difference, which is innate in human society. How can we forget the history of human evolution, the formation of societies, cultures, and groups, and speak from a naive position of "simply being human"?

In making sense of conflict between two groups, a student of the liberal arts would instead first ask the question 'when and why do national identities matter?' Does the erasure of identity of some lead to the dominance/flourishment of

other identities? If identities did not matter, then why do passports matter when we travel? Why do nations not open up their borders to all religious and national subjects?

Power as a central vector

In aiming to answer these questions, the role of power in societies can be recognised as being extremely significant. Liberal arts education allows students to learn that power is a central vector in understanding contexts and crises. Incorporating the role of power in any analysis does not denude it of nuance, as Allison Schrager argues in a 'premium' media online article of December 3, 2023, "There is an economic case for redefining liberal arts education". Rather, it deepens the engagement with contemporary crisis situations. Ignoring power relations and hierarchies between identities often leads to flat, homogenised narratives that are hardly of use in the real world. It would be naive and ignorant to deny the role of power in war, or in societies at large.

Power itself may operate in a society, or between nations, in a complicated, multi-layered fashion, and thus a nuanced liberal understanding should anchor itself on a complex treatment of power – not by excluding or wishing it away. A liberal arts education, seeking to be transformative, encourages students to be more humane, while recognising differences and identities, and understanding how power operates within our societies. By asking critical questions first and then understanding the problems in-depth, students can learn to think about solutions, take informed stands, and find resolutions – which shall also have to be complex and nuanced.

spearheaded the rath yatra

movement which led to the

Masjid. It cannot be denied

that Mr. Advani's concept of

a national movement was

narrow and exclusionary.

He subscribed to Hindutva.

If such a prestigious award

is given with such divisive

considerations in mind, it

will hurt the concept of an

inclusive nation. To be

deserving of the highest

civilian award of our nation,

demolition of the Babri

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Defacing the ballot One ought to have gauged the Chief Justice of India's anguish aplenty when he was provoked to say that 'democracy is being murdered' in the defacing of the ballot in the Chandigarh mayoral elections (Page 1, February 6). The sanctity of the election process has vanished into thin air. Is it not a shame on the part of a learned government official to be sullying his role and duties? Mani Nataraajan, Chennai

I can only recollect the glee with which India's leading television anchors were crowing from the rooftops when the election result was declared. All of them

were unanimous in saying that the election result marked the end of the INDIA bloc. I would like to see the faces of these same TV anchors now. The state of Indian (television) journalism is abysmal. John Samuel Jesupatham, Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu

The flagrant flouting of the process and procedures annihilates the sanctity of democracy. The perceptional horror of the transgression lies in a scenario ahead — of a similar situation in the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections.

N. Sadasivan Pillai. Guntakal, Andhra Pradesh

As a senior citizen, it was

the surreptitious manner in which the mayoral elections were held. The Returning Officer was expected to be non-partisan and conduct the elections in a smooth and orderly way. Instead, he was an active participant in derailing the process. With the national election due in a few months, one prays that the Supreme Court of India will issue instructions to the authorities concerned to ensure free and fair

distressing to read about

elections. H.N. Ramakrishna, Bengaluru

The Chief Justice of India's strong words are of immense significance even as the country braces for the mammoth general

election ahead. Given the vulnerabilities of the poll staff for ostensible reasons, the Election Commission of India has the onerous task of ensuring an infallible election process.

G. Ramasubramanyam, Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Award conferment

It would be appropriate to describe the conferment of the Bharat Ratna on L.K. Advani more as a reward than an award. He

Corrections & Clarifications

one should subscribe to In the front-page report titled "White Paper on economy this session" (February 6, 2024, some editions), the second sentence, "Deliberations are on and they had already consulted States and Central government staff associations, he said", was with reference to the status of the committee formed to review the National Pension System for government em-

ployees, and not the white paper on the economy as it seems to suggest

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constitutional values on the basis of which our nation was built. Unfortunately, it is sorely lacking in this case. N.G.R. Prasad, Chennai

Technology to the rescue

Technology has its pros and cons and it was stunning that a man used it in an efficient way (Tamil Nadu, "Man recovers father's stolen phone using Google Maps", February 6). This generation is comfortable using technology and there are lessons to learn. Pragalya S.,

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

The severe erosion of fiscal federalism

n February 8, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan will lead a protest in New Delhi against the Centre for "placing Kerala on a financial embargo". The Kerala government has accused the Centre of pushing the State into a severe financial crisis by imposing a limit on its borrowings. Kerala has moved the Supreme Court contending that the Centre's imposition of a Net Borrowing Ceiling (NBC) on the State, which limits borrowings from all sources, violates Article 293 of the Constitution. The wide array of constitutional issues that are now thrown open point at the severe erosion of fiscal federalism in the country.

What is net borrowing ceiling? The NBC limits the borrowings of States from all sources including open market borrowings. The Centre has decided to deduct liabilities arising from the public account of the States to arrive at the NBC. In addition, borrowings by state-owned enterprises, where the principal and/or interest are serviced out of the Budget, or through assignment of taxes or cess or any other State revenue, are also deducted from the NBC.

Kerala is particularly agitated by the inclusion of debt taken by state-owned enterprises as the State's own debt. Major infrastructure projects initiated by the State government are funded by the government statutory body called the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board (KIIFB), primarily through extra-budgetary borrowings. Since the debt of KIIFB is now included in the NBC, the State government claims that it is not even able to fund pensions and meet expenses for welfare schemes. Is the Centre within its constitutional limits to impose such harsh conditions on the finances of States?

Determining State finances According to Article 293(3) of the Constitution, the State has to obtain the consent of the Centre to



Mukund P. Unny

Advocate-on-Record at the Supreme Court of India raise 'any loan', if 'any part of the previous loan' extended by the Centre is outstanding. The imposition of the NBC is done by invoking the powers of the Centre under Article 293(3).

On close scrutiny, the Centre's decision to include extra-budgetary borrowings by state-owned enterprises in the total debt of the State is constitutionally suspect. The Union Finance Minister justified the decision by relying on the 15th Finance Commission Report, which says, "Governments at all tiers may observe strict discipline by resisting any further additions to the stock of off-budget transactions and contingent liabilities which is against the norms of fiscal transparency and detrimental to fiscal sustainability. One very important purpose of our recommendation for higher borrowing limit to the Union and State Government is to foster transparency and to avoid build-up of non-transparent liabilities." Notably, the Finance Commission has not called for the inclusion of the debt of state-owned enterprises in the NBC.

Parliament does not have the power to legislate upon the 'Public Debt of the State' as this finds place in Entry 43 of the State List of the Constitution. Therefore, the power to make laws on, administer and determine aspects of the public debt of the State falls squarely on the State Legislature.

The State government raises another crucial argument that the balances in the public account of the State should not be included in the NBC. The State relies upon Article 266(2) of the Constitution which indicates that the money collected by the Central or State government, which do not pertain to the consolidated fund, can be brought under the head of 'public accounts'. Small savings, security deposits, provident funds, reserve funds and other treasury deposits constitute 'public accounts'. All activities related to public accounts fall within the domain of the State Legislature and the Centre has no power to include the withdrawals from public accounts in the NBC.

State territory

The Kerala Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2003, which is enacted by the State Legislature, spells out the fiscal deficit targets for the State. It says that Kerala shall reduce the fiscal deficit to 3% of the GSDP by 2025-2026. When a State Act provides for budget management and fiscal discipline, it is not desirable to have external supervision on the finances of the State by the Centre. Under Article 202 of the Constitution, it is the State government that is tasked with determining the revenue and receipts and corresponding expenditure and with presenting the Budget of the State before the Legislative Assembly. Budget management of the State is the discretion of the State government. The territory occupied by the State executive and legislature cannot be ceded to the Union executive and Parliament in the name of fiscal management. Even otherwise, Kerala's fiscal deficit is reported to have significantly reduced to 2.44% and revenue deficit to 0.88% of the GSDP. In the Centre's case, the fiscal deficit is estimated to be 5.8% for for 2023-2024.

The KIIFB was a novel idea in Kerala to fund infrastructure and development projects through extra-budgetary spending. But the State's responsibility to fund development work cannot come in the way of it delivering justice to pensioners and beneficiaries. If the Kerala Finance Minister is to be believed, not permitting the State to borrow will affect the State's spending on welfare schemes. This can lead to a catastrophic situation in the revenue-scarce State. The character of India's federalism is moving rapidly from cooperative to one that is destructive and annihilative. The borrowing restrictions are an example of 'annihilative federalism' at play.

The BJP's new plank in Mandya

The removal of a saffron flag in a village in the district has sparked controversy

STATE OF PLAY

Laiqh A. Khan laiqh.khan@thehindu.co.in

he political discourse in Mandya district, known as the sugar bowl of Karnataka, has long been dictated by the Cauvery issue or by Vokkaliga identity. The traditional rivals in the State, the Congress and the Janata Dal (Secular), have always shared the electoral spoils. With the exception of winning a by-election in 2019 from the K.R. Pet Assembly constituency, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has not won any Lok Sabha or Assembly seat in the district.

The party, therefore, is leaving no stone unturned to change this. Recently, a saffron flag with an image of Hanuman, which was flying from a 108-foot tall flagpole on government land in Keragodu village, about 12 km from the district headquarters, was replaced by the government with the national tricolour. The sensitive issue comes close on the heels of the BJP joining hands with the JD(S), a potent electoral force in the Vokkaliga heartland, to fight the Lok Sabha elections.

The saffron flag was replaced by the national flag amid strong protests on January 28. The local administration pointed out that permission had been given to a private trust to hoist either the national flag or the Karnataka flag on the flagpole.

A day later, the BJP took out a march from Keragodu to the Deputy Commissioner's office in Mandya. The march was led by the BJP's former national General Secretary, C.T. Ravi, and comprised mostly activists from the party and its frontal organisations such as



the Bajrang Dal and the Vishva Hindu Parishad. The activists sported saffron flags and shawls and shouted 'Jai Sri Ram'. JD(S) leader and former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy also turned up at the protest site near the Deputy Commissioner's office in Mandya wearing a saffron shawl.

At the protest site, Mr. Kumaraswamy shared the BJP's anger over the lowering of the saffron flag by the government. He blamed the Congress government, led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, for "communalising" the atmosphere. The next day, reacting to Mr. Siddaramaiah's accusations that the JD(S) leader, alongside the BJP, was inciting violence, he told reporters that he will not support illegal activities of the BJP. As Mr. Kumaraswamy's saffron shawl came under media glare, party supremo H.D. Deve Gowda felt that he could have instead sported the JD (S)'s colours. But he added that there was no need to read too much into it.

Clearly, the JD(S) leader appeared to be focusing more on countering the Congress, which had stormed the party's citadel in Mandya by defeating it in six out of seven constituencies during the 2023 Assembly elections. Even though the Mandya Lok Sabha seat is held by film actor Sumalatha, an independent candidate who had declared her support for the BJP after defeating Mr.

Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil during the 2019 polls, the JD (S) is expected to bargain hard for Mandya during its seatsharing talks with the BJP.

With the BJP-JD (S) combine calling for a Mandya bundh on February 9, the Congress leaders see a political game plan by the BJP and its new-found political ally in the State to "polarise" voters before the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress has said that the BJP is trying to convert Mandya into another Hindutva laboratory in the State, after its experiments in coastal Karnataka.

Congress leaders in Mandya have also predicted that that the flag row could boomerang on the BJP. Agriculture Minister N. Cheluvarayaswamy, who is also Minister in charge of the district, and Malavalli MLA P.M. Narendraswamy have argued that the bundh call is indirectly against the national flag that is now flying from the flagpole.

The flag row is not the first sensitive issue to rock Mandya in recent years. In the run-up to the 2023 Assembly elections, BJP leaders had similarly tried to build a narrative around Uri Gowda and Dodda Nanje Gowda. The party claimed that these Vokkaliga warriors had killed Tipu Sultan, the erstwhile ruler of Mysuru, even though there are no historical records to back this claim. The efforts failed to yield any electoral dividends.

However, unlike the past when the JD(S) strongly opposed the BJP's "communal" planks such as the hijab issue and the Uri Gowda and Dodda Nanje Gowda narrative, the regional party has now aligned with the saffron party. The alliance could either help the BJP-JD (S) combine or it could prove to be counter-productive like it did for the Congress-JD(S) alliance in 2019.

Maldives accelerates plan to lower dependence on India

The Chinese make up for the minor reduction in Indian tourists in the Maldives following the diplomatic row between New Delhi and Malé

DATA POINT

<u>Sonikka Loganathan</u> <u>& Vignesh Radhakrishnan</u>

January, controversial tweets by deputy ministers of the Maldives on Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lakshadweep led to a diplomatic row between the two countries. The consequences of this row have been two-fold. The tweets sparked a call by some Indians on social media to boycott the Maldives. This was an attempt by them to puncture the biggest money-maker for the Maldives, the tourism industry. Meanwhile, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu strengthened ties with one of India's rivals, China. Just a few days after tensions between the Maldives and India flared up, Mr. Muizzu visited China, met with Chinese President Xi Jinping, and appealed to Chinese tourists to visit his nation in large numbers and reclaim the top spot in tourist arrivals, which they once held.

While the number of Indian tourists visiting the Maldives has declined marginally, Chinese tourists have swifty filled this gap, resulting in an overall increase in tourist inflows, data show. Chart 1 shows the number of tourists who visited the Maldives in the first 35 days of 2023 and 2024. The number of Indians who visited the archipelago dropped marginally from 21,460 to 16,895 in the period considered. It is important to note that the decline cannot be entirely attributed to the boycott call as a considerable share may also have dropped their plans fearing repercussions of the ongoing row, among other reasons. Moreover, the number of Russian tourists also decreased from 26,305 to 22,577 in the period, so India is not an outlier.

The decline in Indian visitors did not have an impact on the overall number of tourists to the Maldives. In fact, if the first 35 days of 2023 and 2024 are compared, the

number of tourists went up slightly from 1,97,252 to 2,22,502. This increase is entirely due to the sudden surge in the number of Chinese tourists from just 6,563 to 25,303 in the period.

Borrowing

restrictions on

States are an

example of

'annihilative'

federalism'

More worryingly, the impact of the diplomatic fallout has been felt by more than just the tourism industry. Generally, 20,000 to 40,000 medical tourists from the Maldives visit India annually for treatment (Chart 2). On January 13, Mr. Muizzu announced that the government's health insurance scheme will cover visits to the UAE and Thailand too, to "diminish reliance on a select group of countries". He made this announcement immediately after his return from China. He also said that a 100-bed hospital with Chinese aid will be built.

Mr. Muizzu and Mr. Xi signed key agreements, including agricultural schemes that would "end its [Maldives'] dependence on one country for imported staple foods such as rice, sugar, and flour," by growing them locally. Currently, the Maldives relies heavily on India for a number of products.

The Maldives imports over 95% of its granite, 40% of its steel bars and coils, over 30% of tubes/pipes, electric motors and cement, 65% of flat-rolled iron and stainless steel sheets, and over 50% of bulldozers from India (Chart 3). Moreover, it sources over 80% of rice, 60% of eggs, close to 30% of cattle meat, 50% of onions, melons and nuts, 25% of wheat, over 45% of crabs/shrimp/prawns and cabbages, and 40% of tomatoes from India. Essentially, the tourism boom in the Maldives – from food to stay - relies heavily on the supply of raw materials from India.

India exports 70% of its cabbages/cauliflowers, over 20% of eggs, over 10% of its melons and live animals and nuts to the Maldives. The archipelago's key agreements with China after the fallout with India threatens this mutually beneficial relationship, and gives China more sway in the Indian Ocean region.

40,000

30,000

20,000

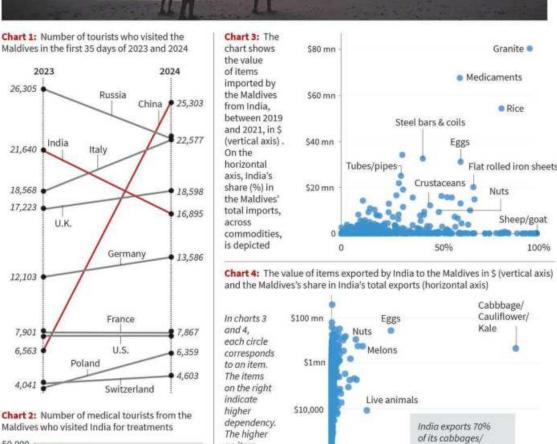
10,000

2016 2017 2018 2019 2020 2021

Dragon checks in

The charts are based on data sourced from the UNcomtrade portal, India Tourism Statistics and the Republic of Maldives'





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FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 7, 1974

Tokyo yields as gunmen seize embassy in Kuwait

Kuwait, Feb. 6: Men of the Japanese "Red Army" and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine seized the Japanese Embassy in Kuwait to-day and on threat of killing the Japanese Ambassador and other embassy staff, forced Japan to accept their demand for an airplane to carry four terrorists out of Singapore.

A Japanese Foreign Ministry spokesman in Tokyo said the Minister of Transport had ordered a Japanese Airlines plane conveniently located to reach Singapore to pick up the four guerillas, who attempted to blow up a refinery in Singapore last week. Since then they have been holding three hostages on board a boat, demanding that they be flown out.

"We are prepared to send a plane to Singapore to carry the four to the country of their choice," a Foreign Ministry spokesman said. "We are ready to make our arrangements public."

Earlier, the Ministry said it had received a telegram saying Japan's Ambassador in Kuwait, the First, Second and Third Secretaries and an attache were all hostages in the Embassy.

The Foreign Ministry said it did not know how many persons were involved in seizing the Embassy.

The gunmen seized the Embassy and shouted with bullhorns from the building encircled by Kuwaiti troops: "Do not interfere or we will execute our hostages."

Kuwait will not allow a landing by a Japanese airliner bringing commandos and their hostages from Singapore in return for release of Japanese diplomats held hostage here. It was stated by senior Kuwaiti Government officials tonight.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 7, 1924

Silver currency in Russia

London, Feb. 6: The "Daily Telegraph's" diplomatic correspondent says, in connection with the announcement that the Russian Soviet Government has decided to substitute silver currency for the present paper currency, that he understands that vast stocks of silver are at present held by American, British and other banks and Russian's new currency move may result in the early appreciation of the price of the metal.

Text&Context

THEMOHINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of sedition cases filed from 2018 to 2022

As many as 5,023 cases were lodged under the **Unlawful Activities** (Prevention) Act, Union Minister Nityanand Rai informed Parliament. He added that sedition cases against the State came down from 149 in 2021 to 68 in 2022. PTI

Number of fraudulent loan apps removed from Play Store

Bhagwat. K. Karad informed Parliament that the loan apps were suspended or removed by Google between September Number of teaching positions vacant in **Uttar Pradesh**

4.17 lakh sanctioned posts, more than 80,000 posts were vacant in schools run by Uttar Pradesh Basic Education Council. PTI

The number of farmers enrolled under the PMKMY

Launched in 2019, the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Maandhan Yojana (PMKMY) is meant for old age protection and social security of Small and Marginal Farmers (SMFs). PTI

The passengers on the no-fly list in the last four years

Minister of State for Civil Aviation V.K. Singh said that 108 individuals were barred from flying by airlines in 2023. The passengers placed on the 'no-fly' list increased from 10 in 2020 to 66 in 2021. PTI COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

2022 and August 2023. PTI

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revised delimitation exercise based on the

The first is to continue with the existing

projected population of various States as

amongst various States (Table 1) and the

second is to increase the number of seats

to 848 with proportionate increase among various States (Table 2). It can be noticed

in both these scenarios that the southern

States, the smaller states in the north like

Uttarakhand, as well as the northeastern

States are bound to be at a disadvantage

Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh

and Rajasthan. This may go against the

when compared to the northern States of

federal principles of our country and may lead to a feeling of disenchantment in the

population of the States that stand to lose

per the 1971 Census with the States that

population losing out on their political

What are international practices?

(the equivalent of our Lok Sabha) has

been capped at 435 since 1913. The

In a federation like the U.S., the number of seats in the House of Representatives

population of the country has increased

almost four times from 9.4 crore in 1911 to

an estimated 33.4 crore in 2023. The seats

among the States are redistributed after

equal proportion'. This does not result in

any significant gain or loss for any of the

States. For example, based on the Census

resulted in no change in the number of

seats for 37 States. Texas gained two seats,

five other States gained one seat each and

In the European Union (EU) Parliament

every Census through the 'method of

of 2020, the reapportionment has

seven States lost one seat each.

which consists of 720 members, the

number of seats is divided between 27

member countries based on the principle

of 'degressive proportionality'. Under this

Denmark with a population of around 60

principle, the ratio of population to the

number of seats shall increase as the

population increases. For example,

in their representation. It also goes against the philosophy of freezing seats as

have been better at controlling the

significance.

543 seats and their redistribution

Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and

Understanding the delimitation exercise

What does delimitation mean and what are the constitutional provisions which deal with it? Why were the seats frozen as per the 1971 Census? Will the fresh exercise go against the federal principle, giving an advantage to certain States over others?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

he delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the first Census after 2026. The 2021 Census was originally postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently due to delays on the part of the Central government.

What is delimitation?

Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. It also includes determining the seats to be reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses. Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution provide that the number of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative assemblies as well as its division into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted after each Census. This 'delimitation process' is performed by the 'Delimitation Commission' that is set up under an act of Parliament. Such an exercise was carried out after the 195 1961 and 1971 Census.

What is the constitutional requirement?

'Democracy' means 'rule or government by the people'. It follows that the government is elected by a majority with the broad principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value'. The number of seats in the Lok Sabha based on the 1951, 1961 and 1971 Census was fixed at 494, 522 and 543, when the population was 36.1, 43.9 and 54.8 crore respectively. This broadly translated to an average population of 7.3, 8.4 and 10.1 lakh per seat respectively.

However, it has been frozen as per the 1971 Census in order to encourage population control measures so that States with higher population growth do not end up having higher number of seats. This was done through the 42nd Amendment Act till the year 2000 and was extended by the 84th Amendment Act till 2026. Hence, the population based on which the number of seats is allocated refers to the population as per the 1971 Census. This number will be re-adjusted based on the first Census after 2026. The boundaries of territorial constituencies were readjusted (without changing the number of seats) and seats for SC and ST were determined as per the 2001 Census and will again be carried out after 2026.

In a normal course of events, the delimitation process for the number of seats, boundaries of territorial constituencies and determining the reserved seats for SC and ST would have happened based on the Census of 2031 as it would have been the first Census after 2026. However, with the 2021 Census now being postponed and the year 2026 nearing, there have been talks about the impending delimitation exercise.

What are the issues?

The number of seats were frozen based on the 1971 Census in order to encourage population control measures. The population explosion that happened in our country during the last five decades has been uneven with some States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan having a greater increase than States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. There are two options that are being discussed in the public domain with respect to the



GETTY IMAGES

THE GIST

Delimitation means the process of fixing the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies in each State for the Lok Sabha

and Legislative assemblies.

The number of seats in the Lok Sabha based on the 1951, 1961 and 1971 Census was fixed at 494, 522 and 543, when the population was 36.1, 43.9 and 54.8 crore respectively. However, it has been frozen as per the 1971 Census in order to encourage population control measures so that States with higher population growth do not end up having higher number of seats

The population explosion that happened in our country during the last five decades has been uneven with some States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan having a greater increase than States like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Skew scenarios

Delimitation is the process of fixing the number of seats in each State for the Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies. Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution provide that the number of seats shall be readjusted after each Census

Table 1: If the number of seats is retained at 543 and reapportioned among States based on

State	Number of seats at present	Number of seats projected	Net gain/ loss
U.P.	80	91	11
Bihar	40	50	10
Rajasthan	25	31	6
M.P.	29	33	4
Tamil Nadu	39	31	-8
Andhra + Telangana	42	34	-8
Kerala	20	12	-8
Karnataka	28	26	-2
Punjab	13	12	-1
Himachal	4	3	-1
Uttarakhand	5	4	-1

Table 2: If the number of seats is

population in 2026

increased to 848 based on the projected

	of seats at present	of seats projected	gain
U.P.	80	143	63
Bihar	40	79	39
Rajasthan	25	50	25
M.P.	29	52	23
Tamil Nadu	39	49	10
Andhra+ Telangana	42	54	12
Kerala	20	20	-
Karnataka	28	41	13
Punjab	13	18	5
Himachal	4	4	-
Uttarakhand	5	7	2

Source: Based on Vaishnav et al, Carnegie endowment

lakh has 15 seats (average population of 4 lakh per member) as against Germany with a population of 8.3 crore having 96 seats (average population of 8.6 lakh per member).

What can be an ideal solution?

The issue arises because democratic and federal principles seem to be at loggerheads in the delimitation exercise as envisaged. However, they can be harmoniously reconciled by giving equal importance to both. The main work of a Member of Parliament is to legislate on 'Union List' matters like Defence, External Affairs, Railways, Telecommunication, Taxation etc. and hold the Central government accountable. Majority of the schemes of the Central government are implemented only by the State governments. Hence, the number of MPs in Lok Sabha may be capped at the present number of 543 which would

ensure no disruption in the present representation from various States. This will maintain and uphold the federal principle. The number of MLAs in each State may be increased in line with current population (without changing the number of Rajya Sabha seats) to address the democratic representational requirement.

However, the most important reform for strengthening democracy is to empower the local bodies of panchayats and municipalities who engage with the citizens on a day-to-day basis. The devolution of powers and finances to these bodies must be significantly increased to strengthen democracy at grass root levels.

Rangarajan. R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. He currently trains civil-service aspirants at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your

"Ms. S. Patnaik, Baroda, wants to know the difference between I am reading a book about animals and I am reading a

" 'On' is used when the book is written for specialists, academics in a scholarly style. 'About' is used when the book is written in an informal style for the

It was a seminar on the government's

He spoke about the political situation." "Mr. V. Sundar, Lodhi Colony, New Delhi, wants to know the difference

" 'Assumption' is from 'assume' and 'presumption' is from 'presume'.

'Assume' means 'to take as being true, for purpose of argument or action'. You take

as true something that has not been

Let's assume that he visited India. We had assumed that he would like this

that it is most likely, when you make a

Assumption is rather arbitrary,

presumption is about what is likely.

Let us assume he is a liar.

for the sake of argument. In Law,

presumption 'is an inference as to the

certain'. 'Presumption' also means

he teacher how he should teach

the meaning of 'the rank and file'."

officers'. Figuratively, it means 'the

I presume he is a liar.

high an opinion of oneself'.

against the Party President.

in single line abreast'. One of the

behind another'. So 'rank and file'

and soldiers standing one behind

and file with him.

logical inference from the facts available. He is presumed to have died in the

You presume when there is at least

some semblance of evidence, you assume

existence or truth of a fact not known for

'disrespectful behaviour that shows too

It was presumption on his part to tell

"Mr. B. Mohan Murali wants to know

" It means 'common soldiers, not

ordinary members of an organisation'. A

The rank-and-file workers revolted

good leader is one who can carry the rank

'Rank' has several meanings. One of

them is the 'number of soldiers drawn up

meanings of 'file' is 'line of persons one

literally means 'soldiers in line abreast

another'. So soldiers as distinct from

'Presume' means 'suppose something to be true', 'take something for granted'. I presume he is away in Calcutta. You presume something when you feel

English

K. Subrahmanian

book on animals.'

general reader.

'presumption'."

proved to be true.

accident.

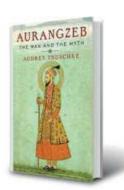
It was a lecture on China.

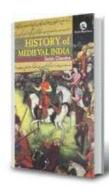
between 'assumption' and

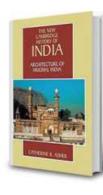
THE HINDU

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The remains of history: The Gyanvapi mosque, and the Kashi Viswanath temple on the banks of the Ganges in Varanasi.AP

Temples and mosques as a marker to study the life and times of Aurangzeb

For the Mughal emperor, say historians, the decision to demolish a place of worship or not was often taken for political reasons; Benares became a place of interest for Aurangzeb because of anti-Mughal factions, 'troublesome zamindars and Hindu religious leaders'

Ziya Us Salam

n February 2 this year, Muslims thronged the Gyanvapi Masjid in Varanasi in almost unprecedented numbers for Friday prayers. It was not out of a new-found love for the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb who is said to have built the mosque in the 17th century but a desperate bid to stand up for a mosque, now under increasing pressure from Hindutva forces. On the same day, local Hindus thronged for darshan at the cellar or 'Vyasji ka tehkhana'.

When and how did the masjid come up? Well, in one line, Aurangzeb demolished a temple on the land occupied by some recalcitrant zamindars and built a mosque to deprive the local warlords of their bastion. It did not start on that note though. Soon, after Aurangzeb replaced his father Shah Jahan on the Mughal throne, he is said to have shown great respect towards Brahmins and even requested them to pray for the well-being of the empire.

Political motives

Writing in Aurangzeb: The Man and The Myth, historian Audrey Truschke explains, "Hindu and Jain temples dotted the landscape of Aurangzeb's kingdom. These religious institutions were entitled to Mughal state protection, and Aurangzeb generally endeavoured to ensure their well-being. By the same

THE DAILY QUIZ

token, from a Mughal perspective, that goodwill could be revoked when specific temples or their associates acted against imperial interests. Accordingly, Aurangzeb authorised targeted temple destructions." Another noted historian, Richard Eaton, puts the figure around 12 for such temples. Amazingly, some time before he became the Emperor, Aurangzeb is said to have condemned any king who resorted to bigotry! A couple of years after assuming power, he issued a 'farman' in 1659 wherein he asked his officials not to disturb the Brahmins of Benares.

Expresses Truschke, "Writing in February of 1659 Aurangzeb said he had learned that 'several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benares and nearby places, including a group of Brahmins who are in charge of ancient temples there.' The king then ordered his officials: 'You must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmins or other Hindus of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire." Indeed, of the tens of thousands of temples during his almost 50-year reign, most stood safe and secure when his reign ended in 1707. Unfortunately, the Benares temple was not among them.

Writing in Architecture of Mughal India, noted historian Catherine Asher, states: "The destruction of Raja Man Singh's famous Vishvanath [Vishwanath] temple

in Benares was largely to punish Hindus, especially those related to the temple's patron, who were suspected of supporting the Maratha Shivaji." According to Asher, "The demolition of the Vishvanath Temple was intended as a warning to anti-Mughal factions, in this case troublesome zamindars and Hindu religious leaders who wielded great influence in this city."

It is a point agreed upon by Truschke who writes, "Political events incited Aurangzeb to initiate assaults on certain Hindu temples. For example, Aurangzeb ordered Benares's Vishvanath Temple demolished in 1669." Incidentally, the temple had been built during the reign of his great-grandfather Akbar by Raja Man Singh. It was believed Man Singh's great-grandson helped Shivaji flee from Aurangzeb's court in 1666, and hence Aurangzeb's wrath. A new Vishwanath temple was built on an adjacent site to the Gyanvapi Masjid by the Maratha ruler Ahilyabai Holkar in the 18th century.

In History of Medieval India, Satish Chandra provides a different take on the temple destruction. "He (Aurangzeb) began to look upon temples as centres of spreading subversive ideas.... Thus, he took strict action when he learnt in 1669 that in some temples in Thatta, Multan and especially at Benares, both Hindus and Muslims used to come from great distances to learn from the Brahmans."

While there is concurrence on the temple's destruction in 1669 among

Asher, Chopra and Truschke, architectural historian Madhuri Desai contends that the Visvanath Temple was only built in the 18th century, perhaps in a reference to Holkar.

Nine lives

In Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review, Desai writes that the Visvanath temple was built long after the Gyanvapi Masjid and stands adjacent to it. The masjid, incidentally, is actually called Masjid Alamgiri or Jama Masjid; Gyanvapi being the name of the locality. Even today, some locals call it Gyanvapi wali Masjid or Masjid of Gyanvapi by the name of the neighbourhood. Surprisingly, there are two other Alamgiri Masjids in the vicinity, which, however, aren't referred to as Gyanvapi.

Others believe the temple was built before the entry of Muslim invaders, probably in the 12th century and was first attacked by Qutubuddin Aibak, who later founded the Slave or Mamluk dynasty. The temple was rebuilt during Akbar's reign by Raja Man Singh. It was once again demolished during Aurangzeb's reign, they contend. As a three-domed mosque came up, a portion of the wall, facing the prayer direction, was kept intact as a warning to defiant elements.

Today, as the mosque is caught in the midst of a legal and social controversy, it is important to remember that it is a medieval monument, and a marker to study the life and times of Aurangzeb.

Ouestions and Answers to the previous

day's daily quiz: 1. This Ritwik Ghatak film

inspired K. Balachander's Arangetram in Tamil. **Ans:** *Meghe Dhaka Tara*

2. The other two films of a trilogy which

Bengal. Ans: Komal Gandhar.

the Bangladesh Cine Journalists'

which marked the directorial debut

Hrishikesh Mukherjee. Ans: Musafir

Early Bird: Sadhan Kumar Panda

Subarnarekha

inanimate things

Nadir Naam

dealt with the aftermath of the Partition of

3. The Ghatak film one will associate with

The attribution of human feelings to

the phrase "pathetic fallacy". Ans: Ajantrik;

4. Ghatak won the Best Director award from

Association for this film. Ans: Titash Ekta

5. Name the Hindi film, scripted by Ghatak,

Visual: Name the two actors in this image.

Ans: Anil Chatterjee, Supriya Choudhuri

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in



officers; from this we get the figurative meaning 'followers as distinct from "Mr. Paritosh Uttain, wants to know which of the following spellings is correct:

(a) Czar (b) Tsar." "Both are correct. There is also a third one. 'Tzar'. All these are acceptable. 'Czar' is the title of the emperor of Russia

and 'Czarina' is the title of the empress. Published in The Hindu on January 8,

Word of the day

the remains of something that has been

destroyed or broken up; loose material (stone fragments and silt etc.) that is worn away from

Synonyms: Debris, dust, rubble

Usage: Rotting food and detritus of every kind

Pronunciation: bit.ly/detrituspro

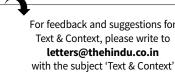
International Phonetic





is scattered all around.

Alphabet: /dɪˈtuaɪ.təs/





Sindhu Nagaraj wedding dress for the rest of her life.

QUESTION 1 This is a collection of short pieces Dickens originally published in various newspapers and other periodicals when he started his career as a journalist. What is the name of the collection?

QUESTION 2

What is the term used to describe something reminiscent of Dickens and his writings, such as poor social or working conditions or comically repulsive characters?

QUESTION 3

This Dickens' character is a wealthy spinster, once jilted at the altar, who insists on wearing her

QUESTION 4

Which writer and critic once remarked that Dickens' Great Expectations was more seditious than Karl Marx's Das Kapital?

QUESTION 5

Traditionally, this word means a person or object that behaves deceptively or dishonestly. However, in modern usage, this is most associated with the character Ebenezer Scrooge. What is the word? How is it referred to in his novella A Christmas Carol?

QUESTION 6

Name the two cities in Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities



Visual question:

Charles Dickens was born on this day in 1812. Get your creative juices flowing,

In this image, identify the character standing on the chair, and addressing the members of his club. Which novel is the character from?

World

Myanmar's Suu Kyi in 'strong spirits', says son citing her letter

BANGKOK



Ousted Myanmar democracy figurehead Aung San Suu Kyi is in "strong spirits", her son said on Tuesday after receiving a letter from her. Suu Kyi was detained on the morning of the February 2021 coup that ended a 10-year experiment with democracy and plunged the Southeast Asian nation into bloody turmoil. AFP

TBILISI

Georgia denounces Russian plan for Navy base in breakaway region



Georgian President Salome Zurabishvili on Tuesday denounced a Russian plan to set up a Navy base in the breakaway Abkhazia region. Last October, as Ukraine stepped up attacks on Moscow's Black Sea fleet, Abkhazia's separatist leader Aslan Bzhania said he has signed an agreement with Russia for the base. AFP

ISTANBUL

Three die in 'terrorist' attack outside Istanbul's main court



The Turkish police on Tuesday shot dead two assailants from a leftist organisation, branded "terrorists" by authorities, who attacked a security checkpoint outside Istanbul's main court, killing one person and injuring five. The assailants were members of the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party-Front. AFP

MALINDI

Kenya cult leader charged with murdering nearly 200 children



A Kenyan court on Tuesday charged the leader of a starvation cult and dozens of suspected accomplices with murdering nearly 200 children in a forest near the Indian Ocean, Paul Nthenge Mackenzie is alleged to have incited hundreds of his acolytes to starve to death in order to "meet Jesus". AFP

King Charles's cancer was 'caught early', says PM Sunak

Agence France-Presse

King Charles III's cancer was caught early, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Tuesday, after treatment began for the monarch who is just 18 months into his reign. Buckingham Palace has not specified the type of cancer afflicting the 75year-old monarch.

Charles's diagnosis will prolong a frontline shortage of royals created by Charles's prostate procedure and the almost simultaneous hospitalisation of Catherine, Princess of

"Thankfully, this has been caught early and everyone will be wishing that he gets the treatment that he needs," Mr. Sunak said.

Trump is not immune from election subversion charges, rules U.S. court

Court rejects Trump's claim that he cannot be prosecuted because the allegations relate to his responsibilities as President; case is on pause until at least February 12 to give Republican presidential frontrunner time to appeal to U.S. Supreme Court

Reuters WASHINGTON

federal appeals court on Tuesday ruled that Donald Trump does not have immunity from charges that he plotted to overturn his 2020 election defeat, bringing the former U.S. President a step closer to an unprecedented criminal trial.

A three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit rejected Trump's claim that he cannot be prosecuted because the allegations relate to his official responsibilities as President.

"For the purpose of this



Latest blow: Donald Trump has repeatedly voiced his immunity claim on the campaign trail and social media AFP

criminal case, former President Trump has become citizen Trump, with all of the defences of any other criminal defendant," the unanimous panel wrote.

"But any executive immunity that may have protected him while he served as President no longer protects him against this prosecution."

The ruling, which Mr. Trump is almost certain to appeal, rebuffs his attempt to avoid a trial on charges that he undermined American democracy and the transfer of power, even as he consolidates his position as the frontrunner for the Republican presidential nomination.

The case will remain paused until at least February 12 to give Trump time to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Trump's lawyers argued that former Presidents were entitled to sweeping legal protections and could not be criminally prosecuted for official actions unless first impeached by the House of Representatives

and removed from office by the Senate.

Mr. Trump was impeached twice by the House, but each time Senate Republicans cast sufficient votes to acquit him of the charges.

Judges homed in on the broad nature of Mr. Trump's claim at a January 9 hearing, questioning a Trump lawyer over whether even a President who ordered military commandos to assassinate a political rival could escape criminal prosecution without initial action by Congress.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly voiced his immunity claim on the campaign trail and social media.

Blinken to push for Gaza truce during tour of West Asia

Associated Press

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is on a diplomatic tour of West Asia on Tuesday, meeting Egyptian leaders as part of his efforts to secure a cease-fire in the Israel-Hamas war in exchange for the release of hostages.

Mr. Blinken's visit also comes amid growing concerns in Egypt about Israel's plan to expand the combat in Gaza to areas on the Egyptian border.

Mr. Blinken was meeting on Tuesday with Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi in Cairo.

Saudi Arabia's stand

Mr. Blinken said that Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman reiter-



Antony Blinken

ated an interest in ties with Israel but wants an end to the Gaza conflict and a pathway to a Palestinian state.

During his latest trip to the region, Mr. Blinken is seeking progress on a cease-fire deal, on potential normalisation of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, and on preventing an escalation of regional fighting.

Biden confuses Macron with ex-French leader Mitterrand

Agence France-Presse WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden confused his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron with France's long-dead former leader Francois Mitterrand, in a speech that went viral in video footage on Monday.

Addressing a campaign event in Las Vegas on Sunday, the 81-year-old U.S. leader described Mr. Macron's reaction to a speech at a G-7 meeting in 2020.

Country misstated

As well as getting Mr. Macron's name wrong, he misstated the country he

"And Mitterrand - Macron, from Germany - I mean, from France looked at me and said, said 'You know, what - why - how long you back for?" Mr. Biden said, according to a

The 81-year-old U.S. President has made the past, notably in September 2022

White House transcript. Mitterrand was French

President from 1981 1995, and died in 1996.

Viral video

Video of Mr. Biden's mixup has been viewed thousands of times on X, formerly Twitter, and shared hundreds of times.

Mr. Biden has made similar public mistakes in the past, most notably in September 2022 when he called on a deceased congresswoman at a conference in the U.S. she helped organise.

"Jackie, are you here? Where's Jackie? I think she was going to be here," he said, referring to Indiana representative Jackie Walorski who had died month earlier.

And in April last year, a White House transcript corrected Mr. Biden when he confused New Zealand's All Blacks rugby team with the Black and Tans, a British military force notorious for its involvement in the War Irish Independence.

The transcript of his speech, given in a pub in Ireland, crossed out "Black and Tans" and inserted "All Blacks".

Trump's gaffe

Mr. Biden's predecessor and probable opponent in the November presidential election, Donald Trump, made a similar gaffe last month, confusing his party rival Nikki Haley with former House speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Healing touch



A man tends to his dog's burnt paw after forest fires in Vina del Mar in Chile. More than 131 people have died in the country so far. AP

Houthis' Uncrewed Surface Vessels are a new threat in the Red Sea

NEWS ANALYSIS

Dinakar Peri NEW DELHI

The ongoing tensions in the Red Sea are seeing the emergence of a new trend, the increasing use of Uncrewed Surface Vessels (USV) by Houthis to target ships in the high seas. On Monday, U.S. military destroyed two explosive-laden USVs. The first instance of a USV use since the beginning of Houthi attacks on commercial shipping was in the first week of January, according to the U.S. military.

"CENTCOM Self-Defence Strikes On February



attacks on commercial shipping was in the first week of January. AP

5, at approximately 3:30 p.m. (Sana'a time), U.S. Central Command forces conducted a strike in selfdefence against two Houthi explosive USVs. U.S. forces identified the explosive USVs in Houthicontrolled areas of Yemen and determined they presented an imminent threat to U.S. Navy ships and merchant vessels in the region," U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) posted on 'X'.

On the measures in place to thwart such attacks, Indian Navy sources said that force protection measures are in place for both surface and aerial threats in case such a threat was to arise.

On January 4, Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, commander of the international Combined Maritime Forces and also head of U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet, said the "lowprofile" USV came within a couple miles of U.S. Navy and merchant ships and exploded. This he said was the first time the Houthis had used an USV, since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war. Houthis had used USVs in the past. "We all

watched as it exploded. No more details on that for right now," he said then without getting into further details.

The second instance was on February 1, when U.S. forces noticed a USV "heading toward the international shipping lane" and shot it down which resulted in "significant secondary explosions".

Control measures

On the measures in place for such contingencies, a Navy source said all frontline ships have anti-drone systems fitted onboard. Indian Navy has close to 12 warships in the Gulf of Aden, North and Central Arabian Sea for anti-piracy and maritime security duties, in the backdrop of Houthi attacks as well as increasing piracy incidents by Somalian pirates.

"Whether manned or unmanned platform does not make much of a difference. Main aspect is the nature of the threat. There is detection by radar and optic sensors and there are gun mounts and close-in weapon systems among others in place," the source

From a perspective of aerial or surface threats, there is constant radar surveillance, surface surveillance and there are fire control systems attached to them and also visual and optic sensors, the source explained. In addition, when on deployment there are regular look outs as part of standard procedures, the sources said adding, "These cater to any surface and aerial threats."

However, these USV add another dimension of threat perception to commercial shipping which have in the last few months been targetted by missiles and one-way drones. With the continuing U.S.-led coalition attacks on Houthi military targets in Yemen as well as airstrikes against Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Quds Force and affiliated militia groups in Iraq and Syria, there is no end to volatility in sight.

India asks its citizens in Myanmar State to leave

Droce Trust of India NEW DELHI

India on Tuesday asked its citizens in Myanmar's Rakhine State to leave the troubled-region immediately in view of deteriorating security situation.

In its first advisory following the spike in violence, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) asked Indians not to travel to the Rakhine State because of the prevailing situation, including disruption in telecommunication network and scarcity of essential commodities.

"In view of the deteriorating security situation, disruption of means of telecommunications, including landlines, and severe scarcity of essential commodities, all Indian citizens are advised not to travel to the Rakhine State of Myanmar," it said.

"Those Indian citizens who are already in the Rakhine State are advised to leave the State immediately," the MEA said.

Myanmar has been witnessing wide-spread violent protests demanding restoration of democracy since the military seized power in a coup on Febru-

ary 1, 2021. The Rakhine State and many other regions have witnessed severe fighting between armed ethnic groups and the Myanmarese military since October last year.

The hostilities between the two sides saw a rapid spike since November in several key Myanmarese towns and regions near the border with India as well, fuelling concerns in New Delhi over the possible ramifications for security of Manipur and Mizoram.



Vigil mode: International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi after a media briefing in Kyiv. AFP

'Security still fragile at Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant'

Associated Press

Security at Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant remains fragile amid worrying recent staff cuts enacted by Russian authorities occupying the facility, which is one of the 10 biggest atomic power plants in the world, the United Nations nuclear watchdog chief said on Tuesday.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi, who is in Kyiv, said that his upcoming visit to the plant as the war approaches its twoyear milestone will aim to assess the impact of recent personnel reductions after Russia denied access to employees of Ukraine's Energoatom.

'This huge facility used to have around 12,000 staff. Now, this has been reduced to between 2,000 and 3,000, which is quite a steep reduction in the number of people working there," Mr. Grossi said. "To man, to operate these very sophisticated big installations you need a certain number of people performing different specific functions."

"So far the situation is stable, but it is a very, very delicate equilibrium," he said.

Mr. Grossi's visit coincided with the arrival in the Ukrainian capital of the European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, who said he was there to discuss military aid and financial support as well as Ukraine's ambition of joining the bloc.

The IAEA has repeatedly expressed alarm about the Zaporizhzhia facility amid fears of a potential nuclear catastrophe.

Mr. Grossi confirmed his team observed antipersonnel mines in some areas of the plant, another cause for concern that he needs to see with his own eyes.

Pak. voters wonder if polls will change the country mired in political turmoil

Forty-four political parties will compete for a share of the 266 seats; for the international community, a strong and stable Pakistani govt. means a better chance of containing any unrest; the country needs a govt. that can regain public confidence and deliver basic services, says political scientist

Associated Press ISLAMABAD

akistan is holding parliamentary elections this week but many voters are disillusioned and wonder if the balloting can bring any real change in a country mired in political feuding, a seemingly intractable economic crisis and resurgent militancy.

Forty-four political parties will compete on Thursday for a share of the 266 seats in the National Assembly, or the lower house of parliament, with an additional 70 seats reserved for women and minorities.

After the election, the new parliament will choose the country's next Prime Minister. If no party wins an outright majority, then the one with the biggest share of Assembly seats can form a coalition government

Many experts agree that in Pakistan's political landscape today, there really seems to be only one top contender for the post of premier – Nawaz Sharif, a three-times former Prime Minister who has returned to the country and been absolved of past convic-

Mr. Sharif came back last October after four years of self-imposed exile in London to avoid serving prison sentences. Within weeks of his return, his



Ray of hope: Supporters of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attend a rally on the last day of the election campaign in Kasur, Punjab province, ahead of Pakistan's national elections. AFP

stemming

sentences were thrown out and his convictions overturned.

His archrival, former Prime Minister Imran Khan is behind bars and banned from contesting

And although Mr. Khan has a significant grassroots following, it's the intensity of his downfall and the ease of Mr. Sharif's return that have led many to believe the outcome has been already decided. Nuclear-armed Pakistan

is the fifth most populous country in the world and an unpredictable Western

For the international community, a strong and stable Pakistani government means a better

chance of containing any unrest, addressing economic challenges and

migration. And though anything can happen on election day, both Mr. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League and Mr. Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf have led lackluster campaigns over the past few weeks - something experts say only feeds into the general apathy among some 127 million eligible voters.

That could come back to haunt Pakistan's next government and set the stage for an even more intense brain drain and more political trouble ahead, as well as violent protests. And that in turn would only benefit Islamic militants.

Mr. Khan's May 2023 arrest triggered destructive rampages on a scale unseen since the 2007 assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. Mr. Khan's supporters blamed the military for his demise and set about wrecking military buildings and property – a strong message of defiance in a country where the army wields huge influence.

The authorities responded with mass arrests, a crackdown on Mr. Khan's party, and the introduction of military trials for civilians. The clampdown appears to have broken some of that spirit, though a recent pre-election rally in the southern city of Karachi showed that some were ready to fight for him.

Military affairs scholar Ayesha Siddiqa warns of more instability as the antiestablishment sentiment grows. "People are angry," Ms. Siddiqa said. "The dislike of the Army has increased tremendously, and it's more noticeable."

A year ago, Mr. Khan was still a free man rallying for a comeback while Mr. Sharif, ousted in 2017 over corruption allegations and banned for life from holding public office, was in London, seemingly out of the picture.

Now the tables have turned. Mr. Khan is in prison while Mr. Sharif's return and the absolution that followed - compounded with an election campaign he only launched on Jan. 15 – positioned him as the security establishment's preferred candi-

Pakistan is not known for holding free and fair elections. Ballot-stuffing, voter intimidation and other forms of electoral fraud have been commonplace in the past.

First-time voter Noreen Khan, who works in an Islamabad beauty salon, said she holds little hope for a free vote and believes there is no way Mr. Khan's "party will be allowed to win".

Mr. Sharif's and Mr. Khan's sharp reversal of fortunes fits the nation's cutthroat pattern of powerseeking politics.

Political scientist Samina Yasmeen at the University of Western Australia envisions negative repercussions for the already troubled economy if voters come out thinking Thursday's vote was unfair. "They won't trust the government," she said.

Talha Ahad, the founder of The Centrum Media, a Pakistani digital news network, said young people are not taking the election seriously. They believe "everything is fixed" and think there must be a deal with the military, and that why Mr. Sharif is back, he said.

Clerics and militant groups have long wanted to impose their interpretation of Islamic law, or Shariah, on everyday life in Pakistan, claiming Western ways and democracy don't work.

With mounting political divisions, a loss of trust in the government and the system, radical Islam could benefit in a country with a history of militancy, said Yasmeen, the political analyst.

Pakistan needs a government that can regain public confidence, create jobs and deliver basic services, she said. "People need that sense of safety," she added. "Without that, we're on a slippery slope."

Russia, China accuse U.S. of stoking West Asian tensions

Assocciated Press

Russia accused the United States on Monday of aggression against Iraq and Syria aimed at preserving its global dominance and salvaging the Biden administration's "image" ahead of U.S. elections. The U.S. retorted that its military response to unjustified attacks by Iranian-backed proxies against American forces is not only legal but will continue.

The exchange came at a contentious UN Security Council meeting called by Russia, Syria's closest ally, where both countries also said they did not want an escalation and spillover of the Israel-Hamas war. Many council members expressed fears of a growing West Asian conflict and urged de-escalation and stepped-up peace efforts.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused the U.S. of violating international law and continuing "to sow chaos and destruction in West Asia." He said violence by the U.S. and its allies has escalated from the Palestinian territories to Lebanon, the Red Sea and Yemen and is "nullifying international efforts to reestablish peace in the West Asia."

The Russian Ambassador claimed the U.S. is attempting "to flex muscles ... to justify and salvage the image of the current American administration ... in the light of the upcoming presidential pre-election campaign.

U.S. Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood countered that the U.S. has an absolute right to self-defence against attacks on American forces and the actions it has taken were "necessary proportionate."

Chill block



Snow stop: Vehicles are stranded on a snow-covered expressway on the outskirts of Wuhan in central China's Hubei province. Widespread snowfall and freezing weather continued disrupting transport and stranding travellers amid the annual Lunar New Year travel rush. AP

Ethiopian PM plays down fears of war with Somalia over a planned naval port

Associated Press

Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has played down fears of a war with Somalia over his quest for sea access for his landlocked country, saying on Tuesday that Ethiopia is only interested in peace with its neighbour.

Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding with the breakaway region of Somaliland on January 1. The document has not been made public, but Somaliland says Ethiopia agreed to recognise its independence in return for a naval port.

The deal has rattled Somalia, which asserts that Somaliland is part of Somalia. Somalia's President has suggested he is ready to go to war with Ethiopia to prevent it from building a port

"It's not just that he's running against Nikki Ha-

ley," said Debbie Walsh, di-

rector of the Center for

American Women and Pol-

itics at Rutgers. "It's be-

cause she is even deigning

to challenge him \dots He goes



Abiy Ahmed

Addressing lawmakers on Tuesday, Mr. Abiy said he had "no intention" of going to war with Somalia.

"To ensure the peace of Somalia, thousands of Ethiopians have died in Somalia," he said, a reference to Ethiopia's troop contributions to the African Union peacekeeping mission fighting the extremist group al-Shabab Somalia.

"We are dying in Somalia because the peace of Somalia is the peace of Ethiopia. The development of

ment of our country V believe we are brothers,' Mr. Abiy said. "We don't want to fight. We want to see a strong and prosperous Somalia that is a market for Ethiopian goods." Mr. Abiy also sought to

allay Egyptian fears over the hydroelectric dam Ethiopia is building on the Blue Nile. "We will share our resources, even in the future, but my hope is I expect them to accommodate our requests as well." Ethiopia says the mega

dam is essential for its development and claims it will have no negative effect on downstream Sudan and Egypt. Practically all of Egypt's 109 million people rely on Nile waters.

There have been several rounds of talks over the dam, but the sides have failed to reach an agreement to regulate its use.

Trump deploys his playbook against women who bother him

Associated Press MAULDIN

Hillary Clinton. Nancy Pelosi. Kamala Harris. Liz Cheney. Carly Fiorina. And for now, Nikki Haley.

The former South Caro-

lina Governor is the latest in a long line of women – historically some of Republican Donald Trump's most stubborn challengers – for whom the former President saves a special playbook. It's centered around intimidation, combined with a now-familiar brand of vulgarity, nicknames and other insults he

deploys for men, too. But where he tries to emasculate his male opponents, Mr. Trump works in put-downs about the appearance of women, their emotional balance and their intelligence. He mispronounces their names. He seemed to confuse two politicians who are women. And he questions their right to challenge

Mr. Trump's nickname for Haley, a Republican who served as his own Ambassador to the United Nations, is "Birdbrain."

"Who the hell was the impostor?" Mr. Trump railed after the New Hampshire primary against Ms. Haley, who acknowledged his victory but has refused to drop out of the GOP pre-



Out of control: The 'playbook' is centered around intimidation, combined with a now-familiar brand of vulgarity . REUTERS

sidential nomination fight. "When I watched her in the fancy dress that proba-

bly was not so fancy, I said, 'What's she doing? We won." Ms. Haley, who lost in Iowa and New Hampshire

but has vowed to stay in the race through her home State's first-in-the-South GOP primary on February 24, shot back that Mr. Trump threw a "tantrum" because he threatened.

after women for their appearance." "You can do anything" to women when you are famous, Mr. Trump said on the "Access Hollywood" tape that threatened his 2016 campaign. And yet Mr. Trump defeated Ms. Clinton with 39% of wo-

ballots for him. Ms. Haley, for her part, has mostly taken Mr. Trump's sexism in stride.

men voters casting their

She said on Sunday that he was respectful to her when she served as his Ambassador to the United Nations. but now is "flawed."

She was a "nasty woman," did not look presidential and her voice gave Mr. Trump a headache – This is Mr. Trump's approach to women he sees as obstacles.

But the defining visual of Mr. Trump's approach to Ms. Clinton came at a debate two days after The Washington Post reported the contents of the "Access Hollywood" tape.

As Ms. Clinton answered questions, he loomed so close, she wrote later, "my skin crawled."

Few days after the debate, Mr. Trump appeared to hark back to the moment. "When she walked in front of me. Believe me, I was not impressed." Laura Schroder, a 39-

year-old mother of three, brought her children to see Ms. Haley recently at a Mauldin, South Carolina, rally. "He is very immature," she said of Mr. Trump, "and so clearly scared to lose to powerful woman."

Ms. Haley herself makes a similar argument, such as one jab to chide Mr. Trump for refusing to debate her.

"Man up, Donald," she says, "I know you can do



HDFC Bank gets nod for 9.5% stake in ICICI Bank, 5 others

HDFC Bank on Tuesday said the RBI had given approval to the group to acquire up to 9.5% stake each in six lenders, including ICICI Bank and Axis Bank. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) gave its approval on February 5, 2024. The six lenders in which HDFC Bank will take stake are Axis Bank, Suryoday Small Finance Bank, ICICI Bank, Bandhan Bank, Yes Bank, and IndusInd Bank. The RBI's approval is valid for a period of one year till February 4, 2025, it said. PTI

Entero Healthcare IPO to open at ₹1,195-1,258 share

Entero Healthcare Solutions Ltd. has announced to open its initial public offering (IPO) on Friday, February 9, in the price band of ₹1,195-1,258 per equity share. The IPO will close on Tuesday, February 13. Bids can be made for a minimum of 11 equity shares and in multiples of 11 shares thereafter. The IPO comprises fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to ₹1,000 crore and an offer for sale of up to 47,69,475 equity shares by selling shareholders.

Indian consumer goods sector slows: NielsenIQ study

Sales volume growth in the Indian consumer goods sector in the October-December quarter slowed sequentially amid soft sales at mom-and-pop stores, market researcher NielsenIQ said, even as rural regions narrowed the gap with thriving urban areas. Consumer goods makers, over the last few quarters, grappled with subdued sales in the hinterlands as people cut back spending on both essentials and discretionary items amid price pressures. REUTERS

Tax-to-GDP ratio to hit all-time high of 11.7% of GDP in FY25'

Revenue Secretary says the rise will be led by an uptick in direct tax collection; more tax payers will opt for the new tax regime, he adds

NEW DELHI

ndia's tax-to-GDP ratio is expected to hit a record high of 11.7% of GDP in 2024-25, led by an uptick in the more 'equitable' direct taxes, and the government will continue to simplify and rationalise the tax regime to reduce disputes, litigation and intrusive means of enforcement, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra has said.

Noting that frequent changes in tax rates "don't help", Mr. Malhotra said corporate and personal income taxes have been reduced, and he was hopeful that a high proportion of income tax payers will opt for the new tax regime that doesn't allow deductions but offers a higher tax-free income threshold. Growth in Personal Income Tax collections stands at 28% so far this year, and may moderate to 20%-22% by the end of March, the Secretary said.

On the prospects for rationalising the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates, the Revenue Secretary said that a Group of Ministers (GoM) tasked by the GST Council to review the rate structure has been reconstituted, but small changes to rationalise rates on different items are a continuing exercise in the Council. The GST Council is expect-

Rising tax collection

Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra says direct tax collection has increased to 6.6% of GDP this year, from 6.1% in 2022-23

Malhotra notes that frequent changes in tax rates "don't help", and that direct tax rates have been reduced

■ Growth in personal income tax collections stands at 28% so far this year, but may moderate soon, he adds

that the Centre will continue to simplify and rationalise the tax regime to reduce disputes litigation

ed to meet every quarter and should meet soon, but no date has been fixed yet, he told The Hindu.

Divergent trend

"The tax-to-GDP tio should be at an all-time high next year at 11.7% from 11.6% this year and 11.2% in 2022-23. This is primarily because of direct taxes increasing from 6.1% of GDP in 2022-23 to 6.6% this year and 6.7% next year, which is more equitable," Mr. Malhotra said, noting that indirect taxes are also increasing but remain at around 5% of GDP.

"As the economy grows and per capita income increases, as per other countries' experience, one can say that the tax-to-GDP also increases and more so when you are developing, with the pace of increase in taxes more than the GDP. We are on a marathon and the target is to keep improving. But there's miles

to go," he said.

On the modest revenue growth projections for 2024-25, he said, "One can't expect the same revenue buoyancy every year. From a 1.4 buoyancy this year, we are projecting a 1.1 buoyancy. As nominal GDP growth is expected to rise 10.5%, tax revenues are expected to grow at 11.5%."

While the Department of Revenue is not examining lapses at Paytm Payments Bank, the Enforcement Directorate steps in when there are issues of money laundering, the Secretary said.

With the deadline for new manufacturing units to avail a 15% corporate tax rate ending in March 2023, Mr. Malhotra said a lot of companies have already availed it, but next year's tax returns will reveal the overall numbers. About 57% of the corporate tax income is being filed at the reduced rate of 22%.

India to see \$67 bn in energy investments in next 5-6 years: PM

Lalatendu Mishra BETUL, GOA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said India aimed to raise the percentage of domestic gas in the primary energy mix from 6% to 15% as part of efforts to develop environmentally friendly energy sources and enhance the energy mix.

"This would see an investment of about \$67 billion in the next five to six years," Mr. Modi said in his inaugural address at the second edition of India Energy Week (IEW).

With India poised to become the third-largest economy, the energy sector would play a crucial role in India's growth story, the Prime Minister observed. India's energy demand would double by 2045; keeping that in mind the country had started working on developing affordable and sustainable energy, he added.

Stating that India had embarked on an 'unprecedented infrastructure push', he mentioned that ₹11 lakh crore had been earmarked for this in the interim budget.

'Big part for energy'

"A big part of this will go to the energy sector. This amount will create assets in railways, roadways, waterways, airways, and housing which will need energy leading to India's efforts to expand its energy capacity," he said. On the Global BioFuel

Alliance, which was unveiled during the G20 Sum-



PM Narendra Modi speaking at the inauguration of India Energy Week 2024. PTI

mit held in India, he said 22 nations and 12 international organisations had come on board to encourage the use of biofuels, and this would create economic opportunities worth \$500 billion.

Ethanol blending push

Emphasising India's progress in the biofuel sector, Mr. Modi said ethanol blending in per litre of petrol had witnessed a significant rise from 1.5% in 2014 to 12% in 2023 leading to a reduction in carbon emissions by about 42 million metric tons.

"Government has set a target of 20% ethanol blending in petrol by 2025," he added.

Recalling the initiation of 20% ethanol blending in more than 80 retail outlets during India Energy Week last year, he said the number of outlets had now increased to 9,000. He said the government

was working towards the installation of 5,000 compressed biogas plants. (The writer is in Goa at

the invitation of the Federa-

tion of Indian Petroleum

Industry)

NIFTY 50

MARKET WATCH		
	THECDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,186	0.63
	83.05	
Gold	63,200	-0.23
Brent oil	78 49	2 22

	PRICE	CHANGE	
dani Enter	3203.75	30.30	
dani Ports	1273.10	14.55	
pollo Hosp	6197.30	37.20	
sian Paints	2930.95	13.60	
xis Bank	1050.05	11.45	
Bajaj Auto	7720.40	62.15	
ajaj Finserv	1597.05	17.85	
Bajaj Finance	6598.15	10.05	
Sharti Airtel	1134.05	20.50	
BPCL	609.30	34.55	
Britannia Ind	5007.05	117.45	
ipla	1425.45	-8.45	
oal India	448.65	8.40	
ivis Lab	3726.50	27.00	
r Reddys Lab			
icher Motors	3944.60	54.65	
irasim Ind			
ICL Tech			
IDFC Bank			
IDFC Life			
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EXCHANGE RATES

URRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
JS Dollar	82.86	83.18
uro	88.92	89.27
British Pound	103.92	104.33
apanese Yen (100)	55.71	55.93
hinese Yuan	11.52	11.57
wiss Franc	94.92	95.29
ingapore Dollar	61.54	61.79
anadian Dollar	61.22	61.46
Malaysian Ringitt	17.39	17.48
ustralian Dollar	53.81	54.01
ource:Indian Bank		

EID Parry Q3 profit halves to ₹217 crore

The Hindu Bureau

EID Parry (India) Ltd., reported consolidated thirdquarter net profit halved to ₹217 crore from ₹482 crore in the year-earlier period.

Revenue from operations contracted by 22% to ₹7,770 crore, the major sugar manufacturer said.

The sugar division's loss before interest and tax narrowed to ₹4 crore from ₹13 crore while farm input operations reported a profit before interest and tax of ₹336 crore against ₹778 crore. The nutraceuticals division's loss before interest and tax narrowed to ₹31 lakh from ₹2 crore.

The operating performance of the sugar segment was lower on account of a reduction in

Commercial vehicle manu-

facturer Ashok Leyland

Ltd. (ALL) is hopeful of

achieving all-time high

sales and net profit based

on its performance in the

first nine months of FY24,

have been a record for us

and we should be able to

maintain the momentum

(in the commercial vehicle

Chairman Dheeraj Hinduja

said in an interaction.

Executive

"The first nine months

said a top official.

segment),"

N. Anand



export volume following restrictions imposed by the government. This was partially offset by the increase in domestic volume and realisation, said Managing Director S. Suresh.

Distillery profitability was better on account of volume benefits flowing from expansion and better realisation. The standalone nutraceuticals segment registered a loss on account of continuing certification issues in Europe.

'Ashok Leyland is on track to

achieving mid-term goals'

Thermax to acquire 51% stake in TSA **Process Equipments**

The Hindu Bureau

Thermax Group, an energy and environment solutions provider, has agreed to acquire a 51% stake in TSA Process Equipments to help it to meet high-purity water requirements in sectors like pharma, biopharma, personal care, and food and beverages.

Thermax has signed agreements for full acquisition of the company to be completed over the next two years, the company said in a statement.

Ashish Bhandari, CEO, Thermax, said, "Our investment in TSA will augment our water division's capabilities to provide customers with end-to-end so-

Acquisition to help it meet high-purity water requirements in sectors like pharma, biopharma

lutions for highly purified water and water for injectables in several fast-growing industries. TSA's expertise in the segment will complement Thermax's own know-how and help us meet an even wider range of requirements."

Apurva Shah, MD, TSA Process Equipments said, "Combining our capabilities will enable us to create meaningful, widespread impact and accelerate the ongoing march towards sustainability."

More than ₹21,000 cr. of block deals seen in 2024

<u>Janaki Krishnan</u>

The momentum in selldowns through block and bulk deals is continuing in the current year as well as sponsors, private equity firms and other investors are taking advantage of the periodic spikes in the markets to exit their holdings or cut exposure to stocks.

In just over a month in calendar 2024, there have been sell-downs worth ₹21,158 crore, over a fifth of the total seen in the whole of 2023 which saw selldowns worth ₹1.04 lakh crore (\$12.6 billion) through the block-deal window. Sales through bulk deals worth ₹52,842 crore (about \$6.4 billion) have been reported this year so far, according to data provided to businessline by Prime Database.

In 2023 sell-downs through bulk deals were even larger at a humongous ₹2.9 lakh crore.

According to the data provided, in FY24 year-totake place.

more action to the tune of ₹3.1 lakh crore this fiscal year versus ₹1.5 lakh crore last fiscal year.

Indian equities had a ve ry strong year in 2023 with benchmark indices rallying 20%. This year brokers and analysts are expecting the markets to perform even better.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Panel pitches for lowering of GST on health policies

Shishir Sinha NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance has recommended that GST on health insurance, particularly for senior citizens, should be lowered. It has simultaneously

pitched for a level-playing field between public and private sector insurance firms in terms of TDS on GST and participation in government-run insurance

High premium burden

Financial services, including premium for health insurance, term insurance plans and unit-linked insurance plans, attract GST at 18%. On endowment plans, GST is applied differently. While it is 4.5% for premium paid during the first year, 2.25% would be the rate from the second year.

For life insurance in the form of single-premium annuity policies, rate of GST is 1.8%. Rates are the same for all age groups. These can be reviewed on the recommendation of the GST Council.

The Standing Committee, chaired by BJP MP Jayant Sinha, underscored the need for rationalising the GST rate on insurance products, especially health and term insurance, which is 18% at present. The high rate of GST results in a high premium burden which acts as a deterrent to getting insurance policies, the Committee said.

With a view to making make insurance more affordable, the Committee said: "GST rates applicable to health insurance products, particularly retail policies for senior citizens and micro-insurance policies (up to limits pre-



Strong barrier: High premium burden acts as a deterrent to getting insurance policies, says Sinha. Getty Images/istock

scribed under PMJAY or Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana, presently ₹5 lakh) and term polices may be reduced."

TDS on GST

The Committee also took note of TDS (Tax Deducted at Sources) on GST that applies only to public sector insurance companies. According to CGST ACT, TDS at the rate of 2% is required to be deducted from the payment made or credited to the supplier of taxable goods or services or both, where the total value of such supply is more than ₹2.50 lakh.

This is applicable to entities mentioned in Section 51 of CGST Act and includes public sector undertaking (PSU) insurers.

"The said requirement for TDS is not applicable on private insurer as the same is not notified under the said section," Financial Services Department told the Committee, adding that it has requested Revenue Department to examine the matter and take necessary action.

Apart from this, the Committee also noted that the public sector insurance companies have to mandatorily participate in government-run insurance schemes that which impact profitability.

"The Committee, with a view to ensuring ensure a level-playing field, recommends that such provisions be uniformly applied to all players," it said.

Unsecured vehicles

Relying on data from Motor Annual Report of the Insurance Information Bureau of India, the Committee observed that almost 56% of vehicles (mainly commercial) plying on the roads are unsecured. Such a trend poses a risk to the owners and third parties in case of accidents or damages.

Accordingly, the Committee recommended implementation of E-Challan enforcement across States by leveraging data integration by IIN, mParivahan and National Information Centre data.

It also suggested that financial institutions consider providing loans when they have proof of insurance coverage.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

manufacturer registered highest topline of ₹36,260 crore in FY23 and highest net profit of ₹1,983 crore in

The commercial vehicle



Dheeraj Hinduja

FY19, whereas in the first nine months of the current financial year, ALL reported total revenue from operations of ₹27,229 crore and net profit of ₹1,717 crore.

Asserting that sales might be slow in the first few months due to the Parliamentary elections, he said demand is very strong

and that it goes hand-inhand with economic activity. The all-round numbers should be much better than FY19, he added. "This is our fourth con-

secutive double-digit EBIT-DA quarter with better revenue recovery and strict cost control. Our capital expenditure spent and debt positions are as per our plans and satisfactory. We are on track towards achieving our mid-term goals of products and market share expansion, improving geographical presence and becoming more profitable," he said.

CFO Gopal Mahadevan said that the company had a debt of ₹1,747 crore with debt-equity ratio at 0.2.

looking at return to Libya: Rath Reuters

Oil India

QUITOL, GOA

Oil India is in talks with stakeholders to restart drilling in Libya, 13 years after the explorer exited the country due to political instability, chairman Ranjit Rath told Reuters. "Because of some issues

there was a hiatus," Mr. Rath said on the sidelines of the India Energy Week conference. "There is a resumption of talks. We have a long-term risk-taking ability for overseas assets," Mr. Rath added. Oil India rose as much

as 12.4% on the BSE to an intraday record.

sell-downs via

MUMBAI

date sales in shares through the block deal window have been to the tune of ₹1.02 lakh crore, versus ₹1.9 lakh crore in FY23. There is still time till March 31 for more deals to Bulk deals are seeing

RBI drains liquidity via 2 **VRRR** auctions



First of sorts: This is probably the first instance of two VRRR auctions being conducted on the same day. REUTERS

MUMBAI

In a surprise move, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) conducted two one-day variable rate reverse repo (VRRR) auctions on Tuesday to drain out liquidity from the banking system and re-anchor overnight money market rates at a

Market players said this is probably the first instance of two VRRR auctions being held on the same day. In the first auction, the RBI received offers from banks to deploy funds for a day, aggregating to ₹27,538 crore against the notified amount of ₹75,000 crore. The RBI absorbed these funds at a weighted average rate of 6.49%.

Later, the RBI came up with a second VRRR auction announcement to suck out ₹50,000 crore (notified amount). At this auction, banks offered to park ₹41,804 crore. The RBI accepted these offers at a weighted average rate of 6.49%.

Gopal Tripathi, Head, Treasury and Capital Markets, Jana Small Finance Bank, said after the first VRRR auction, some banks would have still been left with surplus funds. So, they would have approached the RBI for deploying these funds. Hence, it conducted the second VRRR auction.

The overnight money market rate has slid to about 6.30% against 6.50% to 6.75% last week. So, the RBI seems to be trying to re-anchor the rate at higher levels in keeping with withdrawal of accommodation stance. The overall liquidity deficit in the banking system has shrunk to about ₹1.22-lakh crore as on February 5 against about ₹3.46-lakh crore as on January 24.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

With solar industry in crisis, Europe in a bind over imports from China

Announcements of production closures are piling up, and the sector has warned half of its capacity could shut within weeks unless governments step in; governments and industry are split over how to help; Europe wants to grow local clean technology manufacturing

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters STRASBOURG, FRANCE/LONDON

urope's green energy transition is stuck between a rock and a hard place.

A flood of cheap Chinese solar panel imports is driving record solar energy installations. But those same imports are crushing Europe's few local solar manufacturers.

Governments and industry are split over how to respond.

Record solar capacity

Europe just had a bumper year for green energy. European Union countries installed record levels of solar capacity, 40% more than in 2022.

The vast majority of those panels and parts came from China - in some cases, 95%, International Energy Agency data

Yet, the green energy boom hasn't helped Europe's few local solar panel manufacturers, which have hit a crisis point, crushed by cheaper imports and oversupply. Announcements of production closures are piling up, and the sector has warned half of its capacity could shut within weeks unless governments step in.

Policymakers are scram-



bling to respond, but are split over how to do so.

German Economy Minister Robert Habeck wrote to the European Commission in November, expressing concern that the EU executive was about to slap trade restrictions on Chinese solar imports, a letter seen by Reuters showed.

"I have heard that the Commission may be intending to impose safeguard measures against imports of photovoltaic (PV) modules from China. I have very strong concerns about this," the letter said.

Mr. Habeck warned restricting Chinese imports could kill off Europe's rapid expansion of green

The green energy boom hasn't helped Europe's few local solar panel manufacturers, which have hit a crisis point, crushed by cheaper imports and oversupply

energy and make 90% of the PV market more expensive. It risked bankruptcies among EU companies that assemble and install solar panels using imported parts, he said.

A spokesperson for Germany's Economy Ministry declined to comment on the letter.

Germany's

planned support for the sector has been thrown into turmoil by a government budget crisis.

Elsewhere, Spain has not ruled out tariffs on imports of solar panel materials. The Netherlands wants to cover solar PV imports with the EU's carbon border tax, a government official told Reuters. And Italy last week announced a €90 million (\$97 million) investment in a PV panel factory in Sicily.

Price war

In a speech on Monday on the solar sector's problems, EU Financial Services Commissioner Mairead McGuinness offered no new support. She pointed to EU measures already underway, including a law due to be finalised on Tuesday, which aims at fasttracking permits for local manufacturing and giving products made in the EU, such as panels, an advantage in future clean tech tenders. On trade restric-

tions, Ms. McGuinness

struck a cautious tone.

"Given that we currently rely to a very important degree on imports to reach EU solar deployment targets, any potential measure needs to be weighed against the objectives we have set ourselves when it comes to the energy transition," she said.

The industry itself is divided over the solution. So-

lar manufacturers have urged governments to step in to buy up excess inventories of solar modules to ease the oversupply - and, if this cannot be done fast, consider trade barriers.

But the broader green energy industry is opposed to import curbs.

"You can't reduce dependency on China in the short term or you don't build the projects," Miguel Stilwell d'Andrade, CEO of Portuguese utility EDP, told Reuters.

Inflationary impact

He noted solar panel prices have climbed in the United States, which has duties on Chinese imports. "It is having an inflationary impact ... the price of panels is more than double that of Europe," he said.

Even local manufacturers say hopes of a competitive local industry are dim.

Europe is in a "price war" with China, said Gunter Erfurt, CEO of Swiss panel maker Meyer Burger, which plans to close its loss-making German solar module factory, citing an absence of supportive European policies.

With some Chinese solar firms able to sell even below production costs, Europe is playing catch up.

"The solar industry in China has been strategically subsidised with hundreds of billions of dollars for years," Mr. Gunter Erfurt told Reuters.

Tinkering with nature?



Not a sustainable model: Protesters hold placards during a demonstration against new genomic techniques as part of a wave of protest accross Europe against green reforms, outside the European Parliament in Strasbourg, eastern France. EU Chief Ursula von der Leyen recommended the bloc bury a plan to cut pesticide use in agriculture as a concession to protesting European farmers. Farmers are demanding lower fuel taxes, better prices for products and an easing of EU environmental regulations. AFP

India to stay alert for 'hot money' after bond index inclusion: official

Reuters

India will monitor flows of foreign funds after its inclusion into JPMorgan's emerging market debt index and take steps to avoid 'hot money' that can trigger volatility in currency and bond markets, a senior government official said.

"We will keep monitoring it. And when necessary, steps will be taken," T. V. Somanathan, a senior Finance Ministry official told Reuters in an interview.

The aim will be to "prevent volatility or volatile inflows" but "never" to resoutflows, Somanathan said, adding all possibilities are open to keep volatility in check.



Orderly flows: The aim will be to 'prevent volatility or volatile inflows' but 'never' to restrict outflows, says Somanathan. REUTERS

However, any talk about measures right now is "hypothetical."

Last year, JPMorgan announced it will include some Indian bonds in the Government Bond Index-

Emerging Markets and its

ministration leans heavily

on private companies to

cut the costs of its trips to

the moon. At present,

there are no U.S. laws or

standards outlining what is

acceptable on the celestial

index suite from June, which could lead to incremental inflows of around

\$23 billion. Foreign investment in Indian government bonds jumped in the last three

months, when investors

₹446 hillion (\$5.3) Mr. Somanathan said the government's main

bought securities worth

concern with index investors was that some of these longer-term investors "come in passively and leave passively" and the exit does not always reflect economic conditions on the ground.

On government's borrowing, Mr. Somanathan said New Delhi was likely to raise nearly ₹200 billion through sovereign green bonds in 2024/25 fiscal.

"Within that total borrowing programme, some component is likely to be green bonds. Likely to be around the same level as last year but a final decision has not been taken."

Moon cargo like human ashes, drink containers spark legal debate

Reuters WASHINGTON

An array of unconventional, privately-funded plans to exploit the moon, including as a site for human ashes and sports-drink containers, has gathered steam in recent years as NASA pushes to make Earth's natural satellite more accessible.

Concerns about possible gaps in U.S. oversight and legal questions about proper use of the moon have rocketed to the forefront.

Landers built by private companies and emerging space powers are expected in the next few years to join the U.S. flag and other vestiges of past programmes to the moon.

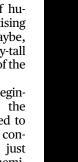
Other initiatives could

include using the moon as a site for capsules of human remains, advertising sports drinks, and maybe, even a two-storey-tall Christian cross made of the moon's own dirt.

"We're just at the beginning of exploring the moon, and ... we need to

Human ashes

Among the payloads aboard a recent private moon mission by U.S. company Astrobotic - which ultimately failed to reach the moon's surface – were dozens of capsules of human ashes and a can of Ja-



be careful we're not contaminating it - not just with biological and chemical contamination but with litter," said Leslie Tennen, an attorney practicing international space law.

Grey areas: The lack of guidelines has some eyeing possibilities. REUTERS

panese sports drink Pocari Sweat. The exact purpose of the can was unclear. Under U.S. law, those

items and anything else

can go to the moon, as long

as the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and other agencies certify a rocket payload's launch off Earth does not "jeopardise public health and safety ...

U.S. national security ... or international obligations of the United States." The issue will gain more

attention as the National Aeronautics and Space Adbody's surface. NASA envisions long-term moon bases and hopes to spur a competitive commercial marketplace. **Absence of norms**

Lawyers with space-law expertise worry that the absence of regulations could pit U.S. companies against other countries operating on the lunar surface or spark international disputes over which private endeavors could be considered land appropriation or claims of sovereignty.

The lack of guidelines has some eyeing the possi-

bilities. Justin Park, a Washington, D.C.-based entrepreneur, wants to build a Christian cross on the moon as big as a twostorey building and made of hardened lunar dirt, an estimated \$1 billion undertaking he has discussed with U.S. lawmakers and Catholic organidations.

"Nobody owns the moon," Mr. Park said. "You don't want to stomp on traditions, but you can't hold the rest of the world back." Overly restrictive regulations for moon activities, he said, would "destroy an industry before it gets off the ground."

'Religious test' Texas-based

Celestis, which launches cremated human remains into space and had arranged the ash-

es on Astrobotic's Peregrine lander, drew ire from the Navajo Nation, which regards the moon as sacred and considered the company's memorial mission sacrilege.

Celestis CEO Charles Schafer said memorials of the dead in space are inevitable as more humans traverse the cosmos. "We don't make space mission decisions on the basis of a religious test," Mr. Schafer said. "I have a photo of 20,000 Buddhist monks celebrating our launch. So which religion rules?"

NASA officials overseeing the programme that helped fund Astrobotic's mission said they have no control over what firms put on landers, and that payload standards could be created in the future.

DIFFERENT TEMPO

Root is losing balance and natural game in Bazball era: Cook



K.R. DEEPAK

Joe Root's desperation to fit into skipper Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum's 'Bazball' plans is making him lose his "balance" and natural game, feels Alastair Cook. "He is England's best batter there's ever been in all formats – but he does struggle sometimes with the tempo of this Bazball era," Cook said.

GETTING INTO THE GROOVE

Expect India to come back even harder in remaining Tests: Hussain



Nasser Hussain believes that India's win in the second Test over England has set up the rest of the series perfectly. "I think it will be a tight series but England is going to have to expect India to come back even harder... I would expect a stronger Indian side in those last three games of the series." Hussain said

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

We don't do theories, will find way to counter Bumrah: McCullum



K.R. DEEPAK

England was at the receiving end of Jasprit Bumrah's sensational spell in the second Test. "We don't really do theories. It is about making sure the guys are totally clear and present, confident and have conviction in their method," McCullum said on how his players will tackle the star Indian pacer.

IMPRESSIVE

Jaiswal's was a stunning innings: Atherton on Visakhapatnam knock



Former England cricketer Michael Atherton lauded Yashasvi Jaiswal, calling his innings "stunning". "Some of the sixes he hit were very powerfully struck showing that he had the drive and desire to make himself into a great cricketer. He also took the game on in T20 style which all the players have now. I thought it was a stunning innings."

Sachin and Saharan deliver in chase as India makes final

The in-form batters join forces to string together a 171-run partnership to help the team scrape through to a two-wicket win with seven balls remaining, after South Africa leaves it in tatters at 32 for four

U-19 WORLD CUP

Press Trust of India BENONI

efending champion India, powered by splendid knocks from skipper Uday Saharan and Sachin Dhas, battled past South Africa by two wickets in an exciting contest and stormed into the final for the fifth consecutive time in the ICC Under-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

Sachin (96, 95b, 11x4, 1x6) and Saharan (81, 124b, 6x4), the guiding force in the previous match against Nepal with a hundred each, garnered 171 runs for the fifth wicket as India hunted down the target of 245 with just seven balls to

India will face either Australia or Pakistan in the summit clash to be played at this venue on Sunday, searching for its sixth trophy in the marquee event.

But the beginning of Inlia's chase resembled a debris yard, as it lost four wickets for just 32 runs in the 12th over.

But the Indians found their saviours in Sachin and Saharan, who dished out innings of vastly contrasting nature and tempo. Sachin was aggressive despite the situation his team was in, but Saharan was happy to keep his end

Sachin reached his fifty in 47 balls, fittingly, with a pull off pacer Riley Norton





SCOREBOARD

and Saharan reached his

half-century in 88 balls

with a cover drive off off-

considerable assistance.

rious (76, 102b, 6x4, 3x6)

and Richard Seletswane

(64, 100b, 4x4, 2x6) after

early blows, but those ef-

forts were not enough.

389 runs.

SOUTH AFRICA Lhuan-dre Pretorius c Abhishek b

spinner Juan James. In the Musheer 76 (102b, 6x4, 3x6), process, Saharan also be-Steve Stolk c Avanish b Limbani came the highest run-get-14 *(17b, 2x4, 1x6)*, David Teeger b ter in this World Cup with Limbani 0 (2b), Richard Seletswane c Moliya b Tiwari 64 Earlier, bowlers played a (100b, 4x4, 2x6), Oliver significant part in shaping Whitehead c Dhas b Musheer 22 India's victory, limiting (34b, 4x4), Dewan Marais c 2014 champions South Abhishek b Saumy 3 (7b), Juan James c Avanish b Limbani 24 Africa to 244 for seven on a pitch that offered them (19b, 1x4, 1x6), Riley Norton (not out) 7 (7b, 1x4), Tristan Luus (not out) 23 (12b, 1x4, 2x6); Extras South Africa found fight (b-1, lb-1, w-9): 11; Total (for through Lhuan-dre Preto-

seven wkts. in 50 overs): 244. **FALL OF WICKETS** 1-23 (Stolk, 4.5 overs), 2-46 (Teeger, 8.1), 3-118 (Pretorius,

5-174 (Marais, 42.2), 6-214

30.2), 4-163 (Whitehead, 39.6),

(Seletswane, 46.3), 7-220 (James,

INDIA BOWLING Limbani 9-0-60-3. Tiwari 8-0-52-1.

Abhishek 4-0-14-0, Arshin 2-0-10-0, Saumy 10-0-38-1, Musheer 10-1-43-2, Moliya

INDIA

Adarsh Singh c Pretorius b Maphaka 0 (1b), Arshin Kulkarni c James b Luus 12 (30b, 1x6), Musheer Khan c James b Luus 4 (12b), Uday Saharan run out 81 (124b, 6x4), Priyanshu Moliya c Pretorius b Luus 5 (10b. 1x4). Sachin Dhas c Teeger b Maphaka 96 (95b, 11x4, 1x6), Aravelly Avanish c Norton b Maphaka 10 (18b, 1x4), Murugan Abhishek run out 0 (1b), Raj Limbani (not out) 13 (4b, 1x4, 1x6), Naman Tiwari

(not out) 0 (0b); Extras (lb-2, nb-2, w-23): 27; Total (for eight wkts. in 48.5 overs): 248

FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Adarsh, 0.1), 2-8 (Musheer, 3.2), 3-25 (Arshin, 9.2), 4-32 (Moliya, 11.2), 5-203 (Dhas, 42.1), 6-226 (Avanish, 46.6), 7-227 (Abhishek, 47.2), 8-244 (Saharan,

SOUTH AFRICA BOWLING

Maphaka 10-0-32-3, Luus 10-1-37-3, Norton 9-0-53-0, Mokoena 7.5-0-45-0, Stolk 2-0-18-0, James 8-0-44-0, Whitehead 2-0-17-0.

Toss: India; PoM: Saharan. India won by two wickets with seven balls remaining. Final: Feb. 11: India vs winner of Australia vs. Pakistan (second

semifinal).

Rohit's men showed they had the depth and resilience to bounce back

ENGLAND IN INDIA

P.K. Ajith Kumar VISAKHAPATNAM

The mood must have been sombre in the Indian team's dressing room after the first Test ended in Hyderabad. India had lost after taking a lead of 190.

That was not all. K.L. Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja got injured. The two key men who did well in the Hyderabad Test were not available for the second. And there was no Virat Kohli. And, of course, there was no Mohammed Shami, either. Rishabh Pant was still recovering from his injuries from the terrible car accident.

So India took the hourlong flight from Hyderabad to Visakhapatnam without nearly half of its best possible eleven. It was facing an England team that had been playing a confident, attacking brand of cricket and winning in all parts of the world, the victory at Hyderabad adding to its

But, this Indian team is unlike the previous ones. It has the ability to bounce back after a chastening defeat. Only a month ago it defeated South Africa inside two days on a seamers' paradise at Cape Town, right after an innings defeat at Centurion.

This Indian team has the depth and resilience to overcome the loss of the biggest stars.

Remember Brisbane 2021? So many players were injured that India had to look at its net bowlers to



Buzzing again: India showed tremendous fighting spirit to win the second Test after the setback in the first. K.R. DEEPAK

put together an eleven. Captain Kohli had already left to attend the birth of his first child. And it was a series in which India was bowled out for 36 in the first Test.

Greatest victory

Yet, India won in Brisbane, breaching Australia's fortress at the Gabba and that remains India's greatest Test victory.

The win scored here on Monday may not have been as thrilling, as dramatic or as soul-stirring, but it is important and should count among the finest. It was a perfect Test win by a team that had been made less than perfect by circumstances.

Bat first, put up a large enough total with at least one batter willing to play a patient innings in these impatient times and then make the rival chase the game, with Bazball or whatever style it prefers, and give it a big target - 399 to chase, even if one of its players expresses the confidence that they would be ready to chase 600. Rahul Dravid and his

boys should be proud of the victory. This was not a win achieved on a wicket where the ball began to turn even before the match began. This was a proper Test match pitch that offered something to the batter, the seamer and the spinner. That was the case at Hyderabad, too.

It wasn't the spinners who turned the match in India's favour here. It was the genius of Jasprit

What Bumrah did on the second day of the match defied belief. Bazball had no answer to his reverse swing. Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis would have been proud of that spell. Yashasvi Jaiswal. who scored a double hundred, is 22. Shubman Gill, who made a secondinnings hundred ending a frustrating run, is 24.

anything but sombre in the Indian dressing room now.

The mood must be

Foden's hat-trick fires City closer to the top

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse LONDON

Phil Foden scored a hat-trick as Manchester City came from behind to beat Brentford 3-1 on Monday and leave the Premier League's top three separated by just two points.

City moves alongside Arsenal on 49 points, two behind Liverpool, but Pep Guardiola's men have a

became the first side in Pre- hat-trick after the break. Ci- Stadio Olimpico on Monmier League history to win ty's rivals for the title may day to notch a third four consecutive away games rue not opening up an ad-straight Serie A win under despite falling behind in all vantage while De Bruyne Daniele De Rossi. of them. Neal Maupay fired and Haaland were sidelined the Bees in front, but there by injury in recent months as was little doubt over the out- it looks primed to become come once Foden levelled in the first side to ever win four 53, 70). LaLiga: Rayo Vallecano 1 first-half stoppage time.

Kevin De Bruyne and Er-flight titles. ling Haaland then teed up



game in hand to move out in Hot streak: Foden eases in City's third against Brentford. AP

The defending champion complete his second career thumping of Cagliari at the consecutive English top-

Paulo Dybala scored twice 4 (Pellegrini 2, Dybala 23, 51-pen, the England international to as Roma eased to a 4-0 Huijsen 59) bt Cagliari 0.

The results: Premier League: Brentford 1 (Maupay 21) lost to Manchester City 3 (Foden 45+3, (Palazon 29) lost to Sevilla 2 (En-Nesyri 19, 45). Serie A: Roma

MUMBAI OPEN

Kamesh Srinivasan MUMBAI

Qualifier Shrivalli Bhamidipaty and wild card entrant Rutuja Bhosale joined Sahaja Yamalapalli in the prequarterfinals of the L&T Mumbai Open WTA tennis tournament at the CCI courts here on Tuesday.

Shrivalli bounced back from a slow start to beat the second seed Nao Hibino of Japan in the third set tie-break. She was able to step up her game and closed it out against the tough Japanese, ranked in the top-100. With the confidence of

having already negotiated two matches in the qualifying round, Shrivalli handled the ebb and flow of the match with equanimity, unleashing her strong strokes at every opportunity. At 6-4 in the tie-break, Shrivalli perhaps felt the nerves and delivered a double fault. The Japanese, however, hit long on the next point to tumble out.

Shrivalli will get the chance to gauge her game against the 16-year-old sensation Alina Korneeva, who has already won three titles in the women's

Rutuja had earlier in the day overcome a sedate start and a crafty Peangtarn Plipuech by sticking to her game plan. Ankita Raina played

well but was unable to progress as she was up against the young and energetic eighth seed Katie Volynets of the USA.

There was more for the home fans, as Prarthana Thombare combined with Arianne Hartone of the Netherlands to beat the Thais, Luksika Kumkhum and Plipuech 10-6 in the super tie-break of the doubles pre-quarterfinals.

Kumkhum had won the singles at the same venue last time when the event was held in 2018.

Sahaja, who had beaten the top seed Kayla Day on Monday, will next play the champion of the last tournament in Indore, Polina Kudermetova.

Shrivalli gets past second seed Nao Hibino

The results: First round: Polina Kudermetova bt Anastasia Zakharova 7-6(8), 6-0; Amandine

Hesse (Fra) bt Lina Glushko (Isr) 6-1, 6-1; Arina Rodionova (Aus) bt Suzan Lamens (Ned) 6-2, 7-5; Moyuka Uchijima (Jpn) bt Carole Monnet (Fra) 6-3, 6-3; Dalma Galfi (Hun) bt Kimberly Birrell (Aus) 6-2, 4-6, 7-5; Katie Volynets (USA) bt Ankita Raina 6-4, 6-2; Rutuja Bhosale bt Peangtarn Plipuech (Tha) 6-4, 7-5; Camilla Rosatello (Ita) bt Anastasia Tikhonova 7-5, 3-6, 6-2: Storm Hunter (Aus) bt Fanny Stollar 3-0 (retired); Shrivalli Bhamidipaty bt Nao Hibino (Jpn) 2-6, 6-1, 7-6(5).

Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals: Valentini Grammatikopoulou (Gre) & Darja Semenistaja (Lat) bt Polina Kudermetova & Suzan Lamens (Ned) 7-6(7), 6-4; Arianne Hartono (Ned) & Prarthana

Thombare bt Luksika Kumkhum & Peangtarn Plipuech (Tha) 6-4, 2-6. [10-6]; Anastasia Tikhonova & Moyuka Uchijima (Jpn) bt Julia Lohoff (Ger) & Conny Perrin (Sui)





Narender and Sahil shine as Thalaivas stay in the hunt

Tamil Thalaivas kept its hopes of reaching the playoffs alive with a 32-25 win over U.P. Yoddhas in Delhi on Tuesday. Thalaivas' raider Narender scored an impressive Super 10 while skipper and defender Sahil Gulia got a High 5. Thalaivas moved to eighth, just two places below the playoff spots.

India to tour Zimbabwe for five-match T20I series in July

Indian men's team will tour Zimbabwe for a five-match T20I series starting July 6, the BCCI announced on Tuesday. The series is unlikely to feature any top Indian players as it has been the case during previous tours of the African nation. The five matches will be held at the Harare Sports Club on July 6, 7, 10, 13, and 14.

India enters SAFF u-19 women's football final

Neha struck twice in the second half as India defeated Nepal 4-0 in its last league match to storm into the final of the SAFF under-19 women's football championship in Dhaka on Tuesday. India will face defending champion Bangladesh in the title clash on Thursday. Neha scored in the 54th and 80th minutes while Sulanjana Raul (85th) and Cindy Remruatpuii Colney (90+3) got the other goals for India.

TN women and Rajasthan men advance to quarterfinals

Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Odisha women advanced to the quarterfinals of the Junior National basketball championship in Bhubaneshwar on Tuesday. In the men's event, Rajasthan's Muhammad Ishan scored 29 points, leading his team to a win over Karnataka.

Other results: Men: Rajasthan 92 (Muhammad Ishan 29, Akshith Hooda 21, Banti Choudhary 20) bt Karnataka 61 (Avinash Nayak 22, N.M. Vishnu 12); Kerala 96 (Krishnalal Mukesh 19, Muhammed Sahal 18, Mohammed Irfan 14, Jims K. Joby 10) bt Mizoram 65 (Lalhmachhuana 33, Abrham Lallawmawma 11); Punjab 86 (Bhanu Pratap Singh 32, Jaddu Maan 19, Shibbjit Singh 13, Babbu Maan 10) bt MP 64 (Goutam Pal 18, Bhagath Singh 15, Ajay 12). Women: Maharashtra 81 (Ananya Bhavsar 23, Sanika Phule 22, Mansi Nirmal 15, Bhumika Sarje 12) bt Karnataka 80 (M.K. Yashaswini 20, Adhya Nagalingam 13, S. Sanjana 13); TN 89 (Harima Sundari 26, T.S. Chnchanna 17, Ruth Anna Blessen 15) bt Kerala 73 (Amanda Maria Rocha 24, P.A. Akla 20, Liva Sonda 15): MP 70 (Kushi Pal Singh 21, Ananya Maheswari 17) bt Uttar Pradesh 53 (Ruby Rajput 10); Punjab 74 (Manmeet Kaur 22, Komal Preet Kaur 16, Anchal 16, Nadar Dhillon 15) bt Chhattisgarh 63 (D. Anusha 13, Ishika Singh 12, Janat Ali 11); AP 58 (A. Tally 20, Hasini 11) bt Jharkhand 57 (Ashmi 21).

Anirudh and Vijay Sundar enter Dallas quarterfinals

Anirudh Chandrasekar and Vijay Sundar Prashanth knocked out the second seeds Nathaniel Lammons and Jackson Withrow of USA 6-4, 7-6(2) in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the \$841,590 ATP tennis tournament in Dallas, USA.

Formula One agrees to sprint format change

Formula One's governing body, FIA, on Monday proposed a change to its sprint format for weekend races for the 2024 season which gets underway in Bahrain later this month. Free practice and sprint qualifying are now set to take place on the Fridays of sprint weekends, with the sprint races and qualifying for Sundays' races to take place on Saturdays. Like last year, six sprint races will take place this season, in China, Miami, Austria, Austin, Brazil and Qatar. A proposal to increase the Power Unit allocation to four per driver for the 2024 and 2025 seasons was agreed. The regulatory refinements for these changes will be presented to the World Motorsport Council on Feb. 28.

Manchester United's Martinez out for at least eight weeks

Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez will be out for at least eight weeks after sustaining knee ligament damage, the club said. The Argentina international was injured on Sunday during a 3-0 win over West Ham in the Premier League. United said he suffered medial collateral ligament damage to his right knee. Martinez had only just returned to action last month after undergoing surgery on his right foot.

Malik downs Tushir, wins freestyle 74kg crown

The latter gives a close chase despite hurting his right ankle early in the contest; in another match, 2022 World junior bronze medallist Kalkal beats Rohit to take the 65kg title

NATL. WRESTLING

Y.B. Sarangi JAIPUR

ommonwealth Games gold medallist Naveen Malik overcame a robust challenge from Yash Tushir to win the men's freestyle 74kg, one of the most competitive weight classes, in the National wrestling championships and put himself in a strong position for the Olympic qualifying

Malik edged past former World junior bronze medallist Tushir 5-4 in a neckand-neck summit clash, in which the latter gave a close chase despite hurting his right ankle early in the

Tushir fought back to erase a three-point deficit, but Malik's second takedown fetched him a crucial 5-3 lead. Tushir gave his best despite the pain but could manage to bridge only one more point as Malik escaped thrice from leg attacks.

In another competitive Olympic weight, 2022 World junior bronze me-



Tough fight: Malik, right, edged past Tushir 5-4. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

dallist Sujeet Kalkal recorded five comprehensive wins to take the 65kg crown. He employed his swift attacks and fine defensive skills to convincingly beat Rohit 12-2 in the

Due to a large number of entries and a delayed start, the freestyle bouts continued well past midnight on the concluding day of the championships.

The medallists:

Freestyle: 57kg: 1. Rabul (Tri), 2. Arvind Kumar (WB), 3. Udit (RSPB), Kuldeep (Goa); 65kg: 1. Suieet Kalkal (Har), 2. Rohit (SSCB), 3. Mangal (Guj), Anuj (Goa). 70kg: 1. Parveen (Har), 2. Sahil (Man), 3 Sharwan (SSCB), Naveen (Goa); 74kg: 1. Naveen Malik (SSCB), 2. Yash Tushir (RSPB), 3. Chander Mohan (Har), Rahul (Goa); 79kg: 1. Sagar

Jaglan (RSPB), 2. Parvinder Singh (Man), 3. Sachin Mor (Tri), Vijay (A&N); 86kg: 1. Sanjeet (SSCB), 2. Rahul Rathi (Skm), 3. Munir Ahmed (J&K), Deepak (WB).

92kg: 1. Akash (RSPB), 2. Parveen (Har), 3. Neeraj (Man), Parveen Chahar (Chg); 97kg: 1. Vicky (Har), 2. Karandeep Singh Nahal (Pun), 3. Gaurav Baliyan (UP), Deepak (SSCB)

125kg: 1. Anirudh (RSPB), 2. Dinesh (SSCB), 3. Mahendra (Mah), Monu Dahiya (Del).

Nikhat, Sakshi begin with victories

STRANDJA MEMORIAL

Agencies

Nikhat Zareen and Sakshi Chaudhary began their campaign with contrasting victories in the 75th Strandja memorial boxing tournament on Monday.

Nikhat defeated Mongolia's Oyuntsetseg Yesugen 3-2 in a split decision verdict in a 50kg bout and will face Lkhadiri Wassila of France in the quarterfinals on Thursday.

On the other hand, Sakshi (57kg) outclassed Selmouni Chahira 5-0 and will take on Mamajonova Khumorabonu of Uzbekistan in the last-eight clash on Thursday.

Preeti lost 2-3 to Niamh Fay of Ireland in the 54kg.

Lovlina disqualified

Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) was disqualified in the third round of her prequarterfinal after three warnings of excessive grappling against Ireland's O'Rourke Aoife.

Australia, Spain arrive for FIH Pro League matches

<u>ANI</u> BHUBANESWAR

Australia and Spain men's

hockey teams landed here to begin their FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-24 campaign.

The hockeyroos finished seventh in the previous edition with 19 points. Australia will take on Spain in its first match on February 11, followed by a clash against Ireland on February 13.

Australia will take on host India on February 15. before facing Netherlands in the final match of the Bhubaneswar leg on February 16.

Spain will meet India on February 10, followed by the contest against Austra-

It will then take on Netherlands on February 13 and Ireland on February 15 in its final fixture of the Bhubaneswar leg before heading to Rourkela.

Australia completes clean sweep in style

WI IN AUS

Agence France-Presse

Australia needed just 6.5 overs to thrash West Indies by eight wickets in an embarrassing end to its One-Day International series in Canberra on Tuesday, with Jake Fraser-McGurk slamming 41 off 18 balls

Australia skipper Steve Smith won the toss and sent it to bat it crumbled to 86 all out in the 25th over.

