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## 10 injured in blast at Bengaluru eatery

**All injured out of danger; an explosive material, yet to be identified, was packed in a bag and left at the restaurant by a customer, say police**

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

Ten people were injured in a low-intensity bomb blast at The Rameshwaram Cafe, a popular restaurant in Brookefield in Bengaluru's Information Technology corridor on Friday afternoon. All the injured are said to be out of danger.

Police said the blast had been caused by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED), which seemed to have been left at the restaurant by a customer. The blast occurred during the busy lunch hour, shocking customers and others in the vicinity with an ear-shattering explosion, followed by smoke engulfing the area. The quick-service eatery had over 200 patrons when the blast occurred, sources said.

Karnataka Chief Minister



**Left shaken:** Moments after the blast in Bengaluru on Friday. PTI

Siddaramaiah confirmed that an IED had been used in the blast. Senior police officials said an explosive material, yet to be identified, was packed with nuts and bolts in a bag with a timer device, which has been recovered.

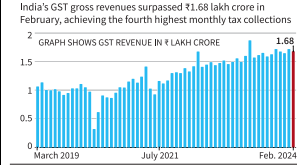
The IED went off exactly at 12.55.32, as the CCTV footage shows. The footage also shows another explosion, five seconds later. Ho-

wever, police said that a single IED had been planted there. Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, who visited the spot, said a man aged around 30 years came to the restaurant at around noon, and left the bag near the hand wash area. It exploded nearby an hour later.

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## GST collections up 12.54% in February

**Top collection**



**Vikas Dhoot**  
NEW DELHI

India's gross revenues from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) grew at a three-month high pace of 12.54% in February to cross ₹1.68 lakh crore, marking the fourth-highest monthly collections from the tax.

February's GST revenue growth reflected the third highest uptick in 2023-24 and lifted the total collections so far this year to ₹18.4 lakh crore, 11.7% above the same period last year.

The gross GST kitty of

₹1,68,337 crore in February was 3.3% lower than January's updated collection numbers of ₹1,74,06 crore, the second-highest tally since GST was launched in July 2017.

The GST numbers "demonstrate continued growth momentum and positive performance", the Finance Ministry asserted, noting that collections from domestic transactions rose 13.9%, while goods imports delivered an 8.5% rise in revenues.

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**IN BRIEF**

**Sandeshkhali: PM questions silence of INDIA bloc**

**KOLKATA** PM Narendra Modi on Friday asked why the leaders of the INDIA bloc were silent on the recent developments in Sandeshkhali. He was addressing a public meeting at Arambagh. » **Page 9**

**Political parties express support for Vakeel Hassan**

**NEW DELHI** Various political parties and trade unions on Friday expressed their support for Uttarakashi tunnel rescuer Vakeel Hassan, whose house in Delhi was razed by the DDA in an anti-encroachment drive earlier this week. » **Page 4**

## Set to sparkle



**Clay craft:** Potters prepare large earthen lamps (diyas) for sale ahead of the Maha Shivaratri festival, in Bhubaneswar on Friday. ANI

## Himachal remains on the boil as Minister meets rebel Congress MLAs, visits Delhi

**Vikas Vasudeva**  
CHANDIGARH

A day after the Congress' central observers asserted that "all is well" within the party's Himachal Pradesh unit, it appears the crisis could be far from over with Cabinet Minister Vikramaditya Singh on Friday rushing to New Delhi, seeking a dialogue with the party "high command".

**'Get act together'** Mr. Vikramaditya's move came even as Pratibha Singh, the State Congress chief and his mother, indicated that the Congress needs to get its act together ahead of the Lok Sabha election. He also met the rebel Congress MLAs in Haryana on Friday. As per his official programme, he is slated to meet Union Mi-



Chief Minister Sukhvir Singh Sukhu addressing the media after a meeting with Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania in Shimla on Friday. PTI

**Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania.** After the cross-voting, Mr. Vikramaditya announced - and then took back - his resignation, bringing the leadership tussle in the State Congress unit to the fore.

On Thursday, the party asserted that differences had been resolved and the government would continue its tenure. However, a day after the assurances, a meeting of Mr. Vikramaditya with some of the disqualified Congress MLAs in Haryana's Panchkula at a private hotel on Friday was being keenly watched by Vikramaditya, whose house in Haryana's Chief Minister Manohar Lal's publicity adviser, Tarun Bhandari, with Mr. Vikramaditya too raised eyebrows. Mr. Vikramaditya later went to Delhi, where he was expected to meet the party's central leadership.

In Shimla, Ms. Singh acknowledged that at the moment, the BJP is better placed than the Congress to lead the State government. She also expressed support for the six disqualified Congress MLAs, pointing out that they would have been hurt.

## Delhi's economy growing despite roadblocks, says Atishi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Atishi on Friday said Delhi's economy has grown at a strong pace in the past year despite the "roadblocks" created by the Centre and the L-G in the functioning of the AAP government.

Tabling the Economic Survey for 2023-24 in the Delhi Assembly, she said the data show Delhi's per capita income registering a growth of 5.69% over the previous year.

## RJD MLA joins NDA, taking 'defections' from Oppn. alliance to 7 Devi trust vote in Bihar

**Amit Bhehari**  
PATNA

The Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) faced another jolt in Bihar on Friday with its Bhabhusan legislator Bharat Bindu changing sides and sitting with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) MLAs on the last day of the Assembly session.

With this, a total of seven MLAs of the RJD-led Opposition *Mahagathbandhan* (Grand Alliance) have switched sides so far, including five from the RJD and two from the Congress. The RJD's numbers have now come down to 74 MLAs from 79, and the

Congress has 17 MLAs left in the 243-seat Assembly. Mr. Bindu's 'defection' comes on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the State on March 2, when he is due to address two public meetings in Aurangabad and Begusarai districts.

Three RJD MLAs - Chetan Anand, Neelam Devi, and Prahalad Yadav - switched sides on February 12, the day of the trust vote for the new Janata Dal (United)-BJP government. On February 27, two Congress MLAs, Murari Gautam and Siddharth Saurabh, along with RJD MLA Sangita Kumari, had re-

fused to sit in their allotted seats in the Assembly and sat alongside NDA MLAs.

**Critical desertions** Three of the defections are significant in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election. Mr. Gautam represents the Chenari Assembly seat, Ms. Kumari represents Mohania, and Mr. Bindu was elected from Bhabhua; all three seats fall under the Sasaram Lok Sabha constituency, presently represented by the BJP's Chhedi Paswan.

Mr. Bindu, from the Extremely Backward Class, contested the 2015 Assembly election on a Bah-

ujan Samaj Party ticket, but faced defeat. Ahead of the 2020 poll, he joined the RJD. Asked about changing sides again, Mr. Bindu said he was impressed with the work of the BJP.

Soon after this development, another Congress MLA Neetu Singh, who represents the Hissua Assembly seat in Nawada district, said she would switch sides too for the price of a Lok Sabha ticket. "If the BJP gives me a ticket from Nawada, I will surely go with them. I have asked for a ticket from the Congress as well, but the party is always giving tickets to outsiders," Ms. Singh said.

## Released after 5 years from U.P. jail, Kashmiri scribe Asif Sultan 're-arrested' in another case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
SRINAGAR

Kashmiri journalist Asif Sultan, who was released after more than five years earlier this week, has reportedly been re-arrested by the J&K police in a separate case in Srinagar.

The police have neither denied nor confirmed the move to re-arrest him.

Mr. Sultan, who worked as assistant editor with the magazine *Kashmir Narrator*, was released from the Ambekar Nagar jail in Uttar Pradesh 78 days after

could not be ascertained immediately. When contacted, the police officers which allows detention without trial for up to two years, terming it "illegal".

The journalist had reached home on Thursday after his release on Tuesday, people close to him said. He was, however, first summoned by the Batmaloo police station in Srinagar on the same day and later shifted to the Rainawari police station, where he was re-arrested in another case.

The details of the case

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## IN BRIEF



## Priyanka Gandhi targets BJP over question paper leak

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday targeted the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh over the question paper leak in the Class 12 mathematics and biology board examinations, accusing the saffron party of following out the foundation of education across children while saving the examination mafia and corrupt entities. "Under BJP rule, from job exams to board exams, almost every paper is getting leaked," she said in a post on X.

## Five arrested in connection with Haldwani violence

The Uttarakhand Police on Friday arrested five women, including a 50-year-old, on charges of rioting in connection with the recent Haldwani violence in the town's Banbhoolpura area on February 8. The violence, which erupted during the demolition of an allegedly illegally built mosque and madrasa as part of an anti-encroachment drive, left five persons dead and over 100 injured.

## VBA ready to contest 46 seats, says Prakash Ambedkar

Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi chief Prakash Ambedkar on Friday expressed confidence that his party could independently secure at least six Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra in the upcoming polls, and that it was ready to field 46 candidates if the alliance with the Opposition's Maha Vikas Aghadi didn't materialise. He added that MVA constituents Shiv Sena (UBT) and Congress were experiencing "tension" over seat-sharing.

## Support pours in for Hassan as he continues protest near razed home

Satvika Mahajan  
NEW DELHI

Various political parties and trade unions on Friday rallied in support of Vakeel Hassan, whose house was demolished by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in an anti-encroachment drive earlier this week. Mr. Hassan, a resident of Delhi, was part of the rescue team that brought out 41 workers from the collapsed tunnel in Uttarakh last year. AAP MLAs Akhilesh Tripathi and Rajendra Pal Garg raised the matter in the Delhi Assembly and sought the intervention of the Lieutenant-Governor. "The poor build their homes painstakingly with their hard-earned money. For these assets, they do not act, and suddenly, one day, they destroy the



Vakeel Hassan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

houses without notice," Mr. Gautam said. Delhi Congress chief Arvind Kejriwal also lashed out at the Central government. "Vakeel Hassan's house was demolished despite the Centre passing a law last year that prohibited demolitions in unauthorised colonies for the next three years," Mr. Lovely

## JMM-Cong. govt. stands for 'jam kar ke khao', says PM at Dhanbad rally

They have looted the people of Jharkhand and created mountains of unaccounted assets for themselves, says Modi accusing both parties of promoting nepotism, politics of appeasement

Amit Bhelari  
PATNA

Accusing the ruling dispensation in Jharkhand of corruption, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday called the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-Congress combine "anti-poor" and "anti-development", and said it believed in the "politics of nepotism and appeasement". Speaking at a rally in Dhanbad's Sindri village as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) prepares for the Lok Sabha election, Mr. Modi said he had never seen such a huge amount of money in one's life. "I had seen mountains of coal, but never such mountains of currency notes. This money belongs to the poor tribals of Jharkhand. Would you accept if anyone takes your money? There should be strict action against such persons," he alleged.

The PM also alluded to the seizure of cash and gold worth nearly ₹350 crore last year from the premises of Congress Rajya Sabha member from Jharkhand Dhiraj Sahu, saying he had never seen such a huge amount of money in one's life. Mr. Sahu reportedly revised his income tax returns to explain the seized income and paid taxes on some of the assets. "I had seen mountains of coal, but never such mountains of currency notes. This money belongs to the poor tribals of Jharkhand. Would you accept if anyone takes your money? There should be strict action against such persons," he alleged.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Union Minister of Tribal Affairs Anjum Munda during a public meeting in Dhanbad on Friday. ANI

State chief Babul Marandi, and other party leaders. Mr. Modi accused the JMM-Congress combine of using the people of the State as vote banks. "The JMM is run by one family, and they think about their own children, not your children. The future of your children is my guarantee and the country trusts in Modi's guarantee. The JMM and the Congress are anti-poor. The more they throw mud on us, the more the lotus (the BJP's symbol) will bloom," he added.

The PM also listed various development works undertaken in the State by

the BJP-led Centre, including the airport and an AI-IMS in Deoghar.

"Hundred percent electrification of railways has been done and three Vande Bharat trains have been given to Jharkhand," the PM said. Taking a jibe at former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate in January on an alleged land scam, Mr. Modi asked the crowd to raise the slogan 'Bharat Mata Ki Ja' so loudly that it is heard even in those in jail.

Projects inaugurated Earlier in the day, the PM inaugurated projects worth nearly ₹36,000 crore in the State, including the revived Sindri fertilizer plant. Monitored by Hindustan Urvarak and Rasayan Limited, the plant is expected to produce around 12.7 lakh tonnes of urea per annum.

"I had guaranteed to start the plant, and today that guarantee has been fulfilled," Mr. Modi said. He also flagged off the Deoghar-Deoghar train service, a long-haul freight train from Shipur station, and a MEMU train service between Tatanagar and Badampahar on a daily basis.

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## Assam braces for anti-CAA protests

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

Assam is set to face another round of protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) of 2019, with a conglomeration of 16 political parties and about 30 NGOs announcing a series of agitations.

The anti-CAA programmes are scheduled to start with a motorcycle rally in every district, followed by the burning of the CAA rules after they are notified. The NGOs headed by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) will also observe a 12-hour hunger strike on March 9 during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the State.

The 16-party United Opposition Forum (UOF), headed by Congress, has threatened a mass agitation against the law. "Assam is already flooded with lakhs of foreigners. We cannot take any more. We shall seek an appointment with the Prime Minister to discuss the issue. We will protest if the Centre is insistent on pushing the CAA," State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah said.

"The Assamese people will never accept the CAA and we will continue our democratic and legal fight against the law," he said. "We will impose it on us," AASU president Uday Sarma said on Thursday, slamming Home Minister Amit Shah for announcing that the rules of the CAA would be framed soon for implementation.



UOF leaders submitted a memorandum against the CAA to the Governor. ANI

The Assam government has warned the anti-CAA groups against imposing shutdowns and damaging public property. Referring to the Gauhati High Court order on handbills, State Director General of Police G.P. Singh said the State sustained a loss of ₹1,643 crore from a day of *bandh*. The loss would be recovered from those who call handbills, he said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said anti-CAA protests would be illegal as Parliament had passed the law. "People have the right to like or dislike the CAA but they should ideally approach the Supreme Court which has the authority to terminate legislation," he said.

"The CAA seeks to provide Indian citizenship to people from the Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi people who came to India from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014, after five years of living in the country."

## AIADMK leader dares Modi to field Nirmala, Jaishankar from T.N.

P. V. Srividya  
KRISHNAGIRI

Senior AIADMK functionary K.P. Munusamy on Friday dared Prime Minister Narendra Modi to prove his claim of the BJP's "soaring popularity" in Tamil Nadu by fielding Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who hail from the State, in any of its two Lok Sabha constituencies.

Addressing a public meeting in Shoogirai village, he said, "If you [Mr. Modi] are so popular, why did you not field Union Minister of State L. Murugan? Why did you give him a Rajya Sabha seat from Madhya Pradesh instead? You claim that your party has

grown in stature and popularity on our Dravidian soil. You have two Union Ministers from this State. Field them in any two constituencies of Tamil Nadu. If you have the courage, bring them here. Then you will know who is popular."

Mr. Munusamy, AIADMK deputy general secretary, also challenged Mr. Modi and BJP State president K. Annamalai's claim of their party's "rising stature". "They keep harping on about 300 seats, 400 seats... how many seats will you get here in Tamil Nadu?"

He added that the ruling DMK was his party's only competitor in the State, and the BJP was going to lose its deposit in all the constituencies it contests.

## In major victory for labourers, Rajasthan extends urban jobs scheme to new municipal bodies

The Hindu Bureau  
JAIPUR

In a big win for the villagers who lost employment opportunities after the conversion of village panchayats into urban local bodies, the BJP government in Rajasthan has agreed to launch the urban employment guarantee scheme in 42 newly created Municipal Councils. The decision came after a month-long agitation in Bhim in Rajasmand district.

The Local Self Government Department has issued orders for starting the guaranteed employment works in the new Municipal Councils, situated in 27 districts, by designating the nearest urban bodies

Villagers had lost out on employment after village panchayats were converted to urban local bodies

works went unchanged even after the change of government in the State. The villagers started an indefinite strike at Bhim in January-end.

