



Drishti IAS

Call to Avail Up to **50% Discount**
☎ **8010 440 440 | 87501 87501**
Download Drishti Learning App

Holi Sale
UPTO **50% Off**
21 - 24 March

On All Online, Pendrive Courses,
Test Series, Books & DLP



Scan to Avail
Up to **50% Off**



EMI Facilities are Available for Discounted Course Prices*

IN BRIEF



Haasan: BJP govt. not yet fascist, but getting there

CHENNAI
Makkal Needhi Maiam founder Kamal Haasan, who recently joined the INDIA bloc, said on Thursday that the Narendra Modi-led government was not yet fascist, but it was getting there. » **Page 13**

BJP fields T.N. chief Annamalai from Coimbatore

CHENNAI
The BJP on Thursday released its first list of nine candidates in Tamil Nadu for the LS poll, which includes State president K. Annamalai, Union Minister of State L. Murugan and former Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan. » **Page 4**

MEIL's ₹584 crore to BJP is top donation to any party

Data released by the EC show that the company donated ₹195 crore to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi and ₹85 crore to the DMK; the Trinamool received ₹542 crore from lottery magnate Martin's firm

Vignesh Radhakrishnan
Jasmin Nihalani
Rebecca Rose Varghese
CHENNAI

H yderabad-based Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd. (MEIL) donated ₹584 crore to the BJP – the most by a donor for any single party.

The company also donated ₹195 crore to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi and ₹85 crore to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

Its subsidiary, Western U.P. Power Transmission Company Ltd., donated ₹110 crore to the Congress, followed by ₹80 crore to the BJP, data released by the Election Commission on Thursday revealed. The commission received the data from the State Bank of India.

Donors and beneficiaries

The table lists the top three donors through the electoral bond scheme and the parties they donated to the most

Donor (company)	Party	% of total donations
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	Trinamool	39.6%
Megha Engineering (MEIL)	BJP	60%
Qwik Supply Chain	Shiv Sena	6.1%

Source: ECI

All the top 19 companies (by total donations through electoral bonds) donated portions of the bonds to the BJP.

Lottery magnate Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services PR, the highest electoral bond donor overall, donated ₹542 crore to the Trinamool Congress through this route.

The data pertain to

bonds purchased and encashed between April 12, 2019 and January 24, 2024, for which information has been released to the public.

Of the bonds worth ₹1,368 crore purchased by Future Gaming and Hotel Services, 39.6% went to the Trinamool, followed by the DMK (₹503 crore), and the YSR Congress Party (₹154 crore). The BJP received

All data on poll bonds given to EC, SBI tells SC

NEW DELHI
The State Bank of India on Thursday informed the Supreme Court that it has made a "complete disclosure" of all the details regarding the poll bonds to the Election Commission. » **Page 12**

₹100 crore from the firm. Qwik Supply Chain Ltd. – the third biggest donor through poll bonds – gave ₹375 crore to the BJP and ₹25 crore to the Shiv Sena. (Three Reliance Group companies own 50% of Qwik.)

CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 12**
RELATED REPORTS
» **PAGE 12**



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal being taken away from his residence by Enforcement Directorate officials on Thursday. PTI

ED arrests Kejriwal in excise policy case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday on charges of corruption and money laundering in connection with the formulation and execution of the government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.

Mr. Kejriwal will be produced before a special

court on Friday. AAP said it has moved the Supreme Court for quashing the arrest, and asked for an urgent hearing.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi High Court declined to grant any immediate protection to Mr. Kejriwal from coercive action in the excise policy-linked money laundering case.

CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 12**
RELATED REPORTS
» **PAGES 3, 12**

Ponmudy case: CJ I raps Tamil Nadu Governor

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Thursday slammed Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi for "defying the Supreme Court" by refusing to re-induct Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader K. Ponmudy as Minister despite an apex court order suspending his conviction in a disproportionate assets case. The court gave the Governor overnight to "set the constitutional position right".

