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There is a need to stress their significance

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## INSIDE



### BJP pushes for simultaneous polls, same list

**NEW DELHI**  
The BJP on Tuesday pitched for simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, the State Assemblies, and the local bodies, with the same voter list. A presentation was made before a high-level committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind. » PAGE 4

### 'U.S. awaits India's findings in Pannun case'

**NEW DELHI**  
The U.S. has raised "concerns" and is still waiting for the outcome of India's investigation into the alleged assassination plot against American national and Khalistani separatist leader Gurbatwint Singh Pannun, a U.S. official said. » PAGE 4

### Seat-sharing deal with SP will be ready soon: Cong.

**NEW DELHI**  
Amid reports that alliance talks between the Samajwadi Party and the Congress have hit a dead end, Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal on Tuesday asserted that seat-sharing talks are on and a final deal could be announced soon. » PAGE 5

### U.S. vetoes UN resolution on Gaza ceasefire

**NEW YORK**  
The U.S. vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Tuesday that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, even as President Joe Biden faced pressure to dial back support for Israel. The vote came as Israel prepares to move into the city of Rafah. » PAGE 12

# SC declares AAP leader Mayor of Chandigarh

The top court sets aside results, initiates action against Returning Officer for 'defacing' ballots | Court dashes BJP's hopes for fresh polls, says it would compound the 'serious misdemeanour' | Bench says it would not tolerate 'subterfuges' that destroy electoral democracy even at local levels

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that it would not tolerate "subterfuges" that destroy electoral democracy even at the local level, while declaring the Aam Aadmi Party's Kuldeep Kumar as the new Mayor of the municipal corporation. On Monday, Chief Justice Chandrachud had voiced "deep concern" about the "horse trading taking place". His remark was made in reference to the sudden shift of allegiances of three AAP councillors to the BJP, coinciding with Mr. Sonkar's resignation as Mayor on the eve of the SC hearing. Mr. Masih's "furtive" conduct had swung the electoral results

in favour of the BJP's Manoj Sonkar. The Supreme Court had intervened on February 5 to sequester the ballot papers and video records of the polling day. By declaring Mr. Kumar as Chandigarh Mayor in a single stroke on Tuesday, the court dashed the BJP's hopes for fresh polls to the municipal corporation. On Monday, Chief Justice Chandrachud had voiced "deep concern" about the "horse trading taking place". His remark was made in reference to the sudden shift of allegiances of three AAP councillors to the BJP, coinciding with Mr. Sonkar's resignation as Mayor on the eve of the SC hearing. Mr. Masih's "furtive" conduct had swung the electoral results

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Anil Masih, who conducted the Chandigarh mayoral elections, arriving at the Supreme Court on Tuesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

perusing the eight ballot papers specially brought to the court. The Bench said that the eight votes were clearly cast for Mr. Kumar, taking his tally to a majority 20 votes out of a total 36 polled. Mr. Masih's declaration of Mr. Sonkar as winner was quashed and set aside.

The court agreed with Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi and advocate Shadan Farasat that there was no need to call for fresh polls as that would only work to compound the "serious misdemeanour" of Mr. Masih. It said the aberration was on-

Monday that the eight ballot papers were already defaced by the time they had reached him. "He has to be held accountable... He could not have been unmindful of the fact that he was making a statement prima facie false to his own knowledge," Chief Justice Chandrachud told senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, Mr. Masih's counsel. The Bench ordered the Supreme Court Registrar (Judicial) to issue a show cause notice to Mr. Masih under Section 340 (conduct affecting the administration of justice) of the CrPc. He was given three weeks to submit his response to the show cause notice.

"BJP STEALS ELECTIONS" » PAGE 2

## Stepping together



**Record rhythm:** Dancers perform Kathak on Tuesday during the inauguration of the 50th edition of the Khajuraho Dance Festival, at the Khajuraho Temple complex in Madhya Pradesh, in an attempt to create a Guinness World Record. A.M. FARUQUI

## Shehbaz to be Pakistan PM, Zardari to be President

**Press Trust of India**  
ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) reached an agreement to establish a new coalition government in Pakistan after days of negotiations on Tuesday, party leaders said. In a joint news conference late on Tuesday night, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari announced that PML-N President Shehbaz Sharif is set to assume the role of Prime Minister again while PPP co-chairman Asif Zardari is slated to become the country's next President. "The PPP and PML-N have achieved the required number, and [now] we are in a position to form the government," Mr. Bilawal was quoted as saying by Geo News.

## Maharashtra clears 10% quota for all Marathas

**Shoumojit Banerjee**  
PUNE

Walking the caste tightrope ahead of the Lok Sabha election, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and his Cabinet approved a Bill to provide a 10% quota for the Maratha community in education and government jobs, which was later passed unanimously by all parties during a special session of the Maharashtra on Tuesday. The "historic" legislation fulfilled his promise to create a "foolproof" Maratha quota within three months, Mr. Shinde said. However, activist Manoj Jarange-Patil, who has embarked on multiple hunger strikes on this issue, was unsatisfied with the new legislation, terming it a "betrayal" of the community. He is seeking a Maratha quota carved out from the existing reservation for other backward classes (OBCs), which is more likely to pass Supreme Court scrutiny. The Bill, passed by the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council, is similar to the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Act, 2018 introduced by the then-government led by Devendra Fadnis, which was struck down by the top court in May 2021. This is the third time in the last decade that the State has introduced legislation for a Maratha quota. While seeking to fulfil demands of poorer Marathas, this Bill does not disturb the existing OBC quota. It will push total reservations in Maharashtra to 62%, above the Supreme Court-mandated limit of 50%. This Bill is distinct from the government's earlier notification on issuing Kumbi OBC certificates to Marathas who had records



Maharashtra community members felicitate CM Eknath Shinde outside Vidhan Bhawan on Tuesday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

showing them as Kunbis. Thus, non-Kunbi Marathas will be covered under the legislation passed on Tuesday.

# Indians hired as 'army helpers' forced to fight in Russia's war

**Vijaita Singh**  
**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

At least three Indians were forced to fight alongside the Russians on the Russia-Ukraine border after they were allegedly conned by an agent and sent there to work as "army security helpers", one of the victims told *The Hindu*. Since November 2023, around 18 Indians have been stranded at Mariupol, Kharkiv, Donetsk, Rostov-on-Don along the Russia-Ukraine border, and one person is said to have been killed in the ongoing war, an agent said. The two countries have been at war since February 24, 2022. While a few Indians volunteered to join the International Legion created to fight Russian forces in Uk-

raine in 2022, the presence of Indians on Russian side in combat roles has been reported for the first time.

**Seeks govt. intervention**  
The family of one of the victims, who is from Hyderabad, has approached All India Majlis-E-Itehadul Muslimeen Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi. On January 25, Mr. Owaisi wrote to External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and the Indian Embassy in Moscow, seeking the government's intervention for their return. The other victims belong to Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. *The Hindu* has withheld their names. One of the victims from Uttar Pradesh, who is in his early 20s and who wished to remain anonymous, said



**Caught in the crossfire:** Indian nationals fighting along the Russian border in its conflict with Ukraine. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

three of them were given basic training in handling arms and ammunition by the "Russian Army" and were packed off to Rostov-on-Don along the Russia-Ukraine border in January where they faced bullets and were forced to fight at gunpoint. "We arrived here in November 2023, were made

to sign contracts, which said that we are being hired as army security helpers. We were categorically told that we will not be sent to the battlefield and promised ₹1.95 lakh salary and ₹50,000 additional bonus per month. Except the ₹50,000 bonus for two months, I have not received any money," he said. He said he came to Russia with the help of an agent - Faisal Khan - who runs a YouTube channel titled "Baba Vlogs". On November 12, the U.P. resident was received in Russia by two Indian agents associated with Mr. Khan. "On November 13, we were admitted into a camp and taken to a deserted place around two-and-half hours away from Moscow. We contacted the Indian agents and they assured us that we will be posted as helpers. We lived in tents and were trained to handle weapons. On January 4, we were sent to Donetsk and promised ₹1.95 lakh salary and ₹50,000 additional bonus per month. Except the ₹50,000 bonus for two months, I have not received any money," he said. One of the agents who received the victims in Russia told *The Hindu* that the men hail from different parts of India and face

grave danger to life if the government does not act. The MEA has declined to comment on the specific case of Indian workers in Russia. "Hands are tied" According to sources, the Indian Embassy has been following up on all such complaints they have received but pointed out that many of those who claim being forced into labour at the border don't want to leave the country. Many of them have paid high fees to recruiters to reach opportunities abroad and do not wish to be repatriated without having earned some money. As a result, officials say their hands are tied, although they are willing to help in any case involving Indian citizens in distress.

## IN BRIEF



## Centre sanctions new railway line between Puri and Konark

The Union government has approved a new 32-kilometre railway line connecting the temple towns of Puri and Konark that are famous for the Shree Jagannath Temple and Sun Temple, said Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday, adding that ₹492 crore had been sanctioned for the building of the line, which is set to have trains featuring an all-weather glass ceiling.

## Asaram's son withdraws plea for bail to meet ailing father

Narayan Sai, son of jailed self-styled godman Asaram Bapu, who is also serving a life sentence in a rape case on Tuesday withdrew his petition in the Gujarat High Court, seeking a 20-day temporary bail to meet Asaram. He described his father to be "in his last lap of life". Sai's lawyer withdrew the plea after the Bench was told that Asaram had been discharged from hospital and was back in Jodhpur jail in Rajasthan.

## Rajasthan Police arrest four in 2020 JEN paper leak case

The Special Operations Group of the Rajasthan Police has arrested four government employees, including a revenue official and a policeman, in connection with the 2020 Junior Engineer (JEN) paper leak case. Additional DGP (ATS and SOG) V.K. Singh said 24 people have been arrested in the paper leak case so far. Of these, five are examinees, and 19 are either part of the gang that leaked the papers or coaching operators.

## Seven booked for beating up tribal man in M.P.'s Seoni

Press Trust of India  
SEONI

The Madhya Pradesh Police have arrested a man for allegedly thrashing a tribal employee, with six other associates, on suspicion of theft at the shop he was working in, police said on Thursday.

The victim's family was also forced to transfer land to another man's name.

The main accused, Vijay Suryavanshi, was one of the owners of the shop, said Superintendent of Police Rakesh Kumar Singh, adding that an FIR has been registered. The hunt is on for the six other accused.

The victim had alleged that he was beaten with iron pipes and tortured with a piler. The incident took place in Barghat town on December 29, 2023.

## Maurya resigns from SP, set to launch own party on February 22

Press Trust of India  
LUCKNOW

A week after tendering his resignation from the post of Samajwadi Party (SP) national general secretary, Swami Prasad Maurya on Tuesday resigned from the party's primary membership and the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council, and announced the formation of a new party.

The five-time MLA had joined the SP after leaving the BJP ahead of the 2022 State Assembly polls, and had contested unsuccessfully from Fazlignagar.

After resigning as the party's national general secretary on February 13, Mr. Maurya accused the leadership of "discriminating" against him and not defending him over his controversial statements on the Ram temple consecration ceremony.



Swami Prasad Maurya

"After my resignation from the party post, no initiative of any talks with me was taken," he added in a letter to party chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Mr. Maurya said he will share more details about his new party on Thursday in New Delhi. Considered a prominent leader in the backward classes in the state, he has been a five-time MLA.

## 'Cultural protest' to mark 151 years of Kolkata tram

Bishwanath Ghosh  
KOLKATA

Fans of the iconic Kolkata tram will gather on February 24 to mark 151 years of the non-polluting mode of transport to "raise their voices against what they think is unjust", and re-group on March 15 in protest. The event is aimed at the government, which has been blamed for presiding over the near-death of the tram, with only three routes remaining functional today.

"We had a meeting on February 13 when we decided that to celebrate the 151st birthday of the Kolkata tram, we will gather at the Gariahat depot at 10 a.m. on February 24. Notable people and dignitaries will be invited. It will be more of a cultural event than a direct protest when we will voice our demands through the dignitaries," Debasis Bhattacharyya, president of the Calcutta Tram Users' Association (CTUA), which is organising the event, said.

"On March 15 afternoon, a street corner meeting will be held at the Esplanade. This will be a pure protest gathering in association with other organisations," Dr. Bhattacharyya added.

"It is the need of the



Traversing the city: Kolkata's iconic tramway will mark its 151st anniversary on February 24. FILE PHOTO

hour to transform Kolkata's central landscape with the revival of trams, and create walkable streets and cycling lanes. That way, we can set an example for other cities," Arghyadip Hatua, urban policy adviser and a member of the 2016-founded CTUA, said.

The Kolkata tram dates back to 1873. During the peak of its popularity in the 1970s, it boasted over 50 routes across the city.

## Kamal Nath will join Rahul's yatra in M.P.: State Congress chief

Press Trust of India  
BHOPAL

Congress leader Kamal Nath will join the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyaay Yatra after it enters Madhya Pradesh on March 2, a senior party leader said on Tuesday.

Mr. Nath and other leaders virtually attended a meeting to review preparations for the yatra earlier in the day, sources said.

"During the four-day tour of the State, Rahul Gandhi will conduct road shows and meetings. He will perform puja at the famous Mahaleswvar temple in Ujjain and address a public meeting in Dhar district on March 6," said State Congress president Jitu Patwari.

"Kamal Nath has said that he would join the yatra during its Madhya Pra-

## Won't arrest Wankhede until March 1, ED tells HC

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) informed the Bombay High Court on Tuesday that it will not arrest former Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) zonal director Sameer Wankhede until March 1.

The court was hearing Mr. Wankhede's plea against the ED's money laundering case against him for allegedly demanding a bribe of ₹25 crore from the family members of film star Shah Rukh Khan in the 2021 Cordelia cruise ship drug bust case, which saw the arrest of the actor's son, Aryan Khan. The case was filed by the ED based on an FIR registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation.

Earlier this month, Mr. Wankhede had filed a petition in the Bombay High Court, seeking to quash the Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR), a stay on the probe, as well as protection from any coercive action.

The advocate for the ED Sandesh Patil stated in the court: "My earlier statement of no arrest or coercive action would stand extended till the time the plea is taken up for hearing."

A division Bench of Justices P.D. Naik and N.R. Borkar accepted the statement, and posted Mr. Wankhede's petition against the case for March 1.

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress on Tuesday welcomed the Supreme Court's decision on the Chandigarh mayoral elections, terming it a big victory for the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), and said that it would go a "long way" to save Indian democracy.

The top court overturned the January 30 result in which BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar was named the winner, and declared the defeated AAP-Congress alliance candidate Kuldeep Kumar as the new Chandigarh mayor. Addressing a press conference in New Delhi, AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal said: "The BJP is not invincible, and this sends a message that if INDIA bloc parties remain united, work strategically, and put in the hard work, they can defeat the BJP."

Mr. Kejriwal said if the BJP can "steal" eight votes out of 36 in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, what will it do in the upcoming elections in which 90 crore votes will be polled. "It is also clear that these people do not win elections, they steal elections. The Chandigarh Mayor election has exposed them in front of the country," he added.



Time for sweets: AAP councillor Kuldeep Kumar congratulated after the Supreme Court declared him Mayor of Chandigarh. PTI

In a post on X, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said: "In the conspiracy to murder democracy by the BJP, Masih (Returning Officer Anil Masih) is just a 'pawn', behind him is the face of Modi."

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also hailed the top court's verdict, saying that the BJP got a "fitting reply" for its blatant wrongdoing" and that "truth finally won".

**Appeal to EC**  
Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal, in a post on X, called the entire election "a complete farce" which has been duly exposed by the SC verdict. "For four months, we have been frantically seeking time from the Election Commission to discuss the issue of complete VVPAT counting, but

it has not found any time for us so far. We hope the EC moves swiftly and takes steps to improve the people's faith in the democratic process, not dent it," he said.

Congress general secretary Sachin Pilot told reporters that undermining the Election Commission does not augur well for a democracy. "I am surprised that it took the SC to intervene and set the record straight. It should set an example of the future functioning of the EC," he said.

Hitting out at the BJP for saying with great confidence that they will get 370 seats ahead of the Lok Sabha election, Mr. Kejriwal said, "If parties in a country start saying clearly before elections that they do not need votes and people, then democracy is in great danger."

## In the numbers game, BJP still holds the key

Vikas Vasudeva  
CHANDIGARH

Even as the Supreme Court on Tuesday declared Kuldeep Kumar, the joint candidate of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress, to be the validly elected Chandigarh Mayor, the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation is set to witness a peculiar situation as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will hold the decision-making key to various agendas related to the city's work that would come up before the House.

Ahead of a hearing on Chandigarh's mayoral election in the Supreme Court, Mayor and BJP candidate Manoj Sonkar had on February 18 resigned from his post, while three AAP councillors — Neha, Poonam, and Gurcharan Kala — joined the BJP.

In the 35-member Chandigarh Municipal Corporation, the BJP had 14 councillors before the three AAP councillors switched sides, while AAP had 13. The Congress has seven councillors. The Shiromani Akali Dal has one member in the House.

The BJP also has an executive member, the Mem-

ber of Parliament from Chandigarh, who has voting rights.

## Testing time

The House meetings would put to test the political manoeuvring skills of the INDIA bloc partners. With the number of AAP and the Congress councillors jointly staying at 17, and the BJP having 18, decisions on the city's development work through different agendas by majority votes would be a difficult task to achieve for the AAP-Congress

Mayor, and it would be eventually the BJP that would play the critical role in approving or disapproving agendas in the House. "We humbly accept the Supreme Court's decision. But in the current scenario [after the three AAP councillors joined the BJP], the BJP is the single largest party in the House. AAP with 10 councillors is sitting in the ruling side and the BJP, which is the majority party, is sitting in the Opposition. This is a mockery of democracy. In a democracy, the current numbers should be applicable," said Arun Sood, former Mayor and senior BJP leader from Chandigarh.

## Jagan grapples with problem of plenty as he seeks first-mover advantage ahead of polls

The Hindu Bureau  
VIJAYAWADA

With Andhra Pradesh heading into both general as well as State election months from now, the ruling YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) has sought to gain first-mover advantage. The Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy-led party leadership has already released seven lists so far and announced in-charges — presumptive candidates — for 68 of the total 175 Assembly constituencies and 16 of the 25 Lok Sabha constituencies in A.P.

While the principal Opposition party, the N. Chandrababu Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party (TDP),

has remained tight-lipped on its plans so far, it is learnt to be inclined towards returning to the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. Negotiations between the two parties are at an advanced stage, and according to BJP sources, it has demanded six Lok Sabha seats and 20 Assembly seats from the TDP, while Pawan Kalyan's Jan Sena Party wants three Lok Sabha seats in what could emerge as a three-way alliance.

While the 2019 Assembly election became a five-way contest between the YSRCP, TDP, BJP, and JSP, alliances have assumed heightened importance this time around because



All hands on deck: While the CM has personally reached out to some disgruntled leaders, he has also put YSRCP general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy on the job. FILE PHOTO

of the Congress also getting a shot in the arm with Y.S. Sharmila, Mr. Jagan's sister, merging her Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Telangana Party with the Congress and

being named as the latter's Andhra Pradesh unit chief last month.

Reiterating his resolve to ensure a "clean sweep" for YSRCP in the general elec-

tion in Andhra Pradesh, the Chief Minister has exhorted the party cadre to do everything possible to register a win in all the 175 Assembly constituencies.

Discontent in party  
Mr. Jagan's strategy is, however, running into headwinds in the form of disgruntled sitting parliamentarians, legislators and party leaders who are either not getting party tickets or are being moved away from their pocket boroughs.

Being sitting MPs have quit the YSRCP after the re-

gion of party in-charges for Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies — Narasimhaiah of the YSRCP and the deceit of the TDP", describing himself as "Arjuna fighting the Mahabharata war against the demonic forces led by the TDP and JSP".

Party sources said MPs Adala Prabhakar Reddy (Lok Sabha) and Vemireddy Prabhakar Reddy (Rajya Sabha) might not contest on the YSRCP symbol. At least 10 sitting party legislators are also said to be unhappy as well after the party leadership conveyed to them internal survey reports that indicated that their winning prospects were dim. The grapevine has it that more sitting MPs

or MLAs are likely to jump ship.

Sources said that while the Chief Minister is personally speaking to some of the leaders, YSRCP general secretary Sajjala Ramakrishna Reddy and others have also been instructed to talk to the disgruntled sitting MLAs and party leaders. Senior leaders are assuring them that their services would be recognised even they have been denied poll tickets.

With the dissonance among the party MLAs and leaders over the appointment of new coordinators for Assembly constituencies refusing to die down, the YSRCP is redoubling its firefighting efforts.



**IN BRIEF**



**A.P. MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy returns to YSRCP**

Mangalagiri MLA Alla Ramakrishna Reddy, who had quit the YSRCP and joined the Congress recently, returned to the ruling party on Tuesday. He rejoined the YSRCP in the presence of Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy at his camp office near Vijayawada. Speaking to reporters, Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy said the leadership would choose the candidate from the Mangalagiri Assembly seat. TDP's N. Lokesh had lost to Mr. Ramakrishna Reddy from Mangalagiri in 2019.

**Three killed as vehicle catches fire after accident in A.P.**

Three persons were killed when their vehicle caught fire after a road accident in Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh on Tuesday. The identities of the victims are yet to be ascertained. The accident occurred when a speeding car hit an auto-rickshaw at Pusalapadu village in Bestavaripeeta mandal in the morning, the police said. The car reportedly caught fire in the impact. One person who was injured in the accident has been admitted to hospital.

**Minister unhappy over low funds for Kannada research**

Kannada and Culture Minister Shivraj Tangadagi on Tuesday expressed disappointment over the "meagre funds" released for research and development of Kannada after it was declared a classical language. Speaking in the Legislative Council on Tuesday during the discussion on the Kannada Language Comprehensive Development (Amendment) Bill, 2024 the Minister said that while Hindi received ₹1,000 crore, Kannada received a meagre ₹3 crore for research.

**Kerala govt. sanctions ₹13 cr. to solve man-animal conflict**

Forest Minister says a committee, comprising Collector, MLAs and senior officials, will be formed to look into the issue; MGNREGS workers likely to be roped in to dig trenches on forest fringes

The Hindu Bureau  
SULTHAN BATHERY

The Kerala government has sanctioned ₹13 crore to the Forest department to expedite steps to mitigate human-wildlife conflict in Wayanad district, Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran said on Tuesday.



A.K. Saseendran and other Ministers on Tuesday visiting the kin of Thankachan, who died in an elephant attack. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Speaking to mediapersons here after an all-party meeting and a review meeting, the Forest Minister, Minister for Local Self-Governments M.B. Rajesh and Revenue Minister K. Rajan said the government will provide support in addressing the issue. While three people were trampled to death by

wild elephants within a month in the district, a farmer was killed by a tiger in December.

**Solutum demand**  
The demand for higher solatium for those who were killed or injured in wildlife attacks would be seriously

considered in the next Cabinet meeting, Mr. Saseendran said. A district-level monitoring committee will be constituted to handle issues such as wildlife attacks and entry of animals into human habitats. MLAs, district panchayat president, senior officials of various departments, and representatives of political parties will be part of the committee. The Collector will coordinate the committee, which will meet every fortnight. People's committees will be set up at panchayat and ward levels to ensure the proper fencing installed on the fringes of forests, the Minister said.

The permission of the Centre was needed to utilise the services of MGNREGS workers in clearing the undergrowth in forests and for digging trenches on the forest fringes. A letter would be sent to the Union Forest Ministry in this regard.

**CCTV cameras to be installed at all exam centres in Karnataka**

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

To root out malpractices, the Karnataka government has decided to conduct the first annual examinations of Classes 10 and 12 under the surveillance of CCTV cameras across the State. The Class 12 examinations will be held from March 1 to 22 and the Class 10 exams from March 25 to April 6 at 2,747 centres.

"CCTV cameras will be installed in all the exam halls," said Ritesh Kumar Singh, Principal Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy. Madhu Bangarappa, Minister for Primary and Secondary Education, said on Tuesday that to reduce the number of students who fail, the government has decided to conduct three annual examinations from this year.

**Karnataka BJP objects to aid given to jumbo attack victim in Kerala**

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

The Karnataka government announcing compensation of ₹15 lakh to the family of a person from Wayanad in Kerala, who died following an attack by an elephant from the State, has now triggered a controversy. The BJP released a letter to show that it was done at the behest of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. A release by the Forest department had explained that the decision to pay compensation to Ajesh had been taken in view of a request from the elected representatives and the government of Kerala. BJP Karnataka chief B.Y. Vijayendra posted a letter by State Forest Minister to Rahul Gandhi on X, saying that he has released compensation as per the advice of Rahul Gandhi.

**'MVA has agreed on 39 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra'**

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) founder Sharad Pawar on Tuesday said members of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) - Shiv Sena (UBT), NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar), and the Congress - have arrived at a consensus on contesting 39 Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra.



I will be glad to see Shahu Maharaj contesting the Lok Sabha elections. He has been doing social work for a long time, which aligns with social reformers late Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar

Mr. Pawar said more rounds of discussions will be held for the remaining five to six constituencies. Maharashtra sends 48 members to Lok Sabha. Mr. Pawar was speaking to reporters in Kolhapur after meeting Chhatrapati Shahu Maharaj, a member of the erstwhile royal family.

The veteran politician virtually proposed the candidature of Shahu Maharaj in the ensuing Lok Sabha election as the MVA nominee.