The Devdungri village in Bhim tehsil, which the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) leaders are situated, is also known as the centre stage of the movement for right to information, which led to the enactment of the RTI Act in 2005.

MKS executive president and RTI activist Shankar Singh said the agitation was aimed at securing the right to work as a guarantee. "We will continue to hold government officials accountable for equitable distribution of work," he said.

The works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme were stopped in the village panchayats converted into urban local bodies in July last year, posing a major challenge to the villagers who depended on the scheme for their livelihood. As the demand for restarting the

## Unrestrained poaching plays big role in decline of Odisha's leopards

Satyasundar Borkar  
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has witnessed a sharp decline in its leopard population - approximately one-fourth lost - primarily due to poaching between 2018 and 2022.

The Status of Leopards India report released on Thursday presented a dismaying picture of the big cat population in the State.

"The leopard population in Odisha is estimated at 568. The population has significantly declined since the last countrywide estimate of 760. However, leopard densities from both the tiger reserves in the State have increased significantly. This indicates that major efforts of recovery are restricted to tiger re-

serve," said the leopard census. The drop of 192 leopards is estimated to be 25.26% of the population.

The report added that leopards are reported exclusively within protected areas such as Simlipal and Satkosia tiger reserves, Hirakud and Kotagarh wildlife sanctuaries, and their adjoining forest divisions.

"Leopard occupancy has declined from the previous occupied regions. Leopard presence was not recorded from Nayagarh and Ghumsur forest divisions in this cycle of countrywide monitoring," it observed.

**Wilderness poaching** According to the report, the biggest threats to the



Three leopard hides seized by the Special Task Force of the Odisha police last year. FILE PHOTO

dwindling leopard population are poaching of prey for bush meat, targeted poaching for tiger and leopard skins and body parts, and habitat loss due to mining and other human activities. Road accidents, incidentally, are also a significant cause for leopard

As per the information furnished by the Forest Department in the State Assembly, as many as 59 leopard skins were seized from wildlife smugglers between 2018 and 2022. Similarly, the Special Task Force (STF) of the State police recovered 57 leopard skins from poachers and wildlife article dealers for mauli. I am only asking the authorities to return the loss of its two Lok Sabha constituencies.

The high number of leopard skins seized by both the Odisha police and the State Forest and Environment Department indicates how poaching remains the prime cause behind the disappearance of leopards in the State.

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"Need for State action" "The State should step up efforts towards effective patrolling, prey recovery, and habitat management

outside tiger reserves, since a major population of the leopards, about 55%, lives outside the protected area network," suggested the census report.

J.N. Panik, Inspector-General of the police's STF, said, "After the seizure of leopard skins, we deliberately do not disclose the value of the contraband. The value is grossly exaggerated by the media, wildlife criminals or locals get encouraged, and look at the poaching of leopards as a way of making money."

Odisha, which has a forest cover of 52,156 sq. km, constituting 33.50% of the State's total area, effective patrolling and law enforcement are especially crucial.

## Cong. disrupts Assembly over farmers' agitation

Press Trust of India  
CHANDIGARH

Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit's address to the State Assembly on the opening day of the Budget Session on Friday was disrupted by the Opposition's Congress MLAs, who raised a hue and cry, supposed to deliver my speech. After my speech, you can raise any issue."

As soon as the Governor began his address, Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring raised the farmers' issue, saying that honage should be paid to 21-year-old Shubhakaran Singh, who died during clashes between the protesting farmers and Haryana security personnel.

Leader of Opposition Partap Singh Bajwa added that Haryana had seized its borders with Punjab and have not been able to protect your farmers," he said.

As Congress MLAs insisted that farmers' issue be discussed first, the Governor said, "As per the raised issue, the honours supposed to deliver my speech. After my speech, you can raise any issue."

However, due to the uproar, Mr. Purohit cut short his address, leading State Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema to slam the unruly MLAs for "disrespecting" the House. "To gain cheap publicity, the MLAs boycotted the address," he said.





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Chief Guest

**Arvind Kejriwal**

Chief Minister, Delhi

**2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2024**  
**JALANDHAR, PUNJAB**

**Bhagwant Singh Mann** Chief Minister, Punjab

Department of Information & Public Relations, Punjab

# Change and continuity in India's Palestine policy



## Decoding the script

Findings from the genome sequencing must be shared widely

**T**he Genome India Project, a project funded and coordinated by the Department of Biotechnology, announced that it had finished sequencing 10,000 Indian genomes. This means that the complete genomes – the DNA blueprint that constitutes and maintains human bodies – from 10,000 individuals were analysed to create a 'reference' Indian human genome. India first sequenced a human genome in 2006. In a way, the latest enterprise would be akin to the creation of the first ever detailed map of India – with all political units, key geographical and topographical features – as opposed to a world map prepared elsewhere, with India just one of several countries and devoid of granular detail. Are 10,000 individuals representative of a country of over a billion? Surely not. But for now, it is the best there is and forms a vital template, the basis on which many more insights can be prised. The most immediate application is in combating disease. In 2009, geneticists in India, as part of an international collaboration, discovered that an aberration in a protein, MYBPC3 (cardiac myosin binding protein C), was correlated with a high risk of heart failure. This genetic variant was present in approximately 4% of those of Indian ancestry – a higher than expected number given that this problematic variant is rare.

India has close to 4.500 population groups and the subcontinent's history of being ordered along caste lines through endogamy implies that rare genetic variants, many harmful, that ordinarily through the course of evolution ought to have died out, persist. When the Human Genome Project published its reference 'human genome' in 2001, at a cost of nearly \$3 billion, it raised the prospect of a 'brave-new-world' promise of humanity having finally decoded the secrets of the genome, mapping every avy gene to a disease and a future of 'personalised medicine'. Much of Genome India's sales pitch reflects similar promises. However, the subsequent decades have tempered such optimism. For only a small fraction of disease is monogenic (determined by a single gene). Despite advances in knowledge of how rare, inherited genes caused debilitating disease, little could be done as the necessary medicines, if discovered, were usually too expensive for those in need. In other words, genome sequencing only opened the door to a world of complexity. While genome India should go beyond the 10,000 mark, it must also be truly democratic. The findings ought not be locked up in the ivory towers of academia and should involve imaginative collaborations with scientists, students, technology companies, ethicists and social scientists to push forward India's understanding of itself.

## Vulnerable to criticism

ED's low credibility casts a doubt on its intent behind summoning TN Collectors

**T**he structure of the law against money laundering is bound to throw up perplexing questions about the possible violation of federal principles. One such question has arisen in Tamil Nadu, where the Enforcement Directorate (ED) is trying to find out whether illegal assets in the hands of a resident of Tamil Nadu, if the "proceeds" are being laundered. The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) allows the ED to probe the money laundering aspect of crimes registered by the police in various States. Allegations of rampant illegal sand mining, either by extraction in excess of permitted limits or through the permit system, are registered in Tamil Nadu. In ruling that District Collectors are allowed to respond to summonses issued by the ED, the Supreme Court of India has underscored Tamil Nadu's duty to cooperate with investigations under central laws. However, this may not necessarily mean that the ED's attempt to assess the linkages to the excavator as a residence or un-checked mining is within its jurisdiction. A final determination may be required on this. The top court has stayed the operation of a Madras High Court order, which had earlier stayed the summonses to the Collectors. The State government and the District Collectors concerned had filed writ petitions in the High Court against the "assertions of the State's powers to the territorial agency and the validity of the summonses."

The Court has now described these petitions as thoroughly misconceived and that the High Court was cited due to "utter misconception of law". It has cited Section 50 of PMLA on the ED's point that it cannot pursue cases on a national basis, on the assumption that an offence has been committed. While asking officials to cooperate with an investigation is unobjectionable in itself, it cannot be forgotten that the ED's low credibility and obvious lack of independence make its actions vulnerable to the criticism of being biased against States ruled by the political adversaries of those in power at the Centre.

**H**istorically, India has been a firm supporter of the Palestine cause. And even when India's relationship with Israel flourished in the past three decades, New Delhi has maintained a careful balance between its new partnership and historical commitment towards Palestine. In recent years, there have been questions on whether India is abandoning this balance and tilting towards the Jewish state in a changing West Asia, where even Arab nations have been ready to sidestep the Palestine question for better bilateral ties with Israel.

Immediately after the October 7 Hamas attack in Israel, in which at least 1,200 people, mostly civilians, were killed, Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a post on X, said he was "deeply shocked by the news of [the] terrorist attack". He said, "We stand in solidarity with Israel at this difficult hour."

Mr. Modi, who became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel in 2017, has a good personal chemistry with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Supporters of Mr. Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hardly conceal their admiration towards Israel's aggressive security model. On October 26, barely three weeks after the Hamas attack, India abstained from a vote at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that called for an "immediate, durable and sustainable humanitarian truce" in Gaza. India explained its stand by saying that there was no explicit condemnation of the October 7 "terror attack in its resolution". All the factors suggested that India's historical policy towards Palestine was undergoing a paradigm shift.

### Evolutionary approach

India's Palestine policy has evolved over the years. When the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution to partition Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, India abstained from a vote (Jerusalem in November 1947, India, along with Pakistan and the Arab bloc, voted against it. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had compared the settler Zionists in historical Palestine to the Muslim League of undivided India. His position was that India, having gone through the horrors of Partition, should not support the partition of Palestine. But when the state of Israel was declared in May 1948, India swiftly adopted a pragmatic line: in 1950, it recognised Israel, but stopped short of establishing full diplomatic relations. Throughout the Cold War, India, an advocate of Third World unity, was one of the few vocal supporters of the Palestinian cause.

After it established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, bilateral ties between New Delhi and Tel Aviv began to deepen and broaden (today, Israel is one of India's major defence and technology partners). But India publicly



Stanly Johny

maintained its support for "a negotiated solution, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living with peace and recognized borders, side by side with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet Road map and relevant UNSC Resolutions" – this means that India supported the creation of a Palestine state with East Jerusalem as its capital and based on the 1967 borders.

This position has evolved further after Mr. Modi became Prime Minister. In February 2018, when he visited Ramallah in the occupied West Bank, he called for dialogue to find a permanent solution to the crisis, but stopped short of saying anything on the status of Jerusalem or borders. It does not mean that India supports Israel's claim over the whole of Jerusalem (New Delhi voted against the U.S. decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital), but it will not talk about the contentious issues such as the capital and border any more, while remaining a partner of Israel and a supporter of the two-state solution. Realpolitik displaces the moral content of India's Palestine policy.

### After October 7

A close analysis of India's voting record at the UN, post-October 7, and the statements made by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) suggests that this position of balancing has not changed. It is neither a strong moral critic, like Brazil or South Africa, of the way Israel is conducting the war, nor a mere spectator in the event of Israel, like the United States or the United Kingdom.

A few days after Mr. Modi's tweet declaring solidarity with Israel over the "terror attack", the MEA stated that India backed "a sovereign, independent viable state of Palestine". After its first abstention, there were at least four votes at the UNGA on Israel. On November 12, 2023, India voted in favour of a resolution that condemned Israeli settlements "in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan". Two weeks later, New Delhi voted in favour of another resolution that expressed "deep concern" over Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank and the Golan Heights. On December 12, India supported a resolution that called for "an immediate humanitarian ceasefire". And on December 19, it voted for the Palestinian right to self-determination.

The voting record speaks for itself. One cannot have a two-state solution if Israel settlements continue in the West Bank. And the only path towards a solution is diplomacy, not war, as there is no balance of power between Israel, the mightiest military in West Asia, and the Palestinian militants. So, in essence, if one supports the two state-solution, there should be a

call for an immediate end to violence, support dialogue, condemn settlements and, in principle, back Palestinian right to self-determination. This is what India has done, unlike the U.S., which claims to be supporting the two-state solution while voting against all resolutions at the UN and refusing to back the ceasefire call.

### India's interests

The support for the Palestine cause, even if limited, is rooted in tangible national interests. Israel's ongoing offensive in Gaza, which has killed over 30,000 people, wounded some 70,000 and displaced nearly 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, is one of the gravest humanitarian tragedies of the 21st century. Israel, despite this rogue behaviour, manages to avoid the wrath of the international laws and system mainly because of the unconditional support it enjoys from the U.S. But America's support for Israel and Tel Aviv's disregard for Palestinian lives and international laws have created strong reactions in the Global South. South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice, while Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva accuses Israel of committing "genocide" in Gaza. China has repeatedly called for a ceasefire, while Russia is trying to bring different Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

India, which aspires to be a leader of the Global South, cannot ignore these voices and sentiments. That is why External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said at the Munich Security Conference last month that Israel's "policy is not even remotely mindful of the civilian casualties in Gaza", which is India's sharpest criticism of the Israel war till now.

The October 7 attack and Israel's retaliatory war have also turned the strategic clock in the region back. Before October 7, India was gearing up to work in the post-Abram Accords strategic space, which is co-operation between the Arabs, Israelis and Americans. But further Arab-Israel reconciliation is now on hold. The U.S.'s reputation stands as tarnished as that of Israel. If Saudi-Israel normalisation is not taking place, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) will have to wait. If the crisis persists and continues to fuel the regional tensions, it will create lasting economic pains for India. A prolonged war in Gaza would also enhance risks of a wider conflict in the region, involving Iran, Israel and America, who are all India's partners. An immediate end to the war, restoration of order and stability in West Asia and the Middle East, and the consequent increase in power in India's interests as anybody else's in West Asia. This should be the guiding core of India's Act West policy.

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# India's burgeoning death penalty crisis

**W**ith 561 prisoners on death row at the end of 2023, India's death row population continues to reach its highest-ever numbers since 2004. In an unprecedented trend, the Supreme Court of India acquitted nearly 55% of the death row prisoners (six prisoners) in the cases it heard in 2023. This development must be understood alongside the Court initiative (in September 2022) to convene a committee to benchmark the death penalty sentencing. However, given the continued evidence of the broken state of sentencing in India's courts, the potential of this Bench to truly turn things around appears uncertain. Instead, the high rate of acquittals with a skyrocketing death row population must compel the Court to consider whether India's death penalty regime can ever be limited to the question of sentencing.

### More communications and acquittals

Data from Project 39A's 2023 annual statistics on the death penalty show that the Court's attempts to reform sentencing through its directions in *Manoj v The State of Madhya Pradesh* (May 2022) have failed to trickle down to trial courts for the second year in a row. In 2023, trial courts imposed 86.96% of death sentences in the absence of information pertaining to the accused that was mandated in *Manoj*.

Additionally, the High Courts continued their reticence in confirming death sentences in 2023. While the Supreme Court did not order a death sentence in any of the 10 cases it decided, only one death sentence was confirmed across High Courts. This follows the findings from the Death Penalty India Report (2016) that ultimately, 4.9% of the death sentences imposed by trial courts between 2000-15 were confirmed at the appellate level. Over the years, a majority of the death cases before the Court have resulted in the Court upholding convictions, but commuting the



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**Death penalty sentencing reform initiated by the Supreme Court of India has failed to percolate to trial courts**

death sentences to life imprisonment.

The acquittals of death row prisoners by the Supreme Court continue to be a trend. Despite comprising a smaller proportion of death cases at the Court in previous years, these decisions underscore systemic failures by the police, prosecution, and trial courts. Acquittals have been outcomes of fabricated evidence, manipulated first information reports, the unreliability of forensic evidence and dubious recoveries of incriminating evidence by the police. What made the year 2023 particularly striking is the dominance of acquittals in the Court's death penalty decisions in the year.

The Court has confined itself to case-specific reprimands in acquittal decisions, without acknowledging systemic problems within which the death penalty is being administered. When it comes to sentencing, the Court has been more willing to recognise systemic concerns plaguing the death penalty. The decision of the Court in September 2022 to send crucial issues surrounding death penalty sentencing to a constitution bench reflects that the Court has acknowledged the growing number of acquittals by the Supreme Court in death penalty cases creates an urgency to recognise the very high chances of error in our criminal system. Repeated instances of acquittals from death row must force us to reconsider the risk we are taking in a system such as ours.

### State of the prisoner

Death row prisoners live in constant distress due to an ever-looming fear of execution. They are subjected to constant violence, ridicule and humiliation within prisons. Prison policies segregating them from work, education and recreation, deprive them the life-making skills for them to cope under such dehumanising circumstances. The death row experience comes with life-long

psychological ramifications, which continue well after a prisoner has been acquitted or commuted. Yet, the continued death row population continues to increase every year due to the exaggerated and unjustifiable use of the death penalty by the trial courts. Data from Project 39A's report, revealing a 15% decrease in High Court case disposal rate, exacerbates an already deep crisis. A majority of death row prisoners are needlessly subjected to the rigors of death row, even after the acquittal or commutation. Others may have been less fortunate. In September 2023, a person under the sentence of death in Yerwada jail died by suicide after spending six years on death row. His case had been pending confirmation in the Bombay High Court since 2019. It should not be acceptable to us as a society that we are increasingly subjecting individuals to a dehumanising punishment using processes that are far from reliable.

In light of such a crisis, the Supreme Court has much to reconsider. The Court's convening of a Constitution Bench, laudable as it may be, may not be ineffective but also off the mark in tackling the death penalty crisis. Death penalty sentencing reform from the Supreme Court has persistently failed to percolate to trial courts, pointing to the futility of this exercise. More importantly, Project 39A's 2023 report shows a dissonance between the narrow sentencing question that the Court pritisises over the actual crisis that the trial courts face in sentencing in death cases – from the police to prisoners. In effect, the Supreme Court is perhaps undertaking an exercise that does too little, too late.

The writers authored the *Death Penalty in India: A Statistical Report 2022*. The views expressed are personal. Those in distress or having suicidal tendencies could seek help and counselling

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**'Drive' for one-party rule**  
Since the formation of the government by the BJP in 2014, the party seems to have launched a full-fledged drive to 'organise' defections especially from Congress government. There seems to be both coercive tactics and the carrot and stick policy. The aim of the BJP leadership seems to be to eliminate the Opposition, come what may, and establish a one-party regime. One has

the Rajya Sabha elections in Himachal Pradesh besides the election of Mayor in Chandigarh Municipal Corporation as examples. The Opposition parties should understand that there is an existential fight to save democracy.

**S.K. Khosla,**  
Chandigarh  
The Rajya Sabha elections saw the spectacle of legislators brazenly giving vent to their dissidence by

cross-voting in favour of the BJP's candidates, signifying the decline in the internal structure of the parties in the Opposition bloc. It is wrong to blame the Bharatiya Janata Party for 'engineering and exploiting' the internal strife in the Opposition bloc. Instead, these parties have to shift gears to gain the confidence of their cadres and face emerging challenges.

**Ravi Mathur,**  
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

**Health and industry**  
The verdict against the reopening of the Vedanta Sterile copper unit in Thoothukudi is a great victory for the people, social activists (like Professor Fatima) and political leaders who were involved in this struggle for over two decades. One cannot forget the 'gunning down of a protest' that led to the killing of 13 people. The fight has been a long one with constant threats from

vested interests.  
**Tharicus S. Fernando,**  
Chennai  
**Study on obesity rates**  
*The Lancet* study (Inside pages, March 1) confirms what is known. Work pressure, a lack of time and an advertising of 'wrong foods' are what make fast foods enticing. A main reason for the popularity of western junk food is that celebrities endorse these products. Policymakers

should give incentives to healthy products.  
**Veena Shenoy,**  
Thane, Maharashtra  
**The course of life**  
It is ironic that Santhan, a convict in the Rajiv Gandhi case, breathed his last in a hospital named after the very leader whose assassination he was associated with. Life is strange.  
**P.G. Menon,**  
Chennai









# PM questions silence of INDIA bloc leaders on Sandeshkhali

Modi says Opposition leaders have closed their eyes, mouth, and ears; accuses Trinamool of betraying the women of Sandeshkhali; he urges people to teach the party a lesson in LS election

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee calls on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in Kolkata on Friday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday targeted the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal over the developments at Sandeshkhali, where a Trinamool leader and his supporters have been accused of sexually abusing women, attacking Enforcement Directorate officials, and grabbing land in the area.

Mr. Modi asked why the leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) were silent on the issue. The Trinamool is a member of the Opposition bloc.

"All the big leaders of the INDIA alliance have closed their eyes, mouth, and ears on the three monkeys of Gandhiji. They held meetings together at Patna, Bengaluru, and Mumbai but the leaders of the Left and the Congress sought no support from the Chief Minister and the government (on Sandeshkhali). They did not even spare a sight

for the women at Sandeshkhali," Mr. Modi said at a public meeting at Arambagh in Hooghly district. He also accused Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge of allegedly saying that "such things happen in Bengal".

"The whole country is sad and angry after seeing what Trinamool, which beats the drum of 'Mao, Mati, and Mamush', has done to the sisters of Sandeshkhali. They should be ashamed of what they have done at Sandeshkhali," Mr. Modi said.

Referring to Sheikh Shahjahan, prime accused in the Sandeshkhali incident who was on the run

for two months, Mr. Modi said: "There must have been someone who was trying to protect him. Will you forgive such a Trinamool? We have to reply to every hurt with votes," Mr. Modi said.

He said the West Bengal ruling party had become arrogant because it felt that it had the support of a particular vote bank. "On this occasion, Muslim women and children will throw away the Trinamool," he said. He added the Trinamool had introduced a "new model of corruption in West Bengal, which has not been announced, she can call on the Prime Minister."

## Bengal CM meets Modi, terms it a 'courtesy call'

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Friday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Raj Bhavan in Kolkata and said the meeting was less about politics and that they had engaged in a chat.

The Prime Minister is on a two-day visit to the State.

The leaders met amidst heightened political tension in the State over the Sandeshkhali unrest. Speaking to mediapersons outside Raj Bhavan, the Chief Minister said, "It was a courtesy call. Since I could not go to RGGC (Royal Calcutta Golf Club to receive the Prime Minister), I came here." She also added that the government has not been announced, she can call on the Prime Minister."

# Kamal Haasan keen on contesting on 'battery torch' symbol, says MNM

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI



Kamal Haasan will have to choose between 'hand' and 'battery torch'. FILE PHOTO

The suspense over which Parliamentary constituency Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan will choose to contest from continues, even as a number of options, including Coimbatore, have been mooted by party sources.

Mr. Haasan met party workers in Coimbatore in September last year and expressed his wish to contest from the constituency.

While the DMK has reportedly asked the Tamil Nadu unit of the Congress to accommodate Mr. Haasan within their quota of seats and let him contest on the Congress's 'hand' symbol, MNM sources insist that Mr. Haasan would prefer to contest on the 'battery torch' symbol, as he did during the last Assembly election.

Political analysts, however, pointed out that it might be easier for the MNM leader to contest on the 'hand' symbol instead of the 'torch' symbol, particularly to appeal to the people in rural areas across a large parliamentary constituency.

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## IN BRIEF



### Centre, Gujarat govt. failed the youth, says Congress president

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday expressed his concern over the "high suicide rate in Gujarat", and questioned the "defeating" silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a statement, Mr. Kharge said the data presented in the Gujarat Assembly showed that 25,000 people died by suicide in the past three years, with 500 of them being students. The Congress chief alleged that the BJP-ruled State and the Centre had failed to create new job opportunities for youths, and the data presents a "grim picture of a populace grappling with despair".

### Supreme Court rejects plea to 'digitally monitor' MPs, MLAs

The Supreme Court on Friday disagreed with a petitioner's view that Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies should be "digitally monitored" to prevent instances of corruption and horse trading. Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said lawmakers were not "convicted felons" who needed watching 24x7 lest they may flee from justice. Surely, the High Court did not want microchips on legislators to keep track of their every movement. "There is also something called 'privacy'. They too have families," Chief Justice Chandrachud told petitioner S.N. Kundra.

### SC refuses Asaram Bapu's plea for suspension of sentence

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to intervene in a petition filed by Asaram Bapu challenging a Rajasthan High Court decision directing his plea for suspension of the sentence on medical grounds in a case of rape of a minor. A Bench headed by Justice Sanjay Khanna, however, gave the octogenarian self-styled godman liberty to approach the High Court seeking permission for treatment at an ayurvedic hospital. The top court also requested the High Court to expeditiously decide Bapu's legislators appeal in the case. The petition, filed by Asaram, said his health was precarious and "rapidly deteriorating".

### President's honours for two IAF fighter squadrons

The first Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) squadron of the Indian Air Force, No. 45 'Flying Daggers', along with the No. 221 Squadron 'Valiants' which flew almost all operations of offensive missions of the IAF during the 1999 Kargil conflict, are set to be awarded the President's Standard. The II Base Repair Depot (BRD) and 509 Signal Unit will be presented President's Colours by President Droupadi Murmu at Hindon Air Force station on March 8. After the war, the squadron was wound down in 2002.

# Don't make appeal on basis of caste, religion, EC tells parties

Sreeparna Chakrabarty  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election, the Election Commission (EC) has directed political parties, especially star campaigners, to maintain decorum while campaigning and refrain from making appeals on the basis of caste or communal politics or make false statements, which can mislead voters.



The Election Commission also asked parties not to make false statements to mislead voters.

In an advisory issued to all political parties on Friday, the EC cited previous examples of such indirect violations using known methodologies to avoid strictures under the model code of conduct (MCC).

The EC said in the advisory that political parties, candidates and star campaigners should not make any appeal on the basis of caste or communal feelings of the electors. No activity, which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between dif-

ferent castes or communities, religious and linguistic groups, should be attempted.

"The political parties and leaders should not make false statements and utterances without factual basis aimed at misleading the voters. Criticism of other parties or their workers on the basis of unverified allegations or on distortions shall be avoided," the advisory further said.

"No personal attacks" It said that no aspect of the private life, not connected with the public activities, of the leaders or workers of other parties is to be criticised.

Low-level personal attacks to insult the rivals should not be made. It also warned the parties against giving advertisements masquerading as news items in the media.

# U.S. drone sales to India progress to the next stage

Arivim Lakshman  
WASHINGTON DC

The possible sale of 31 MQ-9B high altitude long endurance armed unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) from the U.S. company General Atomics to India progressed to the next stage after a 30-day Congressional notification period concluded on Friday.

The deal, pegged at an estimated \$3.9 billion, was announced in June last year during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's State visit to Washington DC.

"The next step after the conclusion of Congressional review is for the parties to agree upon and sign a Letter of Offer and Acceptance," a U.S. State Department official told The Hindu. The procurement decisions and timelines were now with the Govern-



The United States approved the sale of armed drones to India at an estimated cost of \$3.9 billion. FILE PHOTO

ment of India, according to the official. With general elections looming in India, it is possible that the next steps will be on hold until May, when the poll results are expected.

The sale had run into difficulties in January, in the U.S. Congress, before the formal notification period began over allegations that Indian government agents were involved in a plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurbaj Singh Panam, a U.S. Citizen, on American soil.

The head of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Ben Cardin, gave his approval for the deal to progress after receiving assurances from the Joe Biden-led administration that India would probe the alleged plot and cooperate with the U.S. in its own investigation.

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Phone: 0744-2220000, 2220001, 2220002, 2220003, 2220004, 2220005, 2220006, 2220007, 2220008, 2220009, 2220010, 2220011, 2220012, 2220013, 2220014, 2220015, 2220016, 2220017, 2220018, 2220019, 2220020, 2220021, 2220022, 2220023, 2220024, 2220025, 2220026, 2220027, 2220028, 2220029, 2220030, 2220031, 2220032, 2220033, 2220034, 2220035, 2220036, 2220037, 2220038, 2220039, 2220040, 2220041, 2220042, 2220043, 2220044, 2220045, 2220046, 2220047, 2220048, 2220049, 2220050, 2220051, 2220052, 2220053, 2220054, 2220055, 2220056, 2220057, 2220058, 2220059, 2220060, 2220061, 2220062, 2220063, 2220064, 2220065, 2220066, 2220067, 2220068, 2220069, 2220070, 2220071, 2220072, 2220073, 2220074, 2220075, 2220076, 2220077, 2220078, 2220079, 2220080, 2220081, 2220082, 2220083, 2220084, 2220085, 2220086, 2220087, 2220088, 2220089, 2220090, 2220091, 2220092, 2220093, 2220094, 2220095, 2220096, 2220097, 2220098, 2220099, 2220100, 2220101, 2220102, 2220103, 2220104, 2220105, 2220106, 2220107, 2220108, 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2220664, 2220665, 2220666, 2220667, 222066

## IN BRIEF



## India to see warmer summer as El Nino conditions continue

India is likely to experience a warmer summer this year with El Nino conditions predicted to continue at least until May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Friday. More heatwave days than normal are predicted over northeast peninsular India - Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and north interior Karnataka - and many parts of Maharashtra and Odisha, it said. The country is likely to record above-normal rainfall in March. India is likely to see above-normal maximum and minimum temperatures in most parts of the country in March to May period, IMD Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

## ED freezes ₹580.78 crore assets in betting app case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has frozen assets worth ₹580.78 crore in connection with the "Mahadev Online Book" app case, following searches at multiple locations. The total value of attached/frozen assets in the case now stands at ₹1,296.05 crore. The fresh round of searches were carried out in Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Gurugram, Indore and Rajpur. According to the agency, Hari Shankar Tibrewal from Kolkata has partnered with the promoters of Mahadev Online Book. "Security holdings worth ₹580.78 crore in the name of the entities beneficially owned by Hari Shankar Tibrewal have been frozen by the ED," said the agency.

## SC to hear petition by Uddhav camp on March 7

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will hear an appeal filed by the Shiv Sena Uddhav Balasahb Thackeray (UBT) party challenging the decision of the Maharashtra Assembly Speaker to disqualify Uddhav Thackeray as Chief Minister. Uddhav Thackeray's camp while declaring the term "real" Shiv Sena. Chief Justice of India D.V. Chandrachud on Friday indicated that the appeal will be heard on March 7. Meanwhile, lawyers for both sides sought an early hearing. On an earlier occasion, Mr. Salve informed the court about an identical petition filed by the UBT camp in the Bombay High Court. He had questioned how the UBT could agitate an identical case in two courts at the same time.

## Ahead of Ambani wedding bash, Jamnagar airport gets international tag for 10 days

Iagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

The Jamnagar airport has been declared an international airport for 10 days as global bigwigs such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Rihanna, Ivanka Trump and leaders from various countries descend on the Gujarat city for the three-day pre-wedding bash of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant.

Anant Ambani is the son of Reliance Industries Ltd CMD Mukesh Ambani and Radhika Merchant is the daughter of Viren Merchant, CEO of Encore Healthcare.

The airport was allowed to receive international flights from February 25 to March 5, said an airport official. The Union Health Ministry, the Finance Ministry, and the Home Ministry

## Google removes matrimony, streaming apps over fee row

The company's long conflict with Indian developers over in-app payment fees enters new chapter with many apps booted out after the Supreme Court declined the developers' interim relief

Aroon Deep  
NEW DELHI

Technology major Google on Friday delisted certain matrimonial and dating apps, including Bharat Matrimony, Truly Madly, and Quack Quack, and two streaming services, Balaji Telefilms' ALIT and the audio platform Kuku FM, after the Supreme Court declined to provide the companies behind these apps interim relief in their battle against the platform fees for in-app payments on Google Play, the company's mobile app marketplace for the Android operating system.

The development is likely to come as a shock to the firms concerned, which offer a rare segment of digital services where Indian consumers are willing to spend money for entertainment and companionship.

Bharat Matrimony says it has a market cap of over ₹2,300 crore. Quack Quack founder Murguvall Jananiaram was quoted by the news outlet TechCrunch as saying that this was a "dark day" for the Internet in India and that the company would



New requirements: Google requires apps to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%. REUTERS

explore legal options. Kuku FM cofounder Vindu Kumar Meena said in a statement that Google was behaving like a 'monopoly,' and that the search giant was 'on [a] hunt to collect [revenue] from developers.'

Quack Quack founder Ravi Mittal said in a statement that the company would comply with Google's rules to get back on the marketplace. "Unfortunately, we will have to comply with Google's current policies as there is no alternative or immediate remedy," Mr. Mittal told *The Hindu*. "This shows the control Google has over the app

economy in a growing country like India."

In a statement, Google said that only a small number of firms have to pay any fees over 15% on payments users made in-app and that the companies that it was acting on had a long window of opportunity to comply with its rules.

Google requires digital services to pay a platform fee that could range from 11-30%, depending on what payment method is used, and the size of the app's user base.

Disney's Hotstar and exam prep service Testbook, for whom the interim relief granted by the Supreme

Court came later, and is still valid, had not yet been delisted.

"Today, we have over 200,000 Indian developers using Google Play who adhere to our policies... however, for an extended period of time, 10 companies, including many well-established ones, have chosen to not pay for the in-app payments they receive on Google Play by securing interim protections from the court," Google said in a statement.

"After giving these developers more than three years to prepare, including three weeks after the Supreme Court's order, we are taking necessary steps to ensure our policies are applied consistently across the ecosystem, as we do for any form of policy violation globally," the company added.

Many of these developers coalesced around a rival app store effort by the Walmart-owned payments company PhonePe last month, while the Supreme Court, the firm's CEO, boasted that no app would be required to pay platform fees and that the app marketplace would find other ways of monetising itself.

## Corporate tax cuts bring in investments, jobs, says Sitharaman

Vikas Dhoot  
NEW DELHI

The government's decision to slash corporate tax rates in late 2019 was a well-considered move to attract investments that has made a lot of difference, and a major transition is under way in the industry-labour relationship, Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Friday.

She was replying to a query on the efficacy of corporate tax cuts and the production linked incentive schemes, some of which may be fuelling capital-intensive investments that create fewer jobs, during an interaction with students at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Noting that India had a very high level of taxation for companies, the Minister said tax rates were cut with a view to bring in more investments, which in turn would create jobs and trigger a "virtuous cycle" in the economy. Many countries were "contending" such tax structure changes to attract investments at the time, she said, stressing that greenfield as well as brownfield investments are now happening.

"Even now, I think that is the way to go forward and ensure additional capacities are created in areas that are going to be job-creators. If there is a perception that it may not have resulted in as many jobs as was in the olden days of investments, it is also because... even as we took this decision, we were aware the industrial revolution called 4.0 was setting in, Web 3.0 was coming in, which is now talked about as AI and GPT."

"Upskilling must" "The matter of fact is that industry, particularly in manufacturing, is going through a huge transition, a reset. And when resets happen, there is a force in also catching up with skills required to meet with that reset. So there will be requirement of labour... that is why the government has ramped up skilling and upskilling [for] people to get into industry," she said.

The industry, she said, wants labour to be at a different level now, as it has introduced robotics, and digitised the operations. "There is a transition and reset happening between industry and labour. If we are looking at only the old-fashioned [sectors] like cement and iron and steel... no, there are new industries coming," she said.

## Elephants take dead calves to be buried in untrodden paths: study

Rahul Karmakar  
GUWAHATI

Elephants in the eastern Himalayan floodplains bury their calves in a 'legs upright' position, a new study has found. Through long-term observation, the researchers also found that elephant herds tend to avoid the paths where the carcasses were buried and take parallel routes.

"We aimed to understand the peri-mortem strategy and post-mortem behaviour of the Asian elephants. The major findings reflect that the carcasses were carried by trunks and legs for a distance before being buried in a 'legs upright' position," researchers said in the study published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*.

Rampant environmental changes and forest destruction push Asian ele-



Strong bond: Elephants taking the carcass of an elephant calf for burial. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

phants (*Elephas maximus*) and their African counterparts (*Loxodonta africana*) to explore human spaces to fulfil their dietary and ecological requirements, leading to 'novel' elephant behaviours in shared spaces.

While elephant calf burial is mentioned in African literature, it has hardly been documented in the Asian context. Parveen Kawan, an Indian Forest Service officer posted in Alipurduar of West Bengal and Akasheep Roy of the

weighing 160 kg was three or four months old while the oldest was about 12 months, and weighed 50 kg suggested the elephants dragged them from a distance to be buried at preferred locations.

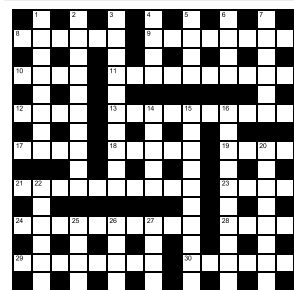
The locations were irrigation drains of the tea estates where many elephants are born too, the study said.

"The 'strange' positioning of each carcass with the legs upright could be because one or more members of a herd needed a better grip to manoeuvre the calf delicately in the trench."

"This strategic behaviour also reflects the care and affection of the herd members towards the deceased. The study suggests that in a situation of space crunch, the herd member(s) prioritise the head for the burial before the feet," the study said.

## THE CROSSWORD 14112

To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site. @ <https://qrqo.page.link/jipTn>



- Prime, not the first, place for Congress in Rajasthan, say (10)
- Oddy prose is starting to metamorphose verse (4)
- Kingdom of infinite bounty (5)
- Part inside ammunition (4)
- Marriage broker initially upset someone like Patek Philippe (10)
- Trembled after avoiding small punch (4)
- Inability to move lower body or balance with a slightest of pressure on leg in action basically (10)
- Got a new robe (4)
- This is wants and longings basically sorted (4,4)
- Stan's tree (6)
- Down
  - A computer man's brief moment of masculinity (8)
  - Redo my chip awayed under the skin (10)
  - Keen? Please turn over small weight to find a puzzle (10)
  - English plundered our money (4)
  - An Asian model mostly has one (4)
  - I am good model for sorcerers (4)
  - Oddly that also makes a design on skin (6)
  - Prepare King for some kind of exercise (5)
  - Hot season going reportedly for fully dried roll (10)
  - Gout hit? Deal with determinator! (5,2,3)
  - Strong old colour (4-4)
  - A California Company Plant (6)
  - Painful part of each year (4)
  - Resting place of ex-Prime Minister, not the first (4)
  - Secret agents' hidden backside entrance (4)

## Across

- Not a real way out for an argumentative guy (6)
- Indian state, partly holy with almost every disorder (8)
- State of love, partly joyful, leads to nothing (4)
- Appease, support and spoil without slightest of validity (10)
- One small piece of land, middle of sea (4)

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

## Solution to previous puzzle

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

## Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

## FAITH

## The message from Rama

Dasaratha asks Sumantra to recount all that happened after he drove the chariot taking Rama, Lakshmana and Sita from Ayodhya to the forest. Sumantra conveys Rama's message to the royal family, said Navalpakkam Vasudevachariar in a discourse.

"Rama wanted me to convey His respects to His father. He wanted His mother Kausalya to know that He was safe. She is the wife of Dasaratha, an Agnihotri. Thus, she must see Agni as her son, and not cry over Rama's absence. She must not harbour negative feelings against the other wives of Dasaratha," says Sumantra.

Rama's message to Bharata is that, as the future king, he must act in accordance with stipulated rules. He must obey his father and treat all the royal mothers alike. As for Lakshmana, Sumantra says the prince was very angry. He had asked what wrong Rama had done to deserve exile. Was it right to exile Rama, to please Kaikeyi? The whole world would be against Dasaratha's decision, and having earned the displeasure of the whole world, could he continue to be king? Lakshmana had declared that he could no longer consider Dasaratha as his father. Rama was everything to him - brother, king, relative and father. Sita had had no words to utter. She had just shed tears, Sumantra says.





## IN BRIEF



## RBI appoints S. Ravindran as TMB's part-time chairman

The Reserve Bank has appointed Tamilnad Mercantile Bank Ltd.'s independent director S. Ravindran as part-time chairman of the bank from February 29 till August 2, 2026. Currently, Mr. Ravindran is an independent director on the boards of NSE, L1TDPL, Invit Services, Shriram Finance and Bandhan AMC, the lender said in a regulatory filing. The non-executive part-time chairman post in TMB fell vacant after the exit of S. Annamalai on February 2, 2020.

## NMDC iron ore output, sales race past 40 million tonnes

State-owned NMDC reported 40.24 million tonne iron ore production and 40.48 MT sales for the 11 months ended February. These figures mark cumulative volumes for the 11-month period and a record high and a more than 2% increase, respectively, over the year-earlier period. India's largest iron ore producer said on Friday. Output and sales in the corresponding period of FY23 were 35.62 MT and 33.42 MT, respectively. February sales rose almost 6% to 3.99 MT (3.78 MT) and was a record for the month.

## Dr. Reddy's, its unit named in antitrust complaint in the US

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories and a step down subsidiary have been named defendants in an antitrust complaint related to cancer drug Revlimid in the US. The complaint, before U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey, asserts claims under federal antitrust law, alleging Dr. Reddy's, with Celgene Corp., and its subsidiary, Nator Pharma and Teva Pharmaceuticals USA, improperly restrained competition, the Hyderabad-based firm said.

## CG Power to set up Gujarat chip unit for ₹7,600 crore

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

CG Power and Industrial Solutions Ltd. (CG) said it would invest ₹7,600 crore over five years in a joint venture with Japan's Renesas Electronics and Thailand's Sars Microelectronics to build and operate an outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility in India.

The unit would come up at Sanand in Gujarat. The capacity would be ramped up to 15 million units per day, CG Power said.

CG would hold 92.3% stake in the JV followed by Renesas (6.8%) and Sars Microelectronics (0.9%).

The project would be financed via subsidies, equity and bank borrowings.

## Automakers register robust sales in Feb. on strong SUV demand

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Leading automakers Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors on Friday reported robust sales for February as demand for sports utility vehicles continued to remain strong.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Honda Cars also witnessed higher vehicle dispatches to dealers last month.

February turned out to be the third-best month for sales for the industry ever.

The highest-ever passenger vehicle wholesales in a month was reported in January this year with dispatch of 3,94,500 units.

Maruti Suzuki India said its total domestic passen-

## FIU imposes ₹5.49 cr. fine on Paytm bank for PMLA lapses

The payments bank arm was found to be in breach of KYC, anti-money laundering and terrorism financing norms, letting some entities route their illegal activities' proceeds through its accounts

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Financial Intelligence Unit-India has fined Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL) ₹5.49 crore for violations of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, after finding substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through accounts held by entities with the bank.

The FIU-IND had initiated a review of PPBL's operations after receiving "specific information"



**In breach:** The FIU said it found substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through PPBL. REUTERS

from law enforcement agencies about a few entities and their network of businesses engaging in a

number of illegal acts, including organising and facilitating online gambling," the FIU said in a statement

on Friday about the order issued on March 1.

"Further, the money generated from these illegal operations, i.e. proceeds of crime were routed and channelled through bank accounts maintained by PPBL, it said. "Based on the voluminous material available... the charges against Paytm were substantiated," the FIU said.

"The penalty pertains to issues within a business segment that was discontinued two years ago," a PPBL spokesperson said.

## Sensex, Nifty surge almost 2% on 'better' GDP data

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

Key benchmark stock indices surged almost 2% higher on better-than-expected third-quarter (Q3) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth data.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) had on Thursday revised upwards India's FY24 growth estimate to 7.6% from 7.3% projected in January. The S&P 500 Sensex surged 1.7%, to 1,245.05 points, to an all-time high of 73,745.34 backed by gains in metal and banking stocks.

## Paytm decides to cut ties with beleaguered banking arm PPBL

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

As part of a process to cut dependencies, One 97 Communications Ltd. (Paytm) and Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL), mutually agreed to end various inter-company agreements, Paytm said in a filing to the stock exchanges.

"Boost governance", further, the shareholders of PPBL had agreed to simplify the Shareholders Agreement (SHA) to enhance PPBL's indepen-

dence and governance. "One 97 Communications Ltd.'s Board approved the termination of agreements and amendment of SHA on March 1," the company added.

Sources monitoring the development said whatever was being done now was 'too little and too late'.

## ₹2,000 notes worth about ₹8,470 cr. still in circulation

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

More than 9 months since the Reserve Bank of India announced the withdrawal of the ₹2,000 banknotes, about ₹8,470 crore worth ₹2,000 banknotes were still in circulation as on February 29, as per the RBI.

"The total value of ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation, which was 33.56 lakh crore on May 19, 2023, has declined to ₹8,470 crore on February 29, 2024," the RBI said. "Thus, 97.62% of the ₹2,000 banknotes has been returned."

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

CG Power and Industrial Solutions Ltd. (CG) said it would invest ₹7,600 crore over five years in a joint venture with Japan's Renesas Electronics and Thailand's Sars Microelectronics to build and operate an outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) facility in India.

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**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Leading automakers Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai and Tata Motors on Friday reported robust sales for February as demand for sports utility vehicles continued to remain strong.

Mahindra & Mahindra, Toyota Kirloskar Motor and Honda Cars also witnessed higher vehicle dispatches to dealers last month.

February turned out to be the third-best month for sales for the industry ever.

The highest-ever passenger vehicle wholesales in a month was reported in January this year with dispatch of 3,94,500 units.

Maruti Suzuki India said its total domestic passen-

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

The Life Insurance Corporation of India on Friday paid an interim dividend of more than ₹2,441 crore to its shareholders.

LIC Chairperson Siddharth Mohapatra presented a cheque for ₹2,441.44 crore to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

The State-owned insurer said the dividend was Ms. Sitharaman also virtually inaugurated the LIC International Business Centre at GIFT City, Gandhinagar.

The opening of the facility is a strategic move aligned with LIC's commitment to providing world-class insurance and financial services on a global scale, the insurer said.

## LIC pays Govt. ₹2,441-crore in interim dividend

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## Undersea cable disruptions expose India's crucial telecom vulnerability

**Aroon Deep**  
NEW DELHI

In the past week, three undersea cables connecting India to global telecom networks — Asia-Europe Gateway, Europe India Gateway, and Tata Global Network — have been damaged as a possible result of targeted attacks, forcing telecom operators such as Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio and Tata Communications to reroute traffic to other cable systems.

The damage to the cable systems in the Red Sea as a result of the ongoing conflict in the region exposes the grave vulnerabilities of India's Internet and over-

seas telecom connectivity systems if infrastructure passing through the region is further impacted.

While Bharti and Jio declined to comment, Tata said in a statement it was "keeping a close watch on the situation and [had] initiated immediate and appropriate remedial actions".

Two network experts said there would be minimal, if any, impact from the cable damage, as traffic could be rerouted to alternative systems.

**Choke point** While the disruptions highlight a choke point in subsea connections between Europe and Asia, they are of particular concern to India because of the relatively few connections India has to such cables, and stiff regulatory limits on growing India's submarine cable industry for private firms that are not full-fledged telecom operators.

"It would be very bad for India" if there were further damage to subsea cable systems landing in India, remarked Sunil Tagare, a former telecom industry executive.

Tagare also shared on social media the news of the damage, said the regulations put India among the "unfriendly jurisdictions in the world" to build undersea cable systems.

The difficulties, he told *The Hindu*, would hamper the ability of Indian Internet providers and telecom operators to rely on back-up redundant back-ups, a worrying prospect if more cables in the Red Sea were to get damaged.

## HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT (INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB))

The Executive Engineer Bilaspur Division No.2, HP-PWD, Bilaspur on behalf of Governor of H.P invites the firm take bids, in electronic tendering system, from the eligible class of contractors registered with HPPWD for the works detailed below.

Bidder names are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website [www.tenders.hp.gov.in](http://www.tenders.hp.gov.in)

Executive Engineer Bilaspur Division No.2, HP-PWD, Bilaspur  
Tel: 0197-222551, e-mail: [ee2@hp.pwd.gov.in](mailto:ee2@hp.pwd.gov.in)  
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

## OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER IRRIGATION DIVISION, GALUDHI (Email ID - eeidgal.icha@gmail.com)

## E-Procurement Notice

E-Tender Ref. No.: WRD/IRR/DIGALUDHISBD/04/2023-24  
DATE: 28.02.2024

Sr. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost of work (in INR)	Starting Date for downloading Bid	Earliest Date for Submission of Bid	Time Period of Bid
1.	Construction of Balance work of Govt. ITI Building at Swarghal in Distt. Bilaspur (HP) (SH- Co-1) floor & 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, W.S. & S.I. Rain Harvesting Tank.	Rs. 3,26,20,120/-	01.03.2024	Rs. 6,52,400/-	07.03.2024
2.	Providing LVSS to Guddi in GP Shal Tehsil in Tehsil Kamoh Distt. Simur (HP) SH- Co-1 Rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-1 Sewerage Tank 3000 lts cap. Filter bed 60.48 Spm 3 units 28.31 Spm. CO-2 Circular sump with 12000 lts cap. CO-3 Circular storage tank 10000 lts cap. CO-4 Sump Tank 3000 lts cap. CO-5 Circular storage tank 3000 lts cap. Pump house. CO-6 JEE office cum residence including sanitary, Electrical installation. CO-7 Paved & Bitum. Paving and laying jointing MERRV and Laying jointing of pipe in Ring main. Silt of pumping machinery Under NSR&S. Job No.1	1146374.30	20/03/2024	18/03/2024	1 Year
3.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
4.	Providing LVSS to hab Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery and Gravity Main Under NSR&S. Job No.2	1222211.40	24/04/2024	18/03/2024	6 Months
5.	Providing LVSS to Kot Burch and adjoining village in GP Kotl Burch in Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Laying, jointing of 8" pipe of various dia. Job No.2	2495500.00	04/37/2024	2/03/2024	2 Months
6.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
7.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
8.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
9.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
10.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
11.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
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13.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
14.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months
15.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	14/03/2024	6 Months

Estimated cost may be vary accordingly initial bid Security/EMD will be applicable. Above information are only indicative. Detail NIT and SBD published on Tender Portal shall be final and mandatory. Details can be seen on Website <http://www.bids.hp.gov.in>

Executive Engineer Irrigation Division, Galudhi  
PR 320832 (Water Resource) 23-24

## HIMACHAL PRADESH JAL SHAKTI VIBHAG SHORT NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

Online bids for sale bases are invited by the Executive Engineer Jhal Shakti Division, Shilla on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh, in electronic tendering system in two covers for the under mentioned work from the contractors/firm of appropriate class involved with the tender portal [www.bids.hp.gov.in](http://www.bids.hp.gov.in)

Sr. No.	Description	Est. Cost (₹)	Est. Money (₹)	Time (Months)	Cost of Form (₹)
1.	Providing LVSS to Guddi in GP Shal Tehsil in Tehsil Kamoh Distt. Simur (HP) SH- Co-1 Rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-1 Sewerage Tank 3000 lts cap. Filter bed 60.48 Spm 3 units 28.31 Spm. CO-2 Circular sump with 12000 lts cap. CO-3 Circular storage tank 10000 lts cap. CO-4 Sump Tank 3000 lts cap. CO-5 Circular storage tank 3000 lts cap. Pump house. CO-6 JEE office cum residence including sanitary, Electrical installation. CO-7 Paved & Bitum. Paving and laying jointing MERRV and Laying jointing of pipe in Ring main. Silt of pumping machinery Under NSR&S. Job No.1	1146374.30	20/03/2024	1 Year	15000
2.	Providing LVSS to Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery with allied accessories, including jointing, painting and laying 80mm dia. CO-2 spring intake. CO-3 pump house with attendant quarter. CO-4 sump tank 8000 lts cap. CO-5 rain water tank 8000 lts cap. CO-6 Sumpwell 4000 lts cap. Silt. development works under NSR&S. Job No.2	11705268.80	14/03/2024	6 Months	15000
3.	Providing LVSS to hab Bagra in GP Bandhal Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Co-1) Laying, Jointing of 8" Pipe in Distribution Machinery and Gravity Main Under NSR&S. Job No.2	1222211.40	24/04/2024	6 Months	4000
4.	Providing LVSS to Kot Burch and adjoining village in GP Kotl Burch in Tehsil Shila Distt. Simur (HP) (SH- Laying, jointing of 8" pipe of various dia. Job No.2	2495500.00	04/37/2024	2 Months	4000

1. Tender documents and other instructions can be downloaded or viewed online from the portal <http://www.bids.hp.gov.in> by the firm/individual registered on the website.  
2. As the bids are to be submitted online, they are required to be encrypted and digitally signed, the bidders are advised to obtain Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from suitable vendors or from an authorized agency/attachee.  
3. Key dates will be as under:-  
1. Date of online publication: 28/02/2024 AT 5:00 PM  
2. Downloading of tender documents: From 28/02/2024 AT 5:00 PM up to 9:00 AM on 12/03/2024  
3. Date of submission of a tendering: From 28/02/2024 AT 5:00 PM up to 9:00 AM on 12/03/2024  
4. Physical submission of earnest money deposit and cost of tender documents: Up-to 11:00 AM on 12/03/2024  
5. Date of opening of cover: (Eligibility criteria and Gover-2) (Electrical) 12/03/2024 at 12:30 PM  
6. Date of Opening of Financial Bids: Shall be intimated separately.

Note: Other Tender information may be checked online portal website. [www.bids.hp.gov.in](http://www.bids.hp.gov.in)  
Executive Engineer Jhal Shakti Division Shilla  
**SOUTHERN RAILWAY**  
Office of the Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer  
Electric Loco Shed, Erode  
E-Tender Notice  
For and on behalf of the President of India The Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer / Rolling Stock / Erode Division are invited for the following work:  
Tender No SA\_A\_RIS\_ED\_OT\_23\_24\_21, Date: 28/02/2024  
Description: Works connected with the tendering and maintenance of traction Motors of electric locomotives available at Electric Loco Shed, Southern Railway, Erode, Erode.  
All details regarding the tender are available at <https://www.rps.gov.in>  
Follow us on: [twitter.com/GMSRailway](https://twitter.com/GMSRailway)



# Bull runs, a Mercedes farewell tour, driver churn: F1 storylines to keep an eye on

Racing fans will have to wait until next year to savour the tasty prospect of Lewis Hamilton turning out for Ferrari, but that doesn't mean 2024 is merely the lull before the storm



I'm very fortunate at Mercedes. I've been able to be myself. And that will be no different at Ferrari... I'm 100% a Mercedes driver now, and I don't want this distracting me from doing a job  
LEWIS HAMILTON

S. Dipak Ragan

At the start of this decade, Formula One was on the precipice of a big crisis with the onset of the global pandemic in 2020. That year, the season shut down days before the first race in Melbourne after a few members of the McLaren team tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.

The economic fallout could have been catastrophic for one of the most expensive sports on the planet. However, F1 struck gold in a bleak time when a humble documentary series about the 2019 season got a new set of people — cooped up in their homes because of lockdowns — to discover the sport.

In 2021, when things returned to normalcy, F1 had a season for the ages where the title was controversially decided on the last lap of the season in favour of Max Verstappen. Since that season, which further boosted the sport's popularity, Red Bull and Verstappen have only grown in strength. A cruise to the drivers and constructors' titles in 2022 became an obliteration of the field in 2023. Red Bull was all but one race last year, Verstappen claiming 19 of the 22.

And so, the 2024 season finds F1 at a crossroads again. It may not be facing an existential threat but it certainly nursing some headaches. Ahead of the 75th year of the F1 World Championship, *The Hindu* explores the storylines set to play out over the next 10 months.

## Can anybody tame the Bull?

The big question on everyone's mind is, who can stop — or even challenge — the Verstappen-Red Bull juggernaut? In sport, nothing good ever comes from predictability. When an audience feels that the result is a foregone conclusion, is there any incentive to tune in?

While it is essential to acknowledge, appreciate and even celebrate such feats of excellence, extended periods of dominance eventually turn

off the neutral and casual fans. Even for Red Bull and Verstappen, their achievements will have more impact made to work for it rather than just disappearing into the distance once the five red lights go out. So, a lot rides on Mercedes, Ferrari, and McLaren finding the means to help both themselves and the sport by taking the fight to Red Bull. But it will be challenging as they have to first douse fires in their own backyards.

Moreover, Red Bull hasn't stood still. Thanks to its significant pace advantage in 2023, the team didn't need to update the car and was able to focus its resources on 2024. This season's car is a fairly drastic evolution of its predecessor. Despite the potential to trip up, it looked quick right out of the box in testing. It has uncorked new potential, it could be another long, dreary year for the rivals.

How the challengers measure up

It has been a chastening experience for Mercedes over the last two years after winning almost everything from 2014 to 2021. The car, the team produced for the new regulations in 2022 looked visually different from the rest of the grid, but was neither fast nor driver-friendly, winning just one race. The team retained the concept last year but made no headway and was forced to discard it. There were also changes within the team after its technical director, Mike Elliott, resigned and his predecessor, James Allison, returned to a day-to-day role.

The evidence from pre-season testing was reasonably promising, especially the feedback from the drivers. However, the headline times suggest it is probably third-fastest behind Red Bull and Ferrari, perhaps not enough for Lewis Hamilton to work with in his farewell Mercedes season.

Ferrari had a far more encouraging testing experience, and the drivers expressed happiness



about the car's handling. The drivability was something both Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz had complained about last year. However, Ferrari has in the past won a few pre-season testing championships before coming a cropper when the serious business got underway.

In 2022, the Scuderia had a race-winning car that was in the title hunt for half a season before things went down a spiral. It took until the second half of 2023 for Ferrari to get things back on track when it showed decent form in the final few races. This season is also a test of team boss Fred Vasseur's leadership. The Italian marque needs to be regularly sniping at Red Bull's heels this year to set the stage for a title assault from 2025 when Hamilton arrives at Maranello.

## Open seats, closed doors and the domino effect

The driver market was expected to be buzzing this year, with a lot of contracts running out in 2024. However, that balloon was pricked at the start of the year with three big announcements. Leclerc and Lando Norris decided to extend their stay at Ferrari and McLaren. But the big

bombshell, the Hamilton-Ferrari deal, dropped a few days later.

Though the principal actors are off the table, a handful will drive for their futures this year. The two drivers on top of that list are Sainz and Sergio Perez.

Sainz, who will make way for Hamilton at Ferrari next year, has to show that he is still a top player in the paddock. He was the only non-Red Bull driver to win a race last year and has done well against Leclerc. The Spaniard will, no doubt, attract the attention of any team that wants a seriously fast driver with a great work ethic. Where Sainz goes next could well decide the career trajectories of many others.

On the other hand, it is a make-or-break year for Perez. Occupying the fastest car on the grid, the Mexican has underperformed Verstappen, which is putting it mildly. Red Bull hasn't needed Perez's help in the constructors' battle or in taking points off Verstappen's rivals in the last two years. But this will change if there is a threat from another team. It is the last chance for the six-time Grand Prix winner to step up and show what he can do.

## The ever-changing sprint conundrum

The sprint format was introduced in 2021 at select events to liven up the proceedings on all three days of a weekend. The venues are chosen based on the circuit's overtaking potential, and there will be six events this year.

It has undergone two format changes already. For this year, the format remains the same, but the flow of the events has changed. Sprint qualifying will now be held on Friday evening and the sprint race on Saturday morning, followed by qualifying for the main Grand Prix.

Last year, sprint qualifying and the sprint race were held on Saturday, making the middle day of the weekend a bit pointless. This is the latest attempt to make the sprint appealing, but the jury is still out on whether it adds to the spectacle.

## STACKING UP

ATP Men's Top 15				
#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Novak Djokovic	36	8,915	19
2	Carlos Alcaraz	20	8,005	18
3	Jannik Sinner	22	8,270	20
4	Daniil Medvedev	28	8,015	19
5	Andrey Rublev	26	5,810	24
6	Alexander Zverev	26	5,085	26
7	Holger Rune	20	3,700	23
8	Hubert Hurkacz	27	3,395	24
9	Alex de Minaur	25	3,210	25
10	Taylor Fritz	26	3,150	25
11	Casper Ruud	25	3,120	24
12	Stefanos Tsitsipas	25	3,080	24
13	Grigor Dimitrov	32	2,925	23
14	Tommy Paul	26	2,475	27
15	Karen Khachanov	27	2,260	23

WTA Women's Top 15				
#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Iga Swiatek	22	10,105	19
2	Aryna Sabalenka	25	8,725	17
3	Coco Gauff	19	6,975	19
4	Elena Rybakina	24	6,848	19
5	Jessica Pegula	30	5,950	21
6	Ons Jabeur	29	4,173	23
7	Marketa Ondruskova	24	4,070	16
8	Qinwen Zheng	21	4,040	21
9	Maria Sakkari	28	3,525	24
10	Jeļena Ostapenko	26	3,448	23
11	Karolina Muchova	27	3,275	12
12	Daria Kasatkina	26	3,063	25
13	Beatriz Haddad Maia	27	2,870	23
14	Liudmila Samsonova	28	2,750	20
15	Ludmila Samsonova	25	2,605	24

English Premier League Standings									
#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Liverpool	26	18	6	2	63	25	38	60
2	Man. City	26	18	5	3	59	26	33	59
3	Arsenal	26	18	4	4	62	23	39	58
4	Aston Villa	26	16	4	6	56	35	21	52
5	Tottenham	25	14	5	6	53	38	14	47
6	Man. United	26	14	2	10	36	36	0	44
7	Brighton	26	10	9	7	49	41	8	39
8	West Ham	26	11	6	9	40	46	-6	39
9	Wolves	26	11	5	10	40	40	0	38
10	Newcastle	25	11	4	11	54	45	9	37
11	Chelsea	25	9	10	7	42	41	1	35
12	Fulham	26	9	12	5	38	42	-4	32
13	C. Palace	26	7	12	13	44	-13	28	24
14	Bournemouth	25	7	11	12	47	-14	28	24
15	Everton*	25	6	7	11	28	34	-6	25
16	Brentford	26	7	15	17	46	-11	25	24
17	N. Forest	26	6	14	14	48	-14	24	24
18	Luton Town	25	5	15	15	31	-16	20	20
19	Burnley	26	4	10	25	50	-113	13	13
20	Sheff Wed	26	3	4	19	22	66	-44	13

Italian Serie A Standings									
#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Inter Milan	25	20	3	1	67	12	55	60
2	Juventus	26	17	6	3	41	19	22	57
3	A.C. Milan	26	16	5	5	50	32	18	53
4	Bologna	26	13	9	4	39	23	16	48
5	Atalanta	26	14	4	8	40	27	13	46
6	Roma	25	13	5	8	48	32	16	44
7	Fiorantina	26	12	5	9	39	30	9	41
8	Lazio	26	12	4	10	32	28	4	40
9	Napoli	26	11	7	8	30	30	0	40
10	Torino	26	9	9	8	29	29	0	36
11	Monza	25	9	9	8	29	-3	36	
12	Genoa	26	8	9	9	21	31	-10	33
13	Empoli	26	6	13	12	40	-18	25	
14	Lecco	26	6	9	12	43	-19	24	
15	Udinese	26	7	14	12	42	-13	23	
16	Frosinone	26	6	15	14	55	-21	23	
17	Verona	26	4	8	14	23	36	-13	20
18	Sassuolo	26	5	16	12	34	-22	20	
19	Cagliari	26	4	8	14	24	-21	20	
20	Salernitana	26	2	7	17	20	53	-33	11

Spanish La Liga Standings									
#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Real Madrid	26	20	5	1	54	15	39	65
2	Girona	26	18	5	3	57	32	25	59
3	Barcelona	26	17	6	3	56	34	22	57
4	Atletico Madrid	26	16	4	6	52	28	24	52
5	Athletic Bilbao	26	14	7	5	46	26	20	49
6	Real Sociedad	26	10	10	6	35	26	9	42
7	Valencia	26	10	6	10	26	26	0	36
8	Las Palmas	26	10	6	10	26	26	0	36
9	Villarreal	25	10	6	9	29	29	0	36
10	Getafe	26	8	10	8	33	38	-5	34
11	Osasuna	26	9	6	11	30	37	-7	33
12	Alaves	26	7	8	11	25	32	-7	29
13	Villareal	26	7	8	11	38	48	-10	29
14	Rayo Vallecano	26	5	10	11	23	24	25	25
15	Sevilla	26	5	11	10	32	38	-6	24
16	Real Mallorca	26	4	12	13	34	-11	24	
17	Cadix	26	2	12	17	37	-20	18	
18	Real Betis	26	4	11	11	27	24	3	18
19	Granada	25	2	8	15	27	62	-32	14
20	Almeria	26	0	9	17	25	54	-29	9

German Bundesliga Standings									
#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts
1	Bayer Leverkusen	23	18	0	5	59	16	43	61
2	Bayern	23	17	2	4	63	26	37	54
3	Stuttgart	23	15	2	6	52	29	23	47
4	Dortmund	23	11	8	4	46	30	16	41
5	Borussia Dortmund	23	11	7	5	49	28	21	40
6	Eintracht Frankfurt	23	8	10	5	36	30	6	34
7	Hoffenheim	23	8	9	6	41	43	-2	30
8	Werder Bremen	23	8	6	9	32	35	-3	30
9	SC Freiburg	23	8	5	10	39	42	-12	29
10	Heldelheim	23	7	7	9	23	40	-17	28
11	FC Augsburg	23	6	9	8	33	41	-8	26
12	M'gladbach	23	6	7	10	41	45	-4	25
13	Wolfsburg	23	6	7	10	28	36	-8	25
14	Union Berlin	23	7	4	12	23	37	-14	25
15	Borussia Dortmund	23	5	10	8	28	46	-18	25
16	Cologne	23	3	8	12	16	37	-21	17
17	Mainz	23	2	9	12	18	37	-19	15
18	Darmstadt	23	2	7	14	24	52	-28	13

Test Batting			
#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Kane Williamson	893	919
2	Steve Smith	818	947
3	Joe Root	799	903
4	Daryl Mitchell	769	884
5	Babar Azam	769	882
6	Usman Khawaja	765	847
7	Dimitthi Karunaratne	750	783
8	Mohsinul Haque	746	839
9	Virat Kohli	744	937
10	Harry Brook	743	773

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# Has Dusan Vlahovic finally found his feet at Juventus?

The 24-year-old's reputation as one of Europe's hottest attacking talents had begun to erode after a big-money move to Turin. But a goal-rich start to 2024 has altered the mood among the Bianconeri. Can he sustain this form and join the ranks of the truly elite?

Reuters  
Agence France-Press

**W**hen Dusan Vlahovic scored his second goal against Frosinone last weekend, creating space in the box by wrong-footing his marker before producing an exquisite finish to level the game at 2-2, the official Juventus social media handle exclaimed: "Dusan! He just can't stop scoring can he?!" It was a sentiment the Bianconeri fans ardently agreed with.

This marked a change — in both the tone and mood in Turin — from much of 2022 and 2023, when Vlahovic's reputation as one of Europe's hottest talents was fast eroding. Juventus had acquired the Serbian hitman's services during the January transfer window in 2022, beating serious competition from Arsenal and forking out €80 million.

## Price-tag pressure

But Vlahovic struggled to reproduce the sort of form that saw him score 38 goals in 58 games across one and a half seasons before Juventus signed him. There was a growing feeling at the Turin-based club that the output was not living up to the price tag. By the 2023 summer window, the Italian powerhouse was courting wealthy clubs, hoping to recoup its investment.

Juventus even reportedly offered him to cash-splash Chelsea in the hope of securing Romelu Lukaku. But with no club willing to part with the kind of money Juventus wanted, Vlahovic stayed put. And now many Juventus fans are thanking their lucky stars.

The brace against Frosinone took Vlahovic's Serie A tally this season to 15, second only to Inter Milan's Lautaro Martinez. Even more impressively, they made Vlahovic the leading scorer in Europe's top five leagues in 2024, his nine goals in seven Serie A games having no equal.

In addition to deciding winners — he also assisted Daniele Rugani's stoppage-time winner against Frosinone — Vlahovic is looking like a leader at the Old Lady. He has scored 37% of Juventus' goals this season; no one among Serie A's top 10 scorers has a higher proportion.

Vlahovic is also setting the tone for the supporters of a club struggling to keep pace in a title race. Juventus' second in the Serie A standings but trails Inter by a large margin. The Serbia international celebrated his first goal against Frosinone by placing his hand under his chin, as if to say the Bianconeri must hold their heads high and soldier on.

What has changed for Vlahovic? "I honestly don't know what happened. I think all the hard work I did finally paid off," he said. "I'm physically well, it's simple. I work as usual, I take care of my body. I sleep well, I eat well and I train well, the difference with the past season is that



15

Vlahovic is second on the list of the top scorers in Serie A this season. Nine of his 15 goals have come in 2024

37%

No other Serie A striker among the top 10 scorers has contributed as high a proportion of the team's league goals as Vlahovic



I honestly don't know what happened. I think all the hard work I did finally paid off. I'm physically well, it's simple. I work as usual, I take care of my body. I sleep well, I eat well and I train well  
DUSAN VLAHOVIC

"I'm fine and I don't have problems. Nonetheless, I am not happy — the team results matter more than my goals. We have not been up to our usual standards."

Former Italy coach Cesare Prandelli believes Vlahovic's desire to prove himself and the trust he has begun to feel in Turin have contributed to the turnaround. "He has more self-esteem and is convinced about his role inside Juventus," Prandelli told *Tuttosport*. "Against

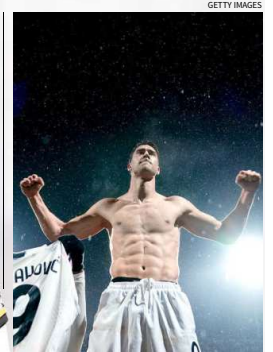
Frosinone, he literally dragged Juventus. He can become a leader and the reference point for personality, technique and goals. He has a fire inside and really cares about the consideration he feels from his teammates and the environment. If he feels trust, he gives his best."

## Best in the world?

And Vlahovic's best is truly elite. Former Juventus striker Darko Kovacevic thinks his compatriot "can become one of the best in the world". "Dusan is — and has always been — a great striker, he just needed to find his best form." Kovacevic told *Gazzetta dello Sport*. "His talent has never been in question. We are talking about a young but complete center forward. He has been going through a spectacular state of form since January and I hope that this is only the start. I remain convinced that Dusan can become one of the best in the world... Just like Erling Haaland."

Vlahovic is an exceptional ball-striker — with a jackhammer of a left foot that can get the ball to curve and dip, he is a goal threat at free-kicks. His left foot also makes him dangerous from range as well as from inside the box, where he often finds space to receive progressive passes.

Unlike many other left-footers, the 24-year-old isn't one-footed. He is a more-than-competent finisher off his right when defenders shepherd him onto his 'weaker' foot — he is capable of both striking across his body and opening up his hips and side-footing



Against Frosinone, he literally dragged Juventus. He has a fire inside... If he feels trust, he gives his best. He can become the reference point for personality, technique and goals

CESARE PRANDELLI  
Former Italy coach

the ball.

The 3-1 win over Lazio earlier this season showcased the variety of finishing Vlahovic possesses. He opened the scoring by sweeping home a cross with a technically supreme first-time finish. He later restored the two-goal cushion when he chipped down a long ball, opened up space in front of two defenders with a touch and fired home from the edge of the box.

At 6'3", Vlahovic has enough of an aerial presence. He can outjump most defenders and score off towering headers. He is also brave enough to attempt diving headers, his poacher's instinct often getting him to balls other strikers may have given up chasing.

At Juventus, Vlahovic doesn't always get to show off his all-round game. He does not participate in the build-up as often as Lautaro does at Inter, for instance, but the Serb has the skill and touch to roll his defenders under contact. This makes him a good bouncing board for passes to release runners from deep, a facet of his game that makes him an ideal option for both one-striker setups and the two-striker system he almost always plays in at Juventus.

## What the future holds

But for all of Vlahovic's undeniable qualities, he will be judged on the numbers he puts up and their influence on Juventus' pursuit of titles. The question both player and club will want the answer to is whether this run of goal-scoring form is consistently replicable or a one-off — this will also have a bearing on their future together.

With Vlahovic's contract set to run until June 2026, this summer could prove pivotal. A 25-goal season will attract interest from top clubs, with several big-name strikers set to shift. Juventus will need to ascertain whether cashing in when Vlahovic's value has risen again is the right move, the risk of losing his potentially elite peak years is fairly high as well.

For now, though, the focus is on closing the gap to Inter and keeping the others behind. If Juventus and Vlahovic can manage that, it's unlikely anybody in Turin will ever question the €80 million price tag again.

## GAME THEORY

Gone in 60 metres: the fastest hurdlers and sprinters

Devynne Charlton came within 0.01 seconds of equalling her world indoor 60m hurdles record in Madrid last week. The Bahamian athlete is set to threaten her mark again at this weekend's World Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow. But Tia Jones, who shares both the world record and the second-best time, is out with an injury and won't face off against Charlton. It's a good opportunity then to take a look at the top times in the women's 60m hurdles as well as those in the 60m flat sprint.

### 60 METRES HURDLES: BEST TIMES (WOMEN)

Mark (sec)	Competitor	Venue	Date
7.67	Devynne Charlton	New York	11 Feb 2024
7.67	Tia Jones	Albuquerque	16 Feb 2024
7.68	Susanna Kallur	Karlsruhe	10 Feb 2008
7.68	Tia Jones	Albuquerque	16 Feb 2024
7.68	Devynne Charlton	Madrid	23 Feb 2024
7.69	Lyudmila Narozhilenko	Chelyabinsk	04 Feb 1990
7.70	Lyudmila Narozhilenko	Madrid	11 Feb 1993
7.70	Sharika Nelvis	Albuquerque	18 Feb 2018
7.70	Kendra Harrison	Birmingham	03 Mar 2018
7.71	Lyudmila Narozhilenko	Chelyabinsk	04 Feb 1990

### 60 METRES: BEST TIMES (WOMEN)

Mark (sec)	Competitor	Venue	Date
6.92	Irina Privalova	Madrid	11 Feb 1993
6.92	Irina Privalova	Madrid	09 Feb 1995
6.93	Irina Privalova	Lieviv	13 Feb 1994
6.94	Irina Privalova	Lieviv	19 Feb 1995
6.94	Aleia Hobbs	Albuquerque	18 Feb 2023
6.94	Julien Alfred	Albuquerque	11 Mar 2023
6.95	Gail Devers	Toronto	12 Mar 1993
6.95	Irina Privalova	Wien	06 Feb 1994
6.95	Irina Privalova	Moskva	14 Feb 1995
6.95	Marion Jones	Maebashi	07 Mar 1998
6.96	Merlene Ottey	Madrid	14 Feb 1992
6.96	Irina Privalova	Madrid	11 Feb 1993
6.96	Katerina Thanou	Maebashi	07 Mar 1999
6.96	Mujinga Kambundji	Beograd	18 Mar 2022
6.96	Julien Alfred	Albuquerque	10 Mar 2023



## PICTURE THIS



## Sand tussle

Brazil prevailed over Italy in a keenly contested final to win a record sixth title at the 2024 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Dubai last Sunday.

With the 6-4 victory, the Brazilians added to the crowns won in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009,

and 2017. Iran defeated Belarus in the third-place playoff.

The Beach Soccer World Cup, first staged in 2005, was preceded by the Beach Soccer World Championships, which was conducted under the supervision of Beach Soccer Worldwide (BSWW) and its predecessors.

FIFA partnered with BSWW, took over the running of the tournament in 2005 and rebranded it as an official FIFA event. Beach football's roots can be traced to the sands of Rio de Janeiro, so Brazil's dominance isn't a surprise. A game of beach football, consisting of five players (including a goalkeeper) each, the field is considerably smaller than a regular football pitch and great care is taken to clear the sand of pebbles, seashells and other objects that can cause injuries.

Seychelles is set to host the 2025 edition of the tournament, which spans 36 minutes, with teams



# Sport

## DOMINATION

### Australia takes charge after New Zealand collapses



Australia dismissed New Zealand for 179 to take control of the first Test on Friday's second day after Cameron Green had scored 174 not out in a final-wicket stand to drive the visitor to 383 all out. **The scores:** Australia 383 (Green 174 not out, M. Henry 5-70); 13/2 in 8 overs vs New Zealand 179 in 43.1 overs (Phillips 71, Lyon 4/43).

## SPECIAL WIN

### Ireland downs Afghanistan to claim maiden Test victory



Ireland won its first Test match on Friday when it defeated Afghanistan by six wickets in Abu Dhabi, ending a streak of seven losses. It reached its target of 111 in the final session of day three. **The scores:** Afghanistan 155 & 218 (Shahidi 55) lost to Ireland 263 & 111/4 in 31.3 overs (Babineer 58 n.o.).

## PRODIGY

### Bashir is the new Ashwin, hails former England captain Vaughan



Michael Vaughan feels England has discovered a world-class superstar in off-spinner Shoaib Bashir, who has the skills to emulate the success of R. Ashwin. He impressed with a match haul of eight wickets in Ranchi. "Celebrating another world-class superstar that we've unearthed, Bashir. He's the new Ashwin," said Vaughan.

## MUCH-NEEDED STEP

### Kapil backs BCCI's decision to protect First-Class events



"A few players will suffer, but let it be," said Kapil Dev on Friday as he backed the BCCI's decision to terminate central contracts for lack of commitment to domestic cricket, calling it a much-needed step to protect First-Class events like the Ranji Trophy. He said the decision to assert importance of domestic cricket was long overdue.

# Ecclestone and Harris sizzle as Warriorz brush off Giants

The former spins a web around the Gujarat batters with a three-wicket haul before the Australian's unbeaten 60 takes the Uttar Pradesh side home with six wickets and 26 balls to spare

## WPL SEASON 2

### Mavank Chaudhary

BENGALURU

Spin it to win! It was the mantra for the UP Warriorz, led by Sophie Ecclestone (4-0-20-3), before Grace Harris' unbeaten fifty (60, 35b, 9x4, 2x6) powered it to a six-wicket win over Gujarat Giants in the Women's Premier League game at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Friday.

Chasing 143, Harris added valuable runs with Chamari Athapaththu and Deepthi Sharma, taking the Warriorz to the finish line with 26 balls to spare for its second consecutive win.

Earlier, spinners capitalised on a turning track to help the Warriorz restrict the Giants to 142 for five after choosing to bowl. Laura Wolvaardt used Anjali Sarvani's pace and exploited the short-off-side boundary, hitting her for three back-to-back fours.

Skipper Beth Mooney, who had two poor performances with the bat, showed the right intent at the start. She stepped out to Rajeshwari Gayakwad and smashed a straight four.

She then welcomed Ecclestone with a boundary, executing a flawless reverse lap, as Giants got off



**Clinical:** Ecclestone's spell set up the easy chase, which Harris & Co. took care of. **K. MURALI KUMAR**



to a brisk start. Harris and Ecclestone bowled in tandem, choking the batters and stopping the boundary hits.

Alyssa Healy's play to operate with the off-spinners paid off, as the Giants could only manage 29 in six overs after scoring 33 in the first four.

Harleen Deol had another

overwhelming outing, scoring 18 off 24 before holing out to Anjali off Rajeshwari's bowling.

Ashleigh Gardner (30, 17b, 4x4, 1x6) provided the impetus, her 52-run association with Phoebe Litchfield powering Giants close to the 150-mark but it was never enough once Harris took charge.

## SCOREBOARD

**GUJARAT GIANTS**  
Laura Wolvaardt c Athapaththu b Ecclestone 28 (6b, 4x4), Beth Mooney c Harris b Ecclestone 16 (16b, 2x4), Harleen Deol c Anjali b Rajeshwari 18 (24b, 1x4), Phoebe Litchfield run out 35 (26b, 4x4, 1x6), Ashleigh Gardner c Athapaththu b Ecclestone 30 (17b, 4x4, 1x6), D. Hemalatha (not out) 2 (4b), Kathryn Bryce (not out) 5 (7b); Extras (b-4, lb-4); 8; Total (for five wks. in 20 overs): 142.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-40 (Mooney, 5.2 overs), 2-61 (Wolvaardt, 9.3), 3-83 (Harleen, 12.6), 4-135 (Gardner, 18.1), 5-135 (Litchfield, 19).

**UP WARRIORZ BOWLING**  
Athapaththu 4-0-19-0, Anjali 1-0-13-0, Rajeshwari 4-0-33-1, Harris 3-0-21-0, Ecclestone 4-0-20-3, Deepthi 4-0-28-0.

**UP WARRIORZ**  
Alyssa Healy b Bryce 33 (21b, 7x4), Kiran Naigric c Hemalatha b Tanuja 12 (8b, 2x4), Chamari Athapaththu c Wolvaardt b Tanuja 17 (11b, 4x4), Grace Harris (not out) 60 (35b, 9x4, 2x6), Shweta Sehrawat b Meghna 2 (7b), Deepthi Sharma (not out) 17 (14b, 3x4); Extras (lb-1, w-1); 2; Total (for four wks. in 15.4 overs): 143.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-42 (Kiran, 4.3), 2-50 (Healy, 5.2), 3-86 (Athapaththu, 8.5), 4-90 (Shweta, 10.4).

**GIANTS BOWLING**  
Meghna 1-33-0, Bryce 2-20-19-1, Gardner 1-0-23-0, Tanuja 3-0-23-2, Mannat 1-0-14-0, Sneha 2-4-0-17-0.

**Toss:** UP Warriorz.  
**UP Warriorz won by six wickets with 26 balls to spare.**  
**Saturday's match:** RCB vs. MI, 7.30 p.m.

# Puneri Paltan reigns supreme against Haryana Steelers, clinches its first crown



**Well-earned win:** Paltan's title triumph made up for its heartbreaking loss in last season's final.

## PKL

### Saikat Chakraborty

HYDERABAD

Puneri Paltan emerged victorious in the Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 final, defeating Haryana Steelers 28-25 in a nail-biting encounter here at the Gachhi-bowli Indoor Stadium on Friday.

The low-scoring encounter, which ended with Paltan winning its maiden title, was built as a defensive battle between the strongest backlines of the season.

However, it was Puneri Paltan's raider Pankaj Mohite who emerged the hero on the night, scoring a crucial nine points and leading his team's offensive charge, particularly in key

do-or-die moments. The first half was a close contest, with Paltan maintaining a narrow lead.

A crucial four-point raid by Mohite near half-time pushed Haryana to the brink of an all-out, but substitute raider Vishal Tate kept the Steelers in the game with a crucial touch point.

The second half continued to be a tense affair. Paltan eventually pulled away to an eight-point lead in the final two minutes. Strong defensive play by right corner Gaurav Khatri, who secured four tackle points, helped Paltan slow down the game and secure a historic victory.

On the other hand, it was a disappointing night for Haryana, which struggled defensively - only managing six tackle points

throughout the match. It was tough for coach Manpreet Singh, whose luck in finals as coach remains poor. He lost two consecutive finals with Gujarat Giants (previously Gujarat Fortune Giants) before this gutting loss to the Steelers.

Paltan captain Aslam Inamdar was named the Most Valuable Player (MVP) of the season for 142 raid points and 23 tackle points. The side's vice-captain Mohammadreza Chiyaneh was added the season's best defender, but fell short of a record-equalling 100 tackle points by one solitary point, while Daak Delhi's Ashu Malik bagged the best raider honour for his haul of 276 raid points.

**The result:** Puneri Paltan 28 bt Haryana Steelers 25.

# Odisha CM Patnaik releases Sportstar's coffee table book on Hockey World Cup

## The Hindu Bureau

BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik released a coffee table book titled 'FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023' brought out by Sportstar, the sports magazine of The Hindu Group, here on Friday. Sportstar meticulously captured every on-field and off-field moment of the 15th chapter of the FIH Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup 2023, showcasing the grand celebration of the sport in Odisha. The captivating coffee table book has preserved the memories of the World Cup for eternity.

The State had successfully organised the Hockey Men's World Cup 2023 at two venues - Bhubaneswar and Rourkela. In a message, Mr. Patnaik said, "having played host to top officials and players from 16 nations, Odisha's sports champions and hockey lovers from across the world, it was indeed a bigger, more



Odisha CM Patnaik releasing the book in the presence of Ayon Sengupta, Editor of Sportstar and Sridhar Aranala, Vice President of The Hindu group, in Bhubaneswar on Friday. **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT**

exciting, engaging and unforgettable Hockey World Cup. It was absolutely delightful to see the people of India and Odisha becoming part of what was a hockey festival like no other.

"The two state-of-the-art venues - the iconic Balakrishna Hockey Stadium, in Bhubaneswar as well as the brand-new Birsu Munda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela - stand testimony to Odisha's strong commitment and love towards hockey," he remarked.

and rich printing production has made the coffee table lively.

"The right to host back-to-back FIH World Cups stands as a testament to Odisha's long-standing support for hockey and its commitment to promote sports at every level. Under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the State has witnessed a sporting revolution," said Ayon Sengupta, Editor of Sportstar.

"Sportstar and The Hindu feel privileged to be part of this endeavour to spread the story of the State's love for hockey through this book. The book not only provides a visual treat, but also an insight into the works that made the miracle happen," said Mr. Sengupta. Odisha's Sports and Youth Services Department Secretary R. Vineel Krishna and Sridhar Aranala, Vice President, SDT Rao, General Manager, of The Hindu Group were present at the release of coffee table book.

# Boyer gets the better of fourth seed Svcrcina

## DELHI OPEN

NEW DELHI

### Kamesh Srinivasan

TRISTAN

Tristan Boyer knocked out the fourth seed Dalibor Svcrcina 7-6(2), 7-6(1) in the quarterfinals of the Dafa News \$82,000 Delhi Open Challenger tennis at the DLFJ complex on Friday.

The 22-year-old Boyer, ranked 242 in the world, allowed his Czech opponent to fight back, as the two exchanged eight breaks of serve in the match. However, the American handled the tie-breaks with authority, thanks to his strong serve, to pull through in straight sets.

In the semifinals, Boyer will play Geoffrey Blancaneaux of France. The Frenchman unleashed his energetic game after a hesitant start to beat qualifier Filip Sekulic of Australia 7-6(3), 6-2. The Aussie had not dropped a set in four matches including two in the qualifying event. More-



**Untroubled:** Boyer handled the tie-breaks with authority, thanks to his strong serve, to pull through in straight sets. **KAMESH SRINIVASAN**

**The results:**  
**Singles: Quarterfinals:** Yuta Shimizu (Jpn) bt Enrico Dalla Valle (Ita) 7-5, 7-5; Coleman Wong (Hkg) bt Tristan Schoolkate (Aus) 7-6(10), 6-3; Tristan Boyer (USA) bt Dalibor Svcrcina (Cze) 7-6(2), 7-6(1); Geoffrey Blancaneaux (Fra) bt Philip Sekulic (Aus) 7-6(3), 6-2.  
**Doubles: Semifinals:** Jakob Schnatter & Mark Wallner (Ger) bt Ray Ho (Tpe) & Calum Puttergill (Aus) 3-6, 7-6(3), [10-5]; Piotr Matyszek (Pol) & Matthew Romios (Aus) bt Constantin Kouzmine & Maxime Janvier (Fra) 7-6(4), 6-1.

# Treesa and Gayatri exit in the quarterfinals

## GERMAN OPEN

MULHEIM AN DER RUHR

### Press Trust of India

MULHEIM AN DER RUHR

Fourth-seeded Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand crashed out of the German Open Super 300 badminton tournament, after losing to Li Yi Jing and Luo Xia Min in the women's doubles quarterfinals in Mulheim an der Ruhr on Friday. The Chinese duo, seeded sixth, prevailed over the Indians 21-16, 21-14 in 41 minutes.

Treesa and Gayatri had defeated the Czech pair of Sona Horinkova and Kateřina Zulkovak 21-10, 21-11 in a round of 16 match on Thursday. However, it was curtains for India in both women's and men's singles events.

**Men: Next round (round of 16):** Omer Nhat (Nguyen) (Irl) bt Sathish Kumar Karunakaran 2-18, 24-22.  
**Women:** Mia Blüchfeldt (Den) bt Akasrith Kashyap 21-13, 21-14.

## INBRIEF



## Lahiri set to be back at Hero Indian Open after five years

Star golfer and former champion Anirban Lahiri is set to return at the Hero Indian Open, the country's National Open which will have an enhanced prize money of \$2.25 million this year. Part of the Asian swing, the Indian Open will have 144 players, including 33 Indians, competing for the top prize from March 28 to 31 at the DLF Golf & Country Club in Gurugram.

## Anuksha nets thrice as India routs Bhutan

Anuksha Kumar's hat-trick headlined India's commanding 7-0 win over Bhutan in the SAFF U16 Women's Championship in Kathmandu at the ANFA Complex on Friday. Anuksha, the 13-year-old from Hazaribagh, stepped into the Bhutan defence with Pearl Fernandes (two goals), Shweta Rani and substitute Anvita Raghuraman being the other goal-scorers for India.

## LIVE TELECAST

**NBA:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 8.30 a.m.  
**Ranji Trophy:** (semifinals), Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.  
**ISL:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 5 & 7.30 p.m.  
**PVL:** Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LV, 6.30 p.m.  
**LaLiga:** Jio Cinema App, 6.30, 8.45, 11 p.m. & Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 1.30 a.m. (Sunday)  
**WPL:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.  
**Serie A:** Jio Cinema App, 7.30, 10.30 p.m.; Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)  
**Bundesliga:** Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LV, 8 & 11 p.m.  
**Formula One:** Bahrain GP, F1 TV & F1 TV Pro App, 8.30 p.m.  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1, 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8.30 & 11 p.m.  
**New Zealand vs Australia:** 1st Test, day 4, Prime Video, 3.30 a.m. (Sunday)  
**Badminton:** German Open, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 4.30 p.m.

## Pragg loses to Rapport

## CHESS

Press Report of India  
PRAGUE

R. Praggnanandhaa blundered for the second day running and lost to Richard Rapport of Romania in the third round of the Prague Masters Chess tournament here. The all-Indian duel between Vidit Gujrathi and D. Gukesh ended in a stalemate.

Mecanville, Arjun Erigaisi became the new India No. 1 defeating Xiangyu Yu of China in the first round of the Shenzhen Masters.

**The results:** Round 3: Vincent Keymer (Fr) drew with Parham Maghsoodloo (Ir) 2.5; R. Praggnanandhaa (I) lost to Richard Rapport (Ro) 2; Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb) 2.5; David Navara (Cze) 1; Mateusz Bartel (Pol) 0.5; lost to Nguyen Thanh Van (Cze) 1; D. Gukesh (I) drew with Vidit Gujrathi (I), 1.5.

## Gutsy Ankita Raina fights back past Jacqueline Cabaj Awad

## ITF WOMEN

Kamesh Srivivasan  
GURUGRAM

Ankita Raina recovered from a precarious situation to beat Jacqueline Cabaj Awad of Sweden 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the Federal Bank \$25,000 ITF women's tennis at the Tennis Project, Balliauw, on Friday.

In a battle that lasted nearly three hours, Ankita trailed 2-4 and was serving at 0-90, when she stepped up her game to deliver the knock-out punch on Jacqueline. The Swede had to put her big frame to good use in hammering heavy strokes all over the court to exasperate the India No.1 till then.

From there, Ankita



Ankita. KAMESH SRIVIVASAN

dropped only two more points in winning four games for a memorable victory. Her partner fought from behind 2-5 in the first set. And later she could not serve out the second set at 5-1, but broke the Swede's serve to take the match into the decider.

In the semifinals, Ankita will play the wily Korean, Yeonwoo Ku who eased

past Zhibek Kulambayeva of Kazakhstan for the loss of three games.

Zhibek joined hands with Ankita to make the doubles final later in the day. Sahaja Yamalappalli also fought hard but went down in three sets to the top seed Dalila Jakupovic of Slovenia who was strong and crafty to reach through the decider without dropping a game.

**The results: Singles:**  
**Quarterfinals:** Dalila Jakupovic (Slo) beat Sahaja Yamalappalli 7-5, 3-6, 6-0; Justina Mikulajcika (Ltu) beat Anshika Singh 6-3, 5-3; Yeonwoo Ku (Kor) beat Zhibek Kulambayeva (Kaz) 6-0, 6-3; Anikita Raina beat Jacqueline Cabaj Awad (Swe) 4-6, 6-2, 6-4.  
**Doubles:** Semifinals: Zhibek & Anikita beat Riya Bhatia & Michika Ozeki (Jpn) 7-5, 6-2; Jacqueline & Justina beat Yeonwoo Ku (Kor) & Diana Marcinkevica (Lat) 7-6(7), 7-5.

## Sahaja, Shrivalli to bolster Indian squad

## TENNIS

Sports Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Thombare. Ruttuja had won the Asian Games gold medal with Rohan Bopanna, and has been doing well in both singles and doubles in the professional circuit.

Prarthana, who has been the best doubles player of the country, commands her place.

**The team:** Anikita Raina, Sahaja Yamalappalli, Ruttuja Thombare, Shrivalli Bhamidipaty, Prarthana Thombare. **Reserve:** Vaidehi Chaudhari. **Captain:** Shalini Thakur Chawla. **Coach:** Radhika Kamtikar.

## Hockey mess continues, questions raised on HI finances, elections

Uthra Ganesan  
NEW DELHI

The days of factions, infighting and alleged administrative malpractices seem to be returning in Indian hockey.

While Hockey India grapples with the resignation of women's chief coach Janneke Schopman and its long-serving CEO Elena Norman within days of each other, questions have now been raised on alleged financial irregularities and election process, specially involving secret general Bhola Nath Singh, treasurer Sekar Ma-

nohanar and executive director Cdr. RK Srivastava.

Former Delhi Hockey secretary Mahesh Dayal, in a series of communiques to the National Sports Goods and Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey, has also questioned the validity of the current dispensation and the election process in 2022, claiming violation of the general Bhola Nath Singh and seeking parity with other federations that have been declared guilty of the same.

"As elections have been stalled in other federations like gymnastics, volleyball, kabaddi etc but no action is

## Sarabjot and Suruchi top the air pistol events



Top three: Kunal Rana, winner Sarabjot Singh, and Gurpreet Singh.

Sports Bureau  
BHOPAL

World Cup gold medalist and Olympic quota winner Sarabjot Singh topped air pistol with 24.84 points in the fourth National shooting selection trials at the Madhya Pradesh Academy on Friday.

Sarabjot beat qualification topper Kunal Rana (585) by 0.9 point. Olympian Gurpreet



Singh placed third ahead of Naveen, Aditya Malra, Arpit Tomar, Akash Bharadwaj and Inderal Singh.

placed third ahead of Naveen, Aditya Malra, Arpit Tomar, Akash Bharadwaj and Inderal Singh.

The rapid fire pistol expert, Gurpreet had placed third in the earlier trial also.

In women's air pistol, Suruchi topped by beating Surbhi Rao by 2.5 points.

The qualification topper, Asian Games gold medalist Palak Gulia (585) placed



Himanshu. SHW KUMAR PUSHPAAR

## Services holds Kerala, tops Group A

Former champion Services finished on top of the Group A standings after it held another former winner Kerala 1-1 in their final league match of the 77th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy at the Golden Jubilee Stadium in Yupia, Arunachal Pradesh on Friday.

Both goals came in the opening half.

Kerala took the lead in the 22nd minute through Sajesh E. who nodded home a corner from Arjun V. Services regrouped quickly and found the equaliser just before the break through Samir Murmu, who so far has scored nine goals in the tournament.

Assam finished fourth with seven points and completed the list of teams progressing to the quarterfinals.

**The results: Group A (final round):** Kerala 1 (Sajesh E 22) drew with Services 1 (Samir Murmu 45-4).

Goa 3 (Lloyd Cardozo 3, Delton Colaco 12, Joshua D'Silva 8) drew with Assam 3 (Pragyan Gopin 27, Sudeepa Komwar 45-3, Milan Basumatary 56).

Arunachal Pradesh (Taru Dolu 22, Rahul Gog Singhpo 56) drew with Meghalaya 2 (Chesterson Lyngdoh 8, Steven Stevenson Sohtking 8).

## A tantalising semifinal between old foes would be a treat for the ardent fans

TN meets Mumbai in the marquee clash; the scanner will be on Shreyas who would be keen on making a statement on the big occasion

## RANJI TROPHY

Amol Karhadkar  
MUMBAI

The Ranji Trophy is coming to its business end. While non-participation of star players in the premier First Class competition may have hit the headlines, the absence of multiple stars has taken the interest in a tantalising semifinal between old foes Mumbai and Tamil Nadu a notch higher.

## Boost for TN

Tamil Nadu, having seamlessly hit top gear after a slow start to the season - has received a boost with the addition of B. Sai Sudharsan and Washington



What's in store? Mumbai skipper Rahane takes a close look at the pitch which had a tinge of grass and may help the seamers. EMANUALL YOGINI

Sundar for his back at the NCA in Bengaluru, Washington arrived in the morning after being released from In-

dia's Test squad. The duo trained extensively at the Sharad Pawar Cricket Academy ground

on Friday morning. At the other end of the ground, Mumbai also had a long practice session. More than the duo, Shreyas Iyer will be under the scanner over the next five days.

After having made himself unavailable for last week's quarterfinal against Baroda and now omitted from the BCCI's central contracts list, Shreyas will be keen on making a statement on the big occasion.

The aggressive batter had a long batting stint in the nets on Thursday, but took it easy on Friday in an optional session.

Shreyas will play for Mumbai in place of Suryansh Shedge in a direct swap. It will be interesting to see if Mumbai brings in wicketkeeper Prasad Pa-

war for opener Bhupen Lalwani. Hardik Tamore proved his mettle with the willow in the quarterfinal, but was ordinary behind the stumps, so Mumbai may be tempted to bolster its depth.

Besides Sai Sudharsan and Washington coming in for R. Vimal Khumar and Mohammed Ali, Tamil Nadu will also be tempted to bring in Kulkdeer Sen in place of M. Mohammed.

The surface at the Bandra-Kurla Complex facility sported a green look and unless the grass is removed, captain R. Sai Kishore - the highest wicket-taker of the season - will know that Kulkdeer Sen's pace may make a difference as much as his own skilful left-arm spin.

## Confident Vidarbh takes on Pandit's Madhya Pradesh

Abhishek Saini  
NAGPUR

Riding on the high of taking down heavyweight Karnataka in the quarterfinals, Vidarbh will look to deny Madhya Pradesh its second

final in three years when they face off in the first Ranji Trophy semifinal at the VCA Stadium (Civil Lines) here on Saturday.

Aditya Sarwate and Harsh Dubey triggered a Karnataka batting meltdown on the final day and led Vidarbh into the final four after five years. MP, meanwhile, scraped a narrow four-run victory against Andhra to continue its bid for a second title under Chandrakant Pandit.

The colossal First-Class coach, Pandit, pitted against his former side Vidarbh, which he led to back-to-back titles in 2017/18 and 2018/19, serves an enticing sub-plot to the contest.

Himanshu Mantri and Yash Dubey have set the tone at the top for MP. The duo has notched up 500 plus runs each this season and contributed three hundred-plus opening-tricket partnerships.

But its collapse from 123 for no loss to 59 for seven in the first innings against Andhra was symptomatic of its middle-order frailties, which have been masked by all-rounder Venkatesh Iyer.

Venkatesh has managed to salvage his side from precarious situations with aplomb, scoring 528 runs at a strike rate of 82.28.

**Favourable match-up** The southpaw will have a favourable match-up against the left-arm off-spin of Sarwate, Vidarbh's leading wicket-taker this season with 37 scalps, and will again be tasked with holding things together for MP.

For Vidarbh, Atharva Tai's coming-of-age century against Karnataka assured that the 23-year-old can fill in the big shoes of Faiz Fazal. But its imports, Dhruv Shorey and Karun Nair, will shoulder the major share of the side's batting hopes.

Vidarbh could have benefited from Jitesh Sharma's firepower in the lower-middle order, but the wicketkeeper-batter has featured just once in eight games so far. In his stead, captain Akshay Wadkar's six half-centuries have been valuable.

Kumar Kartikeya's 32 wickets proved crucial when MP clinched the crown in 2022. The left-arm off-spinner has managed 38 this season already and is MP's leading wicket-taker. With help from pacers Avesh Khan and Kulwant Khejroliya, MP could pose a threat to the home team's batting.





# Destination Uttarakhand

Committed to boost economy through pilgrimage and tourism

## KEDARPURI BECKONS TRAVELLERS FROM FAR AND WIDE

**S**hri Kedamath Dham, situated in the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayan mountain in the Rudrapur district of Uttarakhand, holds a significant place in Hinduism as one of the 12 Jyotirlingas. It is revered as a sacred pilgrimage site and offers a divine experience to all who visit. The Mandakini river originates from this sacred

spot. The Chardham Yatra is deemed incomplete without paying homage at Kedamath.

The Kedamath Shrine was badly affected by the floods and landslides in June, 2013 in Uttarakhand. Soon after assuming his office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi initiated the restoration of the Kedamath Shrine. PM Modi is committed to

ensuring that the beauty and grandeur of the Kedamath gets enhanced. The reconstruction efforts are being carried out with future needs in mind while maintaining the religious and spiritual essence of the site. PM Modi himself has started monitoring the redevelopment work at the site.

Since 2021, Kedarpuri is experiencing a revival, drawing worshippers from

near and far. PM Modi has emphasized the importance of a "Surakshit Uttarakhand - Surakshit Yatra (Safe Uttarakhand - Safe Yatra)" after his spiritual retreat in the meditation cave at Kedamath. With its blend of spirituality and natural beauty, Kedamath is a must-visit destination for those who want to experience a spiritual bliss.



**I** congratulate the Uttarakhand government for the remarkable progress made in the last few years. This has been possible due to sustained policy incentives and focus on key sectors such as tourism and renewable energy. I am glad that the State has made significant progress in infrastructure development and has set new benchmarks for sustainable development. Uttarakhand's commitment to exploiting its natural resources and promoting tourism has not only strengthened the economy but also showcased its potential on the global stage. I commend the state's dedication towards inclusive growth and look forward to its continued success in the years to come.

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister



**U**nder the visionary leadership of Honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, We are committed to the overall development of our state, preserving and promoting its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. To this end, we aim to promote economic growth, improve infrastructure and improve the quality of life for all citizens through effective policies and strategic initiatives. We want to make Uttarakhand a model of progress where there is a confluence of tradition and modernity. Every person in the state can get a conducive environment for prosperity and development.

**Pushkar Singh Dhami**  
Chief Minister, Uttarakhand

### PM Modi's Dream Project: Enhancing Beauty and Grandeur of Kedarnath Shrine

- Samadhi of Adiguru Shri Shankaracharya
- Redevelopment of Sangam Ghat in Shri Kedarnath
- Construction of administrative office and hospital
- Saraswati Civic Amenity Building
- Museum complex at Kedarnath pilgrimage centre
- Queue management and rain shelter for Mandakini Astha Path
- Residence for pilgrimage priest
- Construction of bridge over Mandakini river
- Construction of flood barrier and river banks at Saraswati river

## Uttarakhand: A Paradise for Filmmakers



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami interacts with people associated with the film industry during the Mumbai GIS Road Show.

**U**ttarakhand has received the prestigious title of the "Most Friendly State for Films", which has been acknowledged by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami. He expressed his pride in this accomplishment and extended his congratulations to the residents of the state. At the ceremony, Banshidhar Tiwari, the Director General Information and CEO of Uttarakhand Film Development Council, accepted the award on behalf of Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand's potential

as a film shooting destination will be enhanced even more in the coming years. The State Government, under the leadership of CM Pushkar Singh Dhami, has been tirelessly working towards establishing Uttarakhand as the perfect destination for film shoots. The Single Window Clearance System ensures swift approval of film shooting proposals, while no fees are charged for shooting permits. Additionally, film units are offered security throughout their shooting period. Over the years, the state has been the

backdrop for over 150 films, shows, and documentaries, such as "The Kashmir Files", "Batti Gul Meter Chalu", "Kabir Singh", "Kedarnath", "Student of the Year", and even featured on Discovery Channel. Additionally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an appearance alongside Bear Grylls in an episode of adventure reality show "Man vs Wild". For shooting purposes, all kinds of approvals can now be obtained within 3-4 days, thanks to the single window clearance system.

### Uttarakhand Film Policy

- Single window clearance for shooting.
- At present, exemption in shooting fees has been given on films being made in Uttarakhand.
- If the film is processed within the state, a subsidy of Rs 25 lakh is given to the films in the regional languages of the state.
- Hindi film makers are eligible for a subsidy of Rs 4.5 crore if they shoot 75% of their film in Uttarakhand. The State Govt has also made a decision to provide a 50% discount on guest houses owned by GMVN and KMN (Tourism Department) to these film makers during their shooting period.

## Manaskhand Circuit Redefining Spiritual Tourism

**CM Pushkar Singh Dhami** is spearheading the initiative to launch the **Manaskhand Express rail service**, which will soon connect devotees and tourists from different states to the temples encompassed by the **Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission**

**U**ttarakhand government is gearing up to launch a train service between Kolkata and Tanakpur to boost tourism and enhance visitor experience. In addition to this, local buses and various transportation services will be provided from Tanakpur to Purnagir, Hatkalka, Patal Bhuvaneshwar, Jageshwar Dham, Golju Devta Temple, Nanda Devi, Kainchi Dham, and other temples of Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission for the convenience of devotees and tourists.



PM Narendra Modi and CM Pushkar Singh Dhami visited Jageshwar Dham Temple as part of Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission.

KMVN's guest houses, homestays, and local hotels offer tourists a glimpse into the art and culture of the region, while local guides trained through Hunar Yojana ensure top-notch hospitality for visitors. Tourists can conveniently take the rail service from Kathgodam to Kolkata for their journey back.

The Tourism Department has prepared separate master plans for all the 16 temples of Kumaon division under the Manaskhand Temple Mala Mission, which has also

been approved. The foundation stone of most of these temples will be laid soon. The work of beautification and development of temples is being done through cluster approach.

Additional Chief Secretary (ACS) Radha Raturi has directed for the swift completion of temple beautification and road widening under the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission. The Public Works Department has been tasked with converting single lane roads to double lanes promptly.

## Extreme Outdoor Adventure Sports and Places to Try in Uttarakhand

**U**ttarakhand not only boasts a distinctive reputation in the global tourism industry but also serves as a prime destination for adventure tourism. The state government has made significant efforts to boost adventure tourism

alongside religious tourism. Tourists exploring the state have the opportunity to experience the excitement of adventure sports like bungee jumping, river crossing, and paragliding, as well as enjoy rafting in Rishikesh. The captivating natural beauty of Tehri Lake, nestled

amidst the hills, mesmerizes visitors. At this lake, tourists can partake in a range of activities including floating house, shikara boat and cruise rides, boat rides, jet speedboat rides, water skiing, jobbing, banana boat rides, bandwaggon boat rides, hot air balloon rides, and paragliding.



PM Narendra Modi meditates at Parvati Kund in Pithoragarh district during his trip.

## Enjoy the Thrill of Aviation with Serenity of Nature on a Gyrocopter

**Uttarakhand Tourism** has received approval from DGCA to operate the Gyrocopter. This is India's first Himalayan Air Safari with safety and expertise, which will also work to connect the remote areas of Uttarakhand

**U**ttarakhand is all set to revolutionize tourism by introducing the first-ever Himalayan air safari in the nation. This ground-breaking initiative promises an unparalleled adventure experience combined with awe-inspiring scenery for tourists.



the majestic Himalayan Range and the meandering rivers below.

After completing a test flight, Col Ashwini Pundir, Additional CEO of Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, said that the Himalayan Air Safari will soon commence, allowing tourists to effortlessly travel between various scenic spots in the state via gyrocopters. This extraordinary scheme will enable visitors to immerse themselves in the natural splendour of the Himalayan peaks and rivers, explore their chosen destinations, and return to their starting point after savoring the destination's charm.

The Uttarakhand Tourism is dedicated to offering secure and exceptional ways to showcase the magnificence of this destination to visitors. The latest gyrocopters have been acquired from Germany for this purpose. Skilled pilots from Germany will oversee the flights initially. Efforts are underway to establish specialized airstrips at different tourist locations through collaboration between the Civil Aviation Department and district officials.

This will serve as a link connecting tourists to the hidden and distant locations in Uttarakhand. It will offer a one-of-a-kind chance to discover the unexplored areas of the state by embarking on an exhilarating gyrocopter ride.

## Transforming Tourism Landscape in Uttarakhand

**The Beatles Ashram**, also called **Chaurasi Kutya**, was established in Rishikesh by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to teach yoga and meditation

**T**he Beatles Ashram, also known as Chaurasi Kutya (84 Kutya), served as the epicenter for Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's global meditation movement. Currently, the Government of Uttarakhand is spearheading a special initiative in collaboration with the Tourism Department and Forest Department to transform this place into a thriving tourist destination.

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation Technique is renowned globally. The ashram imparts in-depth understanding and through training on this method through transcendental meditation instructors and facilities. Progressing from Meditation to Awareness represents a phase in Yoga that cultivates a heightened state of alertness, enabling the yoga practitioner to levitate while seated. Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) has taken a major step by creating a vision document, master plan, and

architectural and engineering design for the ashram with the help of top design consultancy firms. The goal is to transform this location into a modern heritage site offering wellness hospitality, art, and culture. The objective is to revive the former splendor of this place in order to draw in visitors from both near and far.

The amenities at this location will not just educate visitors about the past of the original site, but also offer a rejuvenating experience to those who come here, which is renowned worldwide in Rishikesh. The redevelopment of this center will give it a fresh look, deserving of praise. Consequently, in the future, this place will captivate the interest of Maharishi's followers, international musicians' fans, and researchers from across the globe. Additionally, this center will transform into a vibrant hub of cultural and artistic events, showcasing dance, music, and various art forms from around the world.

## Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023

Under tourism policies, all possible support is provided to hospitality projects and tourism products

- This policy supports & encourages both existing and planned tourism projects
- Provides incentives to investors



Capital subsidy for guest projects	
Category of region	Maximum capital subsidy
Grade A	25% of eligible capital property
Grade B	35% of eligible capital property
Grade C	50% of eligible capital property