Mr. Ravi has refused to administer oath to Mr. Ponmudy as Higher Education Minister, saying it is against "constitutional morality". The Governor has argued that the court's stay of the conviction on March 8 did not rub off the fact that Mr. Ponmudy had been convicted of moral turpitude.

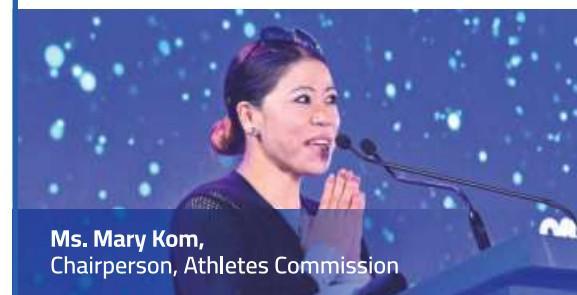
CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 12**



PROUD TO BE THE OFFICIAL BANKING PARTNER TO TEAM INDIA
For Paris Olympics 2024



Mr. Prashant Kumar,
Managing Director & CEO, YES BANK



Ms. Mary Kom,
Chairperson, Athletes Commission

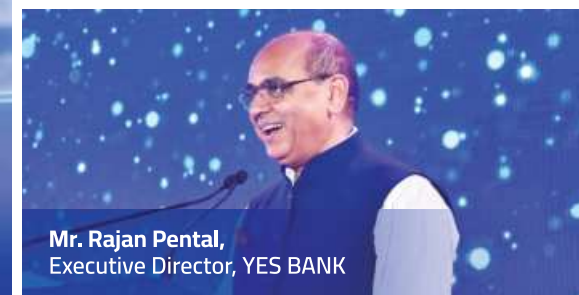


YES BANK unveiled the partnership with the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) & Team India in the esteemed presence of Dr. P. T. Usha, President, IOA & Hon'ble MP of Rajya Sabha, Ms. Mary Kom, Chairperson, Athletes Commission, Mr. Raghuram Iyer, CEO, IOA, and Mr. Prashant Kumar, Managing Director & CEO, Mr. Rajan Pentel, ED, Mr. Manish Jain, Country Head, Wholesale Banking, Ms. Archana Shiroor, CHRO and Mr. Nipun Kaushal, CMO & Head, CSR from YES BANK.

Indian contingent athletes, Ms. Manu Bhaker, Pistol Shooter, Mrs. Rajeshwari Ria Kumari, Trap Shooter, Mr. Dhiraj Bommadevara, Archer, and Ms. Parveen Hooda, Amateur Boxer also graced the prestigious event at YES BANK HOUSE in Mumbai.



Dr. P. T. Usha, President, Indian Olympic Association & Hon'ble MP, Rajya Sabha



Mr. Rajan Pentel, Executive Director, YES BANK



An athlete's journey is the collaborative effort of all those who have believed in their dream. The guidance and unconditional love of their family, the encouragement from friends, the mentorship of coaches, and the backing of fans all add up to an athlete's success. We too have always been a part of their journey in spirit. But today, we're making it official.

HC notice to Centre on sterilisation of 'feral' pets

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday issued a notice to the Centre on a petition challenging a recent notification banning 23 breeds of 'ferocious' dogs, which also mandates sterilisation of the same breeds for all current owners.

During the hearing, the

High Court remarked that the Centre's notification was a "policy decision" but it could look into aspect of the notification that mandate all current owners of the banned breeds of dogs to forcibly sterilise their pets.

The petition challenged the March 12 notification of the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying,

Government of India, banning the import, breeding and selling of Pitbull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Dogo Argentinos, American Bulldogs and others.

The plea said "the notification lacks a comprehensive framework or research-backed methodology to define what exactly constitutes a

'ferocious breed' and how the selected breeds fit into this classification."

It added that enforcing breed-specific legislation can be challenging especially when determining a dog's breed is not straightforward, especially when dealing with mixed breeds.