Quered on the status of seat-sharing discussions among the Opposition parties, Mr. Pawar said, "There is consensus on 39 seats. We will hold discussions for the rest five to six seats."

Mr. Pawar said he had not yet spoken to other allies about Shahu Maharaj's candidature.

"I will be glad to see him contesting the Lok Sabha elections. He has been doing social work for a long time, which aligns with social reformers late Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and B.R. Ambedkar," he added.

Mr. Pawar said Shahu Maharaj generally stays away from political events, but he has been actively participating in social events and programmes. In the 2019 general elections, the BJP and Shiv Sena (undivided) won 41 out of 48 seats they had contested jointly in Maharashtra. The Nationalist Congress Party (undivided) and the Congress collectively won only 5 seats.

However, the political landscape has changed since 2019 in view of vertical splits in the Shiv Sena and NCP, whereas the BJP is consolidating its base by inducting disgruntled leaders from rival parties.

**Keeping cool**



Take a break: In view of soaring temperature, Kerala Education department has introduced 'water bell' in schools, asking the students to drink water when the bell rings. A scene from a school in Kochi. THULASI KAKKAT

**Parliamentary Committee lauds various pro-pilgrim initiatives adopted by TTD**

The Hindu Bureau  
TIRUMALA

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs lauded various pro-pilgrim initiatives adopted by Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) on Tuesday.



The Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has been doing various socio-economic activities since its inception. FILE PHOTO

The committee was also briefed about the various socio-economic activities adopted by the TTD since its inception.

In a 40-minute audio-visual presentation to the committee, which is on a two-day visit to the hill temple, TTD Executive Officer A.V. Dharm Reddy explained the various as-

pects of crowd management and upkeep of hygiene in the temple town.

Committee Chairman Brij Lal praised the security measures and manage-



Narendra Modi

**PM opens IIT, IISER, IIITDM in Tirupati and Kurnool**

The Hindu Bureau  
TIRUPATI/KURNOOL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally dedicated to the nation the permanent campuses of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT-Tirupati), Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER-Tirupati) and the Indian Institute of Information Technology, Design and Manufacturing (IIITDM Kurnool) through virtual mode on Tuesday.

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister K. Narayanaswamy attended the inaugural event at the IIT campus, where Director K.N. Satyanarayana coordinated the event. At IISER Tirupati, Member of Parliament M. Gurumoorthy attended the inaugural programme along with Collector G. Lakshminsha, who were formally received by the Director Santanu Bhattacharya.

The IIITDM established on Jagannath Gattu in Kurnool as part of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 was formally inaugurated by Mr. Modi, in the presence of Deputy Chief Minister S.B. Amzath Basha. MP Sanjeev Kumar called it a happy auguring for the institute. The 151.51 acre site currently accommodates 907 students, 40 regular faculty and 10 adjunct faculty, said Director D.V.L.N. Somayajulu.

**Man dies after smile design procedure in Hyderabad**

The Hindu Bureau  
HYDERABAD

A 28-year-old man died in Hyderabad following a dental procedure.

His family alleged medical negligence, but the hospital denied it. The incident occurred on February 16 when Laxminarayana Vinjan visited the FMS International Dental Centre and underwent a smile designing procedure to beautify his teeth ahead of his marriage. The hospital said the procedure was done under local anaesthesia. The police have filed a case after his father complained that his son died of anaesthesia overdose.

**182-km stretch of Regional Ring Road in Telangana to be declared national highway**

The Hindu Bureau  
HYDERABAD

Hurdles for the declaration of the southern part of the Regional Ring Road spanning 182 km (Choutuppal-Amangal-Shadnagar-Sangareddy) as national highway had been cleared.



Courtesy call: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy with Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Union Road Transport & Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari has directed the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to seek proposals for declaration of the southern stretch of the RRR in Telangana as national highway. Mr. Gadkari gave the directions responding to the request made by Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy who called on the former in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The Centre had already declared the northern part of the RRR as national highway.

The Chief Minister urged the Union Minister to take steps to upgrade several important State highways as national highways and sought permis-

sion for expansion of some of the national highways. He submitted a list of State highways that needed expansion as national highways to Mr. Gadkari and explained to him about the need to declare them as national highways. During the meeting, Mr.

Revanth briefed the Union Minister about the problems encountered in the expansion of national highways and ongoing works. The meeting discussed about the stalemate between the State and Union governments over the expenditure that would be incurred on the removal of utilities like buildings and current poles.

The NHAI asked the State government to bear the expenses involved in the process 10 months ago, but there was no response from the State government. The Congress government, which took over the reins in December, has conveyed to the NHAI, the State's consent to bear the expenditure.

**Siddaramaiah terms 5 guarantees of State 'good economics'**

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday described the State government's five guarantees as "good economics" and said taxes are being collected from the rich for the empowerment of the poor.

In his reply to the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address, Mr. Siddaramaiah said: "I believe in good economics." A sum of ₹52,009 crore has been set aside for the implementation of five guarantees in the Budget. "We are giving economic and social strength to the poor. This is good economic

is. This is the economics of self-respect," he said.

**'No discrimination'**  
"The five guarantees - Stree Shakti, Anna Bhagya, Griha Jyoti, Griha Lakshmi and Yuvanidhi - will cover the poor, Dalits, backward classes and minorities without discrimination," he said. "There are no middlemen in the delivery of guarantee schemes," the Chief Minister said.

"We will impose tax on rich people as per law and collected taxes will be used for the poor," Mr. Siddaramaiah said. He said the government has kept ₹39,000 crore in 2023-24 for the programmes.

## Assets case: CBI searches premises of former officer

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The CBI on Tuesday searched the premises of Ramesh Abhishek, the then secretary of Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and then chairman of the Forward Markets Commission (FMC), in an alleged disproportionate assets case against him and his daughter.

The agency has named Mr. Abhishek and his daughter, Vanesha Abhishek, in the FIR which has been instituted following a reference from the Lokpal on December 20, 2023.

A 1982-batch IAS official, Mr. Abhishek had taken charge as the FMC chief on September 21, 2012. In February 2016, he took over as DPIIT Secretary and retired in July 2019.

The Lokpal had directed the CBI to investigate the doubtful transactions entered into by Mr. Abhishek

and his daughter by way of receiving huge amounts as professional/consulting fee from various entities or organisations with whom he had official dealings while he was Secretary DPIIT or headed FMC.

The investments made in a property located at Delhi's E-72 Greater Kailash Part-II also came under the scanner, so did an alleged sudden increase in the business income in a short period of time.

Earlier, in May 2023, a local court had ordered the Mumbai's Economic Offences Wing to investigate Mr. Abhishek's alleged role as the then FMC chief in the matter related to the National Spot Exchange Limited (NSE). He has reportedly challenged the order in the Bombay High Court. Taking cognisance of a complaint lodged in 2019, the Lokpal also issued orders for investigations on consensus based on the goal. The BJP wants that the law should be

## BJP pushes for simultaneous polls, with common voter list

In letter to Kovind-led panel, BJP says elections for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies must be held together; it says that frequent polls cause stagnation of economic activities and add financial burden on parties and governments

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday pitched for simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, the State Assemblies, and the local bodies, with the same voter list for all three.

A presentation was made before a high-level committee formed to look into the feasibility of the "one nation, one election" idea. The panel is headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind.

In both the BJP's eight-page letter to the panel and party president J.P. Nadra's briefing to the media, it was suggested that simultaneous elections, with a common voter list, were desirable and a law based on consensus should be the goal. The BJP wants that the law should be



Bigger goals: BJP chief J.P. Nadra with Home Minister Amit Shah during the party's recent National Council meet in New Delhi. ANI

amended to hold simultaneous elections, Mr. Nadra said.

He also said that the BJP had proposed that if conducting all the three polls together was not possible immediately, then the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections could be held together first.

"But in the long run, local body polls should also be held alongside Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, or it will defeat the purpose due to the frequent imposition of the Model Code of Conduct," Mr. Nadra said.

In the letter submitted to the panel, the BJP stated

that when elections are imminent, State governments tend to make populist, short-term decisions rather than more policy-based, long-term ones.

### 'Govt. paralysed'

It was also suggested that the frequent imposition of the model code paralysed government in policy terms. In Maharashtra, of the 365 days in 2016-17, some parts of the State or the other were under the code for 301 days. "It would be difficult under these circumstances to have effective governance," the BJP said.

"The committee should evolve a consensus on holding simultaneous elections," Mr. Nadra said, expressing confidence that everyone would move together on this.

"Ongoing development work is stopped during the

period of an election, often three times in a State, causing stagnation of economic activities and adding to financial burdens on political parties and governments," he said, adding that it also gave rise to corruption. Security forces deployed for internal and external security are also used for election duties, Mr. Nadra said, noting that civil staff like teachers and health sector workers are also part of election work. This adversely affects administration and pro-people work, he said.

Major Opposition parties, including the Congress, the Trinamool Congress, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, have strongly opposed the idea, first mooted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, dubbing it as an assault on the federal structure.

## Bring back ballot papers, RJD appeals to poll panel

Press Trust of India  
PATNA

The Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar urged the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday to consider reverting to the old practice of ballot papers. In place of electronic voting machines (EVMs), "to ensure free and fair polls". According to the party's representation, elections ought to be conducted through ballot papers to ensure transparency.

However, the party also said that as long as EVMs remained in use, it must be ensured that VVPAT (voter verifiable paper audit trail) slips were shown to the respective voters after voting and these were kept in a sealed box until counting. The RJD also demanded that postal ballots be counted before EVMs.

Concerns on EVMs were also raised by the CPI(M), Liberation and the CPI(ML), both alliance partners of the RJD.

## India can be a 'great market place and producer' for military equipment: Garcetti

Dinakar Peri  
NEW DELHI

Calling on India and the United States to quickly look at co-development of military hardware and not just co-production, U.S. Ambassador Eric Garcetti on Tuesday outlined how India can be a "great market place and producer" for countries that might not always be able to afford top-shelf equipment. This can be done to dissuade countries from going to "mutual adversaries" to get their weaponry, he added.

"We can deter, we can defend, we can also de-escalate together, because the goal... is not to wage war but is to protect

**The INDUS-X was launched in June 2023 during Modi's State visit to the U.S.**

peace," Mr. Garcetti said, speaking at the second India-U.S. Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) summit. "Co-production is not the same thing as co-development. We need to make sure we are looking at co-development not just for the sake of that but something that India needs in its military and that America needs it."

The INDUS-X was launched in June 2023 during PM Narendra Modi's State visit to the U.S., and is meant to expand strategic

technology partnerships and defence industrial cooperation between the Indian and U.S. governments, businesses, and academic institutions.

The summit aims to be a "pivotal event driving strategic technology partnerships and defence industrial cooperation" between India and the U.S., the Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Two defence innovation challenges related to the maritime domain – underwater communications for the Indian Navy, and oil spill detection for the Coast Guard – have since been launched under INDUS-X, for which the selection of companies from both sides is under way.

## Sonia, 2 BJP leaders elected unopposed to RS from Rajasthan

The Hindu Bureau  
JAIPUR

Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders Madan Rathore and Chumnilal Garasiya were elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan on Tuesday, which was the last day for withdrawal of nominations for biennial elections to the Upper House. No other candidates were contesting for the three seats.

The ruling BJP and the Opposition Congress were comfortably placed to win two and one seats, respectively, based on their strength in the State Assembly.

Election Officer and Assembly Secretary Maha-



Sonia Gandhi

veer Prasad Sharma declared the three leaders elected at the end of the scheduled day for withdrawing the papers.

Veteran Congress leader and former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot congratulated Ms. Gandhi on her election and said her entry into the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan would give "new energy" to the Opposition.

## Nadra, three others elected unopposed from Gujarat

Press Trust of India  
GANDHINAGAR

BJP president J.P. Nadra and three other candidates of the party, including an OBC leader and a prominent diamond merchant, were declared elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Gujarat on Tuesday.

There were four vacant Rajya Sabha seats in the State.

As there were no other candidates in the fray for the Rajya Sabha elections from Gujarat on the vacant seats besides them, Returning Officer Reeta Mehta declared all the four BJP nominees, including Mr. Nadra, elected unopposed to the Upper House of Parliament, an official said.



Union Minister Piyush Goyal and U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti with Richard R. Verma, right, in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

## U.S. awaits India's findings in Pannun case, says U.S. official

Subhasini Haidar  
NEW DELHI

The U.S. has raised "concerns" and is still waiting for the outcome of India's investigation into the alleged assassination plot against American national and Khalistani separatist leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a senior U.S. official said on Tuesday.

Speaking at a think tank event in Delhi, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Verma, who was U.S. Ambassador to India between 2014 and 2016, said that U.S.-India relations are built on "shared values" that are the "glue" in the partnership, which he said has made major strides in the past decade.

Mr. Verma spoke about the need for India and the U.S. to cooperate on global challenges like the Russian war in Ukraine, a day after External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar pointed out that Russia has never harmed India's interests.

### Shared values

"We can't stray too far from the shared values that hold us together. We are both post-colonial democracies governed by a constitutional framework with checks and balances. We aspire for equality, social inclusion, and racial and minority rights and so much more," Mr. Verma said, speaking at the Observer Research Foundation on the "The Long View" on bilateral ties.

If India and the U.S. share only "transactional" interests, they could return to the 1960 to 1980 era, when ties between the two countries were not close, he added.

When asked whether the shared colonialism had been affected by the "assassin for hire" case – where U.S. agencies have filed an in-

dictment against an Indian national allegedly working for a senior Indian intelligence official to plot Mr. Pannun's assassination – Mr. Verma said the two sides remain "engaged".

The Ministry of External Affairs has denied any wrongdoing in the case, but set up a "high-level" panel to investigate the allegations in November.

### U.S. Senate criticism

While the U.S. government has been dealing with the Pannun case diplomatically, behind closed doors thus far, the U.S. Congress has been more vocal about its concerns in the case. At a U.S. Senate committee hearing on "transnational repression" in December, several senior lawmakers had sharply criticised the Modi government over this case, as well as similar allegations by Canada, and some lawmakers threatened to "activate" U.S. laws against cooperation with India.

In January, Senate Foreign Relations chair Ben Cardin said that he had held up the sale of MQ-9 drones to India, only clearing the deal after receiving assurances that New Delhi was "fully cooperating" and would ensure "credible accountability" for those found responsible.

When asked how differences with India's position on the Ukraine war were viewed in Washington, Mr. Verma said that India's "complicated history" with Russia is understood, although the U.S. as a NATO member has "different responsibilities" from those of India.

He said that statements that India and the U.S. had jointly issued clearly called for "upholding integrity, standing up for the rule of law, and to minimise the humanitarian impact".

## SC criticises ex-judge for releasing judgment after retirement

Mohamed Imranullah S.  
CHENNAI

Former judge of the Madras High Court T. Mathivanan has come to the adverse notice of the Supreme Court for having pronounced only a single-line order in open court in a criminal case and then releasing a detailed judgment running to 114 pages nearly five months after his retirement from service.

Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan of the Supreme Court wrote: "According to us, retaining the file of a case for a period of five months after demitting the office is an act of gross impropriety on the part of the learned judge. We cannot countenance what has been done in this case."

**113-crore cheating case**  
The observations were made while allowing an appeal preferred by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the orders passed by Justice Mathivanan, who had quashed a charge sheet filed by the investigating agency against businessman Naresb Agrawal of Chennai in a 113-crore cheating case.



T. Mathivanan

April 17, 2017, the judge had also discharged the businessman's son N. Ganesh Agrawal from the cheating case.

However, on appeal, the CBI told the Supreme Court that the High Court judge had pronounced only a single-line order declaring the operative part. Thereafter, the judge demitted office on May 26, 2017 and a detailed judgment running to 114 pages was made available on October 23, 2017.

Expressing surprise over how a retired judge could retain the case bundle for so long, the top court said the fact regarding the delay remained undisputed.

"We cannot support such acts of impropriety," the Supreme Court added.

## J&K on path to progress, says Modi; launches projects worth ₹32,000 cr.

Peerzada Ashiq  
JAMMU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who dedicated ₹32,000-crore projects to Jammu and Kashmir on Tuesday, expressed satisfaction over the positive outcome of the revocation of the special status under Article 370, "with the Gulf countries showing keen interest in investment".

He also congratulated the local youth for liberating themselves from dynastic politics.

"There is a positivity about investing in Kashmir. The successful G-20 meeting on the path of progress and development," Mr. Modi, who addressed a well-attended public rally at Jammu's Maulana Azad Stadium, said.

Mr. Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation of projects worth ₹32,000 crore in several sectors, including education, health, aviation, roadways and railways.



The gathering at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public meeting at the Maulana Azad Stadium in Jammu on Tuesday. ANI

tism, would emerge from Kashmir. Education, connectivity and development has replaced it. Now, J&K is on the path of progress and development," Mr. Modi, who addressed a well-attended public rally at Jammu's Maulana Azad Stadium, said.

Mr. Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation of projects worth ₹32,000 crore in several sectors, including education, health, aviation, roadways and railways.

**'Biggest wall gone'**  
"Kashmir is taking a new shape now. The biggest wall between J&K and the rest of the country was Article 370. The BJP removed that wall. All development initiatives

get implemented simultaneously now. It's the removal of Article 370 that gave us confidence to seek 370 seats for the BJP and 400 for the NDA," Mr. Modi said.

**Electric train launched**  
Mr. Modi inaugurated two key railways projects on the occasion – the 46-km Banihal-Khari-Sumber-Sangaldan stretch and an electric train on the Sangaldan-Baramulla section.

Without naming the Congress, the National Democratic Party, Mr. Modi said J&K suffered due to dynastic politics. "These dynasties only see their own interest and not that of people. It's the

youth that bears the brunt of this dynastic politics because it does not prioritise welfare schemes for them or the downtrodden. I am happy J&K is liberating itself from dynastic politics. The youth is rising on a new wave of politics and is writing the future of J&K themselves," he said.

### Education hub

Mr. Modi also highlighted the new initiatives taken in J&K like the opening up of two IITs, two AIIMS, eight medical colleges and 45 nursing and para-medical colleges. "There was a time when schools were burnt, today schools are being decorated. J&K is emerging as an educational hub now," he added.

J&K Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha said, "The incidents of terrorism have been reduced by 75%. *Jop hi tanzeem thi unke up* commanders *ko uchi jagah pahucha diye gaye hai* [all of those top organisational commanders have been sent to the appropriate spot]. Protest calendar is no longer issued, and stone throwing is now history. Markets, schools, and universities are now main open throughout the year."



# Police gear up for farmers' march

Punjab DGP says that no earthmoving equipment should be allowed to reach the inter-State boundary with Haryana; police allege that protesters were planning to damage the barricades, which they say will compromise law and order situation

Vikas Vasudeva  
CHANDIGARH

A day ahead of their 'Delhi Chalo' march, protesting farmers in Punjab on Tuesday made efforts to mobilise supporters to swell their ranks.

The Punjab Police are leaving nothing to chance, alleging that inputs indicated plans of the protesters to storm the barricades erected by the Haryana Police and enter Haryana, a move which would disturb the law and order situation in both States.

On Tuesday, Punjab's Director-General of Police issued instructions to all Senior Superintendents of



Destination Delhi: The protesting farmers are set to resume the Delhi Chalo march on Wednesday. REUTERS

Police and Commissioners of Police that "no ICBS, po-claines, tippers, hydras, and other heavy machinery should be allowed to reach the Punjab-Haryana boundary at Khanauri and the Shambu

barrier where the farmer agitation is under way".

Earlier, Haryana's Director-General of Police wrote to his Punjab counterpart saying, "It is reliably learnt that heavy earthmoving equipment, which are

further modified/armoured, have been acquired by protesting farmers and have been deployed at the locations where the protesters are camping right now. These machines are meant to be used by the protesters to damage the barricades thereby posing a serious danger to the police and paramilitary forces deployed on duty and is likely to compromise the security scenario in Haryana."

### 'Not a difficult task'

The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non Political) - the two umbrella bodies of around 200 farmers and farm labourer unions - had given the call

for the march to the national capital to press for the fulfilment of demands such as a legal guarantee for purchasing crops at minimum support price (MSP) and loan waiver.

KMM, coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher told *The Hindu* that on Wednesday farmers would peacefully start their march towards Delhi. He said if the Centre had an intent to resolve the issue, it was not a difficult task.

Meanwhile, while hearing two petitions surrounding the march, the Punjab and Haryana High Court observed that tractor-trolleys cannot be piled on highways as per the Motor Vehicle Act.

## Modi govt. spreading a barrage of lies on MSP: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Congress claimed on Tuesday that farmers were wise to the Centre's mischief, which is why they rejected the Modi government's offer to buy pulses, maize, and cotton at minimum support price for five years based on contracts.

It said the Centre's proposal was a "false offer" and reiterated its commitment to provide statutory backing for MSP and take other steps to ensure justice for farmers.

In a post on X, party leader Rahul Gandhi said that ever since the Congress promised to make MSP a legal guarantee, "Modi's propaganda machinery and friendly media have been spreading a barrage of lies on MSP".

"It is not feasible to provide legal guarantee for MSP in the budget of the Government of India. Fact: According to CRISIL, giving MSP to farmers in 2022-23 would have resulted in an additional burden of ₹21,000 crore, which is only 0.4% of the total budget," he said.

If bank loans worth ₹4 lakh crore can be written off and corporate tax exemption of ₹1.8 lakh crore allowed, why is the ruling dispensation irked by a little additional expenditure on farmers, Mr. Gandhi asked. He said making MSP a legal right will propel investments in agriculture.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, in a separate post on X, asked if a section of the media had been encouraged to describe the protesting farmers as "traitors, Naxalites and Khalistanis".

He also claimed the handles or accounts on social media that put out the views of farmers, labourers and tribals were being "blocked" by the government.

## IN BRIEF



### U.P. court grants bail to Rahul in 2018 defamation case

Congress MP Rahul Gandhi appeared in a special court in Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday in a defamation case filed by a BJP leader for his remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah in 2018, and was granted bail. The former Congress president entered the MP-MLA court at 11 a.m. amid tight security. BJP leader Vijay Mishra had filed the case on August 4, 2018 over Mr. Gandhi's alleged objectionable comments against Mr. Shah at a press conference in Bengaluru during the State Assembly elections. The next hearing will be held on March 2. m

### Goa Police file FIR after mob attacks State Minister

The Goa Police on Tuesday registered an FIR against unidentified persons for unlawful assembly and attack on the State's Social Welfare Minister Subhash Phal Desai after the unveiling of a statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at a village in South Goa, a senior official said. A mob threw stones on Mr. Desai after he unveiled the statue at Sao Jose De Areal village near Margao town on Monday, to mark the 394th birth anniversary of the Maratha emperor. The accused persons will be identified based on video footage of the incident, said Deputy Superintendent of Police Santosh Desai. There was heavy police presence in the village after a group of people objected to the installation of the statue. m

### Sonowal launches several projects in Assam, Tripura

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday unveiled several projects together worth an estimated ₹308 crore to boost inland waterways in northeast India. The projects included a passenger-cargo terminal at Bogibhel near Dibrugarh in eastern Assam, an inland water transport terminal at Sonamura in Tripura, and upgraded terminals at Karimganj and Badarpur in southern Assam. He pointed out that the economy of the northeast was dependent largely on inland water transport before India's independence. Apart from the losing access to the seaports, the rivers became shallow over the years due to siltation. m

## Khap leaders call for lifting Internet ban, road blockades

The Hindu Bureau  
GURUGRAM

Farmer unions and Khap leaders at a mahapanchayat in Haryana's Jind on Tuesday demanded that the ban on Internet services and the blockade put by the police on various roads should be lifted.

It announced that it would hold a pakka morcha (round-the-clock sit in) on the Delhi-Patala Highway, partially blocking the traffic movement. Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader Azad Palwa told *The Hindu* that the mahapanchayat around 2,000 representatives of different farmer unions and khaps from Jind had participated in the four-hour-long meeting and decided to hold an indefinite sit-in on one of the carriageways of the Delhi-Patala Highway in Uchana.

"If the need arises we will increase the number of pakka morcha and hold more sit-ins across the district," said Mr. Palwa.

He said that mahapanchayat also demanded that the suspension of mobile Internet services be immediately revoked and the blockades laid by the police to stop farmers from marching towards Delhi be lifted. The suspension of Internet services has made the life of the common man miserable. Also, the police have blocked several roads making it difficult for the people to travel within the district. These barriers should be removed, Samyukt Kisan Morcha leader Azad Palwa told *The Hindu*. The Khap leaders also called for all farmer unions in Haryana to put up a united fight with the Punjab farmers.

## SKM welcomes splinter group's decision to reject Centre's offer on MSP

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Tuesday welcomed the decision of its splinter group, the SKM (Non Political), to reject the Centre's proposal to procure five crops on minimum support price (MSP) for five years based on contracts and resume their 'Delhi Chalo' protest from Wednesday.

In a statement, the SKM welcomed the SKM-NP's announcement to continue their protest till all the common demands are achieved and said the decision was a step in the right direction of greater unity of all farmers across India.

It urged all the farmers' organisations across India to support the mass pro-



test of farmers in the constituencies of the National Democratic Alliance MPs on Wednesday, demanding the implementation of the agreement signed by the Narendra Modi government with the SKM on December 9, 2021.

SKM-NP's leader Shiv Kumar Kakka, however, said the SKM was not part of the protest and they had no right to comment on it. He said the SKM-NP and the Rashtriya Kisan Maha Sangh, the organisation he leads, usually does not hold any protests during elections so that no political party suffers from their actions. "Kisan movement has now split into two. But protests will continue seeking a solution for farmers issues. At a right time, based on these issues, we need to have united struggles", Mr. Kakka said.

The SKM questioned the argument that legal guarantee for the procurement of all crops at minimum support price could be a 'spell' fiscal disaster. "This argument is the logic of corporate forces," the statement said.

## Seat-sharing deal with SP will be ready soon: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Amid reports that alliance talks between the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress for the Lok Sabha elections have hit a dead end, Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal on Tuesday asserted that seat-sharing talks are on and a final deal could be announced soon.

"[Seat-sharing] is in final stage. Any time, it can be finalised," Mr. Venugopal told presspersons at the All India Congress Committee headquarters in response to a question on whether the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) had derailed in Uttar Pradesh.

Asked if the Congress would accept the SP's offer of 17 seats, Mr. Venugopal said, "The discussion is going on. It will be finalised at any point of time. Wait for some time."

The last round of discussion between leaders of the Congress and the SP was held on February 19, sources added.



The discussion is going on. It will be finalised at any point of time. Wait for some time

K.C. VENUGOPAL  
Congress general secretary (organisation)

seats was announced on January 30.

Of the 80 Lok Sabha seats, the SP offered 17 seats on the condition that party chief Akhilesh Yadav would join Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, that is passing through the State, only if the Congress accepts their offer.

When asked about other INDIA bloc partners talking about fighting the elections alone, Mr. Venugopal said, "We are in the process. Our alliance team is there and Congress president has appointed a team of leaders for alliance? "They are discussing with everybody, day after day. We have great hope that a solution will come," he added.

## SP declares 3rd list for Lok Sabha poll, fields Shivpal from Budaun

Press Trust of India  
LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Tuesday declared its third list of five candidates for the Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh, fielding senior leader Shivpal Yadav from Budaun parliamentary constituency.

Mr. Shivpal, the uncle of party chief Akhilesh Yadav, is party general secretary and a six-time MLA from the Jaswantnagar constituency in Etawah district.

In its first list, the party had announced Dharmendra Yadav, son of party founder Mulayam Singh's younger brother Abhay Ram Yadav, from Budaun.

The other candidates in Tuesday's list are Surendra Singh Patel from Varanasi, Iqra Hasan from Kairana, Praveen Singh Aron from Bareilly and Ajendra Singh Rajput from Hamirpur.

Mr. Shivpal said the Congress, with its dynastic record and lack of direction, was no match for the BJP.

## Cong. hails SC order on definition of 'forest'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday applauded the Supreme Court's interim order asking the States and the Union Territories to act as per the definition of a "forest" laid down by the court in a 1996 verdict.

It also said that it was committed to protecting the environment when an INDIA bloc government is formed.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh accused the Modi-

led government of tweaking the laws to make it easier to hand over forests and pollute the environment, to benefit Mr. Modi's "corporate cronies friends."

"So first, he changed the rules in 2017 so that projects that had violated their forest clearance could be legalised. Over 100 projects of big corporates including coal mines, factories and cement plants were allowed to brazenly start work in violation of environmental clearances," he alleged in a long

post on X.

The ruling, that came soon after an order against the "electoral bonds scam", stopped another set of "blatantly illegal and disastrous" Central schemes, he said.

The Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act of

2023, the Congress leader said, stripped protection from two lakh square kilometres of forests. "This was in complete violation of a 1996 Supreme Court judgment. This amendment would have made it easy to divert 'deemed forests', as well as forests in the North East," he claimed.

Mr. Ramesh, a former Union Minister of Environment and Forests, was one of the six Opposition members to file a dissent note against a Parliamentary

Committee report on the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill, which had changed the definition of a "forest".

"One by one, the scams and frauds of the Modi government are being exposed in India's highest court of law," he said. "The Congress applauds this order, and commits to protecting India's forests and environment when we form an INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance) government," he added.

## INDIA bloc an 'opportunistic alliance', says Shah

The Hindu Bureau  
JAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday hit out at the Opposition's INDIA bloc, saying it was an "opportunistic alliance" against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), guided by the family politics of each of its participants.

Mr. Shah said the Congress, with its dynastic record and lack of direction, was no match for the BJP.

Mr. Shah launched the BJP's campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in Rajasthan with a series of events in Bikaner, Udaipur and Jaipur.



Poll bugle: Union Home Minister Amit Shah arriving at Bikaner to address the BJP Lok Sabha Election Committee meeting. ANI

He addressed the meetings of the BJP's booth-level workers and the party's State election committee before wrapping up his day-long visit with an inter-

action with voters in the State capital.

Mr. Shah said the Congress, with its dynastic record and lack of direction, was no match for the BJP.

Mr. Shah said the Congress, with its dynastic record and lack of direction, was no match for the BJP.

Rajasthan will enable us to achieve our target," Mr. Shah said.

The Union Home Minister sought to cover three clusters, comprising three Lok Sabha seats each, during his visit to the three regions of the State.

In addition to Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and senior BJP leaders, former Congress leader Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya, who joined the BJP on Monday, was also present at the event in Udaipur.

Mr. Shah praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the country's achievements in the past 10 years and said he had successfully fought against the "four ills" bequeathed from the previous Congress regime at the Centre.

"Dynastic politics, appeasement, corruption

## IN BRIEF



### India to display relics of Lord Buddha in Thailand

India will hold an exhibition of some of the relics of Lord Buddha, which are in its possession, in Thailand from February 22 to March 18. The relics (20 bone fragments) have been preserved at the National Museum in New Delhi. At first the relics would be kept at the National Museum, Bangkok, and would then be exhibited at five different venues across Thailand, a Union Culture Ministry official said. The relics of Lord Buddha along with the relics of two of his disciples, preserved in Madhya Pradesh's Sarnath, are being sent on the request of the Thai government, an official said. The Buddha relics were excavated from Piprahwa in Uttar Pradesh.

### Drug worth ₹2,000 cr. seized in Pune, New Delhi: 3 arrested

Police have seized 1,100kg of synthetic stimulant drug methedrone, estimated to be worth more than ₹2,000 crore, following raids in Pune district and New Delhi and arrested three persons, officials said on Tuesday. The persons arrested in connection with the biggest-ever drug seizure according to the Pune police were booked under various sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), they said, adding two other men are being questioned in connection with the same case. Pune police commissioner Amitesh Kumar said 700kg of methedrone was seized from different locations in Pune district.

### NHRC seeks report from DGCA on death at airport

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Tuesday issued a notice to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) over the death of an 80-year-old man at the Mumbai airport after he failed to get a wheelchair despite prior request to the airline. According to reports, there were 32 passengers who needed wheelchair on the particular flight, but there were only 15 available with the ground staff. The octogenarian collapsed after walking around a kilometre and a half. The DGCA should send a detailed report to the commission on the matter within four weeks, the NHRC said.

### 800 athletes reach Kashmir for Khelo India Winter games

Around 800 athletes arrived in Kashmir on Tuesday to participate in the fourth edition of the Khelo India Winter Games, as the venue, Gulmarg, received more than three feet of fresh snowfall in the past 48 hours. An official said the athletes from across the country will participate in events like snowboarding, alpine skiing, Nordic skiing, and ski mountaineering. "The field of play has been set up by the best technical teams. We aim to provide international standards to the players. Snow beaters have been made functional to set the stage for the games." Nuzhat Gul, secretary, J&K Sports Council, said, Gulmarg is one of the best destinations in the country deemed fit for winter games.

## Rules that edge out women from jobs due to marriage illegal: SC

Regulations based on gender-based bias unconstitutional, it says; asks govt. to pay compensation to a woman permanent commissioned officer

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Rules that bully women out of their jobs for getting married or having domestic issues amount to "coarse gender discrimination" and are plainly unconstitutional, the Supreme Court has said.

"Terminating employment because the woman has got married is a coarse case of gender discrimination and inequality. Acceptance of such patriarchal rule undermines human dignity, right to non-discrimination and fair treatment. Laws and regulations based on gender-based bias are constitutionally impermissible," the court said in a recent order.

The observations were part of an order which upheld the rights of a woman permanent commissioned officer in the Military Nursing Service who was discharged for getting married.

A Bench headed by Jus-



The court said terminating employment because the woman has got married is a coarse case of gender discrimination. FILE PHOTO

Justice Sanjiv Khanna directed the Union Government to pay former Lieutenant Sella John ₹60 lakh in compensation within eight weeks as a full and final settlement of all her claims. The government had come in appeal against a decision of the Lucknow Bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal which had ruled in her favour.

Noting that her release from services was both "wrong and illegal", the Supreme Court found that the rule against marriage

was applicable only to women serving officers. The rule was "ex facie manifestly arbitrary".

"Rules making marriage of women employees and their domestic involvement a ground for disemployment would be unconstitutional," the order noted.

The court also recorded that the Army instruction concerned with the terms and conditions of service for the grant of permanent commissions in the Military Nursing Service was withdrawn in 1995.

## BJP leader Suwendu visits Sandeshkhali after HC intervention

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

The Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, was allowed to visit Sandeshkhali on Tuesday at the intervention of the Calcutta High Court.

The BJP leader had been stopped by the police from visiting the area on two occasions earlier this month, after protests broke out on the island over allegations of sexual assault and land grab by local Trinamool Congress leaders.

Hundreds of people, including women, came to greet Mr. Adhikari at the island. Women also broke down as they narrated their plight to the BJP MLA. During the day, the Division Bench expressed its disappointment that the prime accused [Trinamool leader Sheikh Shahjahan]

remained absconding. CP(M) leader Brinda Karat was also allowed to visit Sandeshkhali.

She claimed that lawlessness prevailed on the island.

## Study finds rise in blood clots, heart inflammation after COVID vaccination

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

One of the largest assessments of its kind, spanning 99 million people and investigating reports of adverse reactions following COVID-19 vaccination, found that instances of Guillain-Barre Syndrome, myocarditis, pericarditis, and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (CVST) were at least 1.5 times more than expected following inoculation with mRNA and ChAdOx1 vaccines.

This is in line with previous observations by the World Health Organization and the European Medicines Agency, and was what led to these being classified as rare side effects following the vaccination for COVID-19.

The data set did not include patients from India. However, a majority of Indians were administered

## India to seek \$26 bn private investment in nuclear power sector'

Reuters  
NEW DELHI

India will invite private companies to invest about \$26 billion in its nuclear energy sector to increase the amount of electricity from sources that do not produce carbon dioxide emissions, two government officials said.

This is the first time that New Delhi is pursuing private investment in nuclear power, a non-carbon-emitting energy source that contributes less than 2% of India's total electricity generation. The funding would help India achieve its target of having 50% of its installed electric generation capacity use non-fossil fuels by 2030, up from 42% now.

The government is in talks with at least five private firms, including Reliance Industries, Tata Power, Adani Power, and Vedanta Ltd., to invest around ₹440 billion (\$5.3 billion) each, the two officials, who are directly involved in the matter, said on the condition of anonymity last week.

With the investment, the government hopes to build 11,000 megawatts (MW) of new nuclear power generation capacity by 2040, said the officials, ad-

ding that the plan is still being finalised.

The state-run Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) owns and operates the country's fleet of nuclear power plants, with a capacity of 7,500 MW, and has committed investments for another 1,300 MW.

The Department of Atomic Energy and NPCIL have held multiple rounds of discussions with the private firms in the past year on the investment plan, the officials said.

The Department of Atomic Energy, NPCIL, Tata Power, Reliance Industries, Adani Power, and Vedanta did not respond to queries.

The officials said under the funding plan, the private companies will make the investments in the nuclear plants, acquire land, water, and undertake construction in areas outside the reactor complex of the plants. But the rights to build and run the stations and their fuel management will rest with NPCIL as allowed under the law, they said. The private companies are expected to earn revenue from the power plant's electricity sales and NPCIL would operate the projects for a fee, the officials said.

The French government had announced the award for Mr. Tharoor in August 2022, but the formal conferring took place on Tuesday.

Mr. Tharoor said his relationship with France began during his UN stint and that he always "nurtured a sense of profound respect for French democracy" as the land where "the people" first replaced "the king" as the nucleus of the nation. "The conferral of this award to an Indian is also an acknowledgement of deepening of Franco-Indian relations," he said.



Shashi Tharoor

## Tharoor gets highest civilian award of France

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor was conferred the 'Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur', the highest civilian honour in France, at an intimate ceremony at the French Embassy on Tuesday.

The French government had announced the award for Mr. Tharoor in August 2022, but the formal conferring took place on Tuesday.

Mr. Tharoor said his relationship with France began during his UN stint and that he always "nurtured a sense of profound respect for French democracy" as the land where "the people" first replaced "the king" as the nucleus of the nation. "The conferral of this award to an Indian is also an acknowledgement of deepening of Franco-Indian relations," he said.



The data set did not include patients from India.

the ChAdOx1, or Covishield, vaccines during the pandemic.

The need for rapid development of vaccines saw a range of new approaches to vaccination, namely the use of synthetic viral particles, or protein constructs being administered following shortened testing programmes.

Guillain-Barre syndrome is a disorder in which the immune system attacks the nerves. While rarely fatal, it can cause muscular damage and can

require prolonged treatment. CVST refers to blood clots in the brain. Myocarditis and pericarditis are inflammation of the heart tissue. All of these are serious conditions and potentially fatal.

The Global Covid Vaccine Safety Project, which made the assessment, compiled electronic healthcare data on adverse events related to COVID-19 vaccines from participants across multiple sites, including Argentina, Australia, Canada, and Denmark.

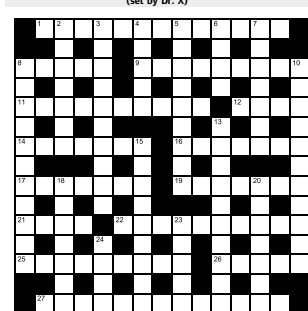
The analysis involved computing the so-called OE ratios, or observed versus expected ratios. This means first healthcare providers, having a baseline 'expectation' of how many adverse events are likely given a certain number of vaccinated people, and comparing it with the number of events actually reported to health systems.

Expectations are formed based on experience with the rates of vaccination, and reactions observed historically. Ratios greater than 1.5 or, in other words, 50% more adverse event reports than what is expected, are considered "potential safety signals", or necessitating a thorough investigation.

"OE ratios >1.5 were observed for Guillain-Barre syndrome and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis (3.23) following the first dose of ChAdOx1 vaccine," notes the study, published this month in the peer-reviewed journal *Vaccine*.

As on December 6, 2022, a total of 92,003 adverse events following immunisation have been reported in India since the start of vaccination, the Health Ministry told Parliament. This is about 0.009% of Indians who took COVID-19 vaccines.

### TH CROSSWORD 14103



- Across
- Difference in attitudes breaking up ageing parent and son essentially (10,3)
  - Forces controlled by Maoist in underground revolution (5)
  - Men reviewed problem with main knob controlling church pipes (5,4)
  - 11 | 18 Detailed narrative in breezy weather report? (4-2-4,7)

To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site. @ <https://qrgo.pugc.link/jkp/Tn>



- Hotel just needs strong locks (4)
  - Characters in terrible unrest around America (7)
  - Rebellious writer in European country acting out awkwardly (7)
  - Worrying about daughter hooking up on the internet (1-6)
  - Granitic rock is found in lawn (7)
  - Every beauty's topos (4)
  - Swindle by phoney tourism company (10)
  - More courageous with money belt (5)
  - Dog picking up right scent (5)
  - Gain an advantage over some charlatan easily (5,1,5,2)
- Down
- Remove part of text from it due to blunders (4,3)
  - Order of demolition finally liberates Cold War capital (4,6)
  - America, Britain hosting gathering about nuclear weapon (1-4)
  - Popular girl angling is getting under one's skin (9)
  - Number series, new for student (4)
  - Seduce a model with finesse, overcoming resistance (7)
  - Myth or otherwise, a blunder to consume dope (5,6)
  - Socialite raised drink, cuddling pretentious maiden in a retreat (5,6)
  - Erotic item shaped like a heavenly body (10)
  - Unmarried Italian woman and character covorting on air (9)
  - See 11 Across
  - Largely formal event featuring a Greek dish (7)
  - Extremely scary broadcast about Middle Eastern country (5)
  - Hunter heartlessly traps bird (4)

### SUDOKU

7	8				5			
	5			9	3	4		
		6				1	9	
2				9	6			
	9	7		8		6		
			5	3				9
6	7			1				
5	1	9			8			
2				5		1		

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

9	2	3	6	1	3	4	7	5
5	6	3	4	7	9	8	1	2
4	1	7	8	5	2	9	3	6
7	9	6	2	4	1	5	8	3
3	4	2	5	9	8	1	6	7
8	5	1	3	6	7	2	4	9
1	7	4	9	2	6	3	5	8
6	8	9	1	3	5	7	2	4
2	3	5	7	8	4	6	9	1

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

9	2	3	6	1	3	4	7	5
5	6	3	4	7	9	8	1	2
4	1	7	8	5	2	9	3	6
7	9	6	2	4	1	5	8	3
3	4	2	5	9	8	1	6	7
8	5	1	3	6	7	2	4	9
1	7	4	9	2	6	3	5	8
6	8	9	1	3	5	7	2	4
2	3	5	7	8	4	6	9	1

### FAITH

#### Duty of Prapannas

The gist of Vedanta is *saranagathi* or surrender. A person who has taken refuge in God with an absolute surrender through an Acharya is called *Prapanna*; his cherished desire will be to attain *moksha*. What will happen to him if he commits mistakes or misdeeds after his surrender or *saranagathi*? Sri Anantha Padmanabhaachariar Swamy, in a discourse, quoted the 13th passage "Apachara Parharam" of *Rahasya Ratnavali*.

Lord Krishna says that *Sruthi* and *Smruthi*, which deal with the codes of conduct, are His orders, and He does not consider those who transgress them favourably. A duty is cast upon the *Prapannas* not to commit mistakes, but owing to the influence of our past deeds (*prarabdha*), we are disturbed and forced to commit errors. Deeds that are not to be done are done and acts that ought to be performed are omitted (*Krithya akarana, Akruthya karana*).

Also, sometimes people cite noble and pious elders as examples to justify their mistakes.

#### Repentance, the way out

A person may commit mistakes or misdeeds in two ways. Knowingly fully well with cognisance, and the other, is inadvertently by mistake.

Scriptures say there is no punishment for the second type, but for the first type, the person will face some punishments, and God accepts him only after that. If he realises his mistake, repents for the same and resolves not to repeat it, he may go scot-free.



SCIENCE

# Amount of tiny plastic particles in bottled water underestimated: study

A study has confirmed the fragmentation of the plastic content of real-world water samples beyond the micrometre scale. Its findings are distinguished by the research team's use of a technique that could reveal a 'hidden world' of even smaller plastic particles that have eluded conventional imaging methods

Privali Prakash

**A** litre of bottled water can contain more than one lakh particles of micro- and nano-plastics, with 90% of those being the latter, a new study has reported. Nanoplastics are minute, with dimensions ranging from 1 nanometre to 1 micrometre. The new findings indicate bottled water contains a much greater concentration of these minuscule plastic particles than previously expected.

The study, conducted by scientists at Columbia University in New York and published on January 8, 2024 in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, profiled individual plastic particles to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in the analysis of nanoplastics, as a result of effective techniques. Experts also believe the study can be instrumental in providing information about plastic pollution at the nanometre level.

The prefix 'micro' means one-millionth; 'nano' means one-billionth.

**How was the study conducted?**

Nanoplastics are difficult to analyse, mainly due to their size and also due to the inability of different diagnostic techniques to identify them.

In their experiment, the researchers addressed these challenges using a custom hyperspectral stimulated Raman scattering (SRS) imaging platform. This set up could capture multiple images of an object's molecules at different wavelengths, allowing the scientists a comprehensive picture with which they could piece together the composition of the object.

SRS microscopy uses the Raman effect, a.k.a. Raman scattering. When light of a certain frequency is beamed at a group of atoms or molecules, the latter both absorb some of the energy in the beam and scatter it to different direction. This is a form of inelastic scattering. (In elastic scattering, the scattered light still has the kinetic energy and the atoms or molecules haven't absorbed any.)

The research team used the SRS imaging platform along with an automated algorithm the team had devised to identify plastics. The algorithm extracted detailed information – i.e. at the single-particle level – about the chemical makeup from the data produced by the SRS platform.

Once the researchers had tested and verified that this combined apparatus could detect plastic particles quickly and accurately, they used bottled water as a



Bottled water hides more gremlins than you can imagine. BRANDON BELL/GETTY IMAGES VIA AFP

model system to look for micro- and nano-plastics.

**What were the findings?**

The investigation revealed the presence of around 2.4 lakh micro- and nano-plastic particles per litre of bottled water (give or take 1.3 lakh). The researchers concluded based on the magnitude of the result – “two to three orders of magnitude more than the previously reported results merely focusing on large microplastics,” according to the paper – that experts may have been underestimating the concentration of microplastics in bottled water.

To quote from the paper: “As it pertains to the estimation of human exposure, these values are substantially higher than those currently reported in the literature, which is a result from the newly detected nanoplastic fraction of plastic particulate. The tiny particles previously invisible under conventional imaging actually dominate in number and account for [approximately] 90% of the entire population of plastic particles detected. The remaining 10% identified as microplastics have a concentration of around [30,000] particles per litre, with the majority of them in the size below 2 µm. Larger particles (>2 µm), which are easier to identify under regular optical microscopy, are in the same order of magnitude as the reported microplastic analysis depending on the detection limited reported based on different technologies.”

Indeed, traditional single-particle chemical imaging techniques like Fourier



The study profiled individual plastic particles to bridge the knowledge gap that exists in the analysis of nanoplastics. Experts believe the study can provide information about plastic pollution at nanometre level

transform infrared spectroscopy and Raman microscopy have lower instrumental resolution and detection sensitivity. As a result, they have a limited ability to study the chemical composition of a material beyond the microscopic scale. At the same time, some of the more sophisticated techniques that can track and study individual particles such as atoms and molecules, like electron microscopy and atomic force microscopy, can't differentiate between different compositions and thus uniquely identify the material.

The study also revealed the presence of particles in the sample that did not match any standards, suggesting the particulate composition of bottled water could go beyond plastic 'contaminants'. These standards refer to international rules that classify different plastic materials based on their physical and chemical properties. Particles that do not match any of these standards implied the presence of other particulate inhabitants.

**Which plastics are in the water?**

The algorithm the research team used to

track the presence of plastics in bottled water could spot following the types: polyamide 66, polypropylene (PP), polyethylene, polymethyl methacrylate, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), polystyrene, and polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

The study confirmed the fragmentation of the plastic content of real-world water samples beyond the micrometre scale. Its findings are distinguished by the research team's use of the SRS platform, which revealed a 'hidden world' of even smaller plastic particles that have eluded conventional imaging techniques.

The researchers also reported that counting the plastic particles in the model system revealed a complex relationship between the compositions, shapes, and sizes of plastic particles. For example, according to them, polystyrene particles are around 100-200 nanometres in size whereas PET particles have a size of around 1-2 micrometres. This, the researchers write, “explains why PET is a more significant component when measuring [the particles] in mass while polystyrene clearly dominates when counting the number of particles”.

The study has been published at a time when plastic pollution has become a defining concern of the present era, with microplastics being found in all ecosystems from ocean trenches to the tops of Himalayan mountains.

Studies have also found that plastic items can break down into sub-micrometre pieces, meaning they can breach biological barriers and enter different parts of the bodies of living beings.

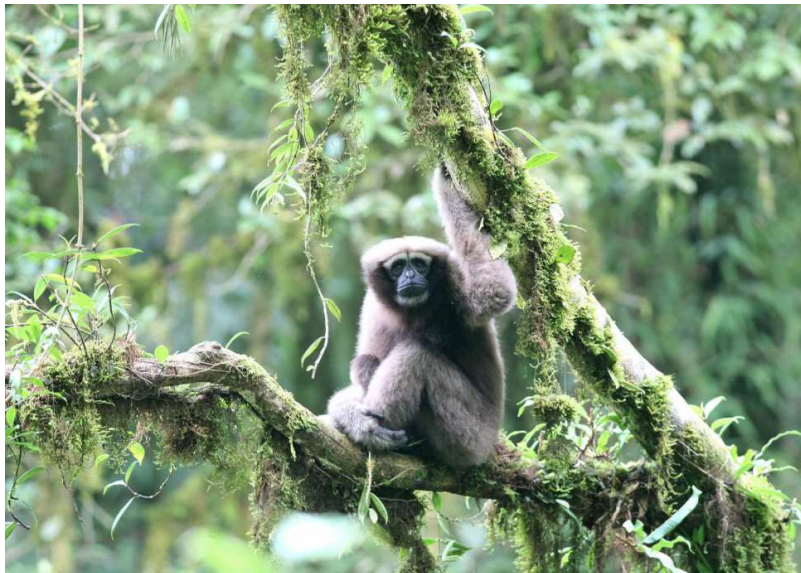
**THE GIST**

Nanoplastics are difficult to analyse due to their size and also due to the inability of different diagnostic techniques to identify them

Researchers used a SRS imaging platform along with an automated algorithm to identify plastics. The algorithm extracted detailed information about the chemical makeup from data produced by the SRS platform

Studies have found that plastic items can break down into sub-micrometre pieces, meaning they can breach biological barriers and enter different parts of the bodies of living beings

**BIG SHOT**



This picture released on February 16 shows a Skywalker hoolek gibbon in Myanmar. When the Skywalker hoolek gibbon was first discovered in 2017 by a group of Star Wars-loving scientists, its only confirmed population (fewer than 200 individuals) was in neighbouring China. But in a new study, researchers confirmed Myanmar has the largest known population of Skywalker gibbons in a single location. AFP

**QUESTION CORNER**

## Sheep are instinctive swimmers

**Q: Do sheep swim? If so, how do they learn?**

**A:** Yes, sheep do swim, said Edward Spevak, assistant curator of mammals at the Bronx Zoo. “It's basically instinctive, a life-saving device,” he said. “They don't go swimming every day, but in case of flooding or falling into a river, in essence they know how to swim.”

Sheep have never been known as big swimmers, and most of the habitat where they evolved does not have a lot of water resources, but swimming is part of their repertoire of skills, he told *The New York Times*. First of all, like many animals, they float, Spevak explained. “Then, in struggling to keep their heads above water and to keep breathing, the method they use is basically fast walking, which constitutes a kind of dog paddle.”

Other large mammals are swimmers, too, Spevak added. Cattle can swim when herded across a river, as Western movie fans know. Deer can swim as well. “The moose, the largest deer in the world, actually feeds in water and is a very good swimmer,” he said.



Sheep can maintain their form in water more than adequately. GETTY IMAGES

**For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'**



## Calm assessment Clarity on the nature and extent of 'deemed forest' is essential

The Supreme Court of India has put on pause an ambitious effort by the Centre to amend India's Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, that was brought in to check the wanton razing of forests for 'non-forestry uses'. According to the Centre, an estimated four million hectares of forest land had been diverted from 1951-75. Under the provisions of the Act, forests could no longer be diverted without adhering to a regulatory mechanism by the Centre. As a measure of its success, the Centre calculates that from 1981-2022, the average annual diversion of forest had reduced to about 22,000 hectares, or about a tenth of what it was from 1951-75. However, the provisions of this piece of legislation largely applied to forest tracts recognised as such by the India Forest Act, or any other State legislation. Illegal timber felling in Gudalur, Tamil Nadu, triggered the landmark T.N. Godavarma Thirumulpad judgment that saw the Court take an expanded view of forest tracts worthy of protection. It also said that forests had to be protected irrespective of how they were classified and who owned them. This brought in the concept of 'deemed forests', or tracts that were not officially classified as such in government or revenue records. States were asked to constitute expert committees to identify such 'deemed forests'. In the 28 years that have passed since the judgment, only a handful of States have constituted such committees or made public the extent of such 'deemed forests' within their territories.

The Centre's attempt to amend the Forest (Conservation) Act was ostensibly to bring "clarity" as there were large tracts of recorded forest land that had already been put to non-forestry uses, with the permission of State governments. There is apparently, the Centre says, a reluctance among private citizens to cultivate private plantations and orchards, despite their significant ecological benefits, for fear that they would be classified as 'forest' (and thus render their ownership void). India's ambitions to create a carbon sink of 2.5 billion-3 billion tonnes, to meet its net zero goals have required forest laws to be "dynamic" and, therefore, the rules have sought to remove 'deemed forest', not already recorded as such, from the ambit of protection. This has triggered a slew of public interest petitions as, on the face of it, the amendments appear as an assault on the Act's ambition of forest protection. While a final judgment is pending, the Court's order to the Centre to compile and make public, by April, States' efforts at recording the extent of deemed forests is welcome. At this point it is mere conjecture on the part of the Centre that India's carbon sink is being impeded due to insufficient private initiative. Only a dispassionate assessment of ground realities can drive forward this very important debate.

## Keep it wholesome

National cervical cancer control scheme must be made accessible to all

Health is seldom uni-dimensional, and it is a policy, particularly, must fathom the entirety of the issue, and assimilate multiple aspects in a field strategy, for optimum realisation of the intended goal. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement during the presentation of the interim Budget that the government plans to encourage vaccination against cervical cancer for girls aged nine to 14, is no doubt a step in the right direction. While the scheme will be fleshed out post elections, it is also time to question if any programme to handle cervical cancer would be wholesome if it did not assimilate a screening aspect. Cancer of the cervix (literally, the neck of the womb) is unique among cancers because almost all the cases (99%, according to the World Health Organization) are linked to infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common virus transmitted through sexual contact. While most HPV infections resolve spontaneously and the women remain symptom-free, persistent infection can lead to cervical cancer. It is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among women in India (over 77,000 annually), and is estimated to be the second most frequent cancer among Indian women between 15 and 44 years. While the good news is couched in the availability of a vaccine, the sobering fact is that the average national prevalence of cervical cancer screening hovers at just under 2% and outcomes depend on the stage of detection.

Ironically, cervical cancer can be easily diagnosed in a public health setting with minimal tools – the human eye, a dilution of white vinegar, and a dab of Lugol's iodine. These are known as VIA and VILI tests and help look for precancerous lesions and cancer, much before an advanced stage of the disease can be picked up with cytology. A simple, short procedure, cryotherapy, can then be done while the patient is awake, to destroy the abnormal growth. Given that it is easy to prevent, identify and treat cervical cancer, it is unacceptable that so many women are dying of the disease. As the government rolls out its vaccination programme, it must also mandate screening right at the primary health centre, and if abnormalities are identified, offer cryotherapy right then. It is unlikely that vaccination of young girls alone will have a far-reaching impact in the short and medium term. The only way to prevent deaths is to deploy the entire assembly of tools as part of a national cervical cancer control programme, accessible to all women, irrespective of age, education, affordability or social status.

With the 17th Lok Sabha having ended, the stage is now set for the general election. The final session of Parliament, unfortunately, proved to be as divisive as several of the previous sessions, with both the ruling and the Opposition parties trading charges and conceding no quarter to each other. This unseemly spectacle has given rise to concerns about the future of parliamentary democracy in the country.

We in India have been more fortunate than many other countries in being able to sustain democracy, and in earning a reputation of adherence to the best of parliamentary practices. The Constitution of India, one of the finest written Constitutions to be found anywhere in the world, includes among other Articles, a set of Fundamental Rights, Fundamental Duties of its citizens and the Directive Principles of State Policy, which have been our safeguards in sustaining democracy. Looking at the current decline in parliamentary practices, people, however, worry whether Parliament can be depended upon to sustain a stable democracy in the future.

This situation has nothing to do with India's external or internal dynamics. India is today better placed than it has been for many decades in connection with these two points. The global political environment may be murky, but India has hardly been impacted adversely, notwithstanding the ongoing war in Ukraine, the turmoils in West Asia and other similar tensions. China remains a matter of concern demanding extreme vigilance, but it does not pose an immediate threat. Pakistan, embroiled in its internal problems, is hardly a threat to India.

The internal dynamics, no doubt, are more problematic, but India has been fortunate, at least, to be spared of facing major terror attacks. There are quite a few internal security issues that lurk just below the surface. While some defy early solution, they are not insoluble. The farmers' agitation in the Punjab and Haryana has, no doubt, the potential to turn into a 'prairie fire', but if handled properly, can be controlled. The northeast region remains unsettled, with Manipur representing a microcosm of the problems that have plagued this region for years. But again, it is manageable. Communal violence is under check, even though communal tensions could be exacerbated in an election year. Left-wing extremist violence is at a low ebb as of now, even though it could see a revival in an election year.

### A 'divided' nation

What is a matter of concern though is that the country today appears more divided than it has at any time in the recent past. The Prime Minister himself has been constrained to observe that the Opposition is creating a "North-South Divide and that the Opposition was speaking the language of breaking the country". He has levelled serious



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charges against the Congress, stating that it was intent on "creating a divide among people in the name of caste, language and religion". During the interim Budget session in Parliament, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman went to the extent of personally attacking the former Finance Minister and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, of having failed to discharge his responsibilities adequately during his tenure, and of failing the nation in its hour of need. Not to be left behind, the Opposition has been pouring vitriol on the Treasury benches, accusing them of vitiating the atmosphere in Parliament and of violating existing guidelines concerning parliamentary practice and conduct. In an election year, it is not unexpected, or unknown, for political parties to trade barbs. It is, however, the element of viciousness that is seen in these exchanges, which does not augur well for either Parliament or the nation. This departure from past parliamentary traditions has resulted in a widening of the gulf between the ruling party and the entire Opposition. This is most regrettable.

### The impact of a polarised politics

On the eve of what is being posited as possibly the most critical election in this century, politics is highly polarised and is further exacerbating divisive tendencies. No issues appear beyond the pale when carving out winning strategies and ensuring bigger victory margins. Even the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya – which most Indians have welcomed – has become an election issue, with both Houses of Parliament passing a resolution terming the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as ushering in a "new era of governance and public welfare". The spectre of 'Hindu majoritarianism', whether intended or not, thus looms large in the minds of sections of the public, alongside a perception that 'Mandir' defines the nature of politics in an election year.

Federalism, on which the Constitution-makers placed great store, is becoming a victim of this situation. While some aspects could be viewed as symptomatic of the steady and gradual decline in democratic practices over the years, there is a difference today, and possibly some substance in the Opposition charge that the ruling dispensation at the Centre is breaching the federal principle with impunity. The Opposition charge sheet includes aspects such as attempts to enforce a Uniform Civil Code, alongside manifest attempts to push through the concept of "One Nation, One Election", possibly intended to undermine the role of regional parties.

Defections have been a major bane of Indian politics, but engineered defections, particularly of the kind being reported in this election year, are making a mockery of democracy and electoral politics. More to the point, ongoing efforts to induce members to change sides through inducements are undermining the entire election system. A rash of defections have

occurred which includes top leaders from other parties, to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party at the Centre. A conspicuous example of this kind has been investigating the Bihar Chief Minister, Nitish Kumar, to change sides with the implicit promise that he could continue as Chief Minister under a new dispensation (headed by the BJP). Many other instances of engineered high-level defections to the ruling party at the Centre are again taking place across the country, undermining democratic principles and practices. This conveys an impression that electoral democracy stands today at the crossroads; and that constitutionally mandated rules and practices are being trampled upon with impunity. While no one party may be responsible for this situation, given that the majority of engineered high-level defections have been to the ruling BJP in this election year, the import is loud and clear, viz., that those holding the reins of power are better positioned to alter electoral verdicts by other means.

### No rules-based order

Distinct from this, but intrinsically linked to it, are perceived violations of constitutionally mandated conduct by centrally-appointed Governors in certain States. The role of Governors in Opposition-ruled States has become a major issue between the Centre and the Opposition-ruled States of late, with these States alleging – and not without reason – that the Centre was using Governors to checkmate the policies and programmes drawn up by the Opposition-ruled States. In some instances, and in certain situations, it is leading to a virtual breakdown of relations between the Centre and the States.

The situation clearly calls for dispassionate analysis. It may be that the ruling dispensation at the Centre is not alone to blame and that the Opposition also demonstrates a disregard for constitutional niceties and the principles of federalism. The onus, however, lies mainly on the Centre. What is apparent, and most lacking today, is the absence of rules-based order in regard to Centre-State relations, and with regard to party-to-party relationships. In the absence of this, there is every danger that the system could overturn altogether.

All this is tantamount to a virtual collapse of Constitution-mandated rules of business. There is again every danger that if these were to continue, what we understand by democracy under a constitutional mandate would cease to exist. Tolerating differences is, hence, the first order of priority. Next, everything has to be subordinated to the requirements of the Constitution. Third, managing the subtle interplay between interests and values and reaffirming a firm belief in the Constitution is a basic necessity. There are no rivalries that cannot be managed within a constitutionally-mandated system, and this is essential if India, as we know it, is to survive.

That the country appears more divided than it has at any time in the recent past, and this worsening in the run-up to the general election, is cause for concern

## Having panchayats as self-governing institutions

Three decades have passed since the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments Acts came into effect, which envisaged that local bodies in India would function as institutions of local self-government. As a follow up, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was constituted in 2004 to strengthen rural local governments.

When it comes to analysing the status of devolution, it is evident that some States have forged ahead while many lag behind. The commitment of State governments towards decentralisation has been vital in making panchayati raj institutions an effective local governance mechanism at the grass-roots level. The constitutional amendment has set forth specific details on fiscal devolution which includes the generation of own revenues. Emanating from the Central Act, various States Panchayati Raj Acts have made provisions for taxation and collection. Based on the provisions of these Acts, panchayats have made efforts to generate their own resources to the maximum extent. Participatory planning and budgeting were the end result of such interventions by the Ministry.

That "Panchayats earn only 1% of the revenue through taxes", with the rest being raised as grants from the State and Centre was highlighted in a "Datapoint" (Opinion page, *The Hindu*, February 5, 2024). It specifically points out that 80% of the revenue is from the Centre and 15% from the States. This is an eye-opener for the proponents of decentralisation as the net result is that the revenue raised by panchayats is meagre even after 30 years of devolution initiatives.

### Avenues for own source of revenue

The report of the expert committee constituted by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on own source of revenue (OSR) of rural local bodies elaborates on the details of State Acts that have incorporated tax and non-tax revenue that can be collected and utilised by panchayats. Property tax, cess on land revenue, surcharge on additional stamp duty, tolls, tax on profession, advertisement, user charges for water and sanitation and lighting are



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the major OSRs where panchayats can earn maximum income. Panchayats are expected to establish a conducive environment for taxation by implementing appropriate financial

"rigor". This includes making decisions regarding the tax and non-tax bases, determining their rates, establishing provisions for periodic revisions, defining exemption areas, and enacting effective tax management and enforcement laws for collection

The huge potential for non-tax revenue includes fees, rent, and income from investment sales and hires charges and receipts. There are also innovative projects that can generate OSR.

This covers income from rural business hubs, innovative commercial ventures, renewable energy projects, carbon credits. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds and donations.

### The role of gram sabhas

Gram sabhas have a significant role in fostering self-sufficiency and sustainable development at the grass-roots level by leveraging local resources for revenue generation. They can be engaged in planning, decision-making, and implementation of revenue-generating initiatives that range from agriculture and tourism to small-scale industries. They have the authority to impose taxes, fees, and levies, directing the funds towards local development projects, public services, and social welfare programmes. Through transparent financial management and inclusive participation, gram sabhas ensure accountability and foster community trust, ultimately empowering villages to become economically resilient. Hence, gram sabhas need to promote entrepreneurship, and foster partnerships with external stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of revenue generation efforts.

In several States, gram panchayats lack the authority to collect taxes, while in numerous others, intermediate and district panchayats are not delegated the responsibility of tax collection. When gram panchayats collect 89% of own taxes, the intermediate panchayats collect 7% and the

district panchayats a nominal amount of 5%. There is a need to demarcate OSR for the entire three-tier panchayats to ensure equitable sharing.

There are several factors behind the general aversion towards generating own revenues. With the increase in the allocation of Central Finance Commission (CFC) grants, panchayats are evincing less interest in the collection of OSR. The allocation for rural local bodies from the 10th and 11th CFC was ₹4,380 crore and ₹8,000 crore, respectively. But in the 14th and 15th CFCs there was a huge increase by way of allocating ₹2,00,202 and ₹2,80,733 crore, respectively. The tax collected in 2018-19 was ₹3,12,075 lakh which diminished in 2021-2022 to ₹2,71,386 lakh. The non-tax collected for the same period was ₹2,33,863 lakh and ₹2,09,864 lakh. At one time, panchayats were in competition to raise OSR for their commitment to fulfil basic needs. This has now given place to dependency on grants allocated through central and State finance commissions. Some States have the policy of incentivisation by providing matching grants but which were sparingly implemented. Panchayats also have no need of penalising defaulters as they believe that OSR has not been regarded as an income that is linked with panchayat finance.

### Overcoming the dependency syndrome

Despite every enabling factor to raise revenue, panchayats confront several impediments in resource mobilisation: the 'freebie culture' rampant in society is the cause for the antipathy in paying taxes. Elected representatives feel that imposing taxes would alter their popularity adversely. Hence, the answer is clear. There is a need to educate elected representatives and the public on the significance of raising revenue to develop panchayats as self-governing institutions. Ultimately, the dependency syndrome for grants has to be minimised and in due course, panchayats will be able to survive on their own resources. Panchayats can only achieve such a state of affairs when there are dedicated efforts in all tiers of governance, which includes even the State and central level.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Court on poll, impact

It is a matter of shame that the Act of an election officer in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, defacing some of the ballot papers, was there for all to see. The Supreme Court's issuance of notice as

to why he should not be criminally hauled up could snowball into a crisis for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). When the BJP is a political force to reckon with, a mayoral election is insignificant since its result

will have a 'nil effect' in the overall scenario. But, in the same breath, any political misdemeanour has the potential to damage the BJP's image as the perception that the BJP is a party that will stoop to any

level to win an or any election, could gain ground.

**V. Lakshmanan**  
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

**Tamil Nadu Budget**  
The Tamil Nadu Budget may be making the right

noises in an election year, but for money to be poured over and over again into 'river rejuvenation' when it comes to the vision of 'Singara Chennai' and the Cooum and the Adyar, and without any appreciable

improvement at all, is painful. Likewise, when it comes to the issue of roads, they should stand for at least five years once they are repaired/re-laid.

**R. Ganesan**  
Chennai



## Judicial clarity on free speech

The 31st January decision of Justice Gautam Patel of the Bombay High Court in a bunch of petitions, popularly known as the Kunal Kamra's case, stands out for its compelling articulation of the constitutional fundamentals in relation to the right of free speech on "social media." The learned Judge has reiterated the sacrosanctity of the inviolate constitutional guarantee of free speech, not to be tinkered with or read down, except for the reasonable restrictions thereon as envisaged in Article 19(2), (6) of the Constitution. The affirmation of this constitutional right and its eloquent defence against State encroachment by the Judge is reassuring, even though his decision on the subject is not yet binding, because of a split verdict by the Division Bench.

The context of the decision is the amended Rule 30(b)(v) of the IT Rules 2021, widely perceived as arbitrary and unjust. Relevant extracts of the Rule are reproduced below:

"30...(b) the intermediary...shall make reasonable efforts by itself and to cause the users of its computer resource to not host, display, upload, modify, publish, transmit, store, update or share any information that, - (v) ...in respect of any business of the Central Government, is identified as fake or false or misleading by such fact check unit of the Central Government as the Ministry may, by notification published in the Official Gazette, specify."

Failure to comply with the due diligence obligation would invite penal consequences for the errant intermediary under Rule 7, reproduced below:

"The intermediary shall be liable for punishment under any law for the time being in force including the provisions of the Act and the Indian Penal Code."

The effect of these provisions is to confer unfettered powers on the Fact Check Unit (FCU) to control the digital content in matters connected with the



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business of the Central government without specifying the contours of the government's business.

Declaring the amended Rule unconstitutional, Justice Patel held that the amendment results in a form of censorship of user content that is vague and overbroad, destructive of the right to criticise and debate, does not disclose reasonable standards and objective criteria to determine the validity of the decisions of the FCU as the sole decision maker, that the amendment is not within the boundaries of reasonable restrictions envisaged in Article 19(2), (6) and that the impugned amendment was unconstitutional for infracting the rule of non-arbitrariness and non-discrimination in Article 14 absent, "clear guidance" and non-application of the Rule to the print media. Invoking, amongst other principles, the doctrine of proportionality and the absolute necessity of the measure to achieve the State's goal, the Judge held the amended Rule as ultra vires Article 19(1)(a), 19(2), 19(1)(g), 19(6), Article 14 and Section 79 of the IT Act.

The decision of the learned Judge vindicates the constitutional conscience in as much as it scoffs at "the potential for wanton abuse" of untrammelled power, a view wholly consistent with the first principles of Constitutional governance. The capping glory of the decision rests on the Judge's elevating enunciation of the democratic principle that "the cacophony of dissent and dissent is the symphony of a democracy at work...". The resounding rejection of the impugned amendment for its "chilling effect" (*Shreya Singhal*, 2015; *Zeran*, 1997) "a frontal assault on the marketplace of ideas" is the Judge's welcome message that fear instilled stillness ill serves the case of a vibrant democracy.

Importantly, the decision does not discount the need for regulation of digital platforms. Indeed, there can be no doubt

about the imperative of combatting fakery and misinformation, which are a threat to the indefeasible right to the reputation and dignity of individuals. The truth of Jonathan Swift's statement in 1710 that "Falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it," was never pronounced as now.

This decision a repudiation of the wide ambit and discriminatory nature of the regulatory power under the amended Rule and protection against the potential of its abuse. It validates the logic of judicial review as a bulwark against the excesses of majoritarian assemblies and untamed power. It reaffirms the premise of a democratic State that "the will of the State is subject to scrutiny by those who are affected by the exercise of State power and that democratic power" is "a trust held upon conditions," to secure the inherent rights of the people (Harold Laski, *A Grammar of Politics*, 1937). The judgment tells us that a law that permits its enforcers to become agents of injustice cannot be countenanced in a constitutional democracy.

The clarity of thought, the power of a clear statement and its unexceptionable constitutional premise lend a unique quality to a defining judicial decision, which represents a convergence of constitutional principles and the nation's felt sensitivities about the right of free speech as a necessary condition of freedom. Hopefully, its irrefutable rationale will attain judicial finality before long. In the interregnum, it is hoped that the Centre will heed the reported suggestion of the Judge (7th Feb) to the Centre, not to notify and operationalise the amended/impugned Rule. The tradition of deference to judicial decisions in matters of import and expectation of self-restraint on the part of the government to foster inter-institutional comity demands that the impugned amendment to Rule 30(b)(v) of the IT Rules 2021 be kept in abeyance.

Views expressed are personal

## Will the TDP-JSP alliance work out?

The alliance in A.P. faces challenges, including disagreements on seat-sharing

### STATE OF PLAY

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In September last year, Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief Pawan Kalyan announced that his party would tie-up with N. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party (TDP), to oust Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy from the seat of power in the State.

The announcement came after the actor-turned-politician Mr. Pawan had met with TDP chief who was then under judicial remand for his alleged involvement in the Andhra Pradesh skill development scam.

Mr. Pawan also stated that the alliance was important not only to defeat the YSR Congress party (YSRCP) but also to see that the anti-YSRCP votes do not get split.

But ever since the announcement, there has been an element of doubt if the tie-up would hold till the last minute. And if it holds, will it be able to stop the YSRCP juggernaut.

Though there are sufficient indications of anti-incumbency against the Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSR Congress government, he is entrenched in the rural parts with the welfare schemes.

He is confident that these initiatives will help him secure success in the upcoming 2024 General and Assembly elections.

While the TDP-JSP alliance has been organising joint meetings and grassroots gatherings involving leaders and members, a concern for both leaders and members revolves around the issue of 'seat-sharing' in the upcoming elections.



ANDHRA PRADESH

secretary and Mr. Naidu's son Nara Lokesh publicly announced that Mr. Naidu will be the Chief Minister, once the alliance comes to power.

This did not go well with Mr. Pawan and his party men, as the JSP chief in all his meetings had said that the Chief Minister candidate would be decided after the combination wins the election and throws YSRCP out of power.

Mr. Pawan also found fault when TDP had unilaterally declared the MLA candidate for the Mandapeta constituency even before a seat-sharing agreement was arrived at and remarked that the TDP had violated their alliance. He (Pawan) himself then had gone ahead to say that JSP would field its candidate from Razole and Rajanagara.

But Mr. Naidu was quick enough to douse the fire and from then on, he stuck to his statement that the candidates would be finalised only after the leaders come to a common consensus.

But seat-sharing will be a herculean task, as both parties are divided on caste lines.

TDP is primarily a Kammas-based party and Mr. Pawan is looked up as a champion for the Kapu community, which has the largest vote share in the State with over about 25 per cent. The Kammas and the Kapus are known not to see 'eye to eye'.

JSP is relatively a new party and lacks good MLA faces. While on the other hand TDP,

which has been one of the strongest regional forces in the country, has no dearth of leaders.

Mr. Pawan himself had agreed that his party lacks good MLA candidates and he needs to build that base and that is why he was keen on tying up with the TDP, to see that the votes are not split. The question would be - would Mr. Naidu sacrifice one of his strong candidates to accommodate someone from the JSP and if so, how many seats can he give away.

The equation of vote sharing would be a crucial factor, which is why both parties have so far not been able to announce anything concrete on this factor.

**BJP factor**  
Another development that can either upset or get the cart rolling, is BJP joining the alliance.

Both Mr. Naidu and Mr. Pawan were summoned to New Delhi by Union Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah, about a week ago, to discuss the modalities of the alliance and so far nothing has been declared openly.

BJP-TDP-JSP was a winning combination in 2014 when Mr. Naidu became the Chief Minister, but will it work this time is the question as BJP is facing resentment from the State for a number of reasons such as not agreeing to the Special Category Status.

A few senior political analysts say the BJP joining the alliance may also upset the minority voters in the TDP-JSP combination. Moreover, the BJP will also demand some share of the seats, which leaves a lesser number of seats for the TDP.

With all these, the election in Andhra Pradesh looks to be heading toward a high-octane show.

## Making sense of electoral bond judgment through data

Data published by the Association for Democratic Reforms played a vital role in assessing electoral bonds' impact

### DATA POINT

**Sonikka Loganathan**  
**Vignesh Kadhakrishnan**

Last week, the Supreme Court ruled the electoral bonds Scheme unconstitutional, saying that the anonymous influx of funding to political parties, especially from corporations, hinders democratic legitimacy. The unanimous judgment squashed the government's argument that the scheme is transparent because donors have to go through official banking channels to purchase these bonds, despite their identity being hidden.