Australia plundered the runs needed with 259 balls remaining to cap a stunning capitulation.

The scores:

West Indies 86 in 24.1 overs (Alick Athanaze 32, Bartlett 4/21) lost to Australia 87/2 in 6.5 overs (Fraser-McGurk 41, Josh Inglis 35

Williamson's twin tons give NZ firm grip

Agence France-Presse MOUNT MAUNGANUI

Kane Williamson crafted his second century of the match on Tuesday as New Zealand took complete command of the first Test on day three against South Africa here.

Daryl Mitchell was on 11 and Tom Blundell on five, with the Black Caps looking to declare early on Wednesday with South Africa facing a mammoth target. The roteas were dismissed for 162 before tea.

The scores: New Zealand 511 & 179/4 in 43 overs (Kane Williamson 109) vs South Africa 162 in 72.5 overs (Keegan Petersen 45, David Bedingham 32. Henry 3/31. Santner 3/34).

Nagal eases past Prajwal; Mukund stops Kasnikowski

CHENNAI OPEN

K. Keerthivasan CHENNAI

India's Sumit Nagal and S. Mukund posted contrasting wins in the first round of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger tennis championship here on Tuesday.

India's top player Nagal had an easy day at the office, beating qualifier S.D. Prajwal Dev 6-1, 6-2 while wild card entrant Mukund eked out a fighting 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 victory over Maks Kasnikowski of Poland in two hours and 25 minutes.

Earlier, in the first match at the Centre Court, Australia's Bernard Tomic, a former top 20 player in the world, changed all his six T-shirts in hot and humid conditions to defeat Olaf Pieczkowski of Poland 2-6, 6-4, 7-6(2). Tomic will take on the top-seed Luca Nardi of Italy in the second round.

Mukund led 5-3 in the



Walk in the park: Nagal hardly broke sweat against Prajwal. R. RAGU

third set and even had a match point on the Pole's serve in the ninth game, but failed to capitalise. Mukund finally sealed the match in the 11th game when Kasnikowski's backhand went wide.

Prajwal was no match for Nagal in the first set. However, in the second set, the qualifier got his groundstrokes going from the baseline and started to trouble Nagal. He, howevwasn't consistent enough.

Nagal will meet Giovanni Fonio of Italy in the second round. "It was a good first round match. I played solid in the two sets. It was unfortunate that two Indians ended up playing each other," Nagal said.

The results:

Luca Nardi (Ita) bt Eric Vanshelboim (Ukr) 6-2, 6-2; Sumit Nagal bt S. D. Prajwal Dev 6-1, 6-2; Dalibor Svrcina (Cze) bt Bogdan Bobrov (Rus) 6-3, 2-6, 6-2; Ugo Blanchet (Fra) bt Jonas Forejtek (Cze) 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (5); Samuel Vincent Ruggeri (Ita) bt Aziz Dougaz (Tun) 6-3, 6-3: Bernard Tomic (Aus) bt Olaf Pieczkowski (Pol) 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (2); S. Mukund bt Maks Kasnikowski (Pol) 6-3, 4-6, 7-5; Evgeny Donskoy (Rus) bt Tung-Lin Wu (Tpe) 3-2 (retd.).

CAS to hear Halep's appeal against doping ban

Associated Press

Former top-ranked tennis player Simona Halep will go to sport's highest court on Wednesday to challenge her four-year ban in a doping case.

The Court of Arbitraon for Sport said on Tuesday that Halep plans to attend in person when the appeal opens for a closed-doors hearing scheduled over three days. The court said in a statement, "No indication can be given as to when the final arbitral award will be notified to parties."

Two-time Grand Slam champion Halep aims to overturn the ban which runs into October 2026.

Halep tested positive for roxadustat at the 2022 U.S. Open to begin a case that became more complex when investigators detected alleged irregularities in her biological passport.

This could finish as the finest series ever played in India



Suresh Menon

This England series is promising to be the most exciting played in India. The teams know how Bazball can succeed as well as how it fails. That knowledge will be important over the next three Tests as each team begins to move closer to the style the other plays in. England might learn that sometimes defence is the better part of valour while India could abandon some of its overcautious approach. It will be fun to watch the process.

England had said they would chase 600 even. But it is usually prudent to have an anchor around

whom the others can play. Bazball ought not to mean jettisoning past lessons. On a fourth-day track that was still kind to batters, Joe Root would have been the key in the pre-Bazball days. Here he played with the desperation of a schoolboy trying to impress his coach. As if to compensate, Ben Stokes attempted a run in that casual manner peculiar to those who don't want to appear desperate. Both paid the At the end of the first Test which England won,

skipper Stokes said he had learnt from his counterpart. Well might Rohit Sharma have returned the compliment after the Vizag Test. He still had a tendency to go on the defensive easily, but where it mattered he attacked in the finest Bazball manner. Youngsters Yashasvi Jaiswal and Shubhman Gill stroked freely and often, and whenever India needed a wicket, the great Jasprit Bumrah obliged. Not since Bhagwat

Chandrasekhar has there been an Indian bowler who threatened every time he had the ball in hand. unplayable ball seemed to be just around the corner.

The manner in which the yorker made a mess of the stumps (Ollie Pope, Stokes) was a physical treat, but there were intellectual treats too (Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow), as when a batter was set up and then fooled by the angle or pace of the delivery. Is Bumrah already the greatest fast bowler India have produced?

Watching two masters at work – Jimmy Anderson at

41 still has more tricks up his sleeve than a card sharp – was further indication this might be the finest home series, with every chance of it going into the fifth Test all-square.

Some fifty years ago, India and the West Indies were locked 2-2. India lost the first two Tests to Clive Lloyd's team still finding its

feet, then won the next two, orchestrated by skipper Tiger Pataudi. Lloyd himself made a double century in the decider. Two youngsters who made their debut were Viv Richards and Gordon Greenidge; fast bowler Andy Roberts in only his second series showed what a force he would become with 32 wickets. Alvin Kallicharran made a classy century in Bengaluru. Gundappa Viswanath

held India's batting togeth-

er. The spin quartet helped bowl out the West Indies for under 250 four times in succession. It was a rebirth of Indian cricket following a 3-0 thrashing in England.

Amidst the modern fashion of two-Test and one-off Test matches, a five-Test series is necessary to unfurl the possibilities of the format. And one like this which imitates the ebbs and flows of a single match makes a mockery of the fears for the survival of Test cricket. Much of the credit for this should go to the England team which has adopted a style of play that is both attractive and vulnerable. It is a winning combination for the spectator, and never mind if the match ends in four days. Often this happens only because there is a fifth day available.

England have taken

aboard the possibility of defeat. At any rate it would be bad faith to change their recent approach at the first sign of vulnerability. A retreat would negate all the excellent work done so far. Bazball is not for all teams. It needs a combination of coach and captain that England have to even contemplate it.

Exceptional

Stokes is an exceptional cricketer and captain. He is moving towards that rarefied place occupied by great predecessors like Mike Brearley, Ray Illingworth, Andrew Strauss. Perhaps he is there alrea-

Captaincy will continue to play a major role in this series. Any future assessment of captains will be based at least partly on what happens here.

Sahaja revives promise with riveting fare

The 22-year-old, who stunned the top seed Kayla Day in the first round of the WTA tennis tournament in Mumbai, said she was really glad that she was able to pull it off since it was not only a big win for her at this point of her career, but also one which motivated her towards achieving more success

WTA

Kamesh Srinivasan

tay calm and face the storm. If possible, be the storm for your

That has been the guiding principle for Sahaja Yamalapalli who stunned the top seed Kayla Day in the first round of the WTA tennis tournament in

Two weeks of training and interaction with Ashley Hobson during her last stint of tournaments in the USA had made the 22-year-old Sahaja see her tennis in a different perspective. More importantly, she understood the meaning of staying in the moment, being aware of what was happening on court, thinking and playing smart, depending on the demands of the situation. She has learnt to enjoy the challenge thrown at her by every opponent and find her way.

Sahaja had beaten the 158th-ranked Ekaterina Makarova in winning her last title, the \$25,000 event in Solapur. However, after that she won one match in four tournaments in Navi Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune and Indore.

Luckily, she not only got the wild card for the WTA event, but also had a long-time coach at the PBI in Bengaluru, Rituplawan Gogoi to travel for the event in

"He came to help me to get back my confidence and do some tweaks in my game because I was travelling without a coach for several weeks leading to Mumbai", said Sahaja, Understandably delighted to be able to play her best when facing her first top-100 opponent, Sahaja put things in perspective, expressing her gratitude.

Very high level

"I was happy and grateful to get this opportunity to play on the big stage. The level is very high. To be around these players, training with them, you get the confidence and belief that you belong here, I was telling myself that I can do this even though Kayla was first seed and top-100," said Sahaja.

To perform well one needs conviction in one's ability. "I just wanted to give everything out there and see what happens. In the end, when I got the match-points, I was shaking. Oh My God, am winning this! Am really glad that I was able to pull it off. It is a big win for me at this point of my career. This win is motivating. It pushes me to do bette train harder in practice. Go out there and get more wins," said Sahaja.

For many, the high quality of tennis



that Sahaja sustained for more than two hours and 30 minutes may have been a

surprise, but Sahaja knew what she was

capable of executing on the court.

"I know I can produce this quality of play. It is all mental. I was preparing myself, I can do this. Earlier when I was this close against a top-200 player, I did not come out on the winning side. At that time, I was a bit less confident. I wasn't sure that I could win that. This time all that experience helped me. I have the confidence to beat anyone," said Sahaja.

Quite remarkably, Sahaja tightened her game and built on her strengths to be able to match a top pro in her craft.

Augmenting fitness

"I have fitness and physical strength built over the years. My forehand has been my biggest strength in my game. Lately, I have been working a lot on the serve. I have big groundstrokes. My serve was only very decent. So I worked on it last

couple of weeks. Today, I was able to serve better than what I had in my earlier matches," said Sahaja.

To play great through the match is one thing, and to handle the climax well is really something.

"I did not play the second set well, made many unforced errors. She was solid. I was not hitting the ball well like I did in the first set. I was not able to control the points. I told myself that this had to stop. I can't let her dominate. Third set, I tried to go for it. Hit the balls I had to and not hold back. If I make it, I win, if I don't, it is ok. That match was on my racquet," recalled Sahaja.

Overcoming nerves

Missing two match-points, Sahaja overcame the nerves and could think clearly. "Anyone at that point would feel those nerves. At deuce, I said, I had to go for it. I was kind of holding back, hoping for her to miss. It was not going to happen

at this level. I had to take charge and create my opportunity. I was just going for it in the end," said Sahaja.

Anyone may be disheartened to face the top seed in the first round of a big event. But, Sahaja had waited for long to play Day.

"I had seen Kayla (Day), especially when I was in USA. I had watched a lot of her matches. I have been wanting to play her. I was kind of happy that I drew her. I wanted to see where I stand in terms of game level. I was thinking that this match would all come down to whether I make my shots or not. I had to stay in, step in, and hit those balls," said Sahaja.

Sahaja said she would continue to have fun on court and enjoy the challenge every opponent poses so as to achieve her goal for the season of getting into the qualifying events of the Grand Slams

For sure, Sahaja and company promise exciting times ahead for Indian women's

THE GIST

Sahaja had beaten the 158th-ranked Ekaterina Makarova in winning her last title, the \$25,000 event in Solapur. However, after that she won one match in four tournaments in Navi Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune and Indore

Anyone may be disheartened to face the top seed in the first round of a big event after the string of losses, but Sahaja says she had waited for long to play

Sahaja said she would continue to have fun on court and enjoy the challenge every opponent poses so as to achieve her goal for the season of getting into the qualifying events of the Grand Slams

Veteran and rising US women gymnasts all set to light up the 2024 Paris Olympic Games

Agence France-Presse

Superstar Simone Biles leads a list of veteran champions vying with a talented new generation aiming to make a US women's Olympic gymnastics team that could be one for the ages.

Biles, who dazzled in winning four gold medals at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016, returned last year from a two-year absence to win four world titles – taking her career tally to 23 as she battled back from the bout of the disorientating "twisties" that cut short her Tokyo Olympics campaign.

Sunisa Lee, who won Olympic all-around gold in Tokyo, and London 2012 all-around champion Gabby Douglas are also in training as what promises to be a hyper-competitive Olympic underway.

Add in Tokyo floor champion Jade Carey and team silver medallist Jordan Chiles, two-time world all-around medallist Shilese Jones and two-time world team champion Skye Blakely, it is clear the US has plenty of experienced talent to draw on.

"The depth this year is



actually really insane," said 17-year-old Joscelyn Roberson, who is hoping to be in the Paris 2024 conversation when Minneapolis hosts the US trials in June.

"I honestly think this

will be one of the best teams the United States has ever had and one of the best teams that the world has ever seen," Roberson said on Sunday at a media opportunity during a USA

Gymnastics training camp in Katy, Texas. "So it'll be really cool to

see. I honestly feel like the United States could make three teams and they'd all be amazing."

Roberson qualified for last year's World Cham-

US team win gold before her campaign was cut short by injury. Roberson has had Paris

pionships and helped the

"It's going to be tough,

2024 circled on her calenand I'm looking forward to dar for a while. "Probably from like

Big test

February 23-25.

June 22-30.

new blood.

The first big test for many

of America's hopefuls will

be the Winter Cup held on

The Core Hydration

Classic in May will be

another key competition

before the US champion-

ships on May 30-June 2,

with the US trials from

Alicia Sacramone Quinn

a former world champion

who won team silver at the

2008 Olympics and is now

part of the US women's

elite team leadership, said

she likes the mix of old and

But she cautioned it

would be months before a

team coalesces as the sea-

soned competitors she

calls the "super seniors"

ramp up their training and

youngsters chase competi-

tive experience. "I think

the expectations are a case

lete's in a different point,

either they're nursing

"Right now each ath-

eight or nine (years old) I was, like, 'OK, so that's my year," she said.

"Ever since then I've been counting down the vears."

Exciting

Now that it has arrived, she said, it's nerve-wracking but exciting.

"It feels like any other season. But then you always have it in the back of your mind, like, 'Oh my gosh, at the end of the season I'll be trying to go to Olympic trials and the Olympics," she said.

Jones, who missed out on a Tokyo Games berth, said the arrival of youngsters like Roberson and fellow teenagers Tiana Sumanasekera, Zoe Miller, and Kaliya Lincoln, who all helped the US to Pan American Games gold last year, will make the path to Paris a tough one.

"There's babies coming up to teenagers to older athletes – that's me being one of them," Jones said.

"So it should fun. "Honestly, I feel like

we're already working real-

ly hard pushing off each

some aches and pains or had an injury or they're a seasoned vet who doesn't need to be really ready for early spring meets.

by case," she said.

"Each athlete's journey is their own," she added.

A IN-X