The High Court is scheduled to hear the case again in August.

Two workers killed as jeans factory building collapses in Welcome

The two-storey building, which was already in a dilapidated condition, crumbled under the weight of rubble stored on the terrace, say police

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Two employees of a garment factory were killed and another injured when the building it was housed in north-east Delhi's Welcome area on Thursday morning, the police said. All three employees were working at the ground floor of the two-storey building, the police added.

"A call was received at 2.16 a.m. regarding a wall collapse at an old construction building. The first floor of the building was vacant, while the ground floor was being used as a jeans factory," said DCP (North East) Joy Tirkey.

An official of the fire department added that by the time firefighters reached the spot, the entire building had collapsed. "Four vehicles of the fire brigade were



Picking up the pieces: The three employees were working at the factory housed on the ground floor of the building. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

subsequently pressed into service," he said.

Workers trapped

The police said that the three workers trapped under the debris were pulled out and rushed to GTB Hospital, where two of them were declared dead. The deceased have been identified as Arshad, 30, and Tauhaid, 20. Rehan, 22, is currently

undergoing treatment at the hospital. "During investigation, it was found that the factory and building owner, Shahid, also owned an adjacent building which was under construction. He had demolished a portion and collected the rubble on the terrace of this building, which was already in a dilapidated condition," an officer said.

HC seeks Delhi govt.'s stand on paying salaries to imams

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday issued a notice to the Delhi government and the Delhi Waqf Board (DWB) on a plea challenging the government's policy of utilising public funds to pay salaries or honorarium to imams and muez-zins under the DWB.

The court asked the Finance and Planning Department of the State government and the Waqf Board to reply to the public interest litigation plea filed by Rukmani Singh, and listed the case for further hearing on July 22.

Ms. Singh, in her petition, had said that the Constitution provides that the State shall be secular, and therefore, cannot favour any particular religion.

"However, the practice adopted by the Delhi government to pay honorarium to a few individuals of a particular religious community without considering the financial condition of a similar category of individuals in other religious communities directly contravenes the secular nature of the State," the plea said.

On poll eve, JNU candidates brace for big battle

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

The debate conducted in the run-up to the student body elections at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) saw presidential candidates for the top post in the Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union battle it out, with each of their speeches touching upon themes of personal identity, national issues, and campus problems.

The debate, which concluded in the early hours of

Students will vote in the election on Friday, while results will be declared on Sunday

Thursday, is a customary part of the highly anticipated polls which are being conducted after a hiatus of four years. Students will vote on Friday, and results will be declared on Sunday. Only seven of the eight candidates participated in the public event.

The candidate fielded by the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad, Umesh Chandra Ajmeera, spoke of his identity as an *Adivasi*, and his father's alleged murder by Naxalites in his hometown in Telangana.

Meanwhile, the United Left Panel fielded Dhananjay, a Dalit candidate, whose arguments were based on the JNU administration's alleged failures to safeguard rights of women, persons with disabilities, and sanitation workers.

Biswajit Minji, the Birs

Ambedkar Phule Students' Association candidate, quoted B.R. Ambedkar in his speech, promising an end to inequality, while Samajwadi Chatra Sabha candidate Aradhana Yadav spoke on the farmers' protest. The Disha candidate highlighted that the party was "independent of any political affiliation", and the last speaker, Junaid Raza from the National Students' Union of India, referred to the Centre's "attack on Muslims that has reached into everyone's homes".

CLASSIFIEDS MART
TO ADVERTISE VISIT
www.thehinduads.com
CALL: 011-43579738 # 011-43579797

EDUCATIONAL
GENERAL

HISTORYS.BALIYAN
REGULAR OFFLINE / ONLINE CLASSES | WEBSITE: INSIGHTDELHI.COM | SEATS ARE LIMITED, ENROL IMMEDIATELY

NEW BATCHES COMMENCE 1st APRIL
INSIGHT
73, OLD RAJINDER NAGAR
NEW DELHI - 110060
011-45090051, 9818333201

EDUCATIONAL
GENERAL

KSG
An Institute For IAS Exam...
www.ksgindia.com
9990 999707

INDIAN FOREST SERVICE
DAF ANALYSIS & One to One Mock
For AGRICULTURE / BOTANY & FORESTY Optional Students
Kindly Forward your DAF 1 & 2 to Book Your Appointment
6588824247 @agrioptionalupsc@gmail.com

PUBLIC NOTICE

IN THE HIGH COURT OF KARNATAKA AT BENGALURU
(ORIGINAL JURISDICTION)
IN THE MATTER OF M/s UNITED BREWERIES (HOLDINGS) LIMITED (IN LIQN.)
E-AUCTION NOTICE FOR LEASE
Online competitive bids are hereby invited as per the orders of the Hon'ble High Court of Karnataka vide order dated 08.11.2023 passed in OLR No.91/2023 for "LEASE" of the below mentioned vacant spaces owned by United Breweries (Holdings) Limited (in liquidation) (for commercial office use on monthly lease rental basis) at UB City, 24, Vittal Mallya Road, Bengaluru-560 001, India. "On as is, where is and whatever there is basis" through e-auction platform (<https://olauction.enivida.com/>) to be conducted by M/s. RailTel Corporation of India Limited. Date and time of Inspection of premises will be on 01.04.2024 & 02.04.2024 from 11.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m.
Details of vacant premises proposed for leasing, i.e., Reserve price, EMD, Date of E-auction are as under:-

Additional District Judge, SHAHDARA.

EDUCATIONAL
GENERAL

BHARTI CONCEPT MATHS
by S.S. Bharti
Holi Offer Till 31 March
Online free with Offline New Admission
For Online - Old students get 85% discount
& New students get 70% discount
Use Coupon Code - Holi
For:- SSC, Banking, Railway CSAT, CPO(SI), all govt.services
Download Bharti Learning App
9250291082, 7065900111
Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, Delhi-9

LEGAL NOTICE

IN THE COURT OF Sh. Deepanker Mohan Additional District Judge-04 Room No.306, 3rd Floor, Karkardooma Court, Delhi
CS/978/2016
DROPTAI
VS
DEEPAK KUMAR
To,
DEEPAK KUMAR S/O LATE SH. KANHYA LAL, R/O A-20, NEW SEELAMPUR, DELHI-110053.
The Defendant above named WHEREAS you are intentionally evading service of summons in the above noted case, it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on 18.05.2024 the day fixed for the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex-parte. Given under my hand and the seal of the Court, this 14-03-2024.

Additional District Judge, SHAHDARA.

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY
E-TENDER NOTICE

Open E-tender is invited by DRM(S&T), Jodhpur for and on behalf of the President of India for S&T work. Details as below. Name of Work: S&T Indoor and outdoor works in c/w yard remodelling of Jodhpur station of NW Railway. Estimated cost of the work: Rs 2,28,68,243/- (R/O). Address of the NIT Issuing office: Sr.DSTE/JU NWR, DRM Office Harish Joshi Marg Jodhpur. Bid security to be deposited: Rs 2,64,400.00. Last Date & time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender: 15.04.2024 Upto 11:00 Hrs through E-tendering online submission on IREPS. Tender will be opened at 15:30 Hrs. Website particulars, where complete details of tender can be seen and participated: www.ireps.gov.in Note: This is a E-Tender, so tenderer can participate through e-tendering process only on mentioned website 388-PR/24

NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY
E-Tender Notice

Open E-tender is invited by DRM(S&T), Jodhpur for and on behalf of the President of India for S&T work. Details as below. Name of Work: S&T Indoor and outdoor works in c/w yard remodelling of Ashapura Gomat station of RKB-JSM section of JU division NW Railway. Estimated cost of the work: Rs 2,23,32,047/- (R/O). Address of the NIT Issuing office: Sr.DSTE/JU NWR, DRM Office Harish Joshi Marg Jodhpur. Bid security to be deposited: Rs 2,61,700.00. Last Date & time for submission of E-tender and opening of tender: 16.04.2024 Upto 11:00 Hrs through E-tendering online submission on IREPS. Tender will be opened at 15:30 Hrs.. Website particulars, where complete details of tender can be seen and participated: www.ireps.gov.in Note: This is a E-Tender, so tenderer can participate through e-tendering process only on mentioned website 390-PR/24

CANBERRA BLOCK						
Lot No.	Floor Number	Super Built Area in Sq.Ft	No. of Car Parkings (r)	EMD	Opening Bid/Start price	Date & time of e-auction
1	Vacant Premises at 3rd floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	on 17.04.2024 from 11.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs
2	Vacant Premises at 4th floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
3	Vacant Premises at 5th floor	26,919	35	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
4	Vacant Premises at 6th floor	26,919	27	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
5	Vacant Premises at 7th floor	26,919	21	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
6	Vacant Premises at 8th floor	26,919	20	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	on 18.04.2024 from 11.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs
7	Vacant Premises at 10th floor	26,919	27	Rs.4,90,000/-	Rs.49,00,000/-	
8	Vacant Premises at 11th floor east portion	9,360	9	Rs.1,70,000/-	Rs.17,00,000/-	
9	Vacant Premises at 14th floor	21,819	22	Rs.4,00,000/-	Rs.40,00,000/-	
10	Vacant Premises at 15th floor south portion	12,689	17	Rs.2,30,000/-	Rs.23,00,000/-	
UB TOWER						
Lot No.	Floor Number	Super Built Area in Sq.Ft	No. of Car Parkings	EMD	Opening Bid/Start price	Date & time of e-auction
11	Vacant Premises at 12th floor	8,414	41	Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	on 19.04.2024 from 11.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs
12	Vacant Premises at 14th floor	8,414		Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	
13	Vacant Premises at 15th floor	8,414		Rs.1,60,000/-	Rs.16,00,000/-	

*Rent for Car Parkings (per month/car) extra as prevailing/market rate.
The entire e-Auction catalogue containing Terms & Conditions of Lease for the schedules for giving full particulars of e-auction, guidelines for online registration and full details of Vacant Spaces of the subject matter for "Lease" are available on website of M/s. RailTel Corporation of India Limited website: <https://olauction.enivida.com/> and can be viewed by clicking on the following URL of: <https://olauction.enivida.com/> and the Official Liquidator's website: www.olkarnataka.kar.nic.in, Ministry's Website at www.mca.gov.in.
The intending bidders may contact Ms. Sujatha, Sr. Manager, Mobile No. 8448288989/ Sri. Gagan, Mobile No.8448288987 of M/s. RailTel Corporation of India, Bengaluru for doubts / clarifications if any on the e-auction procedure. For details about the Vacant Spaces contact Sri M.Venkatarama Reddy, Assistant working in the office of the Official Liquidator on his Mobile. No.9845415102 or to contact the officials of the Official Liquidator, Karnataka during working hours.

Sd/- (C V SAJEEVAN)
OFFICIAL LIQUIDATOR,
HIGH COURT OF KARNATAKA
CORPORATE BHAVAN", No.26-27, 12TH FLOOR,
RAHEJA TOWERS, M.G. ROAD, BENGALURU-01.
Tel.No:080-25598671/72

Place : Bangalore
Date :19.03.2024

SHIRT

TROUSER & JEANS SALE

Formal & Party Wear

up to 60% off

MEN & WOMEN
By Economy Sales: 9212758425

ARROW PARK AVENUE ColorPlus SMART CASUALS LOUIS PHILIPPE Levi's

- GURUGRAM 306, City Center, Sