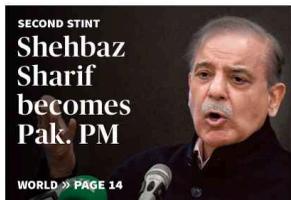


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Ministers discuss 100-day agenda for govt. after poll

Council of Ministers, at its last meeting, brainstorms a vision document for 'Viksit Bharat 2047', and a detailed action plan for next five years; PM exudes confidence over NDA returning to power

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

Seeking to send a message of confidence that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would return to power, the Union Council of Ministers, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at its last meeting, on Sunday, deliberated over a 100-day agenda for quick implementation after the formation of the new government in May.

At the meeting, the Prime Minister reportedly told his colleagues: "Go and win. We will meet again soon."

According to sources in the government, the Council also brainstormed the vision document for "Viksit Bharat 2047" (Developed



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the meeting of the Union Council of Ministers on Sunday. ANI

India 2047") and a detailed action plan for the next five years.

"The road map for Viksit Bharat is a result of more than two years of intensive preparation. It takes a 'whole of government' approach involving all Ministries, and wide-

ranging consultations with State governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations, and the mobilisation of the youth for seeking their ideas, suggestions and inputs. More than 2,700 meetings, workshops, and seminars were

held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20 lakh youth were received," a source said.

"Its goals include the areas of economic growth, sustainable development goals, ease of living, ease of doing business, infrastructure, and social welfare," the source added.

Mr. Modi had earlier asked his ministerial colleagues to hold extensive consultations and, based on the inputs, prepare a plan of action for the first 100 days of the new government, to be taken up at the last meeting of the Council of Ministers.

The Niti Aayog was also involved in giving final touches to the draft plan of action.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Seizure of cargo by India unjustified: Pak.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Pakistan has condemned India's "high-handedness" over the seizure of dual-use items bound for Karachi from China, saying that the "specifications of the equipment clearly indicate its purely commercial use".

The Hindu reported on Saturday that two advanced computer numerical control machines were seized by Customs authorities at Mumbai Port on January 23.

The spokesperson for Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement late on Saturday, said this "disruption of free trade underscores the dangers inherent in the arbitrary assumption of policing roles by states with dubious credentials".

"This is a simple case of import of a commercial lathe machine by a Karachi-based commercial entity which supplies parts to



the automobile industry in Pakistan... The transaction was being conducted through transparent banking channels with all the relevant documentation," the spokesperson said, adding that relevant private entities were pursuing the matter against "this unjustified seizure".

Termining reports on this as reflective of Indian media's "habitual misrepresentation of facts", the spokesperson added, "Such acts highlight the growing impunity of certain states in violating international norms and taking arbitrary measures in violation of international law".

IN BRIEF

BJP's Asansol candidate opts out of LS poll
KOLKATA
A day after the BJP nominated Pawan Singh as its candidate from the Asansol seat in West Bengal, the Bhojpur actor and singer withdrew from contesting the Lok Sabha poll on Sunday. There was outrage over his songs that allegedly targeted women. » Page 11

ED examines bank accounts linked to opioid smuggling
NEW DELHI
The ED has examined nearly 150 bank accounts linked to an international syndicate, which allegedly supplied opioid drugs in huge quantities to its contacts overseas. The agency is investigating the money laundering case based on an FIR registered by the Mumbai police. » Page 12

CBI probe sought into death of Kerala student
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM
Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan has written to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan demanding an investigation by the CBI into the death of Sidharthan J.S., a second-year student of the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences at Pookode in Wayanad district. » Page 3

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Calcutta HC judge to resign tomorrow, hints at joining politics ahead of LS poll

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Calcutta High Court judge Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who has given several orders directing the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe recruitment scams in West Bengal, said on Sunday that he would be resigning as a judge and hinted at taking a plunge into politics ahead of the Lok Sabha election.

Speaking to Bengali TV news channel ABP Ananda, the judge said he would step down on Tuesday. He



Abhijit Gangopadhyay

thanked the ruling Trinamool Congress and said it had challenged him to come and face them politically. He has often targeted leaders of the party, including its general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

The announcement triggered strong reactions in political circles. Opposition parties such as the BJP, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Congress welcomed him to join their parties. Opposition leaders said a person with the integrity and stature of the judge would bring something good to the State and the country.

Justice Gangopadhyay, who became a permanent judge in 2019 and on 14 instances directed a CBI probe into allegations of corruption in the school

and municipal job scams, had become a household name in the State. Job seekers protesting against the government have hailed his interventions.

The Trinamool leadership has often targeted the judge and described his interventions as "politically motivated". "It is good if such people join politics. Whichever party you join, there will be allegations of corruption and other things. Will you be able to accept those?" Trinamool leader Kunal Ghosh said in a post on X.

Legislators were upset over action against mining mafia: Sukhu

Sandeep Phukan
Vikas Vasudeva
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Some MLAs were upset with the government over the crackdown on "mining and stone crushing" mafia in the State, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu said on Sunday.

In an exclusive interview with *The Hindu*, Mr. Sukhu said the embarrassing loss for the party in the Rajya Sabha elections happened because of his "wrong assessment".

He alleged that there was a conspiracy by the BJP and also within the Congress party.

Mr. Sukhu asserted that now no one would leave the party and everyone was committed to the Congress ideology.

"People of Himachal Pradesh have elected us for



Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu

five years and I am working towards fulfilling our commitment to the people of the State. Some people, who have vested interest may be troubled with the crackdown on corruption by my government but I will continue my work," he said.

Expressing confidence that the Congress government in the State will complete its full term, he said the party was preparing for the Lok Sabha elections.

FULL INTERVIEW
» PAGE 11

Four terror suspects under scanner for Bengaluru cafe blast

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Bengaluru City Police are probing the networks of at least four terror suspects from Karnataka in connection with the recent Rameshwaram Cafe blast, informed sources said. At least two of them are believed to be based abroad, while another, known just by his code name "Colonel", is yet to be identified.

Owing to the similarities between the explosion at the restaurant and the cooker bomb blast in Mangaluru on November 19, 2022, the police are now probing the networks of the absconding accused in the Mangaluru case - Abdul Mateen Taha, 30; Musabir Hussain; and 'Colonel'. The authorities have found similarities in the assembling of the explosives,

the detonators, the timers, and the mechanism used to explode the bombs.

The fourth suspect, Junaid, belonged to another alleged terror module that the city police busted in July 2023. He had gone to Dubai in 2021. The police had arrested Junaid's associates and recovered grenades, country-made pistols, and walkie-talkies rigged to work as detonators, allegedly supplied by him to carry out terror acts.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10
POLITICAL SLUGFEST
» PAGE 4

Rape of Spanish tourist: 4 more identified

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

The Jharkhand police have identified four more accused in the gang rape of a Spanish woman tourist in Dumka district of the State on Friday night.

The three persons arrested in the case on Saturday were produced before a Judicial Magistrate Court on Sunday. All of them

were remanded in judicial custody. The police are also trying to give compensation to the woman.

DETAILS
» PAGE 3

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IN BRIEF

L-G nod to policy for allotment of land among departments

Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena has approved a draft uniform policy for inter-departmental allotment of land in the Capital, Raj Niwas officials said on Sunday. Till now, there was no uniform guideline to deal with the issue, leading to delays extending up to years in the execution of critical projects, an official added. "The policy, inter alia, deals with the rates at which land shall be allotted, depending on the nature of allotment. If the allotment is for public utility, it would be free of cost," the official explained.

Iron grille at Noida mall falls; two men killed on the spot

Two men died on Sunday after an iron grille fell on them inside a shopping mall in Noida Extension, the police said. The victims were walking towards an escalator on the ground floor of Galaxy Blue Sapphire mall when the iron structure fell on them from the fifth floor, leaving them dead on the spot. Additional DCP (Central Noida) Hridesh Katheriya said. Both the victims, aged around 35, were residents of the Vijay Nagar area in adjoining Ghaziabad district, Mr. Katheriya said.

Mother, son die as motorbike rams into road divider

A woman and her son were killed after the motorcycle they were riding on rammed into a divider in south-east Delhi's Sarai Kale Khan, the police said on Sunday, adding that the deceased have been identified as Shanti Devi and Rahul. Both were residents of Faridabad in Haryana. Information regarding the accident was received by the police on late Saturday night, said an officer, adding that police teams rushed to the spot and took the injured persons to LNJ Hospital, where they succumbed to their injuries.

Bansuri defended anti-India forces in courts, cancel her candidature: Atishi to BJP

Delhi Minister says Sushma Swaraj's daughter represented wrongdoers as lawyer; BJP's New Delhi candidate too questions AAP's choice, claiming Bharti was 'beaten up' by his own party workers

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Sunday slammed the BJP for fielding Bansuri Swaraj from the New Delhi constituency for the Lok Sabha poll, claiming that she as a lawyer defended "anti-India forces" in the country's courts.

Delhi Minister and senior AAP leader Atishi also said the BJP should withdraw her candidature for her acts throughout her legal career.

The BJP nominee hit back at the ruling AAP in the Capital, questioning its choice for the constituency. AAP has fielded Sonmath Bharti, who Ms. Swaraj said was "beaten up by the AAP cadre" in Rajendra Nagar on Saturday.

"They have named a candidate who is not liked by his own party members. They can level allegations against us but people will give them a reply in the election," she said.

Ms. Swaraj, a lawyer and the daughter of former Union Minister Sushma Swaraj, will be making her electoral debut this general election, replacing sitting MP and Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi. Ms. Swaraj, 40, is the youngest of the five candidates announced by the party.



Delhi Minister Atishi addressing the media along with AAP's Lok Sabha candidate Sonmath Bharti. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Supreme Court in a case linked to his passport. He fled with his passport before the court order came and has not returned since then. Not only that, he had also thanked Ms. Swaraj via a post on X for fighting his case," she said.

The fugitive businessman's passport was revoked by the authorities following allegations of money laundering, tax evasion and corporate corruption.

The Delhi Minister said Ms. Swaraj also defended the Central government when women were

stripped and paraded naked in violence-hit Manipur last year.

She said the BJP leader also stood for the BJP candidate in the Chandigarh mayoral poll, which was dubbed as a murder of democracy by the Supreme Court.

"Today, she will go to people and ask for votes from women. She should apologise to the country for those actions," Ms. Atishi said.

The Minister said either the BJP should change its candidate or it will reveal to the country its "anti-national, anti-women and anti-democracy" face.

He also slammed the BJP for replacing its sitting MPs every election, alleging the party fields those candidates who never work for people.

"The BJP has been doing this from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi [MCD] to the Lok Sabha elections. Its blueprint can be seen in the list of BJP candidates released on Saturday. Four out of seven Delhi MPs have been replaced," she said.

Denied ticket for LS poll, Harsh Vardhan quits active politics

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Sitting Chandni Chowk MP Harsh Vardhan quit active politics on Sunday, a day after the BJP chose a fresh face as its candidate over him for the upcoming Lok Sabha poll.

An ENT doctor by profession, the leader in a long post on X said he will return to his clinic after "over 30 years of a glorious electoral career".

"...I won all five Assembly and two parliamentary elections that I fought with exemplary margins, and held a multitude of prestigious positions in the party and the governments at the State and Centre. I finally bow out to return to my roots," he added.

The BJP on Saturday announced candidates for five out of Delhi's seven parliamentary constituencies as part of its list of 195 names across 16 States and two Union Territories.

It retained only Manoj Tiwari from North East Delhi seat while dropping its four of the sitting MPs, including Mr. Vardhan. In the upcoming election, Praveen Khandelwal will be contesting from the Chandni Chowk.

In 2014, Mr. Vardhan had defeated the then Congress leader Kapil Sibal to



Former Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan. FILE PHOTO

win the Chandni Chowk seat while in the 2019 poll, he defeated Jai Prakash Agarwal of the Congress.

The former Union Health Minister said service to mankind was his motto.

"A swamyasewak at heart, I have always been an ardent admirer of Deendayal Upadhyay's Aatmdaya philosophy of striving to serve the last man in the queue," he said.

Mr. Vardhan said the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS) could convince him to join politics only because politics for him was an opportunity to fight against poverty, disease and ignorance.

"Without remorse, I must say that it has been a marvellous innings during which my passion to serve the common man was quenched," he said.

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Delhi govt. budget today; likely to be based on concept of 'Ram Rajya'

Press Trust of India NEW DELHI

The Delhi government's budget for 2024-25, which will be presented in the Assembly on Monday, is likely to be based on the concept of "Ram Rajya", according to sources in the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

Delhi Finance Minister Atishi will present her first budget after being inducted into the Delhi Cabinet in March last year. "This will be the 10th budget of the AAP government. The budget is likely to have provisions for every section of society, in accordance with the principles of Ram Rajya, in the election year," a source said.

The Lok Sabha election is likely to be held in April-May this year. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has often spoken about the concept of "Ram Rajya". In his Republic Day speech, he had said the AAP government has adopted 10 principles of "Ram Rajya" and is providing quality education, healthcare services, free electricity and water to people, and ensuring women safety in the national capital.

CM Arvind Kejriwal has often spoken about the concept, saying his government is providing quality education, healthcare, and free power

The Delhi government is likely to allocate 1,000 crore for various initiatives in unauthorised colonies. The national capital has nearly 1,800 unauthorised colonies, accommodating 30% of the city's population.

Illegal colonies in focus The government is likely to strengthen the road network in these unauthorised colonies and augment the water-supply pipelines and sewer networks.

A total of 1,031 unauthorised colonies in the city are already connected to the sewer network, with a total installation of 4,000-plus kilometres of sewer lines, officials have claimed. Currently, around 1,400 unauthorised colonies in the Capital have water and sewer lines, drains and a network of 5,000-plus kilometres of road, an official said.

3 killed, 4 hurt as car collides with truck in Badarpur

The Hindu Bureau NEW DELHI

Three men were killed and four others injured after their car hit a divider and then collided with a moving truck on the Badarpur flyover in south-east Delhi, the police said on Sunday.

The accident took place at 12.48 a.m. on Sunday when the victims were returning from a marriage function in Haryana's Faridabad.

The car driver lost control over the vehicle, which hit the divider, tumbled over to the opposite carriage-way and then collided with the truck. All seven were shifted to the AIIMS Trauma Centre, where three of them died.

Those killed in the accident were identified as Raj, 21, Sanju, 38, and Dinesh, 22—all residents of Okhla.

A case has been registered against unknown persons under IPC sections including 279 (rash driving) and 304-A (causing death by negligence).

Economic Survey: men account for only 3% of sterilisation operations in city

Alisha Dutta NEW DELHI

Only little over 3% of the sterilisation procedures were performed on men in the national capital in 2022-23, according to the Delhi government's Economic Survey released recently. While only 375 men opted for a vasectomy in 2022-23, over 30 times that number—11,037 women—underwent sterilisation in that financial year.

The trend has remained similar for the past many years, according to the data of previous Economic Surveys. In 2021-22, 314 men opted for the procedure against 11,341 women. Similarly, in 2020-21, 78 vasectomies were performed on men compared with 7,806

performed on women. The data showed that in 2019-20, 740 men opted for the procedure against 17,652 women.

Dr. M. Sivakami, a professor at the School of Health System Studies at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, told The Hindu that the glaring disparity is "not surprising".

'Entire burden on women'

"Past family planning policies have historically targeted women and conveniently kept men out of the conversation. There is a lot of silence surrounding the subject of male contraception. Most men and even some women believe that men will experience a lower sex drive if they undergo a vasectomy," she said.

Dr. Rinku Sengupta, a gynaecologist, added that the lack of conversation about male contraception forces women to undergo the procedure.

"Most women, in order to avoid unplanned pregnancies, prefer to get sterilised instead of trying to convince their male partners to undergo the much simpler process of getting a vasectomy," she said.

Tubal ligation is a far more intrusive and complicated process as compared to a vasectomy. Dr. Sengupta added. "A vasectomy involves a small procedure in the scrotal region, while to sterilise women, we have to perform an incision in the abdominal area, which may cause chronic pain in the pelvis and irregular periods," she said.



The Opposition in the State has slammed the government for attempting to hide the truth behind Siddharthan's death.

CBI probe sought into death of Kerala veterinary student

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan has written to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan demanding an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into the death of Siddharthan J.S., a second-year student of the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences at Pookode in Wayanad district. Mr. Satheesan said that brutality of the crime had shocked Kerala's conscience and created fear and concern among parents.

In the letter, he said that Siddharthan's parents had alleged that he was stripped naked, subjected to a mob trial for days, and hanged to death. It was a matter of serious concern that the faculty, including the Dean, were complicit

in the brutality. Even as Siddharthan's parents had reiterated that campus leaders of the Students Federation of India were responsible for his death, the investigating officer claimed that there was no political motive to the incident, he said.

"Communist Party of India (Marxist) leaders in the district are trying to protect the accused by threatening the investigating officers. The post-mortem examination report is proof of the brutal beating and brutality that Siddharthan faced. Despite evidence of brutal torture on Siddharthan's body, there was a serious lapse in the police investigation," said Mr. Satheesan, adding that the probe should be handed over to the CBI to uncover the conspiracy behind the student's death.

Gang rape of Spanish tourist: four more accused identified

Jharkhand Police says all of them will be arrested soon; 3 arrested men sent to judicial custody; NCW says State gov't. 'insensitive towards women, calls for strict action against perpetrators

Amit Bhelekar
PATNA

Three persons arrested in the gang rape of a Spanish woman were produced before a Judicial Magistrate Court on Sunday. Later, all three were sent to jail.

"The remaining four criminals have been identified and we have got their details. Soon, they will be arrested. We are also trying to give compensation to the woman. According to the rules, there is compensation of ₹5 lakh to ₹10 lakh, but we will ensure that she gets the maximum compensation. We also appeal to the court for a speedy trial," Dumka Superintendent of Police Pitambar Singh Kherwar said on Sunday evening.

Forensic and CID teams from Ranchi inspected the spot of the assault and collected evidence on Sunday. The couple's statements have been recorded under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

The woman was gang-raped in Dumka district of Jharkhand on Friday night under Hansdaha Police Station limits, when she was



Forensic teams at the spot of the incident in Kurmahat village in Dumka; (right) three accused in the case being produced before the court on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT/IANI

travelling to Nepal from West Bengal. The woman and her husband were on a tour of India by motorcycle, and the incident took place when they were resting in a tent in a deserted area in Kurmahat village. Seven men passing through the area stopped at the tent, assaulted the couple and gang-raped the 28-year-old woman. They also beat up the couple and stole ₹10,000.

'Deteriorating law'

Manita Kumari, member of the National Women for Commission (NCW), met

the victim. She termed the incident unfortunate and blamed the State government for the deteriorating law and order in the State.

"I met the couple at the district guest house and saw scratches on their faces. She told me that they were beaten up with a helmet and seven people gang-raped her. I want to know why the police did not provide any security to them, considering they were foreigners. When they were passing through Dumka, what was the vigilance, government and police team doing? We

[NCW] have taken up this case suo motu and we will not tolerate this. We have given an ultimatum that the remaining four [accused] should be arrested as soon as possible. This government is insensitive towards women. Strict action should be taken against the accused," Ms. Kumari said in Dumka.

On Saturday, the Opposition BJP had slammed the ruling government, calling the incident an utter failure of law in the State. They also demanded the removal of the Dumka SP.

Uddhav mocks BJP for 'clean chit' to Kripashankar Singh

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Mocking the first list of 195 candidates released by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the Lok Sabha election, the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) on Sunday said the list comprised leaders like Kripashankar Singh, a former Congressman who served as a Maharashtra Minister, whom the BJP had threatened to put in prison over graft charges.

Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray expressed astonishment at the exclusion of BJP stalwarts like Union Minister for Road Transport Nitin Gadkari from the first list, while those like Mr. Singh made the cut.

Alluding to the list, Mr. Thackeray recalled his past collaboration with Mr. Gadkari, who had expedited the completion of the Mumbai-Pune Expressway.

Sena (UBT) spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut questioned whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vaunted "guarantees" only amounted to either absorbing into the BJP, or giving tickets, to leaders accused of corrup-



Uddhav Thackeray. FILE PHOTO

tion from the Congress and other parties.

"Today, Kripashankar Singh has been given a ticket from Jaunpur, near Varanasi. Earlier, Ashok Chavan, facing allegations in the Adarsh scam, was made a Rajya Sabha MP by the BJP as soon as he joined the party. The case against [Deputy Chief Minister] Ajit Pawar pertaining to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank scam, allegedly totalling ₹40,000 crore, has now been closed. Once upon a time, [State BJP leader] Devendra Fadnis had said he would throw all these leaders in jail. So, is this Modi's guarantee? That Kripashankar gets a ticket, Ajit Pawar gets a clean chit, and Ashok Chavan is given a Rajya Sabha berth?" Mr. Raut said.

Delhi Timings

MONDAY, MAR. 04

- RISE 06:43 SET 18:23
- RISE 01:36 SET 11:46

TUESDAY, MAR. 05

- RISE 06:42 SET 18:24
- RISE 02:38 SET 12:43

WEDNESDAY, MAR. 06

- RISE 06:41 SET 18:25
- RISE 03:37 SET 13:49

Delhi Weather max min

Delhi City 26 14

Safdarjung 26 14

Palam 25 14

Delhi Palam Today
25°C Morning will be very cool with mist and haze. Day will be comfortable. Short spell of light rain and thundershower with gusty winds may occur.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
26°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be very cool with mist and haze. Day will be comfortable. Night will be cool.

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बिक्रीची दिनांक :- ०४/०३/२०२४ ते १८/०३/२०२४ दुपारी २.३० वजे

अ. क्र.	निविदा क्र.	खात्याचे नाव	कामाचे नाव	निविदा वॉल्यूम किंमत रु.	अंदाजित पूर्णगणित खर्च रु.	बयाणा रक्कम रु.	कामाची मुदत	निविदा विषयक जाहिरात वार्षिके नाव व दुसऱ्या क्रमांकाचे
१	PMC/VEHICLE/2023/217	मोटर वाहन विभाग	१५ व्हा वॉल्यूम आयोग अंतर्गत पुणे महानगरपालिकेला ग्राम झालेल्या निविदापुढे पुणे शहरातील घटककारा संकेत व बाह्यक कर्मकांतीना १७,८७९/-, ७,८८,२७,८३०/-, ३,९४,९३,९४/-	१७,८७९/-	७,८८,२७,८३०/-	३,९४,९३,९४/-	१० दिवस	श्रीमती भाग्यश्री तेलंग ७७७७७७२९१८

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जाहिरात क्र. ३/१९५५, दि.०१/०२/२०२४

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CORRIDGNUM

Subject: Extension of tender submission end date for e-NIT no. 01 of GMCK 2024 published vide no. GMCK/Estt.-III/2023-24/975-978 dated 7th of February, 2024 regarding the canteen services at Associated Hospital, Govt. Medical College, Kathua (J&K)

It is to inform to all prospective bidders that the last date and time for the bid submission for the e-tender invited for the above-mentioned work has been extended as per detail given below:-bid evaluation is completed

S.No.	Bid Submission last date and time	Extended Bid Submission last date and time
1	On 28.02.2024 at 04:00 PM	On 11.03.2024 at 04:00 PM

The opening of the bid will be on dated 14.03.2024 at 11:00 AM. All other terms and conditions of the said tender document will remain unchanged.

Sd/-
(Dr. Surinder K Atri)
Principal,
Government Medical College, Kathua.

DIP/J-15621/23

Office of the Executive Engineer, Sub Transmission Division-II, Jammu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (JPDC), Jammu Power Development Department
(e-mail: xenstd2@gmail.com)

NOTICE INVITING TENDER
e- NIT No: STD-II/Tenders/2024-25/Manpower/02 dated: 29.02.2024

INVITATION:-

For and on behalf of the Lieutenant Governor of the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, the Executive Engineer, Sub Transmission Division-II, JPDC, Jammu, hereinafter referred as 'Employer', invites online e-bids from Contractors/Agencies registered as Class 'A' Electrical Contractor with the Chief Electrical Inspector, Power Development Department, J&K Govt. or any other Govt. registering authority, for:

"Providing of Manpower for Operation of 66-33/11 KV Sub Stations and 66-33 KV lines in the Districts of Jammu and Samba for the FY 2024-25"

1. Bidders are advised to study the Bidding Document carefully. Submission of e-Bid against this SBD shall be deemed to have been done after careful/conscious study and examination of the procedures, terms and conditions of the Standard Bidding Document with full understanding of its implications.

1a. The tender document is available at website http://ktenders.gov.in. Interested Bidders may view, download the e-Bid document, seek clarification, if any, and submit their e-Bid online up to the date and time mentioned in the table below:

A	Tender Document Sale/Download Start Date	29.02.2024; 05:00 PM
B <th>Tender Document Sale/Download End Date</th> <td>20.03.2024; 04:00 PM</td>	Tender Document Sale/Download End Date	20.03.2024; 04:00 PM
C <th>e-Bid submission (start) date & time</th> <td>29.02.2024; 05:00 PM</td>	e-Bid submission (start) date & time	29.02.2024; 05:00 PM
D <th>e-Bid submission (end) date & time</th> <td>20.03.2024; 04:00 PM</td>	e-Bid submission (end) date & time	20.03.2024; 04:00 PM
E <th>Submission of Hard Copy of Tender Fee</th> <td>22.03.2024; 02:00 PM</td>	Submission of Hard Copy of Tender Fee	22.03.2024; 02:00 PM
F <th>Commercial and Technical Bid opening</th> <td>22.03.2024; 04:00 PM</td>	Commercial and Technical Bid opening	22.03.2024; 04:00 PM
G <th>Online financial e-Bid opening date & time (Only of the technically qualified Bidders)</th> <td>Will be communicated to the Technically Qualifying Bidders.</td>	Online financial e-Bid opening date & time (Only of the technically qualified Bidders)	Will be communicated to the Technically Qualifying Bidders.
H <th>Venue -of opening of techno-commercial Bids</th> <td>Soft Copy Electronically & Hard copy in the Office of the Executive Engineer, Sub Transmission Division-II, JPDC, Jammu.</td>	Venue -of opening of techno-commercial Bids	Soft Copy Electronically & Hard copy in the Office of the Executive Engineer, Sub Transmission Division-II, JPDC, Jammu.
I <th>Tender Value</th> <td>Rs. 233.37 lacs</td>	Tender Value	Rs. 233.37 lacs
J <th>Cost of e-Bid document</th> <td>Rs. 3000.00 (Non - Refundable)</td>	Cost of e-Bid document	Rs. 3000.00 (Non - Refundable)
K <th>Earnest Money Deposit</th> <td>Rs. 4.67 lacs</td>	Earnest Money Deposit	Rs. 4.67 lacs
L <th>Status of Administrative Approval</th> <td>Accorded</td>	Status of Administrative Approval	Accorded
M <th>Status of Technical Sanction /Techno Economic clearance</th> <td>Accorded</td>	Status of Technical Sanction /Techno Economic clearance	Accorded
N <th>Status of Funds</th> <td>Budgeted</td>	Status of Funds	Budgeted

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Ad- Rationya post-Saji, Dist-Pravara, Pin code-432306. If any one has objection the registration of GS GUNDEKARAN, B.A.B.L., RVBASKARAN, B.A.B.L., Advocates, No.126, R.C.M. Complex, Arcot Road, Cheyyar -694 401, Thiruvananthai District, Tamil Nadu.

INBRIEF



Hopeful of becoming Minister in U.P. by this week: Rajbhar

Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party chief Om Prakash Rajbhar on Sunday expressed the hope of becoming a Minister in the Uttar Pradesh government this week, and also claimed victory of BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidates on all the 80 seats of Uttar Pradesh in the coming Lok Sabha poll. Since Mr. Rajbhar, who was part of the Samajwadi Party alliance in the 2022 Assembly election in U.P., returned to the NDA a few months ago, there is constant speculation about his becoming a Minister in the Yogi government. **PH**

Delhi HC to hear wrestlers' plea against WFI polls today

The Delhi High Court on Monday will hear a petition by wrestlers Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and her husband Satyawart Kadian seeking to set aside and declare as illegal the elections held by the Wrestling Federation of India. The petition by the wrestlers, who were at the forefront of last year's protest demanding the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for alleged sexual harassment of women grapplers, is listed for hearing before Justice Sachin Datta. The plea contended that the WFI polls were in blatant violation of sports code and sought a direction to the federation to "cease and desist" from undertaking any activity pertaining to the sport. **PH**

Kerala: newcomer's spat with key ally catches BJP off balance

Hiran Unnikrishnan
PATHANAMTHITTA

Veteran politician P.C. George, a high-profile newcomer to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kerala, appears to have thrown the party's State unit off balance by accusing the Bharath Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), a key backward class ally, of scuttling his chances of contesting from the Pathanamthitta Lok Sabha constituency. Known for his combative approach to politics, Mr. George alleged that BDJS leader Tushar Vellappally and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam leader Vellappally Natesan had plotted with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to prejudice the BJP leadership against him.

The BDJS has taken strong exception to his statement, accusing the veteran of being a conspirator and harbouring a bigoted view of the Ezhava community, a crucial electoral bloc, and arguably, the numerically largest Hindu caste group in the State. The BJP is reportedly worried about the feud within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) impacting the party's attempt to sway backward class and Christian votes in its favour, chiefly in central and south Kerala. Mr. Vellappally has rushed to New Delhi to meet BJP president J.P. Nadda to complain about Mr. George, who he has accused of "insulting the SNDP Yogam, BDJS, and the Ezhava community as a whole".

Rameshwaram Cafe blast triggers political slugfest between BJP, Congress

Is it not failure of NIA, IB, and RAW, asks Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, says government has taken the incident seriously and the investigation has been handed over to the Special Crime Branch

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU/SHIVAMOGGA

The recent blast at Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru triggered a political slugfest between the BJP and the Congress on Sunday, with the Opposition party accusing the Congress-led Karnataka government of sympathising with anti-social elements and terror organisations. Responding sharply, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar alleged that the BJP was tarnishing the image of the State as well as of its capital, Bengaluru, by trying to politicise the incident.

Maintaining that the Congress has no moral right to continue in power, Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok said, "The Congress is focusing on the Lok Sabha election and indulging in vote bank politics. It is continuing with its anti-people policies. We have petitioned the Governor to dismiss the government." Mr. Ashok said it was a matter of concern to see



Taking stock: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah during a visit to the blast site on Saturday. He said the Opposition should refrain from politicising the issue. FILE PHOTO

the manner in which the Congress government was behaving after the "pro-Pakistan" slogan shouting in the Assembly and the Rameshwaram Cafe blast. "The Congress is indulging in minority appeasement and displaying indifference instead of being serious towards such anti-national activities that has shocked the people of the State." The BJP leader said the

government for political reasons is not ready to accept that it was a blast though the police have acknowledged that it was an act of terror. "The government looks dead. It is better for them to resign and go," Mr. Ashok said. Taking exception to comments by the BJP, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wondered if the incident was not the failure

of the Central agencies like the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau (IB), and Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). He said the government has taken the incident seriously and the probe has been handed over to the Special Crime Branch.

"Don't do politics" "Nobody should do politics over the incident. Who was in power when a blast occurred in Mangaluru? Who was in power when there was a blast near the BJP office in Malleshwaram? There were four such blasts during the BJP rule," Siddaramaiah told media persons in Chikkamagaluru. "Is it not failure of NIA, IB, RAW?" he said, adding, "Under whose control are these agencies?"

Asked if the probe would be handed over to the NIA, the Chief Minister said the State government had handed over the case to the Crime Branch. "If handing over to the NIA is necessary, we will examine the issue," he said.

'U.P. Yadavs have broken chains of vote bank politics'

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav said in Lucknow on Sunday that the Yadav community had "freed itself from the contractual system of vote bank politics practiced by one particular family" in Uttar Pradesh and is now fully behind the development vision of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.



M.P. CM Mohan Yadav in Lucknow on Sunday. **PH**

"It was believed that only one family was the contractor for the society and its vote, but I am happy that it has left that contractor system. Now the community has its own identity," said Mr. Yadav, hinting at the Samajwadi Party (SP) led by Akhilesh Yadav. He was speaking at the Yadav Mahakumbh organised by a Yadav social organisation.

The Madhya Pradesh CM who is making his second trip to U.P. within a month asked the Yadav community to join the BJP. He said the party gives due representation to every section of society. "I am among you today to discuss a few things. We have a great opportunity to take

the path of development under the leadership of the Prime Minister. The BJP made someone from a poor family, someone from the Yadav family, the Chief Minister. There is no dearth of opportunities for anyone in the BJP," said the MP CM. He said many are bothered by his visits to U.P., once again hinting at Akhilesh Yadav.

Influential group

"Even if someone has problems, I will come if you call," he said. The Yadav community is an influential social group in U.P. constituting roughly seven percent of the state population and has a sizeable presence in at least 15 parliamentary seats.

JJP sets up panel to hold talks on alliance with BJP in Haryana

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

The Jannayak Janta Party (JJP) on Sunday set up a coordination committee to hold discussions on the party's possible alliance with the BJP in Haryana for the upcoming Lok Sabha poll within a week.

The decision to form the panel, taken at the party's executive meeting in Karnal, came in the wake of the BJP State poll committee's recommendation to go solo in the poll. It also formed committees to decide on the names of the candidates and formulate the campaign strategy. Keeping an eye on the Jat and scheduled caste

votes, the JJP also reiterated its demand for Bharat Ratna for late Deputy Prime Minister Chaudhary Devi Lal and Bahujan Samaj Party founder Kanshi Ram. Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala, coming out of the meeting, said that the party would write to the Union government over its demand.

Addressing the meeting, JJP national chief Ajay Singh Chautala said that guided by the ideology of Chaudhary Devi Lal the party was now stronger. He said that due to COVID-19, the party was unable to resolve some public issues but was still able to fulfil a lot of the poll promises.

Lucknow road caves in, Oppn. questions BJP's 'vikas' model

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

A massive sinkhole, resembling a huge crater, appeared on a road in Lucknow's Vikas Nagar area on Sunday after a portion on the stretch caved in following a brief spell of heavy rain.

In a purported video of the road cave-in, a red car could be seen stuck on the edge of the around 25-foot-wide and 20-foot-deep pothole, drawing widespread criticism on social media. The car was later removed by the Uttar Pradesh police and Lucknow Municipal Corporation officials.

The pothole led to the diversion of traffic as the road runs through an area, which is home to close to



The around 25-foot-wide and 20-foot-deep pothole drew widespread criticism on social media. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

40,000 people. A Samajwadi Party post on X (formerly Twitter) targeted the government, saying "vikas" (development) exists only on paper. "The public will give a befitting reply to the BJP with votes," the party said posting a picture of the site.

An Uttar Pradesh government statement said the Public Works Department (PWD) took immediate cognisance of the incident and carried out an inspection. It said the leakage in the Jal Nigam sewer line underneath the road damaged its base, leading to the road cave-in.

In Rajasthan's Kota, teachers get the stick as Education Minister goes on a suspension spree

SPOTLIGHT

Shishu Mishra
KOTA

On February 26, at 10 a.m., a group of students of Khajuri Odpu government school in Rajasthan's Kota started a 17-km march towards the office of the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM). It was the second time since February 21 that the students were protesting, demanding the reinstatement of three Muslim teachers — Mirza Mujahid, 42, Firoz Khan, 52, and Shabana, 28.

On February 21, the teachers were suspended and attached to the Education Department's office in Bikaner on the orders of School Education Minister Madan Dilawar after an umbrella organisation of various right-wing groups — Sarva Hindu Samaj — and people from the Hindu community submitted a written complaint to the department accusing the

teachers of religious conversion and propagating 'love jihad', a term coined by right-wing outfits for interfaith couples, at the school. When the students finally arrived at his office, SDM Krishna Kumar Rajawat met them, accepted their memorandum, and asked his driver to drop them back to school. "They are young children. They don't understand the harsh realities of the world," the SDM said.

At Khajuri village, residents say the allegations against the teachers surfaced after a girl from the village, Muskan Gaur, 19, fled with a boy, also from Khajuri, named Lucky Ali, 22, on February 5. "Some anti-social elements, who are always on the lookout to create social unrest, were trying to find a way to give this case a communal colour. Muskan's admission form served the purpose," said a teacher of the school, who in her statement to the



Speaking out: School children interacting with sub-divisional magistrate Krishna Kumar Rajawat at his office; (right) placards made by the students of Khajuri Odpu government school in Kota, demanding the reinstatement of three Muslim teachers. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Education Department, maintained that she had not seen any of the three teachers propagating religious conversion.

Mr. Khan, who has taught in the school for five years, said he knows why action was taken against him and two of his colleagues. "Our fault is that we are Muslims."

"Strict action" The action against the three teachers is not the only case in which the Edu-

cation Minister vowed to take "strict action". Akleema Parveen, 38, who teaches Social Science at a government school in Kishanganj block of Baran district, was relieved of her duties on February 23 and attached to the Education Department's office 550 km away in Bikaner without being given any reason.

"She used to offer namaz in a corner when the students went out for lunch or to play. She used to wear a burqa to the school

against which some people had raised objections," said a teacher at the school where Ms. Parveen used to teach, on condition of anonymity.

In a similar move, 40-year-old Chaman Noor, a teacher at a government higher secondary school in Pipar in rural Jodhpur, was attached to the Bikaner office after a few students in the school offered namaz wearing a hijab. Many parents objected to it and accused the teacher of bring-

ing religion into the school. At Lakdai village in Kishanganj, Hemlata Baiwa, an elementary schoolteacher, was suspended on February 23. The action came after the teacher put up the pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar, and Savitribai Phule on the stage at the school's function on January 26 and refused to place a painting of Goddess Saraswati with the three. A few days later, Mr. Dilawar said he would act against

"those who give weightage to themselves so much that they question the contribution of Goddess Saraswati". He has also promised to terminate the services of teachers who have been accused of molestation, and vowed that teachers who have disproportionately high assets will face "bulldozer action".

At a recent event, Mr. Dilawar, whose election affidavit states that he has 14 criminal cases pending at various police stations in the State, said if villagers beat up teachers who are found to be consuming tobacco in school, the police should not intervene.

While speaking to The Hindu, the Education Minister trashed allegations by Muslim and Dalit outfits. "When I take action, I don't see the caste. I will continue to act against all those who tarnish the image of the school and hamper studies," he said.

"Besides, how can people say there has been 'too much' action against teachers in the past few days? I

have barely suspended a dozen teachers in a State whose Education Department employs over six lakh people," he added.

"Baseless accusations" Mr. Khan and Mr. Mujahid have filed an appeal against their suspension in the department.

Ms. Shabana, however, has made peace with her fate and joined the office in Bikaner. Back at her home, her mother and younger sister live in fear as it is the first time Ms. Shabana has stepped so far away from home by herself.

"She had joined the school just four months ago. What did she have to do with a matter that dates back to 2019? Will they now look at all Muslims with the same lens and level the same baseless accusations against each person who follows Islam?" Mr. Mujahid said.

LINK TO FULL STORY
» <https://rh.gy/gjiu11>

National dam panel to examine Kaleshwaram project on March 6

Telangana government, alarmed by the sinking piers at the Medigadda barrage, had written to the NDSA to thoroughly probe the other barrages

B. Chandrasekhara
HYDERABAD

An expert committee set up by the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) will examine the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Project (KLIP) on March 6, Telangana Irrigation Minister N. Uttam Kumar Reddy has said.

The Minister said the State government, alarmed by the sinking of piers of the Medigadda barrage of the KLIP, had written to the NDSA to conduct a thorough probe into the other barrages, including Sundilla and Annaram barrages.

The Congress government had alleged irregularities in the KLIP, which was inaugurated by the previous BRS regime. The Medigadda barrage was shut after the sinking of piers and seepage.

Congress had alleged irregularities in the project, which was launched by the previous BRS regime

In a press release issued here on Sunday, Mr. Reddy said the NDSA had constituted a five-member committee under the chairmanship of J. Chandrasekhara Iyer, former chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC). "We welcome the visit of the expert committee, and we will cooperate with the committee in all aspects since the government is prioritising the recommendations of the NDSA," he said.

The NDSA team had already inspected the damaged Medigadda barrage as part of preliminary investi-

gation and advised releasing water. It also suggested emptying Sundilla and Annaram barrages as well.

The committee has been asked to submit its report to the NDSA within four months. The terms of reference for the expert panel include visiting the three barrages, holding discussions with stakeholders concerned for holistic appreciation of the site-related issues, and ascertaining the hydraulic, structural and geotechnical aspects of the three structures.

The panel has also been tasked to examine the project data, drawings, design memoranda, tests and site investigation reports, barrage inspection reports and other reports related to the construction, quality control and quality assurance of the barrages.

Telangana: PM to inaugurate several railway projects today

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate the electrified Ambari-Adilabad-Pimpalkhuti stretch to the nation at Adilabad in Telangana on Monday.

The project is part of the Mukhd-Pimpalkhuti electrification project sanctioned for 182 route km in 2017-18 at an estimated cost of ₹206 crore.

The 58-route km (71 track km) of Ambari-Adilabad-Pimpalkhuti section has been electrified at a cost of approximately ₹70 crore, said an official release on Sunday. This railway line section falls in the backward district of Adilabad (46.6 route km) in northern Telangana region, and parts of Nanded and Yavatmal districts in Maharashtra (11.5 route km).

Mr. Modi will also be inaugurating doubling and electrification of 22 km Sanathnagar-Moula Ali rail line along with six new station buildings as part of the MMTS (Multi Modal Transport Service) Phase-II during his visit to the capital the next day.

The new stations are at Ferozguda, Suchitra Centre, Bhudevi Nagar, Ammuguda, Neredmet and Moula Ali Housing Board stations. He will also flag off the inaugural MMTS Train Service from Ghatkesar-Lingampalli via Moula Ali-Sanathnagar, connecting the new areas in the eastern part of the city with the western part of the twin city region, the release said.

Man flees with SUV on pretext of test driving in Noida, arrested

Press Trust of India
NOIDA

The Noida Police on Sunday arrested a man for allegedly fleeing with a Mahindra Thar for a test drive of taking it for a test drive, officials said.

The incident took place

on Saturday in Sector 63, police said, adding that the vehicle has been recovered.

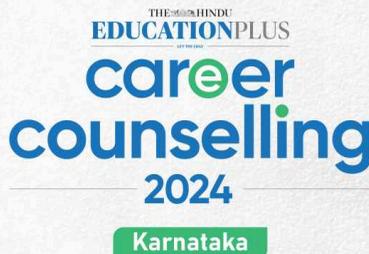
"The accused, Mohit Chawla, had taken the Mahindra Thar for a test drive on Saturday but did not return after which the plaintiff lodged a complaint

against him at the local police station," a police spokesperson said.

"The accused was arrested from Sector 63 after a probe was launched," the spokesperson said, adding that the accused was previously booked in similar cases in Delhi and Noida.