The Bench agreed that the voters' right to know was violated, by the anonymity electoral bonds provide. In Justice Sanjay Khanna's opinion, "access to information which can materially shape the citizens' choice is necessary for them to have a say in how their lives are affected." This meant Solicitor General Tushar Mehta's argument that no black or unaccounted money can be used for bonds was not strong enough as, "denying voters the right to know the details of funding of political parties would lead to a dichotomous situation."

Data from the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), one of the petitioners in the case, shows that the share of unknown sources of income has only increased after the introduction of the electoral bond scheme, in direct contradiction to the government's claim. The ADR categorises the income of political parties into two primary categories: known and unknown. Known income is further divided into two subtypes - voluntary contributions over ₹20,000 with donor details provided to the Election Commission of India, and other known sources of income such as the sale of movable and immovable assets. The unknown income encompasses voluntary donations over ₹20,000 where

donor details remain undisclosed.

Table 1 shows that the share of unknown sources of income for national parties increased from 66% between FY15 and FY17 to 72% between FY19 and FY22. The transition year FY18, the year in which the scheme was introduced, was not considered for analysis. The BJP's share of unknown income increased from 58% to 68% in the period, while the Congress' remained at around 80%.

A reason behind the call for transparency is that a bulk of these donations were made by corporations. This gives unfair power to a certain section. "... [The] amendment to Section 182 by permitting unlimited corporate contributions (including by shell companies) authorises unrestrained influence of companies on the electoral process. This is violative of the principle of free and fair elections...". The court observed. Justice Khanna noted that the 25th report by the Law Commission of India states that when importance is given to certain groups, it violates, "the right of equal participation of each citizen in the polity." ADR data shows that the BJP received a lion's share of corporate donations in the FY17 to FY22 period - ₹3,200 crores or 84% of them (Chart 2).

Over 90% of the electoral bonds sold in terms of value and over 50% sold in terms of numbers belonged to the ₹1 crore denomination. The share of other denominations - ₹10 lakhs, ₹1 lakh, ₹10,000 and ₹1,000 - in electoral bond sales, paled in comparison as shown in Chart 3. The court observed that this data pointed to the influence of corporates in the scheme, as not many individuals can afford to donate in crores. Finally, the court also observed that a bulk of the donations from electoral bonds were done in favour of the BJP. ADR data shows that in the FY18-FY22 period, the BJP earned ₹5,272 crore through electoral bonds - 57% of the money donated to all parties in this route (Chart 4).

### Bond villain

The data for charts and tables were sourced from the Supreme Court of India's electoral bond judgment and the Association for Democratic Reforms



**Table 1: Income of national parties from known and unknown sources and their share in the total income of parties**

Parameter	National parties		BJP		Congress	
	FY15-17	FY19-22	FY15-17	FY19-22	FY15-17	FY19-22
Known income from donations > ₹20,000 (A)	1,314	3,340	1,046	2,620	204	458
Total unknown income (B)	2,550	8,489	1,431	5,516	757	1,823
Total income without other known sources (C = A+B)	3,864	11,829	2,477	8,136	961	2,280
Total income from electoral bonds (D)	0	6,841	0	5,062	0	947
% of known income from donations > ₹20,000 (A/C)	34%	28%	42%	32%	21%	20%
% of unknown income (B/C)	66%	72%	58%	68%	79%	80%
Electoral bonds income as a % of total income (D/C)	0%	58%	0%	62%	0%	42%
Electoral bonds income as a % of unknown income (D/B)	0%	81%	0%	92%	0%	52%

Chart 2: Corporate donation received by national parties (in ₹ crore) between FY17 and FY22

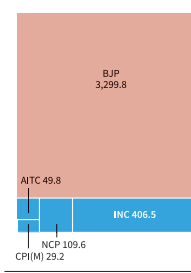


Chart 3: Denomination-wise sale of electoral bonds between March 2018 and July 2023. Figures in %

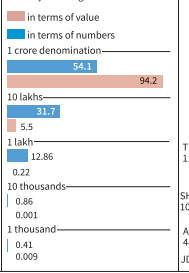
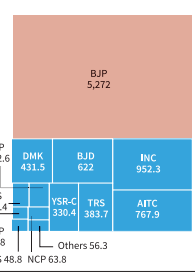


Chart 4: Party-wise donation received through electoral bonds (in ₹ crore) between FY17 and FY22



### FROM THE ARCHIVES

## The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 21, 1974

## ONGC to drill more wells in Bombay High region

New Delhi, Feb. 20: With the encouraging strike for oil in the first well on Bombay High, the Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC) is expected to go ahead drilling more wells in this promising structure, 160 km off Bombay.

Though oil was flowing out from a depth of 962 metres the drill ship "Sagar Samrat" will continue to drill the well to its projected depth of 2,000 metres before moving on to another drilling point, 40 km away from this site.

The news of the oil strike was received here with jubilation and the Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals, Mr. D. K. Barooah, is likely to go to the "Sagar Samrat" to congratulate personally the workers "who have done a good job."

Experts point out that the oil found in the well is of high quality with API gravity of 43.6 which indicates an oil lighter than the light Arabian crude.

The lightness implies that oil from Bombay High, if commercially exploitable, will have very small sulphur content. According to petroleum geologists, this will make extraction of oil considerably easy.

Interpreting the pressure encountered experts say that reservoir pressures varying from 15 pounds to 12.635 pounds per square inch have been recorded in the world and Bombay High's 500 pounds is on the low side.

Since the highest pressure is usually recorded in the first drilling, experts say that increased pressures are unlikely with further penetration.

Geologists, however, feel that reservoirs with pressures greater than 500 pounds per square inch could exist in other zones in the Bombay High region.

As the location is more than 160 km away from the nearest Bombay coast, steel pipelines will have to be laid under the sea bed connecting the oil wells.

### A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 21, 1924

## Lady J.P.'s in Bombay.

Bombay, Feb. 20: Four ladies have been appointed this year for the first time as justices of peace for Bombay. These are Lady Jagmohandas Varjivandas, Dilshad Begum, Mrs. Harry Hodgkinson and Lady Cowasji Jehangir.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

## Surge in the shares of crisis-hit fintech company Paytm

**5** In percentage. The scrip of the company surged ₹376.45 and ₹376.25 apiece — its upper circuit limit — on the BSE and NSE. The rally comes after the company announced its collaboration with Axis Bank for the continuation of merchant settlements. **PTI**

## The rise in the number of measles cases globally last year

**79** In percentage. The WHO voiced alarm at the rapid spread of measles around the world, with more than 3,06,000 cases reported last year. The WHO's estimate indicates that there were 9.2 million cases and 1,36,216 measles deaths in 2022. **AFP**

## The decline in Suez Canal revenues due to Houthi attacks

**40-50** In percentage. The canal is one of the main sources of foreign currency for Egypt which is undergoing a severe financial crisis. Several shipping firms have stopped passage through the Red Sea. **AFP**

## The number of EPFO members added in December

**15.62** in lakh. An increase of 11.97% was registered in net member addition during December 2023 compared to the previous month. The data showed that 8.41 lakh new members were enrolled in December 2023. **PTI**

## Number of investor accounts added in January

**46.7** in lakh. The mutual fund industry saw an uptick in folios. Over the past year, average folio additions were 22.3 lakh per month; the latest figure was more than double this level. **PTI**

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Why are farmers protesting again?

What is the primary demand of the farmers who are currently camped out near different locations on the Haryana border? Why have meetings with the Union government failed? What is the government's stance with respect to purchasing crops at Minimum Support Price?

## EXPLAINER

## Vikas Vasudeva

**The story so far:** In February 13, groups of farmers heeded a call given by the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (non-political) and began a march to the national capital, to press for fulfilment of their demands, which include a legal guarantee for purchasing crops at Minimum Support Price (MSP) and a farm loan waiver.

**How has the march progressed?** While farmers from different States have reportedly started heading for Delhi, it has been largely from Punjab that scores of farmers started their 'tractor-trolley' march to reach Delhi via Haryana. As farmers arrived at Shambhu-Ambala and Khanauri-Jind, the inter-state boundary between Haryana and Punjab, they were stopped from entering Haryana. The Haryana government had put in place elaborate security arrangements with multi-layer barricades, which included iron nails, barbed wires, concrete barricade-blocks, boulders, trenches and anti-riot vehicles on the roads bordering Punjab. Additionally, the police resorted to the use of tear gas through drones, and water cannons to disperse the agitating farmers. Police-farmer clashes ensued when farmer groups attempted to enter Haryana by pushing and throwing away the multi-layer barricades.

Massive deployment of police and paramilitary personnel have been put in place in areas bordering Delhi to stop protesting farmers from entering the city. As the stand-off continues, farmers from Punjab have been camping near different locations on the inter-state boundary with Haryana and are set to resume their march on February 21.

**What about talks between the two?** So far, four rounds of meetings have been



**A long fight:** Farmers protest near the Haryana-Punjab state border at Shambhu on February 20. **AFP**

held between the Union government and farmer leaders but they have not resulted in anything concrete. On February 18, after the latest meeting between Union Ministers Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal, Nityanand Rai and farmer leaders Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Sarwan Singh Pandher, the government offered to procure five crops on MSP by entering into a contract for five years. The protesting farmers, however, rejected the government's offer.

According to Sarwan Singh Pandher, coordinator of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, the proposal presented during the fourth meeting was different than what the Union Ministers disclosed before the media after the meeting was over. He pointed out that in the meeting it was proposed that the government would purchase five crops including masoor

(lentil), urad (black gram), arhar (pigeon peas), maize, and cotton at the MSP. However, what was conveyed after the meeting was that the buying would be done for five years under contractual agreements. This, Mr. Pandher said was not acceptable, and hence the offer was rejected. According to Samyukta Kisan Morcha leaders, the government should clarify whether the MSP they proposed is based on the A2-FL+ 50% method (input cost and family labour) or at the rate of C2 (input cost and rent of the land)+50%. They asserted that there has been no transparency in the discussions.

**What are the primary demands?** The primary concern of the protesting farmers is that no law on MSP has been enacted yet, and that the Union government is turning a blind eye to their

other demands despite repeated appeals.

The MSP is the price at which the government promises, on paper, to procure agricultural produce from farmers. There are MSPs for 22 crops, primarily grains, pulses and oil seeds, paddy and copra. According to studies, only a small share of farmers in the country benefits from MSPs. Farmers accuse that even as the government promised to look into their demands during the earlier agitation, it has been going slow on its commitments.

### What has been government's stance?

The Union government has repeatedly asserted that announcing a guaranteed MSP will not be possible. The Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda told the media that for a law on guaranteed MSP, the Centre would have to look at all sides.

The ongoing farmers' protest rekindled memories of the year-long agitation by farmers during 2020-21 when scores of farmers camped at several places around Delhi's borders. Back then, farmers were demanding a repeal of the three farm laws enacted by the Union government, which they asserted were detrimental to the interests of the agricultural community. These included the Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, and the Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act. The laws were rolled back in 2021 by the Centre. One of the key demands included a guarantee for purchasing crops at MSP.

Other demands include a complete loan waiver for the farmers and farm labour, a monthly pension for 58-year-old farmers/farm labourers, withdrawal of the Electricity Amendment Bill, 2020, reintroduction of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 to ensure farmers consent and compensation at four times the collector rate, 200 days of employment annually at a daily wage of ₹700 under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act etc.

## THE GIST

While farmers from different States have reportedly started heading for Delhi, it has been largely from Punjab that scores of farmers started their 'tractor-trolley' march to reach Delhi via Haryana.

The primary concern of the protesting farmers is that no law on MSP has been enacted yet, and that the Union government is turning a blind eye to their other demands despite repeated appeals.

The Union government has repeatedly asserted that announcing a guaranteed MSP will not be possible. The Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda told the media that for a law on guaranteed MSP, the Centre would have to look at all sides.

## On the right to maintenance for divorced Muslim women

Do personal laws debar divorced Muslim women from availing maintenance under Section 125 CrPC?

## Aaratrika Bhaumik

**The story so far:** The Supreme Court has decided to examine if a divorced Muslim woman is entitled to a claim of maintenance under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) from her former husband — reigniting the debate on whether secular laws should be given precedence over distinct personal laws. On February 19, a Bench comprising Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih reserved its verdict in the case.

**How has the law evolved?** The law governing maintenance for destitute wives, children, and parents has been codified under Section 125 of the CrPC. It stipulates that if any person "having sufficient means neglects or refuses to maintain" his wife, — then a magistrate of the first class may, upon proof of such neglect or refusal, order

such a person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his wife at a monthly rate as the magistrate thinks fit. The explanation to this provision clarifies that a "wife" includes any woman who has been divorced by, or has obtained a divorce from, her husband and has not remarried.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 (1986 Act) on the other hand, is a religion-specific law that provides a procedure for a Muslim woman to claim maintenance during divorce. Section 3 of the 1986 Act guarantees the payment of maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman by her former husband only during the period of *iddat* — a period, usually of three months, which a woman must observe after the death of her husband or a divorce before she can remarry. After the completion of the *iddat* period, a woman can approach a first-class magistrate for maintenance in case she has not remarried and is not in a position to take care of herself financially.

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in the *Danial Latifi versus Union Of India* (2001) case upheld the constitutional validity of the 1986 Act by extending the right of a Muslim woman to get maintenance till she re-marries. It, however, reduced the period of maintenance to the completion of *iddat*. In 2009, a Division Bench of the Supreme Court reiterated a divorced Muslim woman's right to claim maintenance under Section 125 of the CrPC as long as she does not remarry. It highlighted that such a relief would be extended even after the expiry of the *iddat* period.

**How did the proceedings play out?** The apex court pointed out that Section 3 of the 1986 Act begins with a non-obstacle clause ("notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force"), and thus it does not bar an alternative remedy under Section 125 of the CrPC. Senior advocate Gaurav Agrawal, the amicus, agreed with

this observation. He also said that the question of whether the 1986 Act takes away the right under Section 125 of the CrPC was not dealt with in *Danial Latifi* and thus there is a requirement of an authoritative pronouncement in this regard.

"However, the observations in paragraph 33 of the judgment suggest that the 1986 Act has to be interpreted in such a manner that the divorced Muslim woman is entitled to all rights of maintenance as are available to other divorced women in the country. Consequently, the rights of divorced women cannot be taken away only from one section of divorced women of our country, lest it infringe Articles 14, 15, and 21 of the Constitution. Thus, the validity of the 1986 Act was upheld with this understanding that the 1986 Act does not seek to treat Muslim divorced women any less favourably than other divorced women," he elucidated.

Dismissing the petitioner's argument that the provisions of the 1986 Act reflect the Parliament's intent to debar Muslim women from seeking relief under Section 125 of the CrPC, the court asserted that if that were the case then the legislators would have explicitly given an overriding effect to the 1986 Act. "The Act does not say no petition under Section 125 shall be filed by Muslim women. They should have said that. In the absence of such a thing, can we add the restriction to the Act?" Justice B.V. Nagarathna emphasised.

## THE GIST

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**



**Voice from the east:** Khasi women from the West Khasi Hill district of Meghalaya cross a hanging bridge in 2020. RITU RAJ KONWAR



**FROM THE ARCHIVES**

**Know your English**

**K. Subrahmanian**

"Ms. A. S. Pramila wants to know the difference between 'He contracted typhoid causing his mother to fear for his survival' and 'He contracted typhoid causing his mother to fear his survival.'"

"To fear for his survival' means the fear that he might not survive. His mother is anxious that he should continue to live. She is concerned about his life. 'To fear his survival' means that he might survive and his survival will be a cause for fear. The sentence means that his mother is afraid that he may survive."

"Several readers would like to know (a) what an idiom is (b) whether good writing or speech should contain a lot of idioms."

"I discussed this briefly a couple of years ago. Perhaps it wasn't clear. An idiom is 'a mode of expression peculiar to a language, an expression characteristic of a particular language not logically or grammatically applicable.' Take the sentence 'She drank milk.' The meaning of this sentence is the total meaning of 'she' plus 'drank' plus 'milk' in that order. By and large, the meaning of a sentence is the total meaning of the words in that sentence. Now take this sentence: 'She kicked the bucket.' The sentence means that she died. We don't get this meaning by combining the meaning of 'she', 'kicked' and 'bucket'. That is why we call an idiom 'a peculiar mode of expression'. You cannot change the structure of an idiom as you please. You have to use it as it is. You can't say 'He kicked a bucket' or 'He kicked buckets'."

"To kick the bucket' is the idiom and it must be used in that form. No alteration is permissible except when you want to be humorous. Idioms should be used judiciously. Idioms are like sweets. We enjoy eating sweets occasionally. We can't live on sweets. We live on our staple diet. Ordinary language is like the staple diet and idioms are like sweets. A speech or writing full of idioms would sound odd and funny. Here is an extract from a dialogue I wrote some years ago:

"How are you?"  
"Fit as a fiddle."  
"How is your father?"  
"In the pink of health."  
"How is your uncle?"  
"He has one foot in the grave."  
"Your aunt?"  
"She kicked the bucket a year ago."  
"Why do you speak like this? Are you so fond of idioms?"

"I am head over heels in love with them. There is more to an idiom than meets the eye, you know. Well, I have to be in another place at nine on the dot..."

"If you speak or write in this manner, you will be considered 'idiotic'. 'Idiom' and 'idiotic' are from the same root."

"Palindrome fans, your time has come: It is 1991 reads the same backward as forward. The last time this happened was in 1881, one of those years that another New York reader thinks should be called a palindromannum. Consider: In every century of this millennium, we have been treated to only one palindromannum - 1001,111,1221 and so on - at intervals of 110 years. But we fortunate humans have the prospect of two such years almost within a decade. The year 2002 is just around the corner. We live in interesting times'. - William Safire"

Published in *The Hindu* on March 5, 1991.

# Tracking the northeast: new fiction by women and a history of the Kohima Battle

New books on the region chronicle old and new struggles, the history of insurgency and other battles and life in the borderlands; women, important knowledge keepers, throw light on a host of issues from patriarchy to the struggle of everyday life

**Sudipta Datta**

**P**enguin has just opened a book store in Nagaland's Chümoukedima town, which lies on the way to its capital Kohima, in association with the White Owl Book Lounge. This is the second exclusive store for the publishing house outside Delhi, and a welcome move in a State with a rich oral tradition and many stories to tell. Nagaland has just held its first literature festival too, earlier this month. Publishers like Zubaan and Speaking Tiger regularly bring out books on the northeast, offering new narratives, chronicling old and new struggles, the history of insurgency and other battles, life in the borderlands and so forth.

In her Introduction to *We Come from Mist, Writings from Meghalaya* (Zubaan), Janice Pariat eloquently writes that much like the rain, the mist is its own entity in this northeastern State, "filled with palpable agency, writing, slithering, billowing, being." She says: "We come from mist, because our stories come from there - the realm of the intangible, the spoken, the sung, from air, and light, and water, all those elements that exist beyond the confines of page and ink and typography."

The publishing house, Zubaan, set up in 2003 as an imprint of India's first feminist publishing house, Kali for Women, has launched a series of books by women from the Northeast, including

from Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Meghalaya.

**'Politics of place'**

In *We Come from Mist*, there's a contiguous thread running through many of the stories, poems, illustrations Pariat collected, all by women - that of "politics of place, emerging in the recounting and remembering of the history of militant insurgency, especially during the 1980s and 1990s." Meghalaya's "astounding landscape" marked by monoliths or mawbryna find mention in both illustration (Balaiaimon Kharnapkynta) and poem (Amanda Basaiaimoi's 'Shared Stories'). But, as Pariat points out, the recurring theme is that of bonds struck between women.

Written accounts of women's lives are still rare in Mizoram, say the editors of *The Keepers of Knowledge: Writings from Mizoram* (Zubaan), Hmingthanualai and Mary Vanlalhanpuii, but it's changing. They point out that recent research on Mizo oral traditions have shown that despite the fact that women's knowledge and words were disregarded in a patriarchal society, they found other ways to articulate their concerns, one way being composing songs, one way being composing poems. It is not mere chance, they write, that studies on Mizo folk songs always begin with the story of Pi Hmuaki, the first song composer who was buried alive on the orders of the village chief and others who were said to be jealous of her talent.

While the tragedy may have prevented other women from raising their voices, "it did not stop them from becoming more active in composing songs," the lyrics speaking out against injustice. When Christian missionaries arrived, women began writing within the enclosure of the Church, but they also dabbled in novels and short stories. And though most of the works on Rambuai, the 20-year conflict in Mizoram from 1966-1986, are by men, there are at least two memoirs by former Mizo National Front women volunteers.

**The Battle of Kohima**

Late last year, Mmholiimo Kikon, writer and politician from Nagaland, wrote about the decisive Battle of Kohima in the Second World War which has been documented about by many American and British historians.

*His Majesty's* Headhunters (Penguin) tells the story from the perspective of the Nagas, and their crucial role in how the Allied forces led by Lieutenant General William Slim defeated the Japanese army led by Lieutenant General Kenya Mutaguchi and Lt. Gen. Sato.

"In many a conversation," he writes in the Introduction, "the Nagas cite three reasons for the victory of the Allied forces over the Imperial Japanese Army - first and foremost being the intelligence inputs and the labour service provided by Naga villagers." Kikon profiles the headhunters who "decapitated with the right blow of the dao" and generals like Yambamo

Lotha, considered "one of the best headhunters from Phiro village in Lotha country." The second reason for the loss of the Japanese is attributed to their "improper planning" and differences among the top two generals, with the third being the air cover provided by the U.S. Air Force and the supply of ammunition and arms.

**Stories, myths, legends**

But much before it became a battlefield, Kohima (even the name is a corruption, villagers called it Kewhima or Kewhira - the British often mispronounced local names) was the political administrative headquarters of the British colonial government since 1878.

Kikon tells the story of how Kohima became the capital of the Naga Hills and the battle between colonial forces and Angami Nagas. It took the British over four decades to establish their headquarters in Kohima, and many more years to secure it. In telling his version of a famous battle, Kikon also traces the origins of Kohima and its journey to becoming the capital of Nagaland in 1963 when the State came into being with stories, myths and legends.

Writing about Meghalaya, Pariat says, "...we are a storied people, fond of tall tales and strange superstitions, passing them on to our children and our children's children."

She could be talking about all the other States in the region too.

**THE DAILY QUIZ**

## A quiz on languages on the occasion of International Mother Language Day being celebrated on February 21

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

**V. V. Ramanan**

**QUESTION 1**  
According to the popular writer Stephen King, which language "turns dirt into romance"?

**QUESTION 2**  
Which was the second language, after Tamil, to become a legally recognised classical language of India?

**QUESTION 3**  
From which language do we get words like assassin, sugar, and zero?

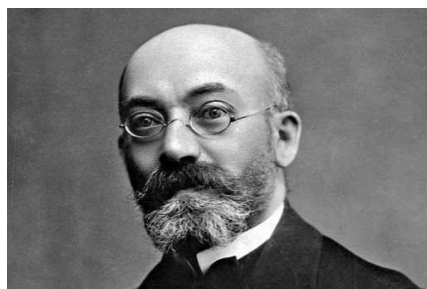
**QUESTION 4**  
In fiction, which specific type of people spoke 'khuzdul'?

**QUESTION 5**  
Alphabetically arranged from A to Z, which would be the first and last in the six official languages of the UN?

**QUESTION 6**  
Which letter appears in approximately 11% of all words in the common English vocabulary and is the second most popular key after the space bar on a keyboard?

**QUESTION 7**  
Nepali is an official language of which Indian State?

**QUESTION 8**  
What is 'loanword'?



**Visual question:** Name this famous linguist and what 'universal' language did he create.

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The salute adopted by Nazi Germany closely resembled this salute, created by James Upham. **Ans: Bellamy salute**

2. This salute originated from a 16th century naval tradition in which a ship would deplete its ammunition by firing its cannons into the water. **Ans: 21 gun salute**

3. The practice of greeting rulers of princely states by firing a certain number of guns was discontinued in this year. **Ans: 1971**

4. The salute in which the palm of the right hand faces downward is for this branch of the armed forces. **Ans: Navy**

5. This German fighter pilot was given a full military funeral, including a gun salute by Australia. **Ans: Manfred von Richthofen**

**Word of the day**

**Rapport:** a relationship of mutual understanding or trust and agreement between people

**Synonym:** resonance

**Usage:** He established a good rapport with the boss.

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/rapportpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ræ'pɔːl/, /ræ'pouːl/, /rə'pouːl/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to [letters@thehindu.co.in](mailto:letters@thehindu.co.in) with the subject 'Text & Context'



LONDON

Prince William appeals for an end to fighting in Gaza at the earliest



Prince William, the heir to the British throne, called on Tuesday for an end to fighting in the Gaza Strip as soon as possible. In a statement released by his office at Kensington Palace, he stopped short of calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza as the House of Commons prepares for a vote on that issue on Wednesday. AP

CAIRO

Hamas chief arrives in Egypt for negotiations on ceasefire in Gaza



Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh arrived in Cairo on Tuesday for talks with Egyptian officials, days after mediators said chances for a new truce with Israel had dimmed. The head of Hamas's political bureau will "hold talks with Egyptian officials on the political situation and the situation in the field", a statement said. AFP

MOSCOW

Kremlin arrests U.S.-Russian woman on charges of treason



Russia's FSB security services said on Tuesday it had arrested a U.S.-Russian woman suspected of treason for raising funds for the Ukrainian army. The FSB in Yekaterinburg said it had "suppressed the illegal activities" of a 33-year-old woman, a resident of Los Angeles with dual citizenship, and taken her into custody. AFP

THE HAGUE

South Africa accuses Israel of apartheid against Palestinians



South Africa argued at the United Nations' top court on Tuesday that Israel is responsible for apartheid against the Palestinians and that Israel's occupation of land sought for a Palestinian state is "inherently and fundamentally illegal." Israel rejects such claims. Israel is also not making a statement during the hearings. AP

Sick Assange absent at extradition hearing

Agence France-Presse  
LONDON

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was on Tuesday absent due to illness from a London court hearing his final appeal against extradition to the United States to face trial for publishing secret military and diplomatic files.

Opening the two-day hearing in Mr. Assange's absence, his lawyer Edward Fitzgerald said his prosecution could not be justified.

Washington wants the Australian extradited after he was charged there multiple times between 2018 and 2020 over WikiLeaks' 2010 publication of files relating to the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. "He is being prosecuted for engaging in ordinary journalistic practice of obtaining and publishing classified information, information that is both true and of obvious and important public interest," Mr. Fitzgerald said.

U.S. vetoes UN vote on Gaza ceasefire, pushes alternative

The resolution, prepared by Algeria, had called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire; Washington says pact would put 'sensitive negotiations in jeopardy' risking the release of hostages

Agence France-Presse  
NEW YORK

The United States vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on Tuesday that called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, even as President Joe Biden faced mounting pressure to dial back support for Israel. The resolution, which Algeria had been working on for three weeks, had demanded "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire that must be respected by all parties."

"Proceeding with a vote today was wishful and irresponsible... we cannot support a resolution that would put sensitive negotiations in jeopardy," said Washington's Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, while advocating an alternate resolution drafted by the U.S.

The vote came as Israel prepares to move into the



Failed bid: The UN Security Council holds a meeting on the Gaza war, at the UN Headquarters in New York on Wednesday. AFP

southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million people have fled, as part of its mission to destroy the Palestinian militant group Hamas.

However Israel is facing increased pressure to hold off, including from its closest ally the United States.

The draft resolution had opposed the "forced displacement of the Palesti-

nian civilian population." It additionally demanded the release of all hostages taken by Hamas in an attack on October 7.

But, similarly to other previous drafts spurred by the U.S. and Israel, the text did not condemn that assault by Hamas, which left about 1,160 people dead in southern Israel, mostly civilians.

UNICEF says one in six Gaza children malnourished

Associated Press  
RAFAH

Israel ordered new evacuations from parts of Gaza City on Tuesday, as a study led by the UN children's agency found that one in six children are acutely malnourished in the isolated and largely devastated north of the territory, where the city is located.

The report by the Global Nutrition Cluster, an aid partnership led by UNICEF, says more than 90% of children under 5 in Gaza eat two or fewer food groups a day, known as severe food poverty. A similar percentage are affected by infectious diseases.

The Israeli military ordered the evacuation of the Zaytoun and Turkoman neighbourhoods on the southern edge of Gaza City, an indication that Palestinian militants are still putting up stiff resistance in areas of northern Gaza that the Israeli military said had been largely cleared.



The move comes as Sri Lankans reel under the painful aftermath of a financial meltdown. REUTERS

India, Sri Lanka move forward with talks on trade agreement

Meera Srinivasan  
COLOMBO

India and Sri Lanka are set to take ongoing discussions on the Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) forward, with the next two rounds of bilateral talks scheduled later this month and in March.

The progress in negotiations is significant for New Delhi and Colombo, as the much-discussed pact was stalled in the past, owing to stiff opposition from some worker unions and hardline Sinhala-nationalist politicians, who saw the agreement as favouring Indian interests predominantly, while endangering Sri Lankan labour. At least 11 rounds of discussions were held between 2016 and 2019, when the Maldivian Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration was in power, but the two sides failed to reach an agreement amid protests in Sri Lanka.

Official sources familiar with the negotiations told *The Hindu* that the two sides are exploring ways of linking service trade to investments to ensure there is no threat to local labour. "Free movement of individual professionals is not anticipated in the agreement," a senior official said. Mr. Wickremesinghe on Monday briefed his Cabinet on the talks, and the 14th round of discussions of the proposed agreement is scheduled to be held on the first week of March 2024, the official press release said.

India and Sri Lanka first signed a free trade agreement in 1998. While the two sides have since attempted to upgrade it multiple times, the attempts proved unsuccessful.

After talks on the stalled pact resumed under President Wickremesinghe has emphasised the need for trade pacts to aid the country's economic recovery. Earlier this month, Sri Lanka inked a free trade pact with Thailand. India, followed by China, are the other two key partners with which Mr. Wickremesinghe is keen to have upgraded agreements, even as Sri Lankans reel under the painful aftermath of a financial meltdown.

After talks on the stalled pact resumed under Presi-

Chile to reopen probe into mystery death of poet Pablo Neruda

Agence France-Presse  
SANTIAGO

Chile will once again try to resolve the mystery of what really killed Nobel laureate poet Pablo Neruda, who many believe was poisoned by the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, a court said on Tuesday.

An appeals court in Santiago ordered the reopening of the investigation into the death of Neruda, who was a prominent member of Chile's Communist Party when military dictator Augusto Pinochet took power in a coup in 1973. In a statement, the court said that the "investigation has not been exhausted as there are precise procedures that can be carried out to clarify the facts."

Neruda had been preparing to flee into exile in Mexico to lead the resistance against the Pinochet regime when he died in hospital just 12 days after the coup. The government claimed the 69-year-old had died of prostate cancer.

An investigation into the cause of Neruda's death began in 2011 when Manuel Araya - his driver and personal assistant - asserted that the poet was given a mysterious injection in his chest just before he died.

Araya died in June last year, aged 77. Neruda's remains were exhumed in 2013 to be tested for traces of poison and returned for burial three

years later. In 2017, a group of Chilean and international experts concluded that Neruda did not die of cancer, but said they could not determine what did kill him.

And in 2023, a scientific panel investigating Neruda's death was also unable to determine whether he had been poisoned, even though they detected dangerous botulism-causing bacteria in his system.

Their findings were delivered to Judge Paola Plaza who ordered the probe closed in December 2023. Neruda's family and the Communist Party appealed that decision soon after, meaning Plaza's final report was never made public.

Among the measures ordered by the appeals court is "a new analysis of the handwriting of the death certificate," saying Neruda's death was also unable to determine whether he had been poisoned, even though they detected dangerous botulism-causing bacteria in his system.

The court also ordered the "meta-analysis" of the results of the experts who analysed Neruda's remains and for new witnesses and an expert in clostridium botulinum bacteria to testify. Neruda is remembered especially for sensual poems about love.

Man v/s waste



A worker removes labels from used plastic bottles as he works in a plastic bottle recycling factory in Dhaka on Wednesday. REUTERS

Navalny's mother asks Putin to release body

Agence France-Presse  
MOSCOW

The mother of Alexei Navalny urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to "immediately" release the body of her son, in her first comments since his death in an Arctic prison.

Navalny's mother, Lyudmila Navalnaya, travelled to the remote IK-3 penal colony on Saturday, the morning after his death was announced, and has since been barred from seeing his body.

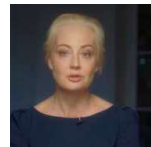
"I appeal to you, Vladimir Putin. The solution to the issue depends only on you," she said, dressed all in black, in a video published by his team. "Let me finally see my son. I demand that Alexei's body be released immediately so that I can bury him in a humane way."

Navalny's allies have said she mother has been barred from morgues and was on Monday told by investigators that his body could be kept for "at least two weeks".

Kremlin rejects claim by Navalny's widow that he was killed by Putin

Associated Press

Russian President Vladimir Putin did not see the video in which Alexei Navalny's widow vowed to continue his fight against the Kremlin, his spokesperson said on Tuesday. The spokesperson also dismissed her allegations that Mr. Putin had killed the country's opposition leader as "unfounded" and "insolent."



Yulia Navalnaya

her husband in the remote Arctic prison and alleged that officials' refusal to hand over his body to his mother was part of a cover-

up of their involvement in the death.

"They are cowardly and meanly hiding his body, refusing to give it to his mother and lying miserably while waiting for the trace of" poison to disappear, Ms. Navalnaya said.

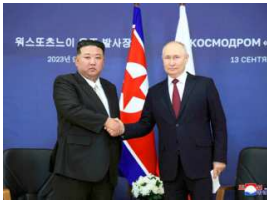
She suggested her husband might have been killed with a Novichok-style nerve agent. Russian authorities said that the cause of Mr. Navalny's death on Friday is still unknown and the results

of any investigation are likely to be questioned abroad.

"These are absolutely unfounded, insolent accusations about the head of the Russian state," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Navalny's death has deprived the Russian opposition of its most well-known and inspiring politician less than a month before an election that is all but certain to give Putin another six years in power.





Pyongyang has been drawing closer to Moscow since Kim Jong Un, left, visited Vladimir Putin last year. FILE PHOTO

## Putin violates UN sanction, gifts Kim Russian-made car

Agence France-Presse  
SEOUL

Russian President Vladimir Putin has gifted North Korean leader Kim Jong-un a Russian-made car, Pyongyang's state media said on Tuesday, as the two countries bolster ties in areas from tourism to defence.

The gift would violate successive rounds of UN sanctions on North Korea over Mr. Kim's nuclear and other weapons programmes – which were passed with Russian approval – that ban the import of any vehicles or luxury goods into the country.

Mr. Kim was "presented with a car made in Russia for his personal use by Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, President of the Russian Federation", Pyongyang's official Korean Central News Agency reported. Mr. Kim's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, said the "gift serves as a clear demonstration of the special personal relations between the top leaders" of the two countries, KCNA added. The report did not specify the vehicle's model.

Since Mr. Kim visited Mr. Putin last year, Pyongyang has been drawing ever closer to Moscow, with a group of Russian tourists arriving earlier this month for a four-day trip – the first known foreign tour group since before pandemic-linked border closures in 2020.

After September's Kim-Putin summit in Russia's Far East, the U.S. and South Korea repeatedly claimed the North had shipped weapons to Moscow for use in its war with Ukraine, in exchange for Russian help with Mr. Kim's satellite programs.

The Russian leader is now set to pay a return visit to Pyongyang, both sides had indicated.

# China boards tourist vessel off Taiwan coast, leads to protests

Taiwanese media has reported that the *King Xia*, carrying 11 crew and 23 passengers, was boarded by the Chinese coast guard for about 32 minutes near the Kinmen archipelago where Taiwan says China has increased military activities

Associated Press  
TAIPEI

Taiwan on Tuesday protested China's boarding of a tourist boat, as tensions rise around the Kinmen archipelago, which lies a short distance off China's coast but is controlled by Taiwan.

Taiwanese media reported that the *King Xia*, carrying 11 crew and 23 passengers, was boarded by the Chinese coast guard for about 32 minutes on Monday. Taiwan's coast guard escorted the boat back to Kinmen, and it then continued its sight-seeing voyage.

Ocean Affairs Council Minister Kuan Bi-ling told presspersons at the legislature on Tuesday that the incident "hurt the feelings of our people, created panic among the people, and was not in the interest of the people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait," referring to the 160 km-wide waterway that separates China from Taiwan, a self-governed island that Beijing claims as its own territory.

Premier Chen Chien-jen said that Taiwan was seeking to lower tensions in the area, which has escalated as China increased military activities following Taiwan's election of an independence-leading President in January.

"We hope that this matter can be resolved properly," Mr. Chen said. "We hope that the two sides of the Taiwan Strait will adopt a rational, reciprocal, and cooperative approach to maintain the security of the waters between Kinmen and (the Chinese port city of) Xiamen and allow people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait to communicate in a more healthy and orderly manner."



Anti-landing barricades on a beach in Kinmen in Taiwan with China's Xiamen in the background. REUTERS

China is stepping up patrols in the waters off the coast of Kinmen and its associated islands, days after two Chinese fishermen drowned while being chased by the Taiwanese coast guard, which accused the boat of trespassing.

Taiwan's coast guard said a boat carrying four persons was fishing about one nautical mile away from Kinmen, which Taiwan has claimed as a restricted area largely for military purposes, and capsized during a chase. Relatives of the deceased arrived on Kinmen to preside at traditional funeral services and to bring their cremated remains home. The two survivors were also sent back to China, according to Taiwan's official Central News Agency.

China blamed Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party for the fishermen's deaths. It also said that there was no such thing as "restricted" waters.

A spokesperson for the Chinese coast guard said on Sunday that its Fujian division will regularly monitor the waters off the

southern coast of Xiamen – within view of Kinmen – to strengthen maritime law enforcement.

"Not a diplomatic issue" China's Foreign Ministry declined to answer questions on the matter, saying it was not a "diplomatic issue," in a reflection of Beijing's refusal to recognise Taiwan as an independent political entity with its own legitimate governing organs.

Fishermen from both Taiwan and China regularly sail that stretch of water, which has seen a rise in tensions as the number of Chinese vessels – including sand dredgers and fishing boats – have notably increased in the area.

Kinmen residents have complained of both the

noise and sound pollution from the vessels, as well as losses to their livelihood in fishing.

Taiwan split from China during the 1949 civil war, but Beijing continues to regard the island of 23 million and its outlying islands as Chinese territory and has been ramping up its threat to achieve that by military force if necessary.

In addition to piling diplomatic, political and military pressure on Taiwan, China is seen as seeking to bring Kinmen into its orbit, along with Taiwan-controlled island group of Matsu, which lies off the Chinese coast to the north. Taiwanese forces based in the area have fired at drones sent over from the mainland in what is seen as a hybrid civilian-military effort to sow fear and undermine support for Taiwan's government.

China regularly sends warplanes and Navy ships into areas surrounding the island. In the 24 hours leading up to 6:00 a.m. on Tuesday, 24 military aircraft and eight ships were detected operating around the island, Taiwan's defence ministry reported, adding that 11 of the planes crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait. It said Taiwan scrambled jets, dispatched ships and put land-based missile defenses on alert, all standard responses to what has become a near-daily show of force between the sides.

## Houthi rebels still put up a fight despite U.S.-led strikes

Associated Press  
DUBAI

Despite a month of U.S.-led airstrikes, Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks – just this week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and apparently downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars.

The continued assaults by the Houthis on shipping through the crucial Red Sea corridor against the backdrop of Israel's war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip underscore the challenges in trying to stop the guerrilla-style attacks that have seen them hold onto Yemen's capital and much of the war-ravaged country's north since 2014.

Meanwhile, the campaign has boosted the rebels' standing in the Arab world, despite their own human rights abuses in a years-long stalemated war with several of U.S. allies in the region. And the longer their attacks go on, analysts warn the greater the risk that disruptions to international shipping will begin to weigh down on the global economy.

On Monday, both Houthis and Western officials acknowledged one of the most serious attacks on shipping launched by the rebels. The Houthis targeted the Belize-flagged bulk carrier *Rubymar* with two anti-ship ballistic missiles, one of which struck the vessel, rendering it inoperable. The U.S. military's Central Command said.

## Russian defector suspected dead in Spain

Associated Press  
MADRID

Spanish police said on Tuesday that they suspect the bullet-riddled body of a man found in Spain is that of a Russian defector who escaped across the front line and into Ukraine last year with an Army helicopter.

The body was found on February 13 in La Cala, near the eastern port city of Alicante, according to Civil Guard police. The man had been shot half a dozen times and was run over by the car, according to the Spanish state news agency Efe.

Spain's Civil Guard said they found documents on the body that identified the man as a 33-year-old Ukrainian. But police now believe it could be Maksim Kuzminov, who defected last year by flying into Ukraine in a Mi-8 Army helicopter with the help of Ukrainian intelligence. Andrii Yusov, a representative of Ukrainian military intelligence, confirmed to local media that the former Russian pilot had died in Spain, but did not provide details. It is not clear how or why Kuzminov would have traveled to Spain.

The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin, told Russian presspersons that Kuzminov was a "traitor and criminal" who became a "moral corpse" as soon as he started planning "his dirty and terrible crime," according to Russian state news agency Tass. Kremlin spokesman Dmitri Peskov said he had no information on it and that Moscow had received no information via diplomatic channels.

## Safe alternative



Cutting emission: People cross a busy street under smog in Milan on Tuesday. Gas-guzzling cars were banned from roads in Milan and eight other cities across Lombardy on Tuesday after the northern Italian industrial region registered high levels of particle pollution. AFP

Agence France-Presse  
BERLIN

The director of a new film conjuring the ghost of a hippopotamus owned by Colombian drug baron Pablo Escobar was shocked to learn how unpredictable and threatening the beasts can be.

Nelson Carlo de los Santos Arias, who made *Pepe*, one of the buzziest titles at this week's 74th annual Berlin international film festival, or Berlinale, said filming the animals on location in Namibia and Colombia had been dicey for his crew.

"One time we didn't know there were hippos there and then they almost took the boat that we were in and so we almost lost the camera," the Dominican filmmaker said.

All the dangers do however landed the 39-year-old director a coveted slot at the Berlinale with one of 20 films in competition for the Golden Bear top prize. The docudrama imagines the inner life of Pepe, an African-born hippopotamus that belonged to the cocaine king's private menagerie until the animal escaped and was shot in 2009 on the orders of state



Director of the movie *Pepe*, Nelson Carlos De Los Santos Arias, right, with actor Fareed Matija at the Berlinale on Tuesday. AP

authorities. Through voice-overs, Pepe recounts his terrifying voyage from home across the Atlantic –

"a river with only one shore" – and the bewildering experiences that led him to become the first

## Farmers in Poland block Ukraine border in protest against non-EU imports

Associated Press  
WARSAW

Polish farmers blocked border crossings with Ukraine on Tuesday while burning tires and spilling grain from train wagons as they intensified a nationwide protest against the import of Ukrainian foods and European Union environmental policies.

Farmers in EU countries complain that the 27-nation bloc's policies on the environment and other matters are a financial burden and make their products more expensive than non-EU imports.

They are also in revolt against competition from non-EU countries, in particular Ukraine, a large producer of agricultural goods.

Polish farmers held protests in more than 180



Farmers on the blockade protest camp at the Polish-Ukrainian border crossing in Dorohusk, Poland on Tuesday. GETTY IMAGES

places, blocking access routes to border crossings with Ukraine. They drove tractors across junctions and highway entrances and exits near cities including Warsaw, Poznan and Wroclaw.

The protests are a growing source of tensions between Ukraine and neighbors across its Western border who support its efforts to fight off Russia's in-

vasion but are facing pressure from farmers who say Ukrainian grain and other food imports are damaging their livelihoods by creating a glut on the market that pushes down prices.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky singled out the protesting Polish farmers in his nightly address on Monday, saying their actions indicated an "erosion of solidarity."

## Pepe, Colombian kingpin Escobar's hippo, makes waves at the Berlinale



Director of the movie *Pepe*, Nelson Carlos De Los Santos Arias, right, with actor Fareed Matija at the Berlinale on Tuesday. AP

hippo killed in the Americas.

After Escobar himself was gunned down by police in 1993, his ranch and collection of exotic animals, including hippos, were left to nature in an area of lush vegetation where they had no predators.

The hippo numbers exploded and authorities say there are now 160 of the beasts wandering freely around northwestern Colombia.

Arias filmed in villages where fishermen feared for their lives – and livelihoods – due to the intrud-

ers. "Their entire life is the Magdalena River," he said. "So imagine this hippo appears in your swimming pool. Because that river is their swimming pool."

The decision to shoot *Pepe*, as he was nicknamed in the media, proved controversial at the time despite the public safety concerns.

**Hero and a martyr** Pepe became a kind of folk hero and a "martyr" while the hippos became part of the "political discourse" in Colombia, the filmmaker said.

Arias said he was in-

trigued by the complex issues the spirit of Pepe raised. "Because of this action of personification of an animal, we enter in the realm of fable," he said, in a story spanning the legacy of colonialism as well as ecological threats.

"Some will say there is an invasion and that it will destroy the environment," he said.

"But rivers are getting dry in Africa and hippos are dying, whereas in South America, there's a lot of water. And that may be the destiny of a lot of people also, and beings and animals and plants."

## IN BRIEF



## Sun to buy 16.33% in U.S.'s Surgimatix for \$3.05 million

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries has decided to acquire 16.33% stake for about \$3.05 million in Surgimatix Inc., an Illinois-headquartered firm developing a proprietary soft tissue fixation device for laparoscopic hernia repair and other minimally invasive surgeries. The acquisition is expected to be completed by this month, subject to fulfilment of certain conditions. Sun Pharma said on Tuesday, announcing the signing of an agreement with the U.S. firm.

## TechM acquires Philippines BPO firm for Australian \$5 mn

Tech Mahindra said it has acquired Orchard CyberTech Services Inc. (OCSI), a BPO firm in Philippines that is a service provider to Australia's TPG Telecom. The acquisition of 100% shareholding is for Australian \$5 million and undertaken through wholly owned subsidiary Customer Philippines Inc. OCSI, including its assets and employees, will become part of TechM and TechM will provide customer support and other services to TPG, TechM said in a filing.

## Raymond Realty forays into Mumbai with luxury homes

Raymond Realty, the real estate arm of Raymond Group, has announced its entry into the Mumbai market with 'The Address by GS, Bandra', a luxury residential project. The project will come up through joint development agreements (JDAs) with the land owners on 2.74 acres. The project will offer a diverse mix of 2, 3, and 4 BHK apartments along with 30 amenities including a 16,000 square feet clubhouse. It will also have a high-street retail space, the company said.

## TVS SCS extends contract with Rolls-Royce

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

TVS Supply Chain Solutions (TVS SCS) announced its extension of contract with Rolls-Royce had been extended for 5 years till 2029.

The partnership extension will be for the Parts Distribution Centre (PDC) in Singapore serving the Asia Pacific markets for Rolls-Royce's Power Systems business unit. The collaboration between TVS SCS and Rolls-Royce Power Systems regional centre, Rolls-Royce Solutions Asia, began in early 2013 to enhance productivity at the PDC with an Automated Storage and Retrieval System, TVS SCS said.

## 'Paytm app back to steady business after RBI's clarifications'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

The clarifications issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) by its Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has helped Paytm to achieve 'normalcy' in business, a company official said without quantifying the recovery in volume.

"The RBI had confirmed through the FAQ that Paytm QR, Soundbox and card machine will continue to operate seamlessly for all merchant partners," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "After that the company is back to steady business."

## Duties on blueberries, cotton, cranberries from U.S. slashed

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

India effected sharp cuts in import duties on frozen turkey, blueberries and cranberries, and scrapped the duty on extra-long staple (ELS) cotton making it easier for U.S. exporters to tap the Indian market, as per a Finance Ministry decision.

The move, which will make it easier for producers to meet Indian consumers' demand for these items that are generally not produced locally, stems from bilateral trade talks between India and the U.S. held on the sidelines of the G20 leaders' summit.

The two sides had agreed to resolve outstanding disputes at the World



Trade Organisation (WTO) concerning the import of certain agricultural products. "These tariff cuts will expand economic opportunities for U.S. agricultural producers in a critical market and help bring more U.S. products to customers in India," U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai's office had said at the time.

Frozen turkey meat and edible offal imports will

now attract 5% import levies compared with 30% earlier. Duties on frozen and dried blueberries and cranberries has been slashed to 10% from 30%. Preserved or prepared cranberries will attract a 5% import duty, while packaged blueberries will face a 10% levy.

A textile industry official said 26% of India's cotton imports last year were of the ELS variety, which is not produced here, and ongoing efforts to grow such cotton will take time. "Why would the domestic industry import the cotton if it was available locally? For those using U.S. and Egyptian cotton, the zero import duty on ELS cotton will improve global competitiveness," he added.

## IT sector's return boosts corporate air travel: Virgin Atlantic

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI

After a long delay, a strong rebound in demand from the IT sector has spurred air travel for business purposes, said Luke Goggin, Virgin Atlantic's vice president for Global Sales.

"The industry that had not caught up fast was technology and IT," Mr. Goggin said in an interaction with *The Hindu*. "That has completely changed. In the fourth quarter, the fastest growing area of corporate travellers are technology and IT customers," he added. He explained that corporate travel recovery post the COVID-19 pandemic started with small businesses, followed by financial services which had back-end offices and regional offices in India.

The London-headquartered airline announced the unveiling of its fourth flight to India, which would connect Bengaluru with London Heathrow, from March 31. With Bengaluru being India's IT capital, the airline expects to see flights out of the city to account for its highest share of corporate travellers out of India by as much as 30% of the aircraft capacity.

## 'Consumers upbeat, inflation to cool'

Private consumption trends indicate buoyant consumer sentiment. FinMin notes in its monthly economic review; adds it expects household consumption to improve, capital formation prospects to rise with an upturn in the private capex cycle

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The outlook for a "reasonably low headline inflation rate is good", the Finance Ministry said on Tuesday, citing the steady fall in core inflation and moderation in food prices along with higher foodgrain buffer stocks and healthy rabi harvest prospects.

Terming strong private consumption as the "bedrock of high growth", the ministry in its monthly economic review for January said India's private con-

## Bright prospects

FinMin expects headline inflation to be reasonably low due to fall in core inflation and strong agricultural output



■ Improved global trade outlook, integration of global supply chain to buoy net external demand

■ Commodity prices, tight monetary policy in the West seen as risks

■ Total foodgrain stocks, at 3.2 times the buffer norm requirement for Jan-March to curb inflation

## 'Rural consumption slumped to an 18-quarter low in Q3'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

India's rural spending fell for the second successive quarter, slumping 1.9% in the October-December quarter with consumption levels in the hinterland hitting an 18-quarter low, even as urban consumption grew at a five-quarter high pace of 9.8%, Motilal Oswal Financial Services reckoned in a report.

The firm's economists based their conclusion on the simple average of 12 proxy indicators for rural consumption, which had contracted 0.5% in the preceding quarter. Similarly, nine indicators were used to assess urban consump-



**Dry quarter:** It is clear that rural spending, especially the agri sector, remained weak in Q3, the economists wrote. NAGARA GOPAL

wage growth. These factors outpaced improvements seen in two-wheeler sales, fertiliser availability and real farm credit flows.

Urban spending was reflected in "continued robustness" in passenger vehicle sales, personal credit growth and a 10.5% rise in salary bill of BSE 500 firms during Q3, they said.

ing to an upturn in the private capex cycle, healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates, and the Centre's capital expenditure thrust.

Although merchandise exports had declined about 5% so far this year, the ministry noted an improvement in the global trade outlook and said rising integration in the global supply chain would support net external demand. However, the ministry said, there were downside risks including a spike in commodity prices from geopolitical shocks, and

more persistent underlying inflation in the developed world, which could extend tight monetary conditions and hurt exports.

With rabi sowing slightly higher than last year, the ministry asserted that high reservoir levels, adequate availability of fertilisers and seeds, and growing tractor sales supporting improvements in sowing acreage and output. That total foodgrain stocks stood at 3.2 times the buffer norm requirement for Jan-Mar. would aid in "curbing inflationary pressures," the ministry stated.

## Inflation expectations may stabilise, edge down, say RBI officials

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

Inflation expectations may stabilise and edge down although renewed pressures from cereals and proteins cannot be ruled out, Reserve Bank of India officials wrote in an article in the RBI's February bulletin released on Tuesday.

Citing the fact that retail inflation slowed to a three-month low of 5.1% in January, from December's 5.69%, the officials noted that overall inflation developments were turning favourable, providing a stable environment for corporates to plan expansion strategies in anticipation of a demand pick-up.

"Non-food wholesale price inflation remains in deflation," they wrote in the article on the 'State of the Economy'. "This should augur well for the input cost outlook and selling prices of manufacturing firms," they added.

A fresh round of capital spending by corporates would likely fuel the next leg of growth, they wrote.

**'Inflation events turning favourable, providing a stable environment for corporates to plan'**

**EXCHANGE RATES**

Indicative direct rates in rupees against except year to 4 p.m. on February 20

CURRENCY	1 FEBRUARY 20	1 FEBRUARY 21
US Dollar	83.16	83.08
Euro	89.37	89.72
British Pound	104.36	104.77
Japanese Yen (100)	55.07	55.29
Chinese Yuan	11.50	11.54
Swiss Franc	93.86	94.24
Singapore Dollar	51.53	51.78
Canadian Dollar	61.34	61.58
Malaysian Ringgit	17.24	17.32
Australian Dollar	94.21	94.43

Source: Indian Bank

## MCA plans to introduce 'leniency plus' regime to crack down on cartels

**K.R. Srinivas**  
NEW DELHI

The Corporate Affairs Ministry (MCA) has notified the introduction of a 'leniency plus' regime, paving the way for the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to roll out a new cartel-detecting tool expected to revolutionise antitrust enforcement in India.

Under the regime, firms under investigation for one cartel would be encouraged to report other unknown cartels to the CCI. Such a programme would help competition authorities to discover secret cartels and obtain insider evidence of the infringement.

With the latest MCA move notifying the relevant provisions in the Competition (Amendment) Act 2023, the stage is set for the CCI to issue related regulations, according to sources.

MCA has now said that leniency plus-related provisions will come into effect from February 20.

**Leniency plus** is a proactive antitrust enforcement strategy aimed at attracting leniency applications by encouraging companies already under investigation for one cartel to report other cartels unknown to the competition regulator.

The benefit that would entail from such disclosure is reduction of penalty in the first cartel to the person disclosing the information, without prejudice to the company obtaining lower penalty regarding the newly-disclosed cartel.

While the Competition Act provides a framework



**Cracking the whip:** The regime may incentivise applicants to come forward with disclosures on multiple cartels. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

**MCA has said that leniency plus-related provisions will come into effect from February 20**

for CCI to deal with leniency or lower penalty applications, it until recently did not recognise leniency plus. Samir Gandhi, co-founder, Axiom's Law Chambers, a law firm, said: "It's heartening to note the government has operationalised the leniency plus provisions of the Competition (amendment) Act."

"We're hopeful that this will give the CCI the requisite tools to focus their enforcement efforts on successfully prosecuting cartels which have a direct impact on the economy and consumer welfare."

**CCI draft regulation** CCI had, in October last year, issued a draft with lower penalty regulations. The draft regulations offer leniency applications in an ongoing cartel inquiry the incentive to disclose

## MARKETS

## -1.59% MARKET WATCH

	TUESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	73,057	0.48
US Dollar	83.07	0.04
Gold	62,700	-0.15
Brent oil	82.22	-1.59

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3228.60	-30.20
Adani Ports	1,300.50	-6.50
Axis Bank	8,095.20	-214.50
Bajaj Finance	1,602.85	-17.30
Bajaj Finserv	6,763.60	59.80
Shakti Steel	1,143.25	1.75
BPLCL	657.60	-5.05
Britannia Ind	4,921.15	-4.10
Cipla	1,461.65	-18.70
Coal India	466.50	-14.50
Divis Lab	3,712.75	-10.70
Dr Reddy's Lab	6,376.00	-41.15
Eicher Motors	1,819.50	74.75
Grain Ind	2,192.25	23.65
HCL Tech	1,663.05	-12.20
HDFC Bank	1,454.20	-7.20
HDFC Life	587.95	2.75
Hera Motocorp	4,663.35	-189.25
Indus Towers	1,559.20	-20.60
Hind Unilever	2,404.10	16.95
ICICI Bank	1,048.75	5.00
Industrial Bank	1,554.20	20.60
Infosys	1,685.25	-14.50
ITC	406.10	-3.15
JRF Steel	821.20	1.80
Kotak Bank	1,792.60	31.10
LAT	1,356.75	16.90
LTIIndevia Ltd.	1,504.35	-9.70
M&P	1,853.65	5.10
Maruti Suzuki	11,446.45	-36.90
Nestle India	2,539.60	26.15
NTPC	345.70	6.85
ONGC	2,716.60	1.95
PowerGrid Corp.	387.90	11.55
Reliance Ind	2,942.50	-5.55
SBI Life	1,513.55	24.70
State Bank	760.10	0.85
Sun Pharma	1,466.50	8.60
Tata Consumer Pro	1,154.40	-0.60
Tata Motors	506.35	-4.25
Tata Steel	144.65	-0.90
TCS	4,030.65	-73.15
Tech Mahindra	1,320.55	10.55
Titan	3,068.70	-4.35
UltraTech Cement	997.95	76.75
UPL	488.05	0.50
Wipro	523.55	-4.00

Source: Indian Bank



## Hindujas may raise stake in IndusInd Bank



**Cash rich:** If promoters decide to raise stake, it could lead to up to \$1.3 bn fund infusion into the lender. THE HINDU

**Hansini Karthik**  
MUMBAI

Almost a year after making a formal application to the Reserve Bank of India for raising stake in IndusInd Bank, the Hinduja Group may get a go-ahead from the banking regulator. According to sources, the approvals to raise stake in the bank is likely to come through by end of this fiscal. Promoted by Ashok Hinduja, IndusInd International Holdings Ltd. and its affiliate entity collectively hold about 16.5% stake in IndusInd Bank. This can be raised to 26% once the approval comes through. An email sent to the group remained unanswered till press time.

The move would mark a very significant development in the banking landscape as IndusInd Bank would be the first instance where its promoters could raise stake to 26% post 2021 RBI's Internal Working Group recommendations. Apart from Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndusInd Bank would also be the second instance in the private banking sector with promoter holding at 26%. This would give promoters voting right majority.

If the promoters decide to raise stake, it could lead to \$1.2-\$1.3 billion or about \$1,000 crore of fund infusion into the bank. To put things in perspective, IndusInd Bank is presently among the most valued entities among the group's financial services firm and in October last, the group indicated it was eyeing an overall valuation of \$35-\$40 billion in the India's financial services landscape. IndusInd International Holdings also emerged as the successful bidder for Reliance Capital though the deal closure is still in works.

*(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)*

# Lab-grown diamonds put natural gems industry under huge pressure

Manmade gems are reshaping the \$89 bn global diamond jewellery market, especially in Surat where 90% of the world's diamonds are cut and polished; lab-grown diamond exports from India tripled in value between 2019-2022 while exports rose 25% between April and October 2023

**NEWS ANALYSIS**

**Agence France-Presse**  
SURAT, INDIA

The glittering diamonds sparkle the same but there are key differences: mined natural gems are more than a billion years old, while laboratory-made rocks are new and cost less than half the price.

Manmade gems are reshaping the \$89 billion global diamond jewellery market, especially in the west Indian city of Surat where 90% of the world's diamonds are cut and polished. In Smit Patel's gleaming lab, technicians drop crystal diamond "seed" slices into reactors mimicking the extreme pressure far underground. "Once the customer sees it for herself, they are sold. I believe this is the future," said Mr. Patel, director of Greenlab Diamond. From seed to ring-ready jewels, his team takes less than eight weeks to produce a diamond virtually indistinguishable from a mined gem.

"It's the same product, it's the same chemical, the same optical properties."

**Gas, heat, pressure**  
Lab-grown diamond exports from India tripled in value between 2019 and 2022, while export volumes rose by 25% between



**Eye for detail:** Indian lab-diamond makers exported 4.04 mn carats between April-October 2023. AFP

April and October 2023, up from 15% in the same period a year earlier, as per the latest industry data.

"We've grown at 400% year-on-year in volume," Mr. Patel told AFP. Reactors in labs such as Mr. Patel's are pumped full of carbon-containing gases such as methane and the crystal grows under heat and pressure. Rough diamonds are then taken to another facility where hundreds of workers design, cut and polish the stones.

The global market share by value of lab-grown gems rocketed from 3.5% in 2018 to 18.5% in 2023, New York-based industry analyst Paul Zimnisky told AFP, and will likely exceed 20% this year. That has heaped pressure on an industry already racked by geopoliti-

intensive process is any better for the environment. Mr. Patel said his lab uses solar energy from the local grid, although others suck up electricity from carbon-heavy sources. And, while mined gem sellers say "conflict diamonds" from war zones are kept off the market through the international Kimberley Process certification scheme, lab producers argue their facilities guarantee a clean record. Such environmental and humanitarian claims have helped make lab-grown stones a popular choice for engagement rings. In February 2023, 17% of diamond engagement rings sold in the U.S. — the world's biggest consumer of natural stones — used lab-grown gems, said

cal turmoil and slumping demand.

**'Clean' stones**  
Machine-made diamonds were first developed in the early 1950s but it took technological leaps to create a commercially viable process less than a decade ago. Producers boast that their gems come at a lower carbon cost, although there are questions about whether the environ-

mentary process is any better for the environment. Mr. Patel said his lab uses solar energy from the local grid, although others suck up electricity from carbon-heavy sources.

**'Perfect storm'**  
Indian lab diamond makers exported 4.04 million carats between April and October 2023, a 42% year-on-year increase, according to India's Gem and Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC).

In contrast, natural diamond companies in India reported a more than 25% drop, to 11.3 million carats, over the same period.

While natural diamond sales during the COVID-19 pandemic surged as affluent shoppers sought to brighten lockdowns with luxury purchases, demand dropped when economies reopened. Top companies were left holding expensive excess stock.

Ajesh Mehta from D.Navinchandra Exports, whose group is one of global diamond giant De Beers Group's authorised buyers, or "sightholders", said it was the worst slump in his 30-year career. "This is a totally different kind of lack of demand," he Mr. Mehta told AFP. "Everything came like a perfect storm."

Factors other than competition from lab-grown rivals included slowing economic growth in the all-important U.S. and China markets, as well as oversupply and sanctions against Russian rough-cut

diamonds. India's natural diamond industry was forced into a rare voluntary import ban on rough diamonds in October.

At least five Indian sight-holders told AFP the De Beers Group had cut prices by 10%-25% for different categories of diamonds at the first sale of its year, when buyers restock after the U.S. holiday season.

**'No monopoly'**  
The lab-grown industry has had its problems, too. Supply has skyrocketed and prices have dropped drastically, with wholesale prices down by 58% in 2023 alone, according to Mr. Golan. Retailers in Surat told AFP the price of a lower-quality one-carat polished stone had fallen from \$2,400 in 2022 to a little over \$1,000 in 2023. WD Lab Grown Diamonds, the second-biggest U.S. producer of the man-made stones, filed for bankruptcy in October.

But Mr. Patel argues falling prices will spur demand. "We knew prices would come down, because there's no monopoly in this industry," Customers in a jewellery showroom in Mumbai appeared to agree. "A mined diamond would be five times more expensive," said 29-year-old Lekha Prabhakar. "If you want something you want to wear daily... a lab-grown diamond works. I really like that."

## Harvest of discontent



**Not green anymore:** Greek farmers take part in a protest to demand financial aid in front of Parliament in Athens. Farmers across Europe have staged protests over shrinking incomes, rising costs and increasingly onerous environmental rules approved by the 27-nation EU. AFP

## Nvidia dethrones Tesla as Wall Street's most traded stock

**Reuters**

Chipmaker Nvidia is replacing Tesla as Wall Street's most traded stock, adding to its prominence after becoming the third-most valuable U.S. company and showing more evidence of how central AI-related bets have become to investors.

Nvidia's outsized representation in day-to-day stock trading could leave investors more vulnerable should the chipmaker's revenue growth fail to meet investors' high expectations and puncture a Wall Street rally that has been fuelled by euphoria about artificial intelligence.

The Santa Clara, California chipmaker's quarterly



**Pulling ahead:** About \$30 bn Nvidia shares changed hands daily on average over 30 sessions ahead of Tesla's \$22 bn. REUTERS

report on Wednesday will be one of Wall Street's most watched events of the week. Some strategists believe anything short of a blowout report could reverse a rally that has sent Nvidia's stock soaring 47%

in 2024. About \$30 billion Nvidia shares changed hands daily on average over the past 30 sessions, pulling ahead of Elon Musk's electric car maker, which averaged \$22 billion per day over the

same period. Tesla since 2020 had dominated daily U.S. stock trading, as per LSEG data, with turnover — a stock's share price multiplied by the number of shares exchanged — peaking above \$35 billion several times in recent years.

"There's an argument here that this is the dawn of a new era of trading, like the dawn of the internet, with Nvidia in the pole position," said Dennis Dick, a trader at Triple D Trading in Ontario, Canada. But he also warned sky-high turnover in AI-related stocks suggests retail investors and algorithmic traders are driving share prices higher based on momentum rather than fundamentals.

# Made-in-China airliner seeks buyers at Singapore air show

**Agence France-Presse**  
SINGAPORE

China's first domestically-produced passenger jet was presented at Asia's biggest air show, which opened in Singapore on Tuesday, as Beijing seeks to stamp its presence in global aviation.

With its C919 aircraft, Beijing wants to challenge the decades-long dominance of top plane-makers Airbus and Boeing while reducing its reliance on foreign technology.

The single-aisle model from COMAC is a potential competitor to the market-leading A320, made by Europe's Airbus, and the 737 MAX from U.S.-based Boeing — which kept a low profile at the Singapore air show following a recent sa-

rety crisis. On the first day of the event in the city-state, the C919 wowed the crowd of trade exhibitors, aviation executives and officials with sleek aerial manoeuvres, sporting a white, green and navy-blue livery. It will take part in the daily flying displays at the six-day event, and features among the static exhibits at a sprawling site near Changi Airport.

A C919 plane in the China Eastern livery was among dozens of commercial and military aircraft on the ground. Beside it were two ARJ21s, smaller commercial jets also made by state-owned Commercial Aircraft Corporation of China (COMAC). The C919 has been making commercial flights in China since May, and was



**Taking off:** The C919 scored its first order at the air show from China's Tibet Airlines. AP

displayed for the first time outside mainland China in Hong Kong in December. While it has yet to attract buyers outside the country, the C919 scored its first order at the air

show from China's Tibet Airlines, which signed a contract to buy 40 of them and 10 ARJ21s. Henan Civil Aviation Development and Investment Group also bought six

ARJ21s which it will use for firefighting, medical service and emergency management, COMAC said. A spokesperson for COMAC at the air show would not give a value for the or-

der. Although the air show is a good opportunity for Beijing to show off the C919, finding a big-name buyer will be hard, said aviation analyst Shukor Yusof of Singapore-based Endau Analytics. "There's still a stigma with the 'made-in-China' brand in the aviation industry, even if China now leads the world in the electric vehicle market," he told AFP.

**'Matter of when'**  
"It will take time for the C919 to land an order from a major carrier," he said, even though it's "a matter of when, not if, a top-tier airline buys a Chinese-made commercial jet". Under scoring China's strong presence at the air show, Beijing also showcased military capabilities,

exhibiting for the first time the Z-10ME attack helicopter, its answer to the U.S.-made Apache.

China, South Korea and the Czech Republic will have country pavilions for the first time, and Airbus is showcasing its new long-range A350-1000 plane.

While Boeing will be in attendance, it is not presenting any physical commercial aircraft, unlike in previous years. The company is still smarting from a near-catastrophic incident in January, when a fuselage panel on a Boeing 737 MAX 9 Alaska Airlines jet blew off mid-flight.

Airbus showed off its A350-1000, which is taking part in the flying displays using sustainable aviation fuel, a key discussion point at the event. Organisers ex-

pect the show to draw 50,000 trade attendees from around the world — close to pre-pandemic levels. A watered-down air show was held in 2020 after many of the exhibitors pulled out, and the 2022 edition went ahead but without the two days open to the public.

"[Year] 2018 was the highest we've ever had. We are close to the best we've ever had," said Leck Chet Lam, MD of event organiser Experlia. This reflects the global recovery of air travel, he said.

"International passenger traffic has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels and is projected to more than double by 2040," said Cindy Koh, EVP, Singapore Economic Development Board.

## REALITY CHECK

Jaiswal has learned from his upbringing, not Bazball: Hussain



VIJAY SONEJI

Nasser Hussain has lashed out at Ben Duckett for suggesting that Yashvir Jaiswal's aggressive batting was influenced by England's Bazball play. "Jaiswal has not learned from Duckett, he has learned from his upbringing and all the hard yards he has put in, he has learned from the IPL. If anything, I'd learn from him," Hussain said.

## BLESSÉD

Kohli and Anushka announce the birth of baby boy Akaay



ANI

Virat Kohli and Anushka Sharma announced on Tuesday that they were blessed with a baby boy. "With abundant happiness and our hearts full of love, we are pleased to inform everyone that on February 15, we welcomed our baby boy Akaay and Vamika's little brother into this world," Kohli posted on Instagram.

## ROYAL RETURN

Rishabh Pant looks on course for much-anticipated IPL comeback



FILE PHOTO

Rishabh Pant remains on course for a comeback in the IPL after taking part in a practice game organised by his Delhi Capitals in Alur. "The match was part of assessing his mobility. He has been batting at nets for a while and playing in a practice game would be like an extension of it," said an NCA source.

## THRILLER

U Mumba and Titans finish their campaigns with a perfect tie



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

U Mumba and Telugu Titans ended their campaigns on a thrilling note as they shared points in a gripping 45-45 tie in a Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 match at Panchkula on Tuesday. Titans skipper Pawan Sehrawat was the top performer with 14 raid points while U Mumba's Animohammad Zafardanesh finished with 11.

## Capitals will be keen to go the distance in Season 2

The Meg Lanning-led outfit is one of the most balanced sides on paper; however, lack of multiple left-handed batters is an issue the franchise did not adequately address at the auction table

## WPL COUNTDOWN

Lavanya L

Delhi Capitals did almost everything right in season one of the WPL to get its hands on the inaugural title. The side roped in an associate nation player to give itself a five-foreigner cushion. Power-hitting and stroke-play were both prioritised in the building of a solid batting line-up and the side's two-pronged pace at attack featuring Shikha Pandey and Marizanne Kapp ran riot during the season. Capitals eventually watched Mumbai Indians get its name inscribed on the WPL trophy after falling short in the final and will seek revenge this time around.

A few chinks notwithstanding, the Meg Lanning-led side is still one of the most balanced ones on paper. The recently retired Australian finished as the Orange Cap holder in the WPL last year with 345 runs in nine games with a strike rate of 139.11.

She comes to India after a stellar run with the bat for Victoria in Australia's Women's National Cricket League.

The Lanning-Shafali Verma stand was a spectator's treat in the first chapter. An in-form Jemimah Rodrigues bolsters the middle-order with Alice



**Terrific trio:** Top-order batters Jemimah, Lanning and Shafali will look to give Capitals rousing starts. FILE PHOTO: SPORTSPICS/WPL

## Capitals' schedule

<b>At Bengaluru</b>
Feb. 23: vs Mumbai Indians
Feb. 25: UP Warriorz
Feb. 29: Royal Challengers
March 3: Gujarat Giants
<b>At New Delhi</b>
March 5: Mumbai Indians
March 8: UP Warriorz
March 10: Royal Challengers
March 13: Gujarat Giants

Capey providing a finishing option. However, the lack of multiple left-handed batters hurt the team before and is an issue the side has not addressed adequately in the auction.

Jess Jonassen, who seems to have dropped down the pecking order in the Australian national side, will be a useful re-

## Star attraction

Annabel Sutherland is currently in the form of her life, with match-winning performances in both departments across formats for Australia. The most expensive player in the 2024 auction, the all-rounder will look to put an underwhelming season with Gujarat Giants behind her. She will look to power Capitals to their maiden WPL crown in front of their home fans.

source for Lanning.

She also provides the lone left-hand batting option for the side and is a cool customer under pressure with bat and ball. India's Titus Sadhu might figure more game time after a commanding show against Australia a few months ago.

However, the player to

keep an eye on will be the side's only leg-spinner Poonam Yadav, who faded away from the national set-up after the 2020 T20 World Cup.

She comes into the tournament in good form (24 wickets in the inter-zonal tournament and 16 in the one-day trophy) and will hope to use the league as an audition to head back to the Indian side ahead of the T20 World Cup in Bangladesh later this year.

## The squad:

Meg Lanning (Capt.), Jemimah Rodrigues, Laura Harris, Shafali Verma, Alice Capey, Annabel Sutherland, Arundathi Reddy, Ashwini Kumari, Jess Jonassen, Marizanne Kapp, Sneha Deepthi, Mimiuni Mani, Radha Yadav, Shikha Pandey, Aparna Mondal, Taniyaa Bhatia, Poonam Yadav, and Titus Sadhu.

## UP Warriorz has the arsenal to take the battle to the opposition

Lavanya L

From Grace Harris' insatiable love for burgers to Sophie Ecclestone's chic braids, UP Warriorz perhaps had the most fun in season one of the Women's Premier League (WPL).

Led by the imperious and straight-talking keeper-batter Alyssa Healy, the outfit was slow to find its rhythm but learnt to play to its strengths of explosive middle-order batting and superior spin bowling to finish third in its first rodeo.

Ahead of the 2024 chapter, much remains the same for the Warriorz. The side has overseas options aplenty but only four slots, which leaves the management in an unenviable position yet again.

While season one's conundrums were in the bowling department, it is the top order which will leave the think-tank scratching their heads this time. In Healy, Danni Wyatt, and Chamari Athapaththu, the Warriorz have three accomplished openers.

## Tough calls

The leadership group will need to take tough calls to accommodate Tahlia McGrath, their only overseas pace-bowling option, big-hitting finisher Harris and Ecclestone — the joint-highest wicket taker in season one (16) — in the ranks as well.

Harris might prove to be the floater yet again, coming up depending on oppo-



**Lynchpins:** Healy, right, and Ecclestone are key to Warriorz's fortunes. FILE PHOTO: SPORTSPICS/WPL

## Warriorz' fixtures

<b>At Bengaluru</b>
Feb. 24: vs Royal Challengers
Feb. 26: Delhi Capitals
Feb. 28: Mumbai Indians
March 1: Gujarat Giants
March 4: Royal Challengers
<b>At New Delhi</b>
March 7: Mumbai Indians
March 8: Delhi Capitals
March 11: Gujarat Giants

nent and wicket.

With England's Lauren Bell sitting out the season to focus on England's tour of New Zealand, the pace battery for the side looks a little depleted with responsibilities mounting for Anjali Sarvani, Saima Thakor and Poonam Khemnar also need to step up to give the

Warriorz artillery some options through the season. Spin twins Deepti Sharma and Ecclestone will be key to wicket-taking strategies for the side.

## Vrinda factor

Uncapped batter Vrinda Dhanraj, who earned a whopping ₹1.3 crore in the auction, is a big-hitting option the Warriorz batting lineup will welcome with open arms.

Vrinda boasts of strike rates upwards of 134 in both the Senior Women's T20 Trophy and the U-23 T20 Trophy in the Indian domestic circuit.

U19 World Cup winner Shweta Sehrawat (34 runs in 7 games) will also want to put last season's jitters behind her with contribu-

## Star attraction

Tahlia McGrath, the Australian vice-captain, Kiran Navgire, Shweta Sehrawat, Vrinda Dinesh, Chamari Athapaththu, Deepti Chopra, Poonam Khemnar, S. Yasvathi, Sophie Ecclestone, Tahlia McGrath, Laxmi Yadav, Anjali Sarvani, Saima Thakor, Rajeshwari Gayakward, and Goucher Sultana.

tions to a title-winning campaign this time around.

**The squad:** Alyssa Healy (Capt.), Danni Wyatt, Kiran Navgire, Shweta Sehrawat, Vrinda Dinesh, Chamari Athapaththu, Deepti Chopra, Poonam Khemnar, S. Yasvathi, Sophie Ecclestone, Tahlia McGrath, Laxmi Yadav, Anjali Sarvani, Saima Thakor, Rajeshwari Gayakward, and Goucher Sultana.

## Bumrah released from India squad for fourth Test



**Heavy workload:** Bumrah has been rested for the Ranchi Test. PTI

## ENGLAND IN INDIA

Sports Bureau  
CHENNAI

Jasprit Bumrah has been released from the India squad for the fourth Test against England to be held in Ranchi from February 23 to 27. The decision was taken keeping in mind the duration of the series and the amount of cricket he has played in recent times.

Meanwhile, K.L. Rahul has been ruled out of the

## Brehme, West Germany's 1990 WC winning goal scorer, passes away

Agence France-Presse  
BERLIN

Andreas Brehme, who scored from the penalty spot to seal victory for West Germany against Argentina in the 1990 World Cup final, died overnight into Tuesday at the age of 63, his former club Bayern Munich said.

"FC Bayern is deeply shocked by the sudden death of Andreas Brehme," the club said in a statement. "We will always keep Andreas Brehme in our hearts. As a World champion and as a very special person."

A versatile left-back, Brehme spent two seasons with Bayern Munich between 1986-1988. His professional career saw him play for Saarbuecken, Kaiserslautern, Inter Milan and Real Zaragoza, among others. He played 86 times for his country, scoring eight goals, the most famous of which, an 85th-minute penalty against Argentina at the Olympic



**Hero!** Brehme is joy unbound, as Klinsmann rushes in to congratulate, after his penalty conversion gave West Germany the 1990 World Cup. AFP

Stadium in Rome, brought West Germany its third World Cup title.

Kaiserslautern, where Brehme played for 10 seasons over two stints, winning the Bundesliga and



Brehme. GETTY IMAGES

team colleagues Juergen Klinsmann and Lothar Matthaus.

Brehme's passing comes shortly after the death of another German footballing legend, Franz Beckenbauer. Beckenbauer, who died in January, was in the dugout for West Germany as manager when the team won the World Cup in 1990.

"Unfortunately, the sad news doesn't stop," said 1990 World Cup winner Pierre Littbarski. "This is very sad for German football and especially for us, the 1990 World champions."

## IPL 2024 to begin on March 22: Dhumal

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The much-anticipated Indian Premier League is set to begin on March 22 and will be held entirely in the country despite the coinciding general elections, league chairman Arun Dhumal said on Tuesday.

The elections are expected to be held in April and May and that is the main reason why the schedule for the IPL's 17th edition has not been unveiled yet.

Dhumal said to begin with, only the schedule of the first 15 days will be announced and the roster for the remaining games will be decided after the announcement of the general election dates.

The dates of the Lok Sabha polls are expected to be announced early next month.

"We are looking at a March 22 start for the tournament. We are working closely with the government agencies and we will first release the initial sche-



dule. The entire tournament will be held in India," said Dhumal.

Only in 2009, the IPL in its entirety, was held overseas (South Africa) while the 2014 edition was partially held in the UAE due to the general elections.

In 2019, the tournament was held in India despite the elections.

The players' auction for the 2024 season was held in December last year and Australian pacer Mitchell Starc became the most expensive player in the history of the league after being bought by Kolkata Knight Riders for ₹24.75 crore.



**IN BRIEF**



**Jota joins Liverpool's injury list, faces long lay-off**

Diogo Jota faces "months" on the sidelines after damaging his knee in Liverpool's win at Brentford, adding to manager Jurgen Klopp's mounting injury woes as it chases Premier League glory. Saturday's 4-1 win victory in London came at a heavy cost as forward Jota and midfielder Curtis Jones were both forced off in the first-half. Jota departed on a stretcher.

**Ankita-Prarthana pair exits early in Dubai tournament**

Wild card entrants Ankita Raina and Prarthana Thombare lot 4-6, 6-3, (17-15) in the doubles first round of the \$3,211,715 WTA tennis tournament in Dubai. The Indian pair got 10 WTA points and \$9,100 for the effort in a draw of 32.

**Hyderabad wins Plate title, returns to Elite Group**

Host Hyderabad defeated Meghalaya by five wickets in the Plate final on Tuesday and qualified for the Elite Group of the Ranji Trophy. **The scores:** Meghalaya 304 & 243 lost to Hyderabad 350 & 203/5 in 34.2 overs (G. Rahul Singh 62, Tlak Varma 64).

**Hodgson leaves Crystal Palace: Glasner to take over**

Roy Hodgson, the oldest ever manager in the English Premier League aged 76, left Crystal Palace on Monday just days after falling ill amid widespread reports he was about to be replaced. The former England coach said he made the decision to step aside so that Palace could bring forward its plans to appoint a new manager.



**Rising to the occasion:** Berenguer gave Bilbao the lead twice in a thriller. **APP**

**Berenguer scores twice, helps Bilbao pip Girona**

The Catalan side remains second in the standings with 56 points, two ahead of third-placed Barcelona and six behind leader Real Madrid

**EURO LEAGUES**

**REUTERS**  
BILBAO

Alex Berenguer scored twice as Athletic Bilbao brought high-flying Girona back down to earth with a 3-2 victory on Monday, a result that provided a reality check to the Catalans' lofty LaLiga title ambitions.

Berenguer intercepted a pass from rival Aleix Garcia to score and give Athletic the lead in the second minute but Viktor Tsyhanok equalised from close range in the 49th minute.

However, Berenguer put the locals back in front with another strike in the

56th minute and Inaki Williams extended the lead in similar fashion four minutes later. Eric Garcia put Girona back in the game netting a close-range effort from an Aleix Garcia free kick but the host held on to secure the win.

Despite suffering its second consecutive league loss, Girona remains second in the standings with 56 points, two ahead of third-placed Barcelona and six behind leader Real Madrid. Fifth-placed Athletic moved up to 49 points, and trails fourth-placed Atletico Madrid by two points.

An Amadou Onana goal sealed Everton a 1-1 draw with Crystal Palace and lifted the Merseyside club out of the Premier League relegation zone, with the match watched by the London side's new manager Oliver Glasner. Jordan Ayew had given Palace a second half lead just hours after manager Roy Hodgson stood down and its new boss Glasner was confirmed. But Onana rose highest at a corner to head in an equaliser for Everton in a game low on quality, but which moves Sean Dyche's side out of the bottom three and above Luton Town into 17th place.

**The results: Premier League:** Everton 1 (Onana 84) drew with Crystal Palace 1 (Ayew 66). **LaLiga:** Athletic Bilbao 3 (Berenguer 2, 56, Inaki 60) bt Girona 2 (Tsgankov 49, Garcia 75).

**Indian teams enter the knockout stage in World TT**

**Sports Bureau**

The Indian men's and women's teams entered the knockout stage (round-of-32) of the World team table tennis championships in Busan on Tuesday. The men will take on Kazakhstan and the women will face Italy.

While the men blanked New Zealand 3-0 in their final Group 3 match, the women pulled off a 3-2 victory over Spain in their last Group 1 tie.

**The results: Men: Group 3:** India bt New Zealand 3-0 (Harmet Desai bt Timothy Choi 11-5, 11-1, 11-6; G. Sathyan bt Alfred Dela Pena 11-3, 11-7, 11-6; Manush

Shah bt Maxwell Henderson 10-12, 6-11, 11-4, 11-8, 11-6). **Women: Group 1:** India bt Spain 3-2 (Sreja Akula lost to Maria Xiao 9-11, 11-9, 11-13, 4-11; Manika Batra lost to Sofia-Xuan Zhang 11-13, 11-6, 11-8, 9-11, 7-11; Anyika Mukherjee bt Silvia Rad 11-8, 11-13, 11-8, 9-11, 11-4; Manika bt Maria Xiao 11-9, 11-2, 11-4; Sreja bt Sofia-Xuan 11-6, 11-13, 11-6, 11-3).

**Lane infringement costs Gulveer his gold**

**ATHLETICS**

**Sports Bureau**

Gulveer Singh, who had finished first in the men's 3000m in the Asian indoor athletics championships in Tehran on Monday, lost his gold later as he was disqualified for lane infringement. The Athletics Federation of India's appeal against the disqualification was rejected.

Kyrgyzstan's Nursultan Keshenbekov, who finished second, was named the winner. Oman's Ali Anwar Ali Al Balushi won the 60m.

India's V.K. Elakkya Dasan had crashed out after finishing sixth in the semi-final earlier in 6.79s.

**The results (gold medalists): Men: 60m:** 1. Ali Anwar Ali Al Balushi (Oma) 6.52s. **3000m (revised):** 1. Nursultan Keshenbekov (Krg) 8:08.85s; **4x400m:** Kazakhstan (3:12.05s). **High Jump:** 1. Ryoichi Akamatsu (Jpn) 2.17m. **Triple Jump:** 1. Su Wen (Chn) 16.74m.

**Karnataka to lead the challenge in final stage**

**SANTOSH TROPHY**

**Sports Bureau**

Defending champion Karnataka will lead the challenge in the final round of the 77th National football championship for the Santosh Trophy, which gets underway at the Golden Jubilee Stadium at Yuzipia near Arunachal Pradesh's capital Itanagar on Wednesday.

A total of 12 teams (nine qualifiers from the group stage and three automatic qualifiers – host Arunachal Pradesh and last year's finalists Karnataka and Meghalaya) have been divided into two groups of six each in the final round.

This time the knockout phase has been enhanced with the addition of the quarterfinals, which will have the top four teams from each group contesting.

The players will be chiefly sourced from I-League 2, which has taken a break to allow the players to represent their states.

The two groups appear to be quite balanced with Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Goa, Assam, Services and Kerala clubbed in group A.

Group B will have holder Karnataka, Maharashtra, Delhi, Manipur, Railways and Mizoram.

This time big names, including the 32-time champion Bengal and eight-time winner Punjab, have failed to make it to the final round.

On Wednesday, matches will be held in three sessions, with Meghalaya taking on Services in the morning before Kerala meets Assam in the afternoon.

Arunachal Pradesh will face a strong Goa in the last match of the day in the evening.

The group league will conclude on March 2 while the quarterfinals come up on March 4 and 5.

**Final on March 9**  
The semifinals will be played on March 7 and the final on March 9.

**Passive Kerala failed to its seize chances**

**RANJI TROPHY**

**M.R. Praveen Chandran**  
VIZIANAGARAM

A passive Kerala failed to qualify for the knockout round of the Ranji Trophy for the fifth straight season. The State came fourth in the Elite Group B with 17 points and finished 18th overall among 32 teams in the competition.

The team managed to win only one match (against Bengal). Even though it lost only once (to Mumbai), the failure to win any away matches against lower-ranked teams – Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Assam – ended the qualification chances.

Ruinous batting collapses, except against Bengal and Andhra, saw Kerala hand away the advantage to its rivals on a platter. The top order, except for

Sachin Baby, flattered to deceive. Baby stood tall among ruins to amass more than 800 runs with four centuries. Apart from him, Akshay Chandran (two centuries) and Shreyas Gopal (one century) managed to score more than 200 runs for Kerala. Sanju Samson was unavailable for three matches and had a poor tournament with the bat. The poor technique of the top-order batters was exposed in the swinging conditions away from home. Kerala lost early wickets in the must-win matches against Bihar and Chhattisgarh, and the first-innings totals in both these matches were inadequate.

Batting slow for personal milestones was also detrimental to the team's cause.

The bowlers came up with occasional flashes of brilliance. Medium-pac-

ers Basil Thampi, M.D. Nidheesh, N.P. Basil and Akhin Sathar bowled well in patches. Jalaj Saxena once again finished as the top wicket-taker with 34.

But apart from the spell (nine for 68 against Bengal), Jalaj struggled to create an impact and his batting was a let-down. Illnesses affected Gopal's performance. Crucial catches were put down, but bowlers couldn't be blamed for not trying.

"Overall it was a disappointing show by the team. The truth is coach M. Venkataramana had little time to work with the boys before the Ranji season. We failed to seize our moments," said Kerala Cricket Association secretary Vinod S. Kumar.

However, coach Venkataramana defended the team and said he was happy with the performance of the team.



**Crisis man:** Sachin Baby's performance with the bat was one of the few positives from the campaign. **FILE PHOTO: RTU RAJU KONWAR**

**Indian women hope to do well in Turkish Cup**

**Sports Bureau**

The Indian women's football team will get to test its ability when it takes on two European and an Asian opponent in the four-nation Turkish Women's Cup tournament, which gets underway at the Gold City Sports Complex in Alanya, Turkey on Wednesday.

India takes on Estonia in the first match before meeting Hong Kong on February 24. It will take on Kosovo in the last match on February 27. The highest aggregator of points in the round-robin will lift the title.

The team was last seen in action in October 2023, when it played both the

The highest aggregator of points in the round-robin will lift the title. All three opponents – Estonia, Kosovo and Hong Kong – are placed below India's current ranking of 65.

Asian Games and the Olympic qualifiers in the same month. The players dispersed to join their respective clubs for the IWL before reuniting for the Turkish assignment.

The team will hope to have a good outing considering all three opponents are below its present ranking of 65.

It presents a chance for the Indian team to register its first-ever win over an UEFA side in an official match.

**Napoli replaces Mazzarri with Calzona**

**AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE**  
MILAN

Struggling Napoli sacked Walter Mazzarri on Monday and brought in Slovakia coach Francesco Calzona. The 62-year-old Mazzarri became the second man to be sent packing this season by the ailing Italian champion.

He took charge in November after Rudi Garcia was dismissed. "I thank Walter Mazzarri, a friend of the de Laurentis family and Napoli, for having helped the team in a tricky period," said Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentis on X.

He confirmed that Calzona has been hired, reportedly until the end of the season.

**It isn't just Bazball – India are better, full credit to their supply chain**



**BETWEEN WICKETS**  
**Suresh Menon**

There are two issues with blaming Bazball for England's defeat in Rajkot. Firstly, a defeat, however crushing, cannot carry greater weight than the 14 wins in 21 matches (this, after 11 defeats in 17 Tests previously). More significantly, it ignores how good the Indian team is, and how strong their supply chain management has become.

England have against England's defeat in Rajkot. Firstly, a defeat, however crushing, cannot carry greater weight than the 14 wins in 21 matches (this, after 11 defeats in 17 Tests previously). More significantly, it ignores how good the Indian team is, and how strong their supply chain management has become.

self-confidence of the players. ("We can chase 600 runs"). It demands risk-taking in a format which preaches risk-aversion. There might a touch of *schadenfreude* too, especially among former players. All this is shows a misunderstanding of what Bazball stands for; it is not about hitting every ball, nor is it about winning every match. It is a mindset which works on putting pressure on the opposition through positive cricket, but is equally conscious of the need to absorb pressure too. England have been playing this brand of attractive cricket for a cou-

ple of years now, and it would be a pity – and Srean bad faith – if the criticism got to them and they jettisoned the approach. Sure it needs tweaking, and a better understanding of the concept even among the English players. **The Root issue**  
Joe Root might well be the greatest batter to have played for England. The manner of his two dismissals in Rajkot points to a fundamental flaw in Bazball. Despite all claims of letting the players express themselves in the manner they like, but (or bow!) without fear and play without any recrimination

from colleagues, the concept assumes a certain uniformity in aspirations and responses. All batters are not equal. Despite surprising Pat Cummins with a reverse hit six in a Test, and playing strokes sanctified by T20, Root gives the impression these departures from his essential self make him uncomfortable. He might want to be long; he has said he wishes to support skipper Ben Stokes like Stokes had supported him when he was captain. Whatever the case, England's game spiralled downwards from the moment he reverse hit Jasprit Bumrah into Yashasvi Jaiswal's hands at slip in the first innings. It didn't help that England's approach in the chase was confusing. This lack of decisiveness exposed cracks in Bazball which prides itself on clear messaging. Root might have been unlucky when his attempted sweep in the second innings failed on the umpire's call. "Everybody has a plan till they are punched in the mouth," said the boxer Mike Tyson. Everybody has a plan till they are 50 for seven. England's fortunes in the remainder of the series will depend on Root rediscovering the touch that has fetched him 11,493 runs

and 30 centuries. Bazball – a shorthand invented by a journalist – is obsessed with positive cricket. Sometimes playing for a draw can be a positive response, especially in a five-Test series. And the best man to lead such a batting approach is Root. Stokes thinks England will win the series 3-2. Ben Duckett has given Bazball the credit for Jaiswal's double centuries. The extravagance of the statements matches the extravagance of the batting. **No need**  
India don't need Bazball when playing at home. They were without their three best batters (Virat

Kohli, K.L. Rahul, Rishabh Pant), their regular middle-order pacer (Mohammed Shami) and their best spinner, Ashwin, for the most part. They had two debutants and a middle-order that had played fewer Tests than Root's average in the series. Since their last tour of Australia where they won the Brisbane Test and the series with what was in effect their third team, India have shown a resilience and a willingness to "run into the danger", to use Stokes' memorable phrase about his team's approach to Bazball. That series win came three years ago. Only three players from that eleven

played in Rajkot were Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubham Gill, Dhruv Jurel and Sarfaraz Khan looked like the youngsters preparing to take India into the next decade. It does look like a 4-1 series for India at this stage, that is merely what was expected before it began. If India plan to rest Jasprit Bumrah to keep him fit for the final Test (and, I suspect, for the IPL), there is a touch of Bazball arrogance about that. There is much to be said for so-called old-fashioned strategies like retaining a winning combination, defence sometimes being the best form of offence and playing session by session!

# 'We don't want to just participate, we want to be remembered'

UP Warriorz team owner Jinisha provides an insight into the workings of the WPL franchise on and off the field, and also dwells on her individual journey as a woman in sports leadership



Lavanya Lakshmi Narayanan

The days leading up to the second edition of the Women's Premier League have been frenetic. Players are flying in from around the world, last-minute strategies are being chalked out, training is on in full swing and franchises are maximising every operational part of the day to keep the fans involved. Life at the UP Warriorz base in Bengaluru is no different. As team owner Jinisha Sharma sits down for a chat, she is finalising a coffee order for the squad winding down in the team room.

"I see myself as a facilitator," Jinisha told *The Hindu* ahead of the league's Season 2.

"The idea is to give the girls as relaxed an environment as possible for them to play the best they can. It's to give some of them the push to get out of their rooms and get to know their teammates," she explained.

## Going with the flow

As an owner, fostering this camaraderie goes a long way in the kind of results the outfit can manage on the field as evidenced by the side's campaign in 2023. After up-and-down results early on, the team found its rhythm, the playing combinations clicked and the Alyssa Healy-led side found itself in the knockouts.

The hands-on approach isn't restricted to her WPL team. Jinisha, who currently heads Capri Sports – the sporting arm of Capri Global Holdings Private Limited – also manages teams in kabaddi (Bengal Warriors), kho kho (Rajasthan Warriors) and International League T20 (Sharjah Warriors). It's one thing to call the shots in an environment filled with women – what Jinisha calls her 'girl gang' – and a whole new challenge to be the person in charge of men's outfits.

"This is something we recognised quite early... each athlete will view the hierarchy and respond to it differently. We don't want to impose or be chatty and put players in an awkward position. For example, Mani (Maninder Singh, the captain of Bengal Warriors) is absolutely fine sitting down and having a relaxed chat about things. Not all kabaddi players are the same way," Jinisha elaborated.

It's been a little over a year since Jinisha took over operations at Capri's sporting ventures. Business ecosystems can be isolating spots for women, particularly in leadership positions. According to a study by Mastercard, women make up only 26.9% of the executive leadership of 31 major international sports federations. Only three are led by women. While the skewed gender ratio is an element the industry has identified as an issue to address, Jinisha feels the hurdle she faces is more age-related.

## A seat at the table

"Maybe it's in my head," Jinisha added with a cheeky smile. "I often wonder if those around me are taking me seriously enough because I am younger. I am aware of the fact that I am still on a learning curve when it comes to the job.

While I do take a stand when needed on most of the brand stuff, I have a really good team supporting me whom I rely on a lot because of the expertise they have in each area of functioning," she added.

That said, the WPL by itself was formed to allow women parity in opportunities, platform and grandeur. Jinisha is not encouraged by the fact that the number of women in these areas can still be counted on one's fingers.

"I've been trying to get more women into the field, whether it's in contract hiring or via internships. A lot of the time, women don't have the same depth of experience as men do and that comes in the way in getting good positions in operational spaces. We need to actually create opportunities where we can either get someone as an intern who might then be able to improve on this experience, move to the IPL and eventually come back to us in this sphere with a paid contract. I feel like it's a chicken-and-egg situation. The time to think is over, it is time to make things happen," she said.

Her principles found an ally in skipper Healy who insists that the control should be with the players on how their lives would be during the WPL.

## Templated ecosystems

"I love that Alyssa is very strong. She possesses all of the qualities of a leader... she is not afraid to speak her mind, she's not afraid to say no to things. Sports ecosystems can be quite templated. There is a certain expectation from players and plenty of off-field responsibilities. You'd imagine it's enough for an athlete to go out there and do their best. But that's not enough.

"They have 1020 interviews and brands they have to perform for, meet and greet and much more. For women's cricket, this is still fairly new. They have never actually had to do this. They have never had to juggle so many balls at once. Now, though, they have to go out there and sell a product too.

"In that context, Alyssa was able to draw boundaries and figure out how to shield her players as well as she possibly could. Indian culture focuses on appeasing and obeying elders and hierarchy, but we were able to



I often wonder if those around me are taking me seriously enough because I am younger. I am very aware of the fact that I am still on a learning curve when it comes to the job

give players space to make choices," Jinisha revealed.

## Passion or pragmatism

Three of the five WPL entities have teams in the IPL, lending their legacies to the women's vertical. UP Warriorz and Gujarat Giants, both franchises with other sporting operations too, do not. Jinisha called this a boon for the outfit.

"We are very fortunate that we don't have the men's IPL legacy attached to us and we don't have a format or a template in which we have to fit in. That allows us to actually go out there and do things that have otherwise not been done," she said.

This becomes important when the think-tank sits down to make financial calls and branding decisions which would help sell the Warriorz brand and its experience to a larger audience.

"Last year, we focused on just being there operationally, making sure everything was done. This time, we're kind of playing a little bit more on the front foot with a lot of our partnerships and ideas that we want to implement. We don't want to be a side that just came and played games. I don't want to be a franchise that just exists. I want to ensure that this is a franchise that is remembered," she added.

This quest for a lasting impression can even make gamblers out of the most cautious entrepreneurs. With the seasonal attention coming WPL's way and, by extension, the larger women's cricket community, it is tempting to cash in and explore merchandising



## THE GIST

Jinisha Sharma handles all four franchises under the Capri Sports fold – Bengal Warriors (Kabaddi), Rajasthan Warriors (Kho Kho), Sharjah Warriors (IL T20 cricket) and UP Warriorz (WPL cricket)

Capri Global Holdings bought the Lucknow franchise at an auction hosted by the BCCI for a massive sum of ₹757 crore

UP Warriorz finished third in the first edition, losing to Mumbai Indians in the Eliminator. The team registered four wins and four losses in eight league matches

The franchise is focusing on a number of female-led collaborations and campaigns, including a tie-up with Navya Naveli Nanda to tackle online trolling directed at women in sports

The team is hoping to release the docu-series based the Warriorz before the third season of the WPL

and other fan-driven initiatives. Jinisha is wary of getting carried away.

"Take the jersey, for instance. It is quite banging, if I say so myself. If I am being honest, though, the data on merchandising is not very positive. We have plans for a limited drop this season," she admitted.

However, the appetite for women's sports doesn't begin and end with material things. While the WPL is still taking baby steps in the franchise world, this toddler is learning to walk at an alarmingly fast rate.

"2023 has been the busiest year for the women's game. This time, the ICC Women's T20 World Cup comes soon after the WPL. I think that's a very good sign that it's not just us, but even the league, even the BCCI and the ICC which is deciding to up the ante.

"We want more. We want more players. We want to increase the pool. Eventually, there will be a sixth team and we know there are more than enough players to stack up that side given the number of quality players who missed out. These are signs that the commercials are looking healthy," she added.

A way to boost the interest in the women's game while keeping the focus lights firmly on the players has led to a docu-series.

The Warriorz have roped in award-winning filmmaker Arlene Nelson and look to do for the women's game what the likes of *Drive to Survive* (Formula One), *Break Point* (Tennis) and *The Test* (Cricket) did for their respective sports.

"We wanted to actually dive deeper into the stories that have made these women cricketers and where they've come from. We've gone to England, we've gone to Australia, we've been around in India to different players' homes.

"We've spoken to their families, giving context to who these girls are and where they come from," Jinisha said.

"I think we are still yet to see that breakout moment for the WPL, where every single person knows about it and is gearing up to be a part of it.

"We're hoping this can push audiences towards that end. You think you know all of these players because you've seen their interviews, you've read about them and you've seen them play, but we're going to peel multiple layers and show you sides to them that you've not seen before," she signed off.