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"Education was transformative in my life"

Safeena Husain, founder of Educate Girls and winner of the WISE Prize for Education 2023, talks about how and why she helps girls to go back to school

Soma Basu
soma.basu@thehindu.co.in

Safeena Husain grew up in adverse circumstances. "Poverty, violence, abuse... my family circumstances were difficult," says the first Indian woman recipient of the WISE Prize for Education. At one point, she had to drop out of school. Her family was keen to marry off the adolescent girl. But, with the support of an aunt, Husain went on to graduate from the London School of Economics.

"Education was transformative in my life," she says. After working abroad, she returned to India in 2007 to found the non-profit organisation Educate Girls, which identifies girls between five and 14 years in rural and educationally backward areas and gets them into schools. In the last 16 years, Educate Girls has led 1.4 million girls back to school and has expanded its reach to work across Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Girls are still battling with household chores, family responsibilities, discrimination and patriarchal mindsets.

Post the pandemic, a road trip across UP showed Husain that an entire generation of girls were being robbed of education. "Marriage was a cost-effective solution during the pandemic. We wanted to create a second chance for them," she says. So the first phase of Project Pragati was launched in Rajasthan in 2021, with 300 girls between 15 and 25 years. In two years, 7,000 girls re-enrolled in schools with 61% successfully clearing the Class 10 exam in the first attempt.

In 2023, Husain won the Hindu businessline Changemaker Award in the Social Transformation Category and the WISE Prize awarded by the Qatar Foundation. Excerpts from an interview:

You have worked across four states for over a decade. What is the status of education for girls in India?

According to government figures, 66 million girls will not be attending high school and in 5% of India's villages, 40% of girls are still out of primary school. The enrollment rates have increased at the primary level but the problem has shifted to older girls, as the



What is your modus operandi?

We work in partnership with the state governments leveraging the existing education infrastructure to identify, enroll and retain out-of-school girls and improve their foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

What are Educate Girls' roadmap when it started?

There are seven lakh villages in India. I got a list of 26 red districts with a critical gender gap in education, of which nine were in Rajasthan. I started in 2007 with 50 villages in Pali district as a social experiment. Now we work in 25,000 villages across Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

What is your modus operandi?

We work in partnership with the state governments leveraging the existing education infrastructure to identify, enroll and retain out-of-school girls and improve their foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

We have a robust network of 3,000 employees and 18,000 volunteers drawn from the villages and trained in community ownership: My Village, My Problem, I Am the Solution. These gender champions do door-to-door survey, convince families and ensure girls are enrolled into the nearest government school

and also help them with remedial classes in English, Hindi and Maths.

How challenging has it been to address the issue of education disparity and social challenges?

We started our pilot phase in pre-RTE (Right to Education) days. We did not want to miss out on a single girl but access to education was difficult.

Doors were shut on our faces, as parents felt their daughters were better off learning and doing household chores in preparation for marriage rather than wasting time, energy and money at school. There are people who

still believe a goat is an asset and a girl a liability.

How did the change come about?

After RTE came into effect in 2010, people became more aligned to the thought of educating girls. Once we got that access, we could not authoritatively ask people to send girls to school because it is their right. We also gave the girls extra coaching. We had to work differently in every region.

What is the difference now?

There has been progress. The drop-out problem at the

primary level has shrunk considerably. But secondary education has new hotspots because the older girls are at risk of never completing their studies due to being over-age or married with children, or facing academic setbacks. However, compared to 15 years ago, girls are gaining confidence now and have aspirations.

Is that why you launched Project Pragati?

Yes. We found girls are vulnerable and take a lot of shame on themselves. The first casualty of any calamity that strikes the family, from illness to debt. We are helping older girls restart their lives by writing the Class 10 exam and following it up with ITI skills and training that will fetch them jobs of nurses, Anganwadi or ASHA workers,

or schools teachers. **What do you foresee for the girls who fall off the education map?**

It took us 10 years to enter homes and convince families. The mindset is changing, but very slowly. Learning has to be gender-neutral. But when you do not have the gender lens, girls get missed. If we have all the tools of their transitioning and equip our girls with education, then their transformation can be rapid.

Your work has won global recognition. What's next?

Never to lose sight of our primary objective: to enhance the access to and the quality of education for over 15 million children by 2025. To impact the lives of 10 million out-of-school girls over next 10 years under Pragati scheme.

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Facts and statistics

GDP numbers bring cheer in election year, but need more scrutiny

The latest national income data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) last week have generated a fair amount of excitement as well as bewilderment. While the markets have cheered the NSO's estimate of a robust 8.4% year-on-year growth in real gross domestic product (GDP) in the October-December quarter, some economists have been hard pressed to reconcile the sharp differences of well over a 100 basis points between the official estimates and their projections that many of them had made. The release also posits that real GDP grew by 8.2% and 8.1%, respectively, in the first and second quarters of the current fiscal, 40 and 50 basis points quicker than it had estimated earlier. Full-year real GDP growth too is now forecast at 7.6%, 30 basis points faster than the 7.3% growth it had estimated as recently as in January. A factor behind the upgrades in the current fiscal's income estimates is the NSO's revisions to the estimates for 2021-22 and 2022-23. While the revisions to 2021-22 data have resulted in that year's real GDP growth being raised by 60 basis points to 9.7%, a fallout is the consequent scaling down of 2022-23's GDP expansion to 7%, from the earlier estimate of 7.2%. Given that revisions to a previous year's data automatically alter the year-on-year pace of growth, the base effect is a crucial element that has to be factored in while gauging the import of the headline number.

In real productive sectors of the economy, third-quarter gross value added (GVA) growth slowed to 6.5%, from an upwardly revised 7.7% pace in the preceding July-September period, as output in the key rural agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishing sector contracted 0.8% year-on-year and growth momentum slowed sequentially across five of the other seven sectors that contribute to the GVA. That the GVA growth rate is a full 190 basis points slower than the GDP's 8.4% pace is primarily because net indirect taxes are estimated to have surged 32% year-on-year in the last quarter, largely as a result of subsidy payouts, including on fertilizers, being drastically lower. To that extent, the GVA growth rate presents a truer picture of the health of the economy. And even on the demand or expenditure side, the data on private consumption spending and government consumption expenditure in the third quarter reveal a lack of traction. While private spending grew by a mere 3.5% year-on-year, government consumption spending actually shrank 3.2%. With the general election set to be announced any day now, the headlines around the NSO data serve as a poll-eye talking point. But there must be a sober analysis of the real state of the economy that draws on multiple statistical sets.

Bloody Thursday

Israel's allies cannot avoid blame for the situation in Gaza

In the early hours of February 29, Palestinians gathered in Gaza City on hearing that trucks carrying food deliveries were arriving. When they rushed towards the trucks, Israeli troops opened fire as they thought the hungry Palestinians "posed a threat". Gaza's health authorities say at least 112 Palestinians were killed and over 700 injured in the subsequent stampede, which triggered global outrage and calls for an international probe. This incident is a testimony to everything that went wrong with Israel's brutal, indiscriminate attack on the defenceless Palestinians. The war, which started with Hamas's October 7 attack in Israel, has already turned much of the Gaza Strip into a pile of rubble. Over 30,000 people, most of them women and children, have been killed and 70,000 wounded by Israeli troops. More than 90% of Gaza's population of 2.4 million have been displaced. According to the UN World Food Programme, Gaza is suffering from the worst level of child malnutrition in the world and is headed towards famine. Most of the enclave's population are crammed in to the refugee camps of southern Gaza with hardly any essentials. The hospital system is on the verge of collapse. And the powerful nations are just watching as one of the deadliest man-made calamities of the 21st century is unfolding.

Israel has successfully turned Gaza into a bombed-out enclave of death, misery and hunger. But it is still far from meeting any of its objectives, which includes the "dismantling" of Hamas and the release of hostages. If international public opinion was largely in favour of Israel on October 7, today, there is a groundswell of anger against its conduct of the war. South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice accusing it of apartheid against Palestinians. Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Brazil's President, says Israel is carrying out genocide. Several western cities have seen massive protests, though their governments remain spectators. Despite global anger, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Cabinet colleagues — some have made outrageous comments about expelling Palestinians from their territories — manage to continue the war without facing any real consequences mainly because of the support from the United States and the West. The Biden administration has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council Resolutions that called for a ceasefire in Gaza and continues to supply weapons to Israel. President Joe Biden, a Democrat who once said his foreign policy would be centred around human rights, should give up this moral ambivalence and be ready to use real pressure on his closest ally. This war should be brought to end immediately and aid allowed into Gaza without any ifs and buts.

Mountains of plastic are choking the Himalayan States

Plastic is ubiquitous everywhere, from the top of the highest mountain to the deepest of trenches in the ocean. It is found even inside the human lungs and placenta. Microplastics are formed by the degradation and the fragmentation of large plastic pieces that are improperly disposed of. Microplastic deposition and accumulation has been found in the Himalayan mountains, rivers, lakes and streams. These microplastics can be trapped in glaciers for a long time and released into rivers during snow melting. The Indian Himalayan Region is a critical source of water in the subcontinent, feeding a number of major rivers of India that include the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra river systems. Unscientific plastic disposal is causing soil and water pollution in the Indian Himalayan Region and impacting its biodiversity, which is having an adverse impact on the fresh water sources that communities downstream depend on.

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation and changing production and consumption patterns are responsible for the plastic waste crisis in the Indian Himalayan Region. A quantum jump in tourist footfalls is another reason for exacerbation of the problem. A recent report by the Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation Dehradun highlighting the plight of towns in Uttarakhand drowning in plastic waste is no surprise — almost all the mountain States face a similar situation. Recently, the National Green Tribunal issued notices to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board, the Deputy Commissioner Lahaul and Spiti and the Panchayat of Koksar in Himachal Pradesh on waste dumping in eco-sensitive areas by tourists and commercial establishments. In Assam, at the Ramsar site of Deepor Beel, Greater adjutant storks have been feasting on the plastic waste in the landfill instead of fish from the wetland. In Manipur, growing pollution in rivers, that include the Nambul, has been widely reported. The Himalayan Clean up (2018-21) that was conducted by the Integrated Mountain Initiative with Zero Waste Himalayas and the National Productivity Council of India's waste and brand audit show increasing plastic waste, especially non-recyclables, in the Indian Himalayan Region. The Himalayan Clean up (2022) waste audit results showed that 92.7% of trash was plastic, with 72% of waste being non-recyclable plastic.

Plastic waste versus management capacities
Every year, there is a day when the amount of plastic waste surpasses the capability of waste management systems to manage this. Environment Action, a Swiss-based organisation, calls it Plastic Overshoot Day. In 2023, India reached its plastic overshoot day on January 6,



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which is shocking especially as the EPR portal of CPCB claims that there is a systemic ability to deal with plastic waste. India has one of the highest mismanaged waste index (MWI), at 98.55%, in the world (after Kenya, Nigeria and Mozambique) which is the gap in waste management capacity and plastic consumption. The Government of India claims that it recycles 60% of plastic waste. In statistical analysis done by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) using CPCB data, India is merely recycling (through mechanical recycling) 12% of its plastic waste. Close to 20% of this waste is channelised for end-of-life solutions such as co-incineration, plastic-to-fuel and road making, which means we are burning 20% of our plastic waste and still calling it 'recycling' and when 68% of plastic waste is unaccounted for.

Legal mandate for waste management
Solid Waste Management Rules (SWM) 2016, Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules 2016 and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) 2022 constitute the regulatory framework for plastic waste management for India (at the country level). Special needs of hill areas are recognised by the SWM but are not factored in while creating a mandate for both local bodies and producers, importers and brand owners (PIBOs), while PWM and EPR have not even recognised the special needs of the hills.

States across the Indian Himalayan Region have also been taking various initiatives including enacting laws to curb this menace. Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim have special State laws banning the use of plastics. Himachal Pradesh has a buy back policy for non-recyclable and single-use plastic waste since 2019, but there is still widespread littering of plastic waste. Sikkim banned packaged mineral water use from January 2022 and has a fairly robust regulatory system, but in the absence of proper infrastructure to handle plastic waste, the State is still grappling with the issue. Mizoram has been proactive on the regulatory front — the Aizawl Municipal Corporation made by-laws under the PWM in 2019. Tripura has made policy changes, enacted municipal by-laws and has a State-level task force to eliminate Single Use Plastic though the results are not visible. The collective mandate of SWM/PWM/EPR requires waste segregation at source. Segregation of not only plastic from other waste but also different types of plastics is a prerequisite for any strategy to dispose of plastic waste in a scientific and sustainable manner. Waste segregation exists on paper, but a closer look shows landfills overflowing with mixed waste. The leachate from the mixed waste causes soil and groundwater pollution while fumes from such mixed waste cause air pollution. A huge amount of plastic waste which can be recycled still remains in landfills.

Under the SWM, PWM and EPR, the task of

waste management from collection to its scientific disposal is the duty of local bodies. They can take help from PIBOs for the setting up and operationalisation of the plastic waste management system, as mandated under the EPR. Though local bodies are the pivot of the waste management system in the country, a commensurate devolution of power to them is still work in progress. Very few States have enacted model by-laws and very few local bodies themselves have made by-laws to operationalise the mandate. There is no clarity regarding the mandate to ensure collaboration between local bodies and PIBOs. There is a need to include traditional institutions within the definition of local bodies when it comes to the Indian Himalayan Region (prevalent in many States in the northeast). It is important to note that under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and the Fifteenth Finance Commission, money was allocated to these traditional institutions.

Plugging data gaps is one step

There is a need for appropriate resource allocation and support that is considerate of and reflective of the rich biodiversity, ecological sensitivity and fragility of the Indian Himalayan Region, besides taking into account the specific geographical challenges of mountain waste management. Empowering local bodies and creating the necessary infrastructure for waste management need immediate attention. Segregation of waste and the participation of the people in this endeavour with the help of sustained public education campaigns are a sine qua non. Geographical neutrality of targets under the EPR could be countered if the higher cost of EPR operationalisation in the mountain region is given its due consideration. The value of the EPR certificate which is earned by a PIBO in the Indian Himalayan Region could be higher than one earned in the rest of the country for every ton of plastic waste processed.

Data gaps in terms of the quantum and quality of waste being generated in the Indian Himalayan Region States should be plugged. Convergence in existing schemes such as SBM, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the Finance Commission's grants could be used to create the infrastructure, maintain and run operations. The Swachh Bharat Kosh Trust set up to facilitate the channelisation of philanthropic contributions and corporate social responsibility funds towards this cause could also be used to augment resources. The Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Smart Cities Scheme under which many cities in the Indian Himalayan Region are selected, could also work in convergence on the issue of scientific waste management and making cities in the Indian Himalayan Region free of plastic.

Empowering local bodies and creating the necessary infrastructure for waste management in the Indian Himalayan Region need immediate attention

The long road to reforming India's political party system

With the general election 2024 inching closer, the spate of political defections across the country is no cause for surprise. In Bihar, MLAs from the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have moved to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while the elections to the Rajya Sabha that were held recently saw cross-voting in favour of the BJP in Himachal Pradesh. The MLAs concerned have now been disqualified under the anti-defection law. In the Andhra Pradesh Assembly too there have been disqualifications under this law.

However, an adjudicatory development from more than a fortnight ago makes one doubt the perceived need and utility of India's anti-defection law. On February 15, 2024, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker delivered his verdict on the split in 2023 within the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). No MLA from either faction of the NCP was disqualified, and the Ajit Pawar faction was recognised as being the "real" NCP. Unsurprisingly, the order appears to be similar to the Speaker's decision in the split in the Shiv Sena where neither faction was disqualified, and one of the competing factions (in that case, the Eknath Shinde faction) was recognised as the real Shiv Sena.

Transgressions that pass muster

While official copies of both these decisions are unavailable, the reasoning that went into the decision can be discerned from the livestreaming of the Assembly proceedings. Relying on the test of legislative majority, the Speaker noted that the Ajit Pawar-led faction of the NCP had the support of 41 out of 53 NCP MLAs, making it the real NCP. More intriguing was the Speaker's observations on the applicability of the anti-defection law to these proceedings.

What transpired between June 30 and July 2, 2023, when the NCP split vertically, is termed as an expression of "intra-party dissent". In uncritical terms, the Speaker has said that such intra-party dissent cannot be subject to the punitive provisions of the Tenth Schedule, and the dissenting MLAs cannot be disqualified from



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Recent political events make one doubt the perceived need and utility of India's anti-defection law

the Assembly. However, the soundness of this observation can be questioned on the ground that if any dissenting group within a political party wishes to distance itself from such a party, it must ideally merge with another party so as to be able to claim protection under the Tenth Schedule. Under the anti-defection law, a faction that splits from its original party cannot claim exemption from disqualification on its own, given that the "split" exception was deleted from the Tenth Schedule in 2003.

The only exemption available now to legislators moving in groups is that of mergers, which mandatorily require a minimum of two-third members to separate from their political party and merge with another. As is well-known, in both the Shiv Sena and NCP splits, the splitting factions (led by Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, respectively), did not opt to either merge with an existing political party or establish an altogether new party. Instead, each of the two factions claimed to be the original political party themselves, and formed an alternate government with other political parties. In neither of these cases was there a merger within the strict terms of the Tenth Schedule.

It would have been interesting to see the Speaker contend with this issue in both these cases purely in terms of the language of the law. Instead, the Speaker made a rather worrying observation to the effect that it is in the very nature of politics for leaders to forge new alliances, undo old relations, and make or break into new forms, and that such political movements cannot qualify as defections under the Tenth Schedule. Why have the anti-defection law in the Constitution when even the most manifest transgressions of the law are allowed to pass muster with the adjudicating authority?

The Speaker's concern for preservation of intra-party dissent is laudable, especially when he says that the Tenth Schedule cannot be used to silence party members. The Speaker had to go by the legislative strength of each faction to determine the real NCP, because reliable information to that end could not be sourced

from the party's constitution, leadership and organisational structure.

The issue of inner-party democracy

Undeniably, this highlights the need for better thought-out reform of the political party system — one which accounts for adequate democracy within parties. Defections are often engineered on the premise of an absence of inner-party democracy in the original political party of a turncoat legislator. To systematically remedy this concern, it is time to first conduct a thorough study of how robust democratic structures and processes are within parties, and, second, usher in statutory regulation that compels political parties to ensure greater inner democracy. The 25th Report of the Law Commission of India proposed amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 which could mandate that besides having a constitution, political parties elect an executive committee (for the party), select candidates who are to contest elections to Parliament or State Assemblies, and conduct regular elections within the party at every level. The Law Commission also proposed granting the Election Commission of India the powers to impose monetary penalties or withdraw the registration of a political party in case it failed to comply.

The Law Commission's recommendations have yet to see the light of day. Evidently, in the absence of more robust means to ensure inner-party democracy, the Tenth Schedule had to be circumvented just to diffuse in the Shiv Sena and NCP verdicts — both instances where the anti-defection law could well be applied! The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker is now presiding over a committee which will review the anti-defection law. Given his recent encounters with this law in two high-profile matters, there could not be a better opportunity than now for India to get an anti-defection law best suited to its felt needs and realities.

Vidhi recently published a report titled *Anatomy of India's Anti-Defection Law: Identifying Problems, Suggesting Solutions*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Overdrive?
The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has gone into overdrive in its quest for a third term in power. It seems to be unmindful of the danger of an overkill if a political party, however invincible it may seem, plans and does everything

too early, too carefully and too professionally. The BJP and its supporters assert that 2024 is a 'done deal'. But they ought to realise that India's political diversity and a host of factors are what influence the electorate, making it difficult to predict the

electoral outcome. Large sections of the media are 'pro-BJP for whatever reason' and present a very one-sided picture of the pre-election scene. It is to state the obvious that the BJP owes its political dominance to the overarching appeal of

Hinduism subsisting caste distinctions, its (and its ideological parent, the RSS's) organisational strength and also money power. It is indeed welcome if the omission of certain names in the first list of candidates marks a shift away from hardline

Hinduism (Page 1, "BJP's first list is out; PM keeps Varanasi, March 3).
G. David Milton,
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu
A shame
It was distressing to have read a report that a Spanish lady, who came to India on

a tour, had to face brutality ("Spanish woman raped in 'harkhand's Dumka; 3 held", March 3). Such crimes tarnish India's image on a global level. The perpetrators should face severe punishment.
Balagopal Gopinath,
Kerikkad, Alappuzha, Kerala

A women's urban employment guarantee act

Reducing gender gaps and increasing women's employment are part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Notwithstanding ethical and constitutional imperatives, there is also evidence suggesting that increasing women's employment rates can be an engine for economic growth.



Rosa Abraham
teaches in Azim Premji University, Bangalore

Unmet demand
Despite functioning at a fraction of its intended capacity, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been pivotal in providing financial autonomy to women in rural areas. More than half the MGNREGA workforce are women. However, urban realities are different. Social norms, lack of safety, and hostile transportation options are some of the factors inhibiting urban women to enter the workforce. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) pegs women's employment rate in urban areas at 22.9% in the last quarter of 2023. There are clear signs of high unmet demand for employment among urban women. First, the unemployment rate in urban areas, which is a measure of how many would like employment (irrespective of whether they are actively seeking it or not), is 9% compared to 4% in rural areas. Second, there are two types of unemployment – individuals who would like to work and are actively seeking a job versus those who would like to work but may not be actively seeking a job. A much larger share of unemployed women in urban areas are seeking employment compared to rural areas. Further, nearly 25% of urban women have completed higher secondary education compared to 5% in rural areas. The low urban employment rates among women also points to wastage of much potential.

To address overall urban unemployment, some States have an urban employment programme. While these are not restricted to women, early evidence suggests a higher



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Views expressed are personal. The authors thank Akshith Arora for data support

Notwithstanding ethical and constitutional imperatives, there is also evidence suggesting that increasing women's employment rates can be an engine for economic growth

participation rate for women. Building on these and other ideas such as the Decentralised Urban Employment and Training Scheme by Jean Drèze, we propose a national Women's Urban Employment Guarantee Act (WUEGA). We envision a WUEGA where women form at least 50% (ideally 100%) of the programme management staff. Involving women and local communities can also potentially strengthen the constitutional mandate of decentralisation. Each worksite would have essential worksite facilities including childcare facilities. Work must be available within a 5-km radius and public transportation must be free for women. A detailed list of possible urban works such as plantation and harvesting reeds on floating wetlands already exist; these should be supplemented based on local needs and wider consultation. Incentives such as automatic inclusion in welfare boards can be created; these could act as agencies to provide maternity entitlements, pensions, and serve as resources for emergency funds. For many women, the school to work transition is impeded by the lack of skills and mobility issues. A recent study of women in Delhi and Bengaluru found that three out of five reported not having adequate skills as a constraint to getting secure employment. Apprenticeship for women college students from different disciplines could be done; this could become a channel for women with higher degrees to join as programme functionaries. This could also act as a stimulus for younger women to take up technical courses. Women who have completed Class 10 could be eligible to run Information Facilitation Centres at each urban local body with computer training facilities. Such centres can be empowered through regular capacity-building initiatives to compensate for the gap in skills. Given the low levels of apprentice intake in India, apprenticeships embedded within an urban employment guarantee

for women can neatly dovetail with the larger mandate of apprenticeships of making women more job-ready. Additionally, it can be a means to empower local communities acting as a single window for grievance registration. A social audit unit of WUEGA with at least 50% women staff can be conceived for independent monitoring of the programme. Social audits would require an array of skill sets and this could be an important avenue for women who have completed Class 12 to join part time or full time and improve their job readiness.

Women-led initiatives
There is precedence of such initiatives. In Karnataka, for instance, women handle end-to-end waste management in gram panchayats of selected districts including collection and driving of the 'Swachh' vehicles. Not only has the initiative been a success, it has also enabled several women to acquire driving licenses.

As per the PLFS, an estimate of the number of women in urban areas in the age group of 15-59 who are out of the workforce is 10.18 crore. If we add those who are self-employed and in casual labour, we get about 11.65 crore. In reality, to begin with, perhaps 50% of them are likely to be interested in such a programme. Assuming 150 days of work per year at ₹500 as daily wages, the wage component, to be funded by the Union government, would then cost around 1.5% of the GDP. Adding material and administrative costs to this is likely to make it around 2%. Such a scheme has to be rolled out in a phased manner with periodic assessments on uptake and the nature of the shelf of works. This is also likely to smoothen the cost. Depending on its positives and challenges, this can pave the way for an urban employment programme for all, not just women. The benefits of this act far outweigh fiscal conservativeness. It is also time to move from income as insurance to assurance of income, especially for women.

Not the right cure for urban maladies

The unification of urban local bodies may not help citizens

STATE OF PLAY

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The Government of Telangana has been exploring the possibility of expanding the purview of the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) by merging together peripheral corporations and municipalities. All the seven municipal corporations and 30 municipalities which fall under the Hyderabad Metropolitan Development Authority (HMDA) are to be unified with the GHMC to form one urban civic body, along the lines of the merger of three corporations into the Municipal Corporation of Delhi two years ago.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy is said to have issued instructions to Municipal Administration and Urban Development officials to study the feasibility of the proposal and come up with a report. It is proposed that the existing divisions also be re-organised because a few have a population of more than 1,00,000 while a few others have a population of only 30,000.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy is said to have issued instructions to Municipal Administration and Urban Development officials to study the feasibility of the proposal and come up with a report. It is proposed that the existing divisions also be re-organised because a few have a population of more than 1,00,000 while a few others have a population of only 30,000.

If this detailed project becomes a reality, Telangana will probably have the biggest civic body in India. The government is said to have decided to centralise urban local governance because of the unequal distribution of funds and the patchy development among urban local bodies (ULBs) around the State capital.

It is true that a few corporations such as Nizampet and municipalities such as Manikonda, Narsingi, and Tellaupura financially better off than others. But financial prosperity does not matter when the facilities in these corporations are poor.

The prosperity – or lack

of those living within the GHMC. Taxpayers say that civic administration and amenities are not improving according to the higher tax collection.

The GHMC, which is poised to subsume all the peripheral ULBs and grow in size, has never been in a worse situation. After elections to the legislative Assembly at the end of 2023, the corporation has found itself bankrupt and unable to pay salaries as well as pending dues to its contractors. The high amount of borrowings, which were used on road infrastructure such as flyovers and underpasses, have not brought much relief to the citizens who continue to

struggle with traffic problems. Sanitation issues have worsened. The sewerage system collapses every time it rains. Illegal structures are flourishing, government lands in the city are being encroached on, and lakes are disappearing while the civic body is struggling with a poor staff strength. Most staff members are reaching retirement age. A third of the sanctioned posts in the GHMC are vacant. Even if all the posts are filled up now, the corporation will still struggle to pay salaries.

Under such circumstances, it is anybody's guess how the proposed merger can improve local governance. For robust local self-governance as envisaged by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, there needs to be minimum interference from the State/Central governments in the functioning of local bodies. In the case of the GHMC or any other ULB in Telangana, there has always been a top-down approach.

The GHMC council is yet to form statutory ward committees and area committees which should ideally make resolutions for local area development. The State is shirking its responsibility in providing affordable housing to the lower and middle classes of the city. The housing department has been wound up, and the HMDA has graduated from allotting housing plots to aspiring home owners through a draw of lots to auctioning large chunks of government land to realtors, who in turn build skyscrapers priced to suit investors from affluent sections. Rising real estate values are shown as the sole proof of development in urban regions which are plagued by civic issues.

Against this backdrop, it is difficult to believe that the unification of ULBs will help the common citizen.

A majority of Indians support authoritarianism: Pew survey

The share of Indians who supported representative democracy was on the wane in 2023, with more wanting strong leaders or the military to rule

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

In India, 85% of respondents to a 2023 survey said that military rule or rule by an authoritarian leader would be good for the country. India's share was the highest among the 24 countries surveyed. Notably, the share of Indians who said that it is important for Opposition parties to operate freely was the third lowest among the countries surveyed. In 2023, the share of Indians who believed that representative democracy is a good way of governance declined considerably from 2017, when the same survey was conducted. Interestingly, a very high share of Indians also wanted experts to rule and not elected officials.

These were some of the conclusions of the Pew Research Center's Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. In India, face-to-face interviews were conducted between March 25 and May 11, 2023, among adults. The north-eastern States and the Andaman and Nicobar and Lakshadweep Islands were excluded. The sample was selected in a way to proportionally represent Indians across gender, age, education, region, and urbanity.

The survey asked about preferences for two types of authoritarian governance: one led by a powerful leader who operates without the need for approval from legislative or judicial bodies (authoritarian leader) and another governed by the military (military governance). Public support for at least one of these governance models varied significantly across countries, with 85% in India showing support in contrast to just 8% in Sweden. Such support was more prevalent in middle-income countries than in wealthier ones. Further, a higher proportion of respondents from countries in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America expressed support for

these models compared to those from Europe and North America. **Chart 1** displays the share of participants who believed that governance by a strong leader or military rule would be beneficial for their country, in 2023.

In countries where fewer individuals regarded democratic values as crucial, there was a greater share of people favouring governance by an authoritarian leader or military rule. In countries where a smaller proportion of the population believed in the importance of allowing Opposition parties to operate without restrictions, there tended to be greater endorsement of authoritarian forms of governance. India had the third lowest share of people who considered the freedom of Opposition parties crucial. Concurrently, Indians exhibited high levels of support for authoritarian governance, as shown in **Chart 2**.

Since the last survey in 2017, in many countries, there has been a notable decrease in support for representative democracy. In 11 of the 22 countries with comparable data from 2017 (excluding Australia and the U.S.), there was a significant reduction in the share of the population that viewed representative democracy as a highly effective method of governance. **Chart 3** shows the figures for India. Close to 44% of Indians believed that representative democracy was a very good approach in 2017, while just 36% held this view in 2023.

Compared to 2017, in 2023 there was also a considerable increase in the number of people who favoured a governance model where experts, rather than elected representatives, are put in charge of taking crucial decisions. This shift in opinion towards technocracy may be partly attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. This share in India increased from 65% in 2017 to 82% in 2023. The share who felt that this was a bad way of governance stayed put at around 15% in both these years.

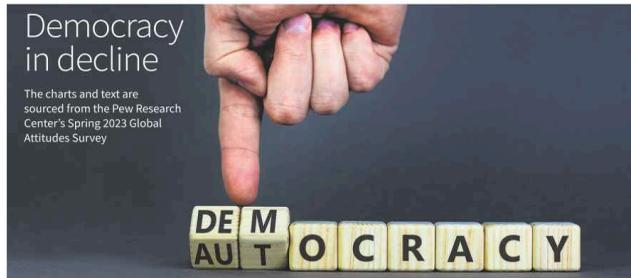


Chart 1 | % who believed that governance by a strong leader or military rule would be beneficial

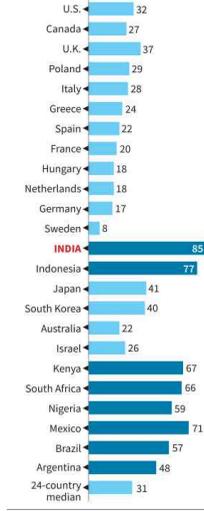


Chart 2 | % who support authoritarian rule against % who said that freedom of opposition parties is not important

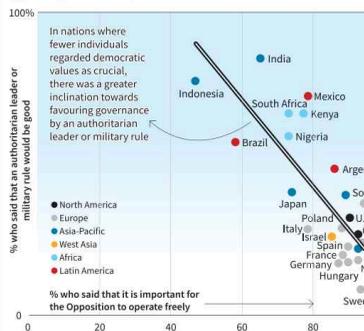


Chart 3 | % population that viewed representative democracy as a highly effective method of governance

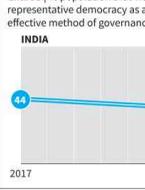
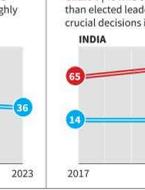


Chart 4 | % who said that experts, rather than elected leaders, in charge of making crucial decisions is good/bad



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Caliphate abolished

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 4, 1974

Scope for more exports to Australia

New Delhi, March 3: Considerable emphasis was placed on developing and strengthening bilateral relations at the sixth round of Indo-Australian officials' talks held in Canberra from February 27 to March 1.

A press communique issued here today of the conclusion of the talks said it was agreed that efforts would be made to increase the level of trade and economic exchanges between the two countries.

The talks covering a wide range of international and bilateral questions were held "in a frank and friendly atmosphere" and revealed close identities of views held on international questions shared by the two governments.

The Indian delegation was led by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Kewal Singh, and the Australian delegation by the Secretary of Department of Foreign Affairs, Mr. A.P. Renouf.

The maintenance of Indian Ocean as a zone of peace was discussed at the talks. The delegations welcomed the recognition of Bangladesh by Pakistan.

The urgent need to improve the international monetary system was recognised. The effects of the world energy crisis particularly on the developing countries were also discussed.

The Indian delegation noted the increased opportunities provided for the expansion of Indian exports to Australia as a result of the measures recently adopted by the Australian Government. The possibility of arranging regular consultations on bilateral economic matters and of concluding trade agreements was examined.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 4, 1924

The Caliphate abolished

Constantinople, March 2: The police have been instructed from Ankara to supervise the households of the Caliph and the Imperial Princes with a view of preventing the removal of valuables. It is reported that the Caliph has said that he intends to proceed to a Mohamedan country, preferably to Egypt. Harem ladies are greatly disturbed on account of the impending events. It is reported that the Caliph's principal wife is prostrated with grief and the principal eunuch has refused to take food for three days.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The amount IPOs are expected to raise in the coming week

1,325 in ₹ crore. Three companies are set to launch their maiden public issues. So far this year, 16 companies launched their IPOs to mobilise ₹13,000 crore. This came after 58 maiden public issues were initiated in 2023. PTI

The votes secured by Shehbaz Sharif to become Pakistan PM

201 Shehbaz Sharif defeated Omar Ayub of the Sunni Ittehad Council who got 92 votes. The winner only needs 169 votes to get a majority. Mr. Ayub was backed by former premier Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party or PTI. AP

Amount injected by FPIs in Indian equities in February

1,500 in ₹ crore. Foreign investors invested in Indian equities in February, reversing the massive outflows seen last month, primarily due to robust corporate earnings and economic growth. PTI

Revenue generated by Sri Lankan tourism in January 2024

342 in \$ million. The country saw a marked improvement, with tourism recording a 122% jump from last year. The economy recorded positive growth in the third quarter of 2023 after six successive quarters of negative growth. PTI

The number of years since MH370's disappearance

10 Malaysia's government said on Sunday it may renew the hunt for the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 after a U.S. technology firm proposed a fresh search in the southern Indian Ocean. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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On the relevance of university rankings

What are some of the most popular rankings schemes worldwide? Is the number of citations an adequate marker of a university's research excellence? What are the concerns regarding conflicts of interest and data security issues?

EXPLAINER

Moumita Koley

The story so far:

Since the first appearance of global university ranking systems around two decades ago, rankings have come to dominate the attention in higher education ecosystems around the world. Today, many countries including China, Japan, and Russia have committed substantial resources to elevate the statuses of their universities to "world class" as defined by these rankings, allowing them not-inconsiderable political heft as well. Of late, however, some universities worldwide have pulled out of being ranked, over concerns about the incentives the systems set up and their compatibility with the universities' own aspirations. But the din of these controversies have also drowned out two crucial aspects pertaining to the conduct of the companies behind some of the ranking systems. They are conflicts of interest and data rights.

What do ranking systems do?

At present, the Times Higher Education (THE), the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the Academic Ranking of World Universities (also known as the 'Shanghai Ranking'), and the U.S. News & World Report are the most popular rankings schemes worldwide and hold significant weight and influence in shaping educational policies and priorities in the higher education sector in many countries.

A ranking system orders the higher education institutes in a place (country, region, etc.) by their accomplishments on various fronts – including teaching, research, reputation, industry-focused research, and collaborative efforts. Each of these activities is complex, multifaceted, and highly contextual, but for the purposes of the ranking, an institute's performance on each one is translated into a few composite indicators, which are then combined to create a consolidated score.

Are ranking systems perfect?

In 2021, Elizabeth Gadd, a research officer at Loughborough University in the U.K., published a critique in which she reported that universities' quests for higher ranking mirrors the flawed pursuit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the sole measure of a country's prosperity.

For example, in their 2010 book *Mis-Measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*, eminent economists Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi contended that the use of a single indicator to capture the economic and social progress of a country will inevitably overlook the environmental impact of its growth and measures of its inequality, among other crucial issues. According to Dr. Gadd, university rankings, like GDP, distill complex roles that universities play in society into a single, unidimensional score.

Experts have noticed that the highest ranked universities in various ranking systems are old, large, wealthy, research-intensive, science-focused, English-speaking, and in the Global North. Studies have also shown that higher scores in research excellence in rankings are influenced to a great degree by two factors: citations and reputation. For example Bielefeld University leaped from 250th to 166th in the 2020 THE rankings. The jump has been attributed to a single scholar's work, who published 10 papers, co-authored with hundreds of



ISTOCKPHOTO

other researchers, most of them in *The Lancet*, contributing to 20% of the university's total citations over two years. (These citations are not spurious but over-represented.)

Arbitrary measures of research excellence like citations can dramatically alter an entire university's performance in the rankings. For example, in 2023, *Science* reported the case of Saewatha Dental College in Chennai rocketing up the ranking ladder allegedly by manipulating citations.

In two analyses in 2016, Richard Holmes, an expert in ranking systems and who has been running the 'University Ranking Watch' initiative since 2006, wrote that THE's regional rankings appeared to favour universities that hosted an important THE summit. According to Mr. Holmes, these changes in favour were effected by, among other things, tweaking the way the ranking system counted citations. There are many similar instances, incentivised by the value accorded to ranking schemes and the riches that universities that rank highly reap.

What are the concerns over conflicts of interest?

Most entities that compile and publish rankings are private enterprises, and there have been instances of these entities consulting with universities to help the latter achieve better ranks in their own systems.

For example, in a 2021 paper, Igor Chirikov of the University of California, Berkeley, reported that "universities with frequent QS-related contracts had an

increase of 0.75 standard deviations (-140 positions) in QS World University Rankings and an increase of 0.9 standard deviations in reported QS faculty-student ratio scores over five years, regardless of changes in the institutional quality." His study was based on the ranks of 28 universities in Russia between 2016 and 2021. Likewise, THE offers membership to an elite group it runs called "World 100 Reputation Network". Dr. Gadd wrote that it's intended "for institutions ranked in the top 200 of one of the big four global rankings to... share strategies for retaining their ranking topping status".

Since these problems started to become more apparent, several prominent institutions have denounced traditional ranking systems. In 2022, Harvard and Yale Universities led a boycott against the U.S. News & World Report's ranking over what they said was a conflict between the careers they wished their law students to have after graduation and the careers the ranking incentivised. Utrecht University in the Netherlands withdrew from the THE world rankings in 2023 for similar reasons. In India, several IITs have boycotted the same rankings.

What about data security?

Like conflicts of interest, another issue deserves similar examination: by participating in ranking exercises, universities and institutes provide ranking agencies free reign over their data, compromising their data security.

For example, to use the THE platform, website, and related services, universities are required to agree to an additional set

of terms and conditions in addition to the general set. According to point 6 of the former: "You grant THE a royalty-free, perpetual, irrevocable, non-exclusive and fully sub-licensable right and license to use, reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, translate, create derivative works from, distribute, perform and display such data (in whole or part) worldwide and/or to incorporate it in other works in any form, media, or technology now known or later developed. With respect to all data you post to the Website, you hereby waive any moral rights you have in the Data. You agree to perform all further acts necessary to perfect any of the above rights granted by you to THE, including the execution of deeds and documents, at our request".

That is, universities are to give THE a free and permanent right over their data without having to seek their permission in the future. Such data includes details of institutional, industry, and research incomes, and of patents. There is no reason why universities, especially public universities, should agree to such a wide-ranging grant of rights in order to participate in the ranking exercise.

As the UN University's statement on 'Global University Rankings' reads: "While rankings may have incentivised some improvement in the quality of some universities, there is growing recognition that they also incentivise a number of perverse and harmful behaviours and produce systemic long-term negative effects."

Moumita Koley is an STI Policy Researcher, DST-CPR, IISc, and consultant, International Science Council.

THE GIST

The Times Higher Education (THE), the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the Academic Ranking of World Universities (also known as the 'Shanghai Ranking'), and the U.S. News & World Report are the most popular rankings schemes worldwide.

In 2021, Elizabeth Gadd, a research officer at Loughborough University in the U.K., published a critique in which she reported that universities' quests for higher ranking mirrors the flawed pursuit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the sole measure of a country's prosperity.

Additionally, by participating in ranking exercises, universities and institutes provide ranking agencies free reign over their data, compromising their data security.

CACHE



REUTERS

How does Apple's PQ3 protocol enhance data security for users?

Apple's PQ3 post-quantum cryptographic protocol seeks to protect messages on iMessage from hackers using quantum computers. The protocol can protect communications against current and future decryption

Nabeel Ahmed

The story so far:

In February 21, Apple announced PQ3, a post-quantum cryptographic protocol, to encrypt conversations in iMessage. The company called it the "first messaging protocol to reach Level 3 security" and claimed it can defend "highly sophisticated quantum attacks." As per Apple, this protocol's security layer will surpass those available in all widely used messaging apps.

What is the PQ3 protocol, and how does it work?

Currently, most messaging apps have standard encryption methods which use public and private keys to securely deliver messages. There are two encryption methods. In the public key encryption method, a user's message is encrypted by the public key before transmission and then the private key is used to decrypt messages. In the private key method, while both keys are required, they are basically the same, and both the sender and the recipient are allowed to encrypt or decrypt the message.

Apple's PQ3 protocol uses a hybrid design combining traditional encryption methods with post-quantum encryption both during the initial key establishment between devices and during rekeying, which essentially rechecks the

cryptographic keys between devices to ensure continued protection.

Under the PQ3 protocol each device generates public keys locally and then transmits them to Apple servers as part of the iMessage registration process using the Module Lattice-based Key Encapsulation Mechanism or ML-KEM. This enables the sender device to get the receiver device's public keys and generate post-quantum encryption keys for the first message. Apple has also included a periodic post-quantum rekeying mechanism within the conversation which is capable of self-healing from key compromise and safeguarding future messages.

Why is Apple shifting to PQ3 protocol?

Currently, Apple's iMessage supports end-to-end encryption by default. This mode of protection relies on mathematical problems that could potentially be solved by powerful quantum computers.

Over the years, Apple has made improvements to encryption, enhancing its platform's overall protection against hackers. However, current cryptographic problems can be solved by quantum computers, though such computers are still in the works. Apple says extremely well-resourced attackers can mount attacks by taking advantage of the drop in data storage costs.

Essentially, attackers can store large amounts of today's encrypted data and file it for future reference. And though attackers may not be able to decrypt this data today, they can retain it until it can be decrypted at a later date by making use of a quantum computer.

What are PQ3's strengths and limitations?

The PQ3 protocol protects communications against current and future decryption. It also limits how many past and future messages can be decrypted with a single compromised key, reducing the impact of key compromises.

But, despite its enhanced protection, the PQ3 protocol, because of its intended application scenario, does not address group messaging, authentication against quantum adversaries, or cryptographic deniability. Also, messages stored in iCloud may not be protected by this protocol.

Will the PQ3 protocol impact Apple users?

The new protocol offers protection against adversaries capable of compromising the transport layer between devices. However, the protocol does protect against attacks mounted on messages delivered to a device, which remains the same and can be extracted after unlocking a device or by using

advanced attackers such as Pegasus, TirangleDB, and other spyware.

Additionally, since PQ3 relies on traditional signature algorithms for message authentication, a man-in-middle attacker with a powerful quantum computer may still have a chance of hacking it, Kaspersky said in a blog post.

Therefore, while the new protocol from Apple enhances security on iMessage and provides protection against future attacks using quantum computers, it is not a one-stop solution. And users concerned about the protection of their data should not rely only on post-quantum cryptographic protocols.

Are other messaging services also using methods like PQ3?

Currently in beta, PQ3 will start to roll out with the public release of iOS 17.4, iPadOS 17.4, macOS 14.4, and watchOS 10.4. However, this is not the first time a tech company has announced post-quantum encryption protocols.

Earlier in September 2023, Signal announced advancements in quantum resistance for the Signal Protocol.

The upgrade called PQXDH added a layer of protection against the threat of quantum computers being built for the future. The upgrade used a new post-quantum cryptosystem that implemented one-way functions that cannot be advantageously reversed by a quantum computer.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

His well-heeled boss threw a party for him

He keeps his employees happy and satisfied so that they do not inform on him to authorities

S. Upendran

"You look tired. What's happening?"
"Venkat is in town, and as you know, he's a big foodie. So, in the evenings, I've been taking him to the new restaurants."
"That's nice of you. I just hope you're not paying all the time. Are you talking about the well-heeled Venkat or the...?"
"Well-heeled Venkat? I don't think I've ever looked at Venkat's heels."
"That's not what I'm talking about. The expression 'well-heeled' is used in informal contexts to mean 'rich'. A well-heeled individual is someone who has a lot of money."
"Some of the well-heeled in Delhi spend a month in Europe."

"When the news of the scandal broke, many of his well-heeled clients left him."
"That's a good example. I heard that your cousin is taking part in the college elections this year. How is she doing? Do you think she'll win?"
"Difficult to say. According to most people, the two candidates are running neck and neck."
"Neck and neck? You mean 'neck to neck', don't you?"
"No, it's always 'neck and neck', not 'neck to neck'. When you run neck and neck with someone..."

"I know what the expression 'neck and neck' means. When you say that two people are running neck and neck, what you're saying is that they're running side by side. That it's difficult to say who will win the race."

"Very good. According to exit polls, the two parties are running neck and neck. At this moment, it's difficult to say who will form the Government."

"For much of the race, Kumar was in the lead. But as he approached the finish line, he was running neck and neck with four others."

"Do you know where the expression comes from?"

"From two people running a race?"
"You're correct about the race part. But it's not a race between people, but horses."

"I see. So, it's the horses that are running neck and neck. That makes sense, I guess. I understand your boss is in some kind of trouble."

"Big trouble! Several people informed on him. The CEO is planning an inquiry."
"Is it 'inform' or 'inform on'?"

"When you inform on someone, what you're doing is going to an individual in authority, and telling them about some wrong that a person has done."

"And I suppose this is done secretly."
"Yes, that's right! For example, you might decide to go to the police and tell them about the illegal activities happening in your company."

"In other words, you betray the company that you've been working for."
"Well, in a sense, yes. In most cases, 'inform on' has a negative connotation."

upendrankye@gmail.com

THE DAILY QUIZ

Rare diseases are debilitating conditions that occur infrequently in a population, with very few of them having approved treatments. A quiz on some really rare diseases

Ramya Kannan

QUESTION 1
Which is considered to be the rarest disease in the world?

QUESTION 2
The plot of the movie *Paa*, starring father and son duo Amitabh Bachchan and Abhishek Bachchan in a role reversal situation, is built around a rare disease. Do you know what it is?

QUESTION 3
Of the more bizarre rare diseases, is one to do with a speech disorder that causes a sudden change to speech, so that a native speaker is perceived to speak with a 'foreign' accent. What is it?

QUESTION 4
Royals do not really have blue blood, but people suffering from a certain rare disease do have blue coloured blood. What is the disease that causes this discolouration?

QUESTION 5
What is stone man's disease, known to be so rare as to occur to only one in two million people?



Visual question:
The only rare disease that came to an end itself is a brain disorder caused by a particular habit among the tribes in New Guinea. What is it? What was the habit?

Questions and Answers to the March 1 edition of the daily quiz: 1. Binaca Geetmala was a weekly countdown show of the top songs from Hindi cinema. Binaca was a popular toothpaste and subsequent incarnations of the show were renamed after this brand. **Ans: Cibaca, which was later acquired by Colgate**
2. For a long time, Binaca Geetmala was broadcast from this country's radio because of this reason. **Ans: Radio Ceylon. The Information and Broadcasting Ministry, which controlled All India Radio, banned film music on radio calling it erotic and vulgar**
3. The language in which Sayani hosted Binaca Geetmala. **Ans: Hindustani**
4. Sponsored by Cadbury India, this show which began in 1972 was also hosted by Sayani. **Ans: Bournvita Quiz Contest**
5. This actor, known for his baritone, once said that he had gone to a commercial broadcasting firm for auditions but they were too busy to attend to him. **Ans: Amitabh Bachchan**
Visual: Identify the singer with Ameen Sayani. **Ans: Manna Dev**
Early Birds: Rajmohan, VJ Tamal Biswas, Saurabh Sinha

Please send in your answers to
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Folderol:
nonsensical talk or writing

Synonyms: trash, rubbish, codswallop

Usage: I have limits to how much folderol I can stand.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/folderolpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /fɒldəʊl/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

From Page One

100-day agenda for new govt. discussed at meet

As part of the exercise, on December 11, 2023, the Prime Minister launched an outreach programme to seek inputs from youth on their vision for India in 2047. During the programme, Mr. Modi said that in the life of any nation, history provided a period when the nation could make exponential strides in its development journey. For India, the 'Amrit Kaal' was ongoing and it was the period in the history of India when the country was going to take a quantum leap.

"Today, every institution and every individual should move with a resolution that every effort and act will be for Viksit Bharat. The aim of your goals and your resolutions should be only one — developed India. We have 25 years of 'Amrit Kaal' in front of us. We have to work 24 hours a day for the goal of Viksit Bharat. This is the environment we have to create as a family," the Prime Minister had said, pointing out that India was going to be the leader in terms of the working-age population for the next 25-30 years and that the world recognised this.

From the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, 2022, which marked 75 years of the country's Independence Mr. Modi spelled out "Panch Pran (five resolves)" for citizens, which included the pledge to make India a developed nation by 2047.

Cafe blast: four terror suspects under scanner

This alleged module linked to the Mangaluru blast, inspired by the Islamic State (IS), originated from Shivamogga district. Mohammed Shariq, 30, who turned up with a cooker bomb that went off in his hands in an autorickshaw, first came on the radar of the agencies with pro-terror graffiti in Mangaluru in 2020, along with his associates Arafath Ali, Yasin and Maaz Muneer. All three have been arrested now.

However, the State police named Abdul Mateen Taha and Musabir Hussain, also hailing from Shivamogga district, as suspects in the Mangaluru cooker blast case. Both Taha and Hussain are also accused in an IS-inspired Al Hind module case busted in Suddaguntepalya, Bengaluru in 2020 and have been at large since then. This IS module was put together by Mehboob Pasha of Bengaluru and Khaja Moideen of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu and the NIA charge sheet alleges that they wanted to set up camps in the forests of south India and launch insurgency. The National Investigation Agency has declared prize money of ₹5 Lakh for information on Taha.

Police suspect that the duo groomed the four youths from their home district, helped and funded them pushing them to carry out terror acts. Investigation into the Mangaluru case also revealed that the accused were also in touch with a man code-named 'Colonel', whose identity is yet to be established. He is said to be the "handler" of the module.

Following the Mangaluru cooker blast case, police found a photo of Mohammed Shariq dressed like an IS fighter holding the cooker rigged with explosives and days after the accidental blast, an unknown group that called itself "Islamic Resistance Council" claimed responsibility and warned of more to come. Now given the similarity to the improvised explosive device in Mangaluru and Bengaluru, police are now probing the networks of these absconding accused to see whether they were involved in the recent blast as well.

Plans for non-lapsable defence modernisation fund put on hold

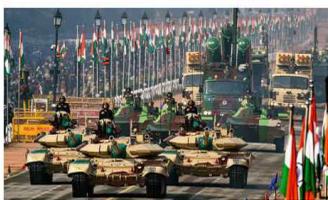
Officials say all defence funding needs are being met as and when they arise; creating a non-lapsable pool has drawbacks as it affects parliamentary scrutiny and accountability, and money is usually drawn from cesses levied for specific purpose

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

The idea of setting up a non-lapsable defence modernisation fund is off the table for now, top government officials told *The Hindu*, stressing that all defence funding needs are being met as and when they arise, and creating a non-lapsable pool has drawbacks as it affects parliamentary scrutiny and accountability.

Among Central Ministries, defence spending accounts for the largest outlays and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) had informed Parliament as recently as December 2023 that a "separate mechanism is being worked out" to explore a special dispensation to operationalise a "Non-lapsable Defence Modernisation Fund".

"As of now, no such decision has been taken on such a Fund and it is not under any active con-



Critical funding: The 15th Finance Commission recommended the constitution of a non-lapsable modernisation fund. PTI

templation because there are drawbacks such as reducing parliamentary accountability. The only funds that are non-lapsable traditionally are those funded through cesses levied for a specific purpose," a top Finance Ministry official said on the issue.

"Except for things financed through a cess, taking away today's appropriations and saying I will use it tomorrow goes against the basic norms or parliamentary financial accountability. Parliament

would like to know whether you spent the money they voted for, or not, and it needs to be told, Yes or No," the first official said.

Assurance of funding Ministries would only want a non-lapsable fund for a certain "assurance of funding", pointed out another government official dealing with the subject. "If we are able to assure that funding without a non-lapsable fund and Budget provisions are made when necessary, then the question

of a non-lapsable fund becomes academic. The real question is to make funds available when they are necessary to complete the procurements that are decided upon," he pointed out.

Asserting that all necessary defence capital spending has been provided for by the Interim Budget 2024-25, the official emphasised that the consolidation of capex demands of the Services under one head instead of three heads for each Service in the Budget provides more space for the Defence Ministry.

"Dovetailing the Services' capex budgets together under one head is aimed at creating a more unified approach to procurements. It is a push towards jointness so the three Services can sit together and optimise their capital expenditure and it can be able to spend, money can take more money," the official explained.

While such optimisation used to be done earlier as well, it required the Finance Ministry to get involved to reallocate the outlays. "Now, the power to optimise is within the Ministry of Defence so you are likely to get better utilisation of this money because you will see this interest fluidity," he noted.

The 15th Finance Commission had recommended the constitution of a dedicated non-lapsable Modernisation Fund for Defence and Internal Security (MPDS) after the Centre had included the examination of such a fund's creation in its terms of reference. In 2021, placing an action-taken report in Parliament along with the Commission's report, the government had said it has "in-principle" accepted the creation of such a fund in the Public Account of India. "Sources of funding and modalities will be examined in due course," it had said.

VBA keeps alliance partners guessing

Shumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Despite the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) expressing confidence in taking along the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) for the Lok Sabha poll, Mr. Ambedkar continued to keep his alliance partners guessing while saying his party was "still in doubt" whether it was indeed a constituent of the MVA coalition.

Speaking in Akola, Mr. Ambedkar, a recent inductee into the MVA, comprising the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress and Sharad Pawar's NCP, claimed that the VBA could win at least six seats if it went alone in the election. He also reiterated his demands of giving tickets to 15 OBC candidates, and three from religious minorities in the election.

Maharashtra ex-Minister eyes 'home comforts' in U.P. seat

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Bhabar
NEW DELHI

The list of 195 names announced by the BJP in its first list of candidates was not one that created shock waves in its unexpectedness, but one name did create a frisson of interest, tickling the memory of those who followed Maharashtra politics in the 1990s and 2000s — that of Kripashankar Singh.

Mr. Singh, a former Minister in the Congress-led government in Maharashtra, has been fielded by the BJP from Jaunpur (his birthplace) in Uttar Pradesh, in a 'return of the native' move perhaps only possible in Indian politics.

Of humble beginnings, Mr. Singh moved to Mumbai from Jaunpur in the



Kripashankar Singh

1980s having failed to clear his Class 12 exams and tried his hand at various jobs, including selling vegetables and milk and working in a pharmaceutical firm as a packer. It is said that he grew close to former President Pratibha Patil when she used to hold sway over Maharashtra Congress, and in 1988 was appointed a secretary.

Mumbai, a city teeming with migrants, has a strong presence of north Indians looking for leadership amid the Shiv Sena's 'son

of the soil' politics, and for the Congress, Mr. Singh filed that void. His rise was swift and he grew to be a Minister of State for Home in the Congress-led Maharashtra government in 1999.

In 2011, a Public Interest Litigation petition was filed against him alleging that he and his family had amassed assets disproportionate to their income to the tune of ₹230 crore. Cases piled up, and he joined the BJP in 2021.

For the BJP, which has a lack of leaders who can appeal to north Indian voters in the city, Mr. Singh has been a god's addition. "Our other north Indian leaders in the city don't have the clout to even get five votes together, while Kripashankar Singh has good connections both in Mumbai and in Jaunpur," said a source in Mumbai BJP.

PM to witness launch of core loading of reactor in T.N. today

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday will witness the initiation of the core loading of India's indigenous 500 Mwe Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) in the nuclear complex at Kalpakkam, about 70 km south of Chennai.

The initiation of the core loading of PFBR, developed by BHAVINI (Bharatiya Nabhiyuga Vidyut Nigam Limited), would mark a "historic milestone in India's nuclear power programme," the Press Information Bureau said.

The core consists of control sub-assemblies, blanket sub-assemblies and fuel sub-assemblies. The core loading activity would include the loading of the reactor control sub-as-

semblies, blanket sub-assemblies and fuel sub-assemblies that would generate power, it said.

PFBR marks the second stage of the three-stage nuclear power programme of the country with a "closed fuel cycle", and the spent fuel from the first stage would be "reprocessed and used as fuel" in FBR. "A unique feature of this sodium cooled PFBR is that it can produce more fuel than it consumes, thus helping in achieving self-reliance in fuel supply for future fast reactors," the release said.

With "minimised nuclear waste" generated from the reactor and advanced safety features, the FBRs would provide a safe, efficient and clean source of energy and contribute to the goal of net zero.

In bid to expand vote base, Tejashwi brands RJD as party of 'A to Z' castes

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Seeking to shake off the Rashtriya Janata Dal's (RJD) labelling as a party of Muslims and Yadavs alone, its top leader Tejashwi Yadav asserted that the RJD stands for the "A to Z" of castes and communities.

As a counter, he has offered an umbrella combination that is aimed at taking along the backward and forward castes, women, and the poor.

"Some people say that we are only a MY party — a party of Muslims and Yadavs. But we are also a BAAP, where B stands for Bahujan, A for 'aadhi' (upper caste), A for 'aadhi' (lower caste), and P for the poor," he claimed, as he spoke on the various achievements in the 17 months the RJD was in power, including providing employment to five lakh



Lalu Prasad, Tejashwi Yadav, Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and others join hands in Patna's Gandhi Maidan. ANI

persons. "In this very Gandhi Maidan [in Patna], we distributed employment letters. When I first proposed 10 lakh jobs, Nitish Kumar asked where will the money come from. In 17 months, I proved him wrong," he said as the crowd roared in response.

Offering an alternative definition for the RJD, Mr. Tejashwi Yadav said it also stands for "Rights, Jobs, and Development". Party insiders claim that this remarking of the RJD as a pro-development party, countering the spectre of "jungle raj" that is raised in

connection with it, is not an overnight effort. "In the 2020 Assembly election, Tejashwi ji had similarly given the slogan of *kamai* [employment], *padhai* [education], *sichai* [irrigation] and *mehngai* [price rise]," a senior party leader pointed out.

In 2020, despite the party's best efforts, it fell short thanks to a counter consolidation against the Yadav euphoria, and finished within striking distance of a victory. The "A to Z" pitch is the RJD's promise to the voters that no one will be

excluded, the senior RJD leader explained.

The MY-only tag that the RJD is assiduously trying to avoid will not fade away so easily, political scientist and fellow at the Delhi-based think tank Centre for Policy Research (CPR) Rahul Verma said. "RJD did not begin as an MY party. It used to attract the larger Bahujan electorate, winning the votes of Backward Classes, not just Yadavs, but also a section of Dalits. But over time, its vote base has reduced because the votes of the Backward Classes have further fragmented," Dr. Verma said.

And on the other side of the balance is the BJP, which draws votes from multiple segments, barring the Muslims.

"While directionally it is the right move to expand beyond the confines of 'MY', the turnaround is not going to be easy, and one that is not without the risk of a possible backlash from the core voters," Dr. Verma said.

Lalu criticises Modi at Bihar rally, says PM is not Hindu

Amit Bhele
PATNA

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad made sharp remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Jan Vishwas Maharatna in Patna on Sunday, saying the PM was "not Hindu" and spread disharmony in the country.

The public meeting was the first joint rally of *Mahagathbandhan* (grand alliance) during the Janata Dal (United) led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar snapped ties with the RJD and joined hands with the BJP to form a government in the State. "Narendra Modi is not a Hindu? Why did he not shave his head [after his mother's death]? He should answer this," Mr. Prasad said.

An impressive crowd of over five lakh people gathered at the ground to be a part of the rally. Workers of the Congress, Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist-L-



Lalu Prasad and Rahul Gandhi during the Jan Vishwas Maharatna in Patna on Sunday.

minist) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) also congregated at the historic ground, which has witnessed hundreds of rallies of socialist leaders in the past including the late Jayaprakash Narayan.

Lashing out at Mr. Kumar for betraying the grand alliance's mandate, the RJD chief said: "When he first betrayed us, I did not abuse him. However, the second time, we made the mistake... I made the mistake and Tejashwi [Yadav] also made the mistake by accepting him. Now once again, he has fallen on the feet of Modi...". He predicted that in the

upcoming Lok Sabha election, the BJP would be rooted out of power and assured the crowd that the RJD would "push away" Mr. Nitish if he tries to make a comeback for the third time.

In a show of strength, the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge too slammed Mr. Modi, accusing him of "destroying the Constitution". Samajwadi Party leader and former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav was also present.

"Whenever there is change in the country, a cyclone starts in Bihar because Bihar is the nerve centre of politics. There is a battle of ideology in the country between 'hated and violence' and 'love and brotherhood'. Why is there hatred in the country? The only reason is injustice. The Prime Minister only works for two to three industrialists," said Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Kharge called Mr. Modi "sardar (leader) of liars".

India on track to attain goal of drugs-free society: Shah

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Modi government's ruthless approach towards narco-trade has borne effective results and there has been a drastic rise in the number of arrests and seizures, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday.

Writing on X, Mr. Shah said country is speeding to achieve the goal of a drugs-free Bharat which will be the greatest gift to the future generations. "Our nation is speeding to achieve this goal through the detection of drugs, destruction of drug networks, and detention of culprits while rehabilitating addicts under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi," he said.

Mr. Shah also said an invincible anti-narcotics apparatus has been built nationwide through coordination, cooperation and collaboration among governments and agencies.

Chargesheet against seven in Manipur arms loot case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a chargesheet against seven accused in a case of alleged loot of arms and ammunition from the 2nd Indian Reserve Battalion (IRB), Narenseina, in Manipur's Bishnupur district on August 3 last year.

The chargesheet has been submitted in the court of chief judicial magistrate, Kamrup, Guwahati, Assam.

The CBI had registered the case on August 24, 2023 to take over the first information report instituted by the Moirang police, following a reference from the Union government.

As alleged, the incident took place on August 3 last year when a large number of armed miscreants and their associates looted more than 300 arms, close to 19,800 rounds of ammunition and about 800 types of munitions and other accessories from two rooms of the battalion headquarters located in Kote inside the Quarter Guard, 2-IRB.

IN BRIEF



CBI arrests NHA official in ₹20-lakh bribery case

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested a general manager of the National Highways Authority of India (NHA) in an alleged bribery case of ₹20 lakh in Nagpur, Maharashtra, officials said on Sunday.

CUET-UG dates may change based on LS polls schedule

The schedule for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG is likely to be changed depending on the Lok Sabha election schedule, according to University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Jagadeesh Kumar.

L-G gives job letters to kin of 3 civilians killed in J&K

Press Trust of India

Jammu & Kashmir Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha on Sunday handed over government job appointment letters to the next of kin of the three civilians who were allegedly killed in Army custody following an ambush by militants in Poonch last year.

The administration had, on February 23, announced compensation for the deceased's families.

An official spokesperson added that allotment orders of land measuring one kanal each were also handed over to the families, to be used for residential purposes.

The L-G assured the family members of all possible support from his administration in the future, the spokesman said, adding that Poonch Deputy Commissioner Choudhary Mohd. Yasin was also present on the occasion.

Farmer leaders give call for Delhi march, 'rail roko' protest

While farmers on Punjab boundary would continue their protest, their counterparts from other States would reach Delhi by trains and buses on March 6; 'rail roko' planned on March 10

The Hindu Bureau CHANDIGARH

The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) and the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) — the two umbrella bodies that are spearheading the fresh farmer's agitation — on Sunday gave a call to farmers from across the country to reach Delhi on March 6.

Along with the 'Delhi Chalo' march, the farmer outfits have announced a 'rail roko' agitation for four hours on March 10 to press their demands.

Farmers from Punjab and Haryana would, however, continue their protest at Shambhu-Ambala and Khanauri-Jind — the inter-State boundary between Haryana and Punjab, where they have been camping after being stopped from entering Haryana since February 13.

KMM coordinator Sar-



Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the Centre is treating farmers and labourers like enemies and that their struggle would continue till the demands are fulfilled. PTI

wan Singh Pandher said farmers, labourers, and tribal people from all over the country would reach Delhi by trains and buses on March 6. "The government keeps saying that the farmers should come with tractor-trolleys, so we have decided that the friends who were supposed to come to Delhi by trains and buses should now march to Delhi. Farmers from Punjab and Haryana will continue to

camp at the different locations and an attempt is being made to establish dictatorship in the country, but the people of the country will not allow this to happen," he said.

Rail roko protest

"Also, we have decided that a 'rail roko' protest will be held on March 10 across the country, which will be held from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.," he added.

Mr. Pandher alleged that the Centre was treating the farmers and labourers demanding their rights like

enemies. "This is unfortunate and an attempt is being made to establish dictatorship in the country, but the people of the country will not allow this to happen," he said.

"The struggle will continue till the MSP and crop purchase guarantee act, implementation of the Swaminathan Report, complete loan waiver of farmers and the entire charter of demands are resolved," he added.

Odisha's famed Rupa Tarakasi, Banglar Muslin earn GI tag

Sangeetha Kandavel CHENNAI

The famous Cuttack Rupa Tarakasi (silver filigree) has been given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai. The application for this was filed by the Odisha State Cooperative Handicrafts Corporation Limited and was facilitated by the Department of Textile and Handicrafts, Government of Odisha.

The historical records attached along with the GI filing mention: "Archaeological evidence suggests that filigree was incorporated into jewellery as early as 3,500 BCE in Mesopotamia where it is practised even today as Telkari work. According to historians, there is every possibility that the Tarakasi work reached Cuttack from Persia through Indonesia some 500 years ago by sea trade. The argument is based on similar workmanship seen in both Cuttack and Indonesia."

pieces of evidence that mention the exchange of jewellery and gems between Kalinga and Indonesia," the record noted.

The other products to join the GI league are Banglar Muslin, one of the popular traditional handloom crafts of Bengal; Narasapur crochet lace product; and Kutch rug craft.

Ratlam Riyawan Lahsun (Garlic), a variety named after Riyawan village in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, also bagged the GI tag along with the Ambaji White Marble, which is formed when limestone is re-crystallised under the earth's crust due to intense pressure and heat.

Tripura Risa Textile, Hyderabad Lac Bangles, Majuli Mask of Assam and the Assam Majuli Manuscript Painting are other products that got GI tag.

The Majuli Mask of Assam is made in different varieties and sizes as they are mainly divided into different categories — Mukha bhaoana covers the face; the Lotokoi hanging mask, which is bigger in size, extends to the chest; while Cho Mukha (huge mask) covers the head and body.

Advanced landing systems cut flight delays, but come at a cost

Lavpreet Kaur HYDERABAD

In January, major airports across India witnessed severe flight disruptions owing to bad weather conditions. Hyderabad ended up playing host to international flights diverted from several destinations, including Singapore, London, Kuwait and Colombo. Meanwhile, Chennai airport's visibility dropped to as low as 100 metres, causing the cancellation of several flights across major cities in India.

The fiasco has raised serious questions about the status of the existing Instrument Landing System (ILS) and the installation of advanced technologies across the major airports.

To enhance the air navigation services infrastructure at airports within the Indian airspace, the Airports Authority of India has started commissioning and upgrading the latest categories of the ILS at several airports in the past few

years. Aviation experts also called for urgent action on this front.

Landing aid

ILS is a standard precision landing aid established by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). It is used to provide accurate lateral and vertical guidance to aircraft for landing on the runway under normal or adverse weather conditions. Interestingly, the need for advanced ILS is now felt in airports which traditionally would not have fog problems, but report visibility challenges due to increased pollution (or smog).

Currently, only six international airports in India, including Delhi, Jaipur, Amritsar, Kolkata, Lucknow and Bengaluru have CAT III B landing facilities, according to data revealed by the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA). "Flights often get delayed due to challenges in landing at some of the airports which lack advanced

ILS [CAT II or CAT III] systems. This trend is particularly pronounced in tier 2 and tier 3 cities of India, leading to a constant knock-out effect in flight delays even in major cities and hence passenger inconvenience." Rishi Jain, chief executive officer at Jain Aviation Consultants, said.

ILS systems, however, are a costly affair. According to experts, the average cost of installing a CAT III ILS at an airport is about ₹100 crore, with added maintenance cost in the range of ₹40 lakh to ₹50 lakh. Moreover, it is an added cost for airlines as well. "It is a catch-22 situation. Advanced [CAT II or CAT III] ILS installation also requires airlines to invest in the training and certification of their pilots for specific technologies while disrupting their rostering schedules," Captain Sanjay Karve N.M., retired Air Chief Pilot, Government of Maharashtra, said.

150 bank accounts linked to syndicate smuggling opioids under ED scanner

Devresh K. Pandey NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has examined nearly 150 bank accounts linked to an international syndicate, which allegedly supplied opioid drugs in huge quantities to its contacts overseas. The agency is investigating the money-laundering case based on an FIR registered by the Mumbai Police. The proceeds of alleged crime are currently estimated to be around ₹44.50 crore.

It is learnt that these bank accounts were in the name of certain individuals and entities related to a key accused, Ali Asgar Shirazi, who was arrested by the agency in January, and currently in judicial custody.

Over 25 companies, partnership firms, and proprietorship concerns came under the ED scanner and four companies and partnership firms (Hustlers Hospitality Private Limited, Zetetic Techno



Over 25 firms are under ED scrutiny and four firms have been included as accused.

India, Trans Air Express, Falisha Technoworld LLP, and One Logistics) have been included as accused.

These entities were allegedly instrumental in the projection of drug money as genuine business proceeds. The investments made by some individuals in the share market, market instruments and cryptocurrency wallets were also examined in detail to trace the end use of the money generated by the illegal sale of opioids.

Mr. Shirazi was initially arrested by the Mumbai Police in May last year when he was attempting to

escape to the UAE. The police suspected that he was instrumental in the supply of drugs worth over ₹200 crore overseas. The ED said Mr. Shirazi and others received orders through call centres being run in different parts of the country. The operations were being run through a network of call centres, websites, logistics companies, consultancy firms, and dummy pharma companies for supply of opioids to the U.S. and U.K.

Cash deposits

The ED also allegedly found many instances of cash deposits in the personal accounts and the accounts of logistics companies controlled by various individuals linked to Mr. Shirazi. An inquiry indicated that these entities did not have offices, employees or licences required for running logistics business. Such orders were meant to evade the formal controls on the use of opioids and therefore ille-

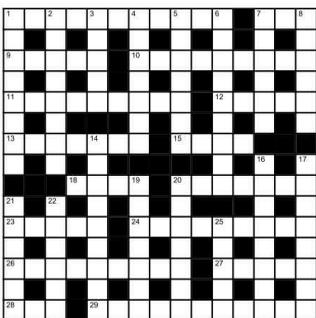
gal. The drugs were being procured from the dummy pharma companies and transported abroad using the logistics companies.

Properties attached

About a week ago, the ED attached properties worth about ₹5 crore in the form of flats, a shop, and land parcels purportedly belonging to Mr. Shirazi, Mehreen Shirazi, Abdul Samad, Manoj Patel, and Bhavesh Shah and the movable assets valued at ₹36.81 lakh in the form of fixed deposits and balance in the bank accounts of Ramlakhan Patel, Shobha Patel, and Hustlers Hospitality Private Limited.

As it turns out, one U.S.-based member of the syndicate named Ezhil Sezhan Kamaloss had been held guilty by a court in U.S. in June 2022 for "conspiring to distribute millions of opioid pills and other illegal controlled substances imported from India and money laundering conspiracy".

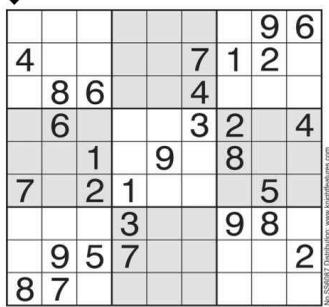
THE CROSSWORD 14113 (set by Arden)



- 1 Return to theatre - you can't wear your dress like that (4,2,5)
7 Prompt to save 50% in the end (3)
9 In any working clothes models look fashionable (5)
10 After two, allows some bands (9)
11 A live coverage of the inauguration for one in Australia (9)
12 Top accommodation for leaders, an early registration is essential (5)

- 13 Real time changes in lawless state (7)
15 With friends backing, it's a hit... (4)
18 ...famous singer keen to make a comeback (4)
20 Fancy entranceway goes away, it's a mess (7)
23 Rule on charity (5)
24 The man heads off taking his newly married wife, an islander (9)
26 Fancy thing, sport for retirement (9)
27 Loves work, there's some delay (5)
28 Long for some money (3)
29 Top down, down in the dumps (11)
Down
1 Covered those born, dead and age in between (8)
2 Universal festival, not hard to hold outside (8)
3 Organs involved in a noteworthy mission (5)
4 Too excited, brief version not in line (7)
5 Beasts of burden working by changing gears (7)
6 On the other hand, a profit follows later (4,5)
7 Lament about her virginity (6)
8 Close to June, a flower festival (6)
14 Given a world leader with atomic bomb (9)
16 Pleased about Tory leader's inclusive stand... (8)
17 ...together with son in marriage (2,6)
19 Articles about permit for a sports person (7)
20 Special act to cover naked performance (7)
21 By hoarding money it gives you a high (6)
22 Indian road in the border (6)
25 Some are paid nicely to go upcountry (5)

SUDOKU



Solution to previous puzzle and Solution to yesterday's Sudoku. Includes a grid with numbers and a difficulty rating of four stars.

Advertisement for Madgaldeep Sandalwood Oil with a QR code and 'Follow us for more content' text.

FAITH Essence of Bhajagovindham

Adi Sankara's granthas are useful to many devotees and the biggest takeaway is that satsang is a big blessing, said Swami Ramacharaya Tirtha (Nochur) in a discourse. Even if a devotee feels he is not well versed in scriptures, he would know Adi Sankara's Bhajagovindham.

The essence of Bhajagovindham lies in the sloka, "Satsangave nissangatvam, nissangatve nirmohatvam, nirmohatve nischalatattvam, nischalatattve jivan mukthi". Everyone wants to be comfortable, but do not know how to go about it. Why does a child cry at birth? It does so because it is aware that the comfort of the womb is gone and the situation is changed. It cries, seeks comfort. This quest for sukham starts from the moment of birth and continues throughout one's life. How will such inner equipoise come? It is only through the company of the wise, through discourses.

In Sivnandanah Lahiri, Adi Sankara prays to Sarveswara, saying, "I will pray and perform pujas; Oh, loka guru, kindly advice in a manner that will bring me inner santi." Listening to discourses in itself would bring one nirvrtti or inner bliss.

Satsang, the company of good people, and hearing their lectures would enhance one's intelligence quotient, while strengthening one's bhakti.

MONEYWISE



Gold, silver remain range-bound

PRECIOUS METALS

Gold oscillating in \$2,000-2,100 range. A decisive break out will set the tone for the next move

B. Krishnakumar

Extending the lacklustre trend witnessed in January, precious metals remained range-bound, and the price action was devoid of any direction in February. The strength in U.S. dollar and the recovery in the equity markets dented sentiments towards the precious metals.

The only positive aspect was that the Comex gold price managed to trade above the psychological \$2,000-level throughout the month.

Comex gold closed 0.24% lower in February to end at \$2,052.8. A similar trend was witnessed in Comex silver as well. The white metal closed 0.78% lower to settle at \$22.9 an ounce.

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, MCX gold closed 0.33% lower in February and closed at ₹62,540 per 10-gram. MCX silver closed 3% lower at ₹1,265 per kilogram.

As observed last month, Comex gold is still oscillating in the \$2,000-2,100 range. A decisive break out from this range will set the tone for the next big move. A move past \$2,100 will impart momentum to the upside and could help Comex gold reach the next target zone of \$2,150-2,160 zone. On the other hand, a fall below \$2,000 would be a sign of weakness and could push the price to \$1,935-\$1,950 zone.

Similar to gold, Comex silver too is yet to break out of the \$21.9-26.4 range that the price has been confined to for several months now. Only a break out of this range would trigger the next big move. Until then expect silver price to remain range-bound and volatile. A fall below \$21.9 would be a sign of weakness and the price could then slide to \$19.2-\$19.8 zone.

Mirroring the global trend, the price action in MCX gold too was devoid of any trend in February. The price is still stuck in the same range of ₹61,300-64,200. As observed last month, a move above ₹64,200 would impart momentum to the upside and the price could then head to ₹65,500-66,000. A fall below ₹61,300 would be a sign of weakness and could push the gold price to ₹59,500-60,200.

Silver too range-bound

MCX silver price too is still confined in the ₹70,400-74,000 zone. The short-term price direction depends on the break out from this range. Above ₹74,000 would be a sign of strength and could push the price higher to ₹76,500-77,500.

A fall below ₹70,400 would impart weakness and could push MCX silver price to ₹68,000-68,500. Until the price breaks out of the above range, expect volatile range-bound price action to persist.

To summarise, expect range-bound and volatile price action to persist in precious metals. As observed last month, only a break out from the prevailing range would lead to any meaningful move.

(The author is a Chennai based analyst/trader. The views and opinion featured in this column is based on the analysis of short-term price movement in gold and silver futures at COMEX & Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not meant to be a trading or investment advice)

Send queries on personal finance and investing to the moneywise@thehindu.co.in ID. Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.



Good practice: Use your credit card responsibly, clear the dues on time, and maintain a healthy credit utilisation ratio. GETTY IMAGES | ISTOCK

How to choose a credit card that suits your pocket

While rewards credit cards provide reward points on your purchase which can later be redeemed for discount vouchers, cashback cards offer a percentage of spending back to your card account

PLASTIC MONEY

Rohit Chibbar

When used responsibly, a credit card can help you build a strong credit profile and save on your regular spends. However, choosing one from multiple options available may be a challenge, especially for young professionals, with limited knowledge of credit cards.

Before you begin short-listing credit cards, the first step should be to understand how a credit card works. You must not consider it as 'extra' money, but instead take it as a means to borrow funds that need to be paid back timely.

Having basic knowledge of credit cards will help you make an informed decision, as you will be able to better understand and compare the benefits offered.

Check for eligibility

Not all card issuers offer credit cards to new-to-credit consumers, and those who do might only provide select entry-level cards.

Hence, if you have no credit history, chances are you would not be eligible for many cards.

While this holds true for most new-to-credit applicants, young individuals with higher income might have a wider choice of cards.

For salaried professionals who are looking for



if you have no credit history, chances are you would not be eligible for many cards. This holds true for new-to-credit applicants, young individuals with higher income might have a wider choice of cards

their first credit card, it is best to check the cards from the bank which holds their salary account, or where they have an existing relationship.

Understand your need

Identify if you need a card only for building credit or to enhance your savings on regular spends or a particular category of spends.

For credit building, an entry-level low-fee credit card with basic features and minimal eligibility requirements could be the right choice. If you do not qualify for any such card, a secured credit card could also serve the purpose.

Explore options

However, if you are looking to save a considerable amount through credit cards, you must compare multiple options and choose the one that best aligns with your spending preferences.

For instance, if you are a frequent traveller, a travel credit card can help you save on your trips in the form of extra rewards/air miles, complimentary lounge access at airports,



For salaried professionals who are looking for their first credit card, it is best to check the cards from the bank which holds their salary account, or where they have an existing relationship

Similarly, if you wish to save on your online spends, a card that offers a higher reward rate on online spends could be the right one for you. If you are loyal to a particular brand like Flipkart, Amazon, Yatra or EaseMyTrip, you could also go for cards co-branded with such platforms for substantial savings.

Narrow down on choice

Once you know why you need a credit card, the next step is to understand how different credit cards could cater to your requirement.

Credit cards can broadly be divided into two categories – rewards and cashback, basis the way they offer value-back.

Rewards credit cards provide reward points on your purchase, which can later be redeemed to avail discount vouchers, merchandise or converted into air miles or cash credit.

On the other hand, cashback credit cards mostly offer a percentage of your spending back into your card account. Ask yourself how you wish to

get value-back.

Several other terms and conditions have a role to play in determining the overall value that the card offers. For example, you would want to know how much the card charges as joining/annual fee, what the reward points are worth, whether you are required to meet certain spend threshold to avail benefits, etc. Asking the right questions will help you filter the options as per your needs.

How to apply

Nowadays, you can apply for a credit card through the issuer's website or through online marketplaces where you can compare options and choose a suitable one.

For most users, the first credit card is usually an entry-level card but it paves the way for you to establish credit and qualify for better cards in future. A good credit score also makes it easier for you to avail loans to meet your life goals like buying a house. Hence, it is important to begin your credit journey as early as possible.

Get your first credit card, use it responsibly – clear the dues on time and maintain a healthy credit utilisation ratio (CUR). When you are confident, move on to better cards with more targeted benefits that will not only help you save more, but also improve your credit score, with disciplined usage.

(The author is head of Credit Cards Business, Paisabazaar)

Family matters

THINKINVESTOR

You should involve your spouse in all investment decisions you make for the family. This makes it less likely for a third party to scam your family out of the investments after your lifetime

Venkatesh Rangarasuwarthy

You may have received several reminders from transfer agents about the last date for filing nominee details for your investments. It is important to ensure that the wealth you accumulate is available to the beneficiary at the time the money is required to meet a life goal. For instance, parents creating an education fund for their child must ensure that the wealth accumulated in the fund is easily accessible at the time the child turns 18. This requires that you thoughtfully craft your investments. In this article, we discuss two factors that are important in this regard – spousal involvement in investment decisions and ownership of the investments.

Spousal involvement

Two heads are typically better than one for decision making. You should, therefore, involve your spouse in all the investment decisions you make for the family. It is even better if your spouse does not understand the world of investments as you do! Why? The more you know about investments, typically the less you are likely to explore the obvious questions.

A case in point is bank deposits. You may know how to anticipate interest rate changes. While you may be focused on which tenure to select to optimise returns, your spouse may suggest that you break your deposits into smaller amounts and stagger the maturity amount through the term period chosen. Bond laddering, to use a technical term. Why? The argument may be that having cash flows through the year is much better than having lumpy flows at any point in time.

Of course, involving your spouse may not be an easy task if your spouse is uninterested in participating in the investment discussions. You must, therefore, address the other important benefit of spousal involvement – being aware of the investments. This makes it less likely for a third party to scam your family out of the investments after your lifetime. At the very least, your spouse will know how much wealth the family has and where the investments are located. Involving your spouse may be an arduous task but perhaps, beneficial if your child is above 18.

Conclusion

A simple way for spousal involvement in family finances is to jointly hold the family wealth. An alternative is to hold in "either or survivor" mode. That way, one of you can continue to operate bank deposits and savings accounts after the other's lifetime; your child will be the nominee for your goal-based investments in equity funds and bank deposits.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Small Finance Banks				
AJ Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.75	7.50	7.25
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.00	8.00	7.25
ESAF Small Finance Bank	8.25	6.00	6.75	6.25
Fincare Small Finance Bank	8.61	7.65	8.11	8.01
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.50	7.25	7.25
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.65	6.85	8.60	8.25
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	8.25	8.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.00	8.50	7.50
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	7.20	6.70	7.10	7.00
Bandhan Bank	7.85	7.25	7.25	6.85
City Union Bank	7.00	6.75	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.75	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	7.50	7.00	6.50	6.50
DCB Bank	8.00	7.15	7.60	7.40
Federal Bank	7.50	6.80	7.00	6.60
HDFC Bank	7.25	6.60	7.00	7.00
ICICI Bank	7.20	6.70	7.00	7.00
INDUSIND Bank	7.75	6.50	7.25	7.00
First Bank	7.75	7.15	7.25	7.25
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.10	7.10	6.50	6.50

Home Loan Interest Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Carur Vysya Bank	7.50	7.00	7.00	7.00
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.40	7.10	7.00	6.20
Nainital Bank	7.05	6.70	6.25	6.75
RBL Bank	8.10	7.50	7.50	7.10
SBM Bank India	8.25	6.05	7.30	7.75
South Indian Bank	7.40	6.70	6.70	6.00
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.75	7.00	6.50	6.50
Public Sector Banks				
Bank of Baroda	7.25	6.85	7.25	6.50
Bank of India	7.25	6.50	6.50	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	7.00	6.50	6.25	6.00
Canara Bank	7.25	6.85	6.80	6.70
Central Bank of India	7.25	6.75	6.50	6.25
Indian Bank	7.25	6.10	6.25	6.25
Indian Overseas Bank	7.30	6.90	6.50	6.50
Punjab National Bank	7.25	6.75	7.00	6.50
Punjab & Sind Bank	7.40	6.20	6.00	6.00
State Bank of India	7.10	6.80	6.75	6.50
Union Bank of India	7.25	6.75	6.50	6.50
Foreign Banks				
Deutsche Bank	8.00	7.60	8.00	7.50
HDFC Bank	7.25	4.00	7.00	6.00

Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
Public Sector Banks			
State Bank of India	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.05	8.40-10.05
Bank of Baroda	8.40-10.65	8.40-10.65	8.40-10.90
Union Bank of India	8.35-10.75	8.35-10.90	8.35-10.90
Punjab National Bank	8.45-10.25	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.15
Bank of India	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75
Canara Bank	8.50-11.25	8.45-11.25	8.40-11.15
UCO Bank	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30
Bank of Maharashtra	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15
Punjab & Sind Bank	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00
Indian Overseas Bank	8.40-10.60	8.40-10.60	8.40-10.60
Central Bank of India	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80
Private Sector Banks			
Kotak Mahindra Bank	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*
ICICI Bank	8.75*	8.75*	8.75*
Axis Bank	8.75-13.30	8.75-13.30	8.75-9.65
HDFC Bank	8.45*	8.45*	8.45*
South Indian Bank	9.84-11.24	9.84-11.04	9.84-11.69
Carur Vysya Bank	9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05

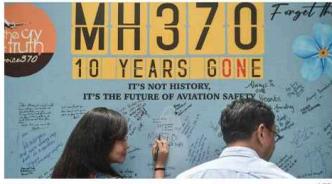
Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
Public Sector Banks			
Karnataka Bank	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60
Federal Bank	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*
Dhanlaxmi Bank	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	9.45-9.95	9.45-9.95	9.45-9.95
Bandhan Bank	9.16-15.00	9.16-13.33	9.16-13.33
RBL Bank	8.90*	8.90*	8.90*
CSB Bank	10.69-12.54	10.69-12.54	10.69-12.54
HDFC Bank	8.55*	8.55*	8.55*
City Union Bank	12.35-14.10	12.85-14.60	13.35-14.85
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
LIC Housing Finance	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.55	8.35-10.75
Bajaj Housing Finance	8.50*	8.50*	8.50*
Tata Capital	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*
PNB Housing Finance	8.50-14.50	8.50-14.50	8.50-11.45
GS Housing Finance	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*
SFNG India Home Finance	10.00*	10.00*	10.00*
Aditya Birla Capital	8.80-14.75	8.80-14.75	8.80-14.75
ICICI Home Finance	9.20*	9.20*	9.20*
Godrej Housing Finance	8.55*	8.55*	8.55*

* Onwards Rates as on February 28 Source: Paisabazaar.com

KUALA LUMPUR

10 years after it disappeared, kin of MH370 victims call for new search



Relatives of passengers on a Malaysia Airlines plane that vanished 10 years ago pushed for a new search on Sunday as they spoke of grief and the struggle to find closure. Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 aircraft carrying 239 people, disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. AFP

DHAKA

Nobel Laureate Yunus granted bail in Bangladesh embezzlement case



A court in Bangladesh on Sunday granted bail to Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus in a \$2.3 million embezzlement case. Yunus, who pioneered the use of microcredit to help poor people, was sentenced to six months in prison in January on a separate charge of violating labour laws. He was granted bail in that case too. PTI

GENEVA

Swiss voters approve proposal to increase pension payments



Swiss voters on Sunday backed a proposal to increase pension payments, a move hailed as "historic" at a time when the country's ageing population faces surging living expenses. But a separate vote to raise Switzerland's retirement age to 66 from 65 was soundly rejected by three-quarters of voters. AFP

PORT-AU-PRINCE

Armed gangs storm Haiti's main prison, letting prisoners escape



An unknown number of inmates have escaped after armed gangs stormed the main prison in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince on Saturday evening. Gang leaders and those charged with the 2021 assassination of President Jovenel Moïse were among those incarcerated in the prison located near the National Palace. AFP

Many OPEC+ nations extend oil cuts to boost prices

Agence France-Presse
VIENNA

Moscow, Riyadh and several other OPEC+ members on Sunday announced extensions to oil production cuts first announced in 2023 as part of an agreement among oil producers to boost prices following economic uncertainty.

The plan to extend cuts to mid-2024 comes on top of previous cuts to both oil output and exports as some of the world's largest energy producers drive to push up market rates.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Ministry said it would cut its production by one million barrels per day (bpd) from April to June (Q2), while Russia announced 471,000 bpd of cuts in Q2. UAE, Kuwait, Iraq and Kazakhstan followed suit, saying they would extend existing voluntary cuts till the end of June.

Shehbaz Sharif becomes Pakistan PM for second time

PM-N leader secures 201 votes, while his PTI-backed opponent Omar Ayub Khan gets only 92 votes; 72-year-old leader raises Kashmir issue in victory speech and compares it to Palestine crisis

Press Trust of India
ISLAMABAD

Pledging to revive Pakistan's debt-trapped economy and eradicate terrorism, newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday said his government would not allow the country to become part of some "great game" and would maintain cordial relations with neighbours based on the principles of equality.

In his victory speech in the National Assembly soon after he was elected as the 24th Prime Minister and for a second time since 2022, the 72-year-old Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) leader proudly thanked his elder brother and three-time former premier Nawaz Sharif and allies for putting



Political duopoly: Nawaz Sharif, left, greets his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif at parliament in Islamabad on Sunday. AFP

their trust in him and allowing him to head a coalition government after last month's election resulted in a hung parliament. While Mr. Shehbaz secured 201 votes, his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan

facing an alarming debt crisis where even the expenditures of the National Assembly were being paid by borrowing money.

Not part of any game

He said that Pakistan would not become part of any "great game" and his government would increase the number of friends. He pledged to improve ties with all leading nations, including its neighbours. "We will keep ties with neighbours on the basis of equality," Mr. Shehbaz said.

Mr. Shehbaz, however, raked up the Kashmir issue and equated it with Palestine. "Let's all come together [..] and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of Kashmiris and Palestinians," he added.

Trump wins Republican vote in three States, edging toward U.S. presidential nomination

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

Donald Trump on Saturday inched ahead in his quest to become the Republican Party's presidential nominee, winning internal party elections in the States of Missouri, Michigan and Idaho, U.S. media reported.

The former President has now won every State nominating contest heading into next week's "Super Tuesday," when voters in 15 U.S. States choose their preferred candidate for each party.

Mr. Trump has gained huge momentum in the race to capture the Republican nomination at the party convention in July and Tuesday is expected to all but secure the result.

He is likely to face President Joe Biden in November elections, pitting the



Donald Trump

two for the second time since 2020.

The voting on Saturday in Missouri, Michigan and Idaho were hybrid internal elections with differing rules, in some cases reflecting rifts and tensions despite Mr. Trump's formidable sway.

Complete sweep

In Missouri, Mr. Trump swamped his main opponent, former South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley,

winning every county caucus in the State, *The New York Times* reported.

In Michigan, around 2,000 party activists voted in a caucus convention, and Mr. Trump won all 39 delegates up for grabs, CNN reported.

The limited vote came in the wake of chaos within the State party, including allegations of overspending and mismanagement.

Mr. Trump had grabbed 16 Michigan delegates earlier in the week in a limited primary vote.

The former President also handily won Republican caucuses in the western state of Idaho, NBC and ABC projected.

Ms. Haley has raced around the country in the run-up to Super Tuesday, trying to make an increasingly hard case against the inevitability of Trump's nomination.

'170 people executed' in attacks on Burkina villages: prosecutor

Agence France-Presse
OUAGADOUGOU

Around 170 people were "executed" in attacks on three villages in northern Burkina Faso a week ago, a regional prosecutor said on Sunday as jihadist violence flares in the junta-ruled country.

On that same day, February 25, separate attacks on a mosque in eastern Burkina and a Catholic

church in the north left dozens more dead.

Aly Benjamin Coulibaly said he had received reports of the attacks on the villages of Komsilga, Nodin and Soro in Yatenga province on February 25, with a provisional toll of "around 170 people executed".

Survivors of the attacks said that dozens of women and young children were among the victims.

U.S., Qatari, and Hamas envoys push for Gaza ceasefire from Cairo as war rages

Agence France-Presse
GAZA STRIP

Mediators in Cairo made a renewed push for a Gaza ceasefire, but differences remained as fighting raged on in the Palestinian territory gripped by desperate food shortages.

U.S., Qatari and Hamas envoys travelled to Cairo for the latest effort towards a six-week truce, stepped-up aid deliveries and the exchange of hostages for Palestinian prisoners.

With another 90 Palestinians killed in past 24 hours, death toll reaches 30,410 in the besieged enclave

But sticking points remained, including a Hamas demand that the Israeli armed forces entirely withdraw from the Gaza Strip after almost five months of devastating war.

And Israel, which has so far announced no plans to

join the Egypt talks, has demanded Hamas provide it with a list of all 130 remaining captives, including more than 30 it fears are dead.

Despite the latest push to halt the fighting sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack on Israel, Israeli bombing and urban combat again rocked Gaza, home to 2.4 million people, most of whom have been displaced.

Another 90 Palestinians were killed within 24

hours, said Hamas-ruled Gaza's Health Ministry, which put the war's overall death toll at 30,410, mostly women and children.

Two babies buried

Two of the latest victims, twin babies Naem and Wissam Abu Anza, were buried on Sunday as their mother Rania wept in agony.

At least 16 children have died of malnutrition in recent days as "famine spreads" in Gaza's north.

Iran conservatives secure bulk of seats in elections: media

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iranian conservatives secured the bulk of seats in elections for a key clerical body and the national legislature, local media reported on Sunday, estimating a record low turnout.

Authorities were still counting ballots two days after Friday's vote for members of parliament and for the Assembly of Ex-

perts, which selects the Islamic republic's supreme leader.

The official IRNA news agency put the turnout at around "41%" among 61 million eligible voters.

The reformist daily Shargh predicted the next parliament would be "in the hands of radical conservatives" who "took advantage of the opportunity created by the low participation".

Sport

Pragg outwits Vedit Gujrathi

Press Trust of India
PRAGUE

Indian GM R. Praggnanandhaa crashed through the defences of compatriot Vedit Gujrathi, but D. Gukesh suffered a shock defeat from a position of strength against Czech Republic's David Navara in the fifth round of the Prague Masters here.

Uzbekistan's Nodirbek Abdusattarov defeated Mateusz Bartel of Poland to emerge as the sole leader.

The results (fourth round): R. Praggnanandhaa (2.5) bt Vedit Gujrathi (2.5); Parham Maghsoudloo (1r, 3.5) drew with Richard Rapport (Rou, 3); D. Gukesh (2.5) lost to David Navara (Cze, 2.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2); Mateusz Bartel (Pol, 1) lost to Nodirbek Abdusattarov (Uzb, 4).

Foden inspires City's terrific comeback win against United

EURO LEAGUES
Associated Press
MANCHESTER

Phil Foden led Manchester City's fightback after an astonishing miss by Erling Haaland for a 3-1 win over Manchester United in a one-sided derby on Sunday.

City trailed 0-1 at half-time after Marcus Rashford's rasping long-range strike in the eighth minute. Foden succeeded where Haaland earlier failed, smashing in a rising drive for the equaliser in the 56th and then sweeping in a low shot in the 80th off Julian Alvarez's inside pass.

Haaland advanced his mistake by taking a free-



Bang! Foden fires in his first goal for City against United in the "Manchester Derby". GETTY IMAGES

tage of a defensive error by Sofyan Amrabat to stroke home the third

Important results:
Premier League: Manchester City 3 (Foden 56, 80, Haaland 90+1) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 8); Luton 2 (Chong 66, Morris 72) lost to Aston Villa 3 (Watkins 24, 36, Digne 89); Burnley 0 lost to Bournemouth 2 (Kluvert 13, Semenyo 88).
LaLiga: Valencia 2 (Duro 27,

Yarechuk 30) drew with Real Madrid 2 (Vinicius 45+5, 76); Villarreal 5 (Sorloth 7, 19, 66, Capoue 32, Guedes 47) bt Granada 1 (Corbeanu 90+1); Atletico Madrid 2 (Rui Silva 8+9, Morata 44) bt Real Betis 1 (William 62).
Serie A: Torino 0 drew with Fiorentina 0; Monza 1 (Carboni 87) lost to Roma 4 (Pellegrini 38, Lukaku 42, Dybala 63, Paredes 82-pen); Verona 1 (Swiderski 79) bt Sassuolo 0.

Disappointing start for Indian boxers

Sports Bureau

India began its campaign on a disappointing note with World champion Deepak Bhorla (51kg) and Asian Games bronze medalist Narendra Berwal (69kg) losing their respective round-of-64 bouts in the first World Olympic boxing qualifier at the E-Work Arena in Busto Arsizio, Italy, on Sunday.

Narrow defeat

Bhorla exited after suffering a narrow 2-3 defeat to two-time European under-22 champion Nijat Husaynov of Azerbaijan. Later, Berwal lost 0-5 to 2022 European champion Nelvie Tiafack of Germany.

Blancaneaux clinches the title

DELHI OPEN
Kamesh Srinivasan
NEW DELHI

Geoffrey Blancaneaux of France played a fine all-round game to outwit the 19-year-old Coleman Wong of Hong Kong 6-4, 6-2 in the final of the Dafa News \$82,000 Delhi Open Challenger tennis tournament at the DLTA Complex here on Sunday.

It was the second Challenger title and 15th singles triumph in the 25-year-old Blancaneaux's career, who was ranked a career-best 134 two years ago.

Wong, who trained at the Rafael Nadal Academy in Spain, showed glimpses of his athletic game but lacked the experience to tackle a seasoned player like Blancaneaux, who



Blancaneaux. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

controlled the flow of the match with ease.

The Frenchman served six aces that sailed beyond a diving Wong. Blancaneaux converted three of six break points to make it a crisp entertainment for the appreciative fans who had turned up in good numbers.

Blancaneaux rarely gave an opening for his opponent to find his way for a fight. The Frenchman saved the two break points

he faced in the match and cruised home. He had beaten a string of high-quality opponents along the way, with considerable authority, including the second seed Adam Walton of Australia. He had dropped only one set in all five matches.

The champion collected \$11,200 and 75 ATP points. For Wong, who has won two singles titles in the ITF circuit, it was a memorable run, as he capitalised on the opening in the draw when he got a walkover from third seed and the champion of the last Challenger in Pune, Valentin Vacherot of Monaco, in the second round. Wong collected \$6,575 and 44 points.

The results (final):

Geoffrey Blancaneaux (Fra) bt Coleman Wong (Hkg) 6-4, 6-2.

Juliette unleashes a glorious run to keep her tryst with destiny

The peerless eight-year-old completes hat-trick of Invitation Cup triumphs by demolishing a high-class field with a record-breaking display; A Star Is Born upstages Knotty Chamer in the Super Mile; Siege Courageous delivers



Reaping the riches: Mehtab Singh, Karthik Ganapathy, Raunak Banerjee, Simone Poonawalla Pandole, Zavaray Poonawalla, C.S. Jodha, Rishad Pandole, and Mrs. Behroze Poonawalla along with HPSLS Suresh Paladuggu, third left on top, and Turf Authority of India members after receiving the awards for Juliette's romp in the Invitation Cup. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Brilliant effort: Cyrus Poonawalla, Rajesh Narredu, Zavaray Poonawalla, Behroze Poonawalla, Raunak Banerjee, Simone Poonawalla Pandole and Rishad Pandole leading in A Star Is Born (Suraj Narredu up) after the facie win in the Maj. P.K. Mehra Memorial Super Mile Cup. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

INVITATION CUP

Cyrus J. Madan
Vinayak M. Zodge
KOLKATA

The ran out of superlatives to describe the wonder mare Juliette, the eight-year-old got abroad grey by Musketter out of Gimmesumgar, as she strolled to victory in the HPSL Indian Turf Invitation Cup here on Sunday. Sporting the colours of the Poonawalla family this time, but with the professional combination of trainer Karthik Ganapathy and jockey C.S. Jodha remaining unchanged, Juliette put daylight between herself and her rivals. At the regal age of 8, it was almost as if she was making a statement when leaving the runner-up Jamar eight lengths adrift while stopping the clock at a record time of 2:16.788s. In the bargain she also completed a hat-trick of Invitation Cups and there's no question that she's one of the greatest of all time. Every sport lover a superstar, and Juliette can rightly lay claim to the title 'Empress of the Indian Turf', in the Major P.K. Mehra Super

Mile, A Star Is Born, a six-year-old bay horse trained by Rajesh Narredu and ridden with panache by Suraj Narredu, got going in time to peg back Knotty Chamer who at one stage looked like having sealed the deal. Suraj, who kept the son of Roderic O'Connor in fourth place, pushed his steed with an electrifying run to win by a shade over a neck. Siege Courageous waltzed away in the Suresh Mahindra Multi Million. The Prasanna Kumar-trained five-year-old son of Gusto out of Golden Queen made advances for losing out in the Sprinters' Cup by turning in a record-breaking run.

THE RESULTS:
1. BANGALORE TURF CLUB MILLION: MISS AMERICAN PIE (N.S. Parmar) 1, Fortune Teller (S. Saqlain) 2, Adjustment (Antony Raj) 3 and Toussaint (Neeraj) 4. S. 3/4 and 2 1/2. Im. 23.44s. 1/4 (w), 12.17 and 14 (p). SHP: 59, THP: 46, Q: 45, Tanala: 208. Favourite: Miss American Pie. Owner: Mr. Prashant Nagar rep. SKJ Thoroughbreds Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: M.K.G. Jadhav.
2. DASHMESH STUB CALCUTTA MILLION: LADY SUNSHINE (P. Trevor) 1, Global Influence (Guraj Narredu) 2, Mothers Care (Neeraj) 3 and Nominal (Yash Narredu) 4. 2, Link and Nose. Im.

36.7s. 1/30 (w), 13 and 71 (p). SHP: 45, THP: 29, FP: 58, Q: 15, Tanala: 339. Favourite: Global Influence. Owners: Mr. Joydeep Datta Gupta, M/s. Ritu Puri, Ms. Tarshia Dutta, Mr. Achuthan Siddharth, Mr. Sanjay Datta Gupta, Mr. Anirudha Lahiri, Mr. Manosh Mukherjee, Mr. Atul Singh, Mr. Pradeep Sahberwal & Mr. Zeeshan Babu. Trainer: Bharat Singh.
3. OCI CABLES & BOLRACECARD.COM MILLION: LA DOMINATE (Antony Raj) 1, Divine Thoughts (Mustakim) 2, Sir Baffert (P.S. Chouhan) 3 and All Time Legend (Bhawani) 4. Link, 2 1/2 and Head. Im. 5.15s. 1/20 (w), 26.18 and 19 (p). SHP: 50, THP: 85, FP: 71, Q: 294, Tanala: 63.80. Favourite: Leather Back. Owners: Mrs. S. Dhanalakshmi & Mr. B. Mahesh. Trainer: B. Mahesh.

4. SURESH MAHINDRA MULTI-MILLION TROPHY (GR. 2): SIEGE COURAGEOUS (Vivek G) 1, Shamrock (Suraj Narredu) 2, Ahead Of My Time (C.S. Jodha) 3 and Savvy Chic (P.S. Chouhan) 4. 4, 2 and 2. Im. 22.52s (record time), 397 (w), 21, 11 and 20 (p). SHP: 42, THP: 51, FP: 158, Q: 46, Tanala: 955. Favourite: Shamrock. Owners: Mr. Dean Stephen & M/s. Mukteshwar Racing LLP. Trainer: Prasanna Kumar.
5. MAJ. P.K. MEHRA MEMORIAL SUPER MILE CUP (GR. 1): A STAR IS

BORN (RODERIC O'CONNOR-ANGEL DUST) (SURAJ NARREDU) 1, Knotty Chamer (Gusto-Stormy Princess) (Vivek G) 2, Mojito (Speaking Of Which-Margarita Rita) (N.S. Parmar) 3 and De Villets (Sepoy-Express) (P. Trevor) 4. 1/2, 2 and 2. Im. 35.73s. 1/20 (w), 11.14 and 14 (p). SHP: 42, THP: 49, FP: 68, Q: 29, Tanala: 233. Favourite: A Star Is Born. Owners: Mr. Cyrus S. Poonawalla, Mr. Adar C. Poonawalla and Mrs. Natasha A. Poonawalla rep. Viloo Poonawalla Racing and Breeding Pvt. Ltd. & Mr. Zavaray S. Poonawalla, Mrs. Behroze Z. Poonawalla, Ms. Delna Z. Poonawalla and Mrs. Simone Poonawalla Pandole rep. Poonawalla Racing and Breeding Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: Rajesh Narredu.

6. HPSL INDIAN TURF INVITATION CUP (GR. 1): JULIETTE (MUSTAKIM-GENESIMUS) (C.S. JODHA) 1, Jamar (Cougar Mount-Glyndeborne) (P. Trevor) 2, Touch Of Grass (Top Class-Zarara) (Neeraj Rajal) 3 and Synthesis (Speaking Of Which-Sana) (Suraj Narredu) 4. 8, 1/4 and 2 1/4. 2m. 26.78s (record time), 415 (w), 11, 10 and 21 (p). SHP: 21, THP: 38, FP: 31, Q: 13, Tanala: 265. Favourite: Juliette. Owners: Mr. Zavaray S. Poonawalla, Mrs. Behroze Z. Poonawalla, Mr. Yohan Z. Poonawalla, Mrs. Michelle Y. Poonawalla, Mrs. Delna Z. Poonawalla, Mrs. Simone Poonawalla Pandole, Mr. Rishad N. Pandole & Mr. Raunak Banerjee rep. Poonawalla Racing & Breeding Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: Karthik Ganapathy.
7. ROYAL WESTERN INDIA TURF CLUB MILLION: MAGNETO (S. Saqlain) 1, Golden Kingdom (P.S. Chouhan) 2, Life Is Good (Mohit Singh) 3 and Shubankar (Merchan) 4. 1/2, 5 and 3/4. 2m. 3.58s. 849 (w), 14, 13 and 23 (p). SHP: 29, THP: 50, FP: 166, Q: 75, Tanala: 1,223. Favourite: Long Lease. Owner: Mr. Ajay Jaban rep. Ultimo Stud Farm Pvt. Ltd. Trainer: Faisal A. Abbas.
NOTE: First favourite Long Lease (Suraj Narredu up) returned lame after the race.
8. MADRAS RACE CLUB MILLION: BLACKSTONE (Bhawani Singh) 1, Fresh Hope (S.K. Daswan) 2, Hasting Sunrise (Akshay Kumar) 3 and Sun Flame (Vinod Shinde) 4. 4-1/2, 3 and 2 1/4. Im. 12.88s. 1/6 (w), 12, 38 and 16 (p). SHP: 209, THP: 57, FP: 351, Q: 469, Tanala: 2,396. Favourite: Blackstone. Owner: Mr. H.S. Chandre Gowda. Trainer: M. Rajendra Singh.
Jackpot: 70%: ₹3,994 (244 tkts.), 30%: ₹23 (403 tkts.). Mini Jackpot: 392 (147 tkts.), 10%: ₹90 (34 tkts.), 5%: ₹5,000 (10 tkts.), 3%: ₹25 (84 tkts.).

Chennaiyin wins a thriller against Odisha

ISL-10

Aashin Prasad
CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC clinched a thrilling 2-1 win over the Indian Super League (ISL) table-topper Odisha FC in the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Sunday to breathe fresh life into its playoffs aspirations.

It looked like Chennaiyin's wastefulness in front of goal would bite the club once again when Roy Krishna levelled the scores in the 78th minute, but substitute Jordan Murray headed home the match-winner in the fourth minute of stoppage time to send the sparse local crowd into delirium.

The three points lifts CFC to 10th in the table while Odisha, remains level with second-placed Mohun Bagan Super Giant, having played a game more.

Chennaiyin's pressure from the start resulted in the opening goal when Rafael Crivellaro's inswinging corner was turned in by defender Ankit Mukherjee. In the second period, out of nothing, Krishna, who was kept quiet for much of the game, looped in a header from a corner to bring Odisha back into the game.

Chennaiyin, however, continued to persist, and Murray nodded in a Connor Shields' corner past Amrinder to give the home side a much-needed win.

The result: Chennaiyin 2 (Ankit 6, Murray 90+) bt Odisha 1 (Krishna 78).

INBRIEF



de Minaur claims Mexican Open title again

Australia's Alex de Minaur won his second consecutive ATP Mexican Open title on Saturday, defeating Norway's Casper Ruud 6-4, 6-4 in the final at Acapulco. The 25-year-old captured his eighth career ATP title.

Ishaque-Adil duo finishes runner-up in Iran tournament

Second seeds Ishaque Eقبال and Adil Kalyanpur lost 5-7, 6-4, [10-6] in the doubles final to Matyas Fuele and Gergely Madarasz of Hungary in the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament in Kish Island, Iran, on Sunday.

Triple jumper Chittraval finishes 11th at World indoors

Praveen Chittraval, the triple jump National record-holder with last year's 17.37m, finished 11th with 16.45m in the World Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow on Saturday. The event was the season-opener for the 22-year-old from Tamil Nadu who had won a bronze in the Hangzhou Asian Games.

LIVE TELECAST

▼ **Jai Trophy:** (semifinals), Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.
Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka: 1st T20, FanCine, 5.30 p.m.
PVL: Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LIV, 6.30 & 8.30 p.m.
ISL: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.
WPL: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.
Serie A: Sports 18-1 & Jio Cinema App, 1.15 a.m. (Tuesday)
Premier League: SS Select & Hotstar, 1.30 a.m. (Tuesday)
LaLiga: Sports 18-1 & Jio Cinema App, 1.30 a.m. (Tuesday)

Toofans beat Thunderbolts in the PVL

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Delhi Toofans secured a dominant 15-9, 16-14, 17-15 win over Kolkata Thunderbolts in the third season of the RuPay Prime Volleyball League here on Sunday.

Ahmedabad Defenders beat Mumbai Meteors 15-12, 15-11, 14-16, 13-15, 15-13 in the second match.

Aditi finishes 21st: Green wins title in Singapore

Press Trust of India
SINGAPORE

India's Aditi Ashok finished 21st at the Women's World Championship golf with a final card of 2-under 70 here on Sunday after being in top-10 in the first two days. Australia's Hannah Green topped 13-under and won the title one shot clear of Frenchwoman Céline Boutier (67).

Inter Miami thumps Orlando City

Agencies
FORT LAUDERDALE

Luis Suarez (fourth and 11th) and Lionel Messi (57th and 62nd) scored two goals each as Inter Miami turned on the style, hammering Orlando City 5-0 in Major League Soccer here on Saturday. Orlando was outclassed by Miami from the outset. Robert Taylor added one in the 29th.

Justina Mikulskyte outclasses Yeonwoo Ku in final

ITF TENNIS
Kamesh Srinivasan
GURUGRAM

Third seed Justina Mikulskyte scythed through the challenge of the 20-year-old Yeonwoo Ku of Korea 6-0, 6-1 in the final of the Federal Bank \$25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament at the Tennis Project, Baliawas, on Sunday.

The 28-year-old Mikulskyte, ranked 251, had a match point to blank her opponent, but the wry Korean salvaged some pride by breaking serve for a to-



Mikulskyte, KAMESH SRINIVASAN

ken game. The score was misleading as the quality of the rallies was top class and the Korean, a half-step slow,

could not cope with the flawless fare of the Lithuanian.

"I am really happy with the way I played the final," said Mikulskyte. After beating top seeded Dailia Jakupovic in the third set tie-break of the semifinals, saving a match point, Mikulskyte had the confidence to play her best.

It was the fifth singles title in the professional circuit for Mikulskyte, who has won 20 doubles titles.

The players will move to the next tournament in Nagpur, followed by the one in Indore.

Mackenzie stars for Rajnigandha Achievers

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

Chris Mackenzie scored four goals in helping Rajnigandha Achievers to a 7-5 victory over Mayfair Polo in the final of the Radha Mohan Rajpolder Mohan Gold Vase polo tournament at the Jaipur Polo ground here on Sunday.

Kipruto and Kebede win Tokyo Marathon

Reuters
TOKYO

Kenyan Benson Kipruto won the men's Tokyo Marathon in two hours, two minutes and 16 seconds on Sunday, breaking former

World record holder Eliud Kipchoge's course mark in perfect racing conditions. Ethiopia's Sittume Asefa Kebede won the women's race ahead of Kenya's defending champion Rosemary Wanjiru in 2:15:55.

Federal Bank pledges support for women's tennis

Sports Bureau
GURUGRAM

It was the second ITF women's tournament that Federal Bank was sponsoring at the Tennis Project run by Vishaal Uppal.

Acknowledging the qualitative improvement at the tournament – with the prize money increasing from \$15,000 to \$25,000 – Chief Marketing Officer of Federal Bank, M.V.S. Murthy, said plans were being made to host five such tournaments in a year.

"We are having talks to host five such international tournaments with more and more prize money in a season, in different parts of the country. We want more foreigners coming into the country, along with creating more platforms for our players to compete at home," he said.

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Midfield magician Kroos' return will add impetus to Germany's Euro campaign

The 34-year-old, who has been at his best for Real Madrid, will be a key member in the country's bid to make a comeback in the international stage under coach Nagelsmann



AFP

Vignesh P. Venkitesh

Toni Kroos is 'in the mood' right now. The 34-year-old German midfielder has never turned down a chance to make it clear that he did not intend to stretch out his career for the sake of being around. However, he had lost the chance to quit while ahead with his national team.

After going from world champions to not being able to get out of the World Cup group stage, the German men's national team was in trouble going into the 2020 Euro Cup.

With its long-time serving legendary coach Joachim Low announcing his decision to step down after the 2020 Euros, the team wanted to forget the disastrous Russia World Cup and give the manager a proper farewell. But it failed to deliver and crashed out of the tournament with a round-of-16 loss to England.

With a poor string of results and the prospect of a new coach after 15 years, it was clear the time was right for a generation change. Kroos, for whom the team always comes first, surprised the world with his decision to retire at the age of 31 to make way for the generation change. Now the midfield magician has surprised, and excited, the world again with his decision to don the German colours again.

After his shock resignation three years ago, fans of Spanish giants Real Madrid – whose midfield remains under the control of Kroos – were dreading the day the maestro decided to call it a day.

With his clear intention of not putting in a long shift, like his iconic partner in crime Luka Modric, Madridistas were prepared to see that day. But after leaving the national team, Kroos did nothing but keep getting better. The decline that he predicted his age would bring by is nowhere to be seen, and the German keeps making his accurate long balls from deep within his own half to effortlessly switch plays or start a counter.

With Kroos in his best-ever form, and the team performing better than expected for one depleted by injuries, the perfect ending to a glorious career was right in front of the midfield magician. But he

kept his word of giving it his all till his body allows; and the signs that his body has a lot more to give is evident from the way he has played this season.

But Kroos' departure was not an ease in transition for Germany. After back-to-back group stage exits from FIFA men's World Cups (2018 and 2022), German football found itself in deep trouble. Hansi Flick succeeded Low to manage the team, coming on the back of a European treble with Bayern Munich.

But he was unable to do with the national team what he did with Bayern, and his tenure came to an early exit a year later. Now with Julian Nagelsmann at the helm, the team is determined to get back to winning ways. And Nagelsmann believes Kroos is key to that.

Nagelsmann acknowledges the 'special role' Kroos has in Madrid. "He guides young players and shows them how they

can work well together as part of a team," said the coach after Kroos' decision to return. This 'special role' is what Germany is lacking right now.

Kroos is aware of the role he has to play. He "has a very clear view of the state of our national team," Nagelsmann had said. The team is filled with immense talent, like it always did, but there were no mentors playing beside them till now.

And with the young core, including the young manager, and presence of calm and experience in the form of Kroos, Germany is a serious contender for the 2024 Euros to be held in its own backyard.

One-man orchestra

Spanish publication *Marca* once described Kroos as a "one-man orchestra", which is exactly what he does in the middle of the ground. While his

partnership with Modric and the trio the two made with Brazilian Casemiro is lauded by many, the significance of Kroos lies in the simplicity with which he manages to orchestrate a game from the deep.

Kroos was considered a *Jahrhunderttalent*, talent of the century, in Germany when he was selected by Bayern Munich from the Hansa Rostock in 2006. Four years later, he made the 23-men list for Germany's World Cup team, and there was no looking back.

Low has praised the "symmetry and balance" that Kroos brings to the national team. French legend Zinedine Zidane – under whom Kroos played a pivotal role in winning Real Madrid's historic three-peat Champions League – labelled Kroos the "perfect player".

While Nagelsmann is also trying to convince right-back Joshua Kimmich to come out of retirement, the availability of Kroos will be a huge relief for the manager.

A player who has played in five Champions League finals and one World Cup final, and won them all, is what Germany needs at the moment. He is, in Nagelsmann's opinion "a player who will stay calm and keep his composure even in a tight European Championship and who you can always pass under pressure".

Kroos is one of the loudest critics of players' busy schedules combining club matches and international matches with not enough breaks to help them relax and rejuvenate, increasing the chances of injury. Some fans worry the toll of extra international matches might take Kroos past his breaking point.

But that is a concern most of the football world has decided to deal with later. For now, they just want to see one of the most exquisite passers of the ball the game has ever seen glide the ball to its destination.

With their beloved player returning to the international stage, both German supporters and Madridistas have their hopes high. While German fans see a major trophy in ten years as achievable, Real Madrid enthusiasts hope the decision is Kroos' way of saying he is not done yet and will be here for more.

THE GIST

▼ Kroos was considered a *Jahrhunderttalent*, talent of the century, in Germany when he was selected by Bayern Munich from the Hansa Rostock in 2006

▼ He made the 23-men list for Germany's World Cup team in 2010



GETTY IMAGES

SCIENCE

In snake genes, study finds they evolved 3x faster than other reptiles

Organisms evolve by inheriting small changes over many generations that collectively enhance their ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. But some organisms also evolved at different speeds, leaving behind in the planet's history signs of bursts of change that researchers are yet to explain

Vinod Scaria
Sridhar Sivasubbu

The sci-fi writer David Brin built his fictitious 'Uplift Universe' in a series of novels for two decades from 1980. In the series, a patron race uplifts species of a future universe to a higher order of life. Something similar happened in the earth's distant past when many species went through bursts of evolutionary innovation, taking giant leaps and incorporating extraordinary diversity in their population, while others were left behind.

Unexplained bursts of change

The question of how some species become capable of taking these quantum leaps has been an enduring mystery in evolutionary biology.

The popular Darwinian theory of evolution states that all organisms evolve through the process of natural selection. In other words, organisms inherit small changes over many generations and these changes collectively enhance the organism's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce. However, the earth's fossil records tell a more complex, in fact different story: in addition to a constant rate of transformation, organisms also evolved at different speeds and through varying degrees of complexity.

Our planet's evolutionary history is dotted with numerous instances of such unexplained bursts of evolutionary changes, leading to the emergence of new species or the extinction of old ones.

A tree of snakes and lizards

One such evolutionary explosion happened about 100-150 million years ago, when dinosaurs roamed the planet's surface. An extraordinary evolutionary transformation happened at this time: the nondescript lizards lost their legs to become one of the most highly adapted predators in history, capturing almost every environmental niche on the planet. We know them today as snakes.

Through a series of remarkable adaptations, snakes acquired legless bodies that could slither across diverse terrains, developed complex chemical sensory systems to track prey, incorporated flexible jaws to swallow large animals, and evolved an assortment of attack mechanisms, including the production of lethal venoms.

In a study published on February 22 in the *Journal Science*, an international team of scientists, led by researchers at the University of Michigan, worked together to unravel the genetic sequence of more



In the case of snakes a series of rapid changes in form and function occurred so close together that they appeared to be a single, unified event on the evolutionary time-scale. DAVID CLODE/UNSPASH

than 1,018 snake and lizard species. The result was the largest and most comprehensive evolutionary tree of snakes and lizards. They analysed the genetic sequence data together with previous studies, and revealed that snakes have been evolving much faster than their reptilian cousins.

Specifically, the team estimated snakes evolved almost three-times faster than lizards and other reptiles, allowing them to take advantage of the new environmental niches that rapidly emerged after the extinction of the dinosaurs.

A clock in the body's molecules

DNA and protein sequences evolve at a relatively constant rate over time, irrespective of the organism. This allows scientists to use genetic differences between two species to estimate the time that has passed since these species last shared a common ancestor. This is then used to calculate the relative pace of evolution of the organism. In a way, genetic sequences serve as a molecular clock using which scientists can determine the 'evolutionary distances' between various organisms.

Along with snakes, many lizards also adapted to these rapid changes and developed snake-like traits, including losing their limbs and elongating their bodies. The Australian scincid lizard (*Lerista*), a member of the clade *Squamata* (which includes lizards and snakes), provides perhaps the best example of such evolution.

Lerista comprises more than 75 closely related species that display a wide variety of digit (finger) layout: from five digits to being entirely limbless. Such extraordinary malleability of limb-count in this lizard is the result of at least 10



Along with snakes, many lizards also adapted to these rapid changes and developed snake-like traits, including losing their limbs and elongating their bodies

independent evolutionary limb-reduction events over a few million years.

But while the lizards made desperate attempts to evolve, snakes easily outpaced them, leading to a burst of diversification. Researchers have attributed this surge to a phenomenon they call the "singularity of snakes". This is akin to the Big Bang theory of cosmology, which postulates that our entire universe emerged from a singular event around 14 billion years ago. In the case of the evolution of snakes, the singularity emerged in a series of rapid changes in form and function, but which occurred so close together that they appeared to be a single, unified event on the evolutionary time-scale.

Availability of prey

The eventual result is that we have about 4,000 living species of snakes flourishing in a variety of geographical conditions. Today, snakes are terrestrial dwellers, tree-climbers, burrowers, swimmers, etc., sporting a bevy of hunting strategies and dietary preferences.

As part of the new study, scientists also painstakingly collected information about snakes' dietary preferences by studying the stomach contents of more than 60,000 snakes and lizards, mostly from field observations and natural-history

museum specimens. They found that snakes largely consumed small vertebrates while lizards preferred insects and invertebrates - meaning snakes specialised their food selection whereas lizards have tended to be non-specific.

However, the availability of prey alone is insufficient to explain snake diversity. The researchers also admitted the ultimate cause of the "singularity" remains hidden from view.

The Sonic hedgehog gene

The hallmark of a snake is the elegant manner in which it glides over land or water. Snakes can move this way thanks to their long spinal column and specially designed vertebrae. They have over 300 vertebrae versus about 65 in lizards and 33 in humans. Also, all three organisms have a backbone and almost the same genetic blueprint - yet varied body plans.

In a previous study of snake genomes, researchers were able to identify snake-specific changes in a vertebrate limb-enhancer of the Sonic hedgehog gene (named for the videogame character). This limb-enhancer sequence has also been found in primitive snakes, such as pythons and boa, but not in modern snakes. When they replaced the mouse-specific limb-enhancer gene with the snake-specific one in mice, the researchers observed severe limb reduction.

Scientists suspect such evolutionary bursts in some species may have happened multiple times, not just once, and are certain that understanding them is key to understanding the earth's ecological future.

(The authors are senior consultants at the Vishwanath Cancer Care Foundation and adjunct professors at Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur.)

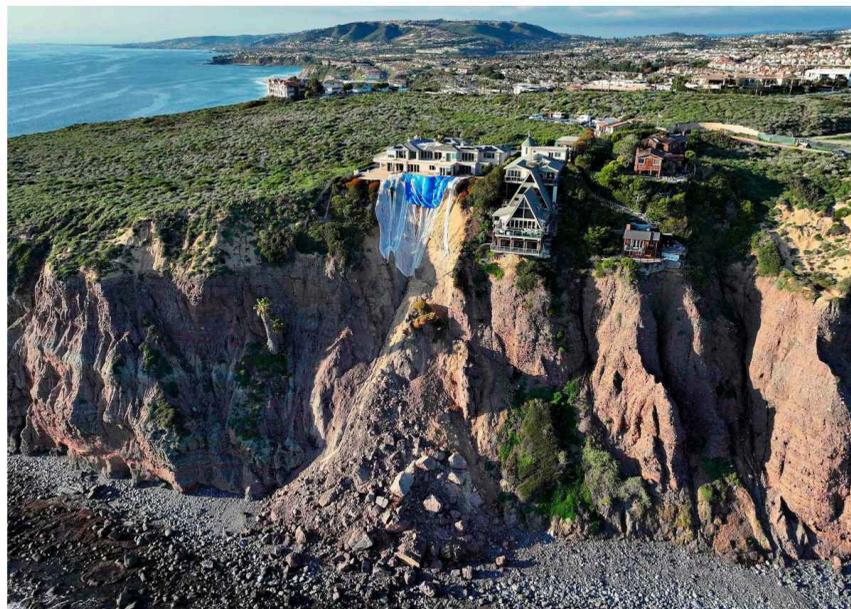
THE GIST

An evolutionary explosion happened about 100-150 million years ago. The nondescript lizards lost their legs to become one of the most highly adapted predators in history, capturing almost every environmental niche on the planet. We know them today as snakes

Researchers unravelled the genetic sequence of more than 1,018 snake and lizard species. They analysed the genetic sequence data together with previous studies, and revealed that snakes have been evolving much faster than their reptilian cousins

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BIG SHOT



An aerial view of mansions still standing along a cliff after a portion of the cliffside tumbled into the Pacific Ocean following days of heavy rains on February 27, at Dana Point, California. A powerful atmospheric river brought flooding, mudslides, and over 17 cm of rain - half the average yearly total. Such atmospheric rivers have been destroying the coveted coastal cliffs. AFP

WHAT IS IT?

Resonance: a tendency to move in step

Vasudevan Mukunth

Sometimes some systems have a tendency to oscillate between two points - like the membrane of a drum that has been beaten. In this setting, the system will oscillate with a higher amplitude if its frequency matches its natural frequency. This phenomenon is called resonance. The natural frequency of a system is the frequency at which it has a tendency to oscillate even when it is not disturbed. Resonance is common in nature and in artificial systems. When you push a child on a swing, your push will have the most effect if you apply it at just the right time - called the resonant interval, which is related to the frequency at which the child is already swinging.

Resonance can be good or bad, depending on the context. It is good in applications like the quartz crystal in a quartz watch, when playing musical instruments or singing (with the vocal chords), when producing laser light, and in nuclear magnetic resonance (which MRI scanners use to look inside your body). You may have noticed the detrimental effects of resonance when you're sitting in a bus, the engine is idling, and you feel the vehicle's metal structure rattling. On April 12, 1831, British soldiers were marching on the Broughton Suspension Bridge in England. As they marched in step [all together going left, right, left, right], they



Nuclear magnetic resonance is used by MRI scanners to look inside your body. GETTY IMAGES

exerted a periodic force on the bridge whose frequency matched its natural frequency, and the bridge broke and collapsed. Since then, soldiers often break step when marching across bridges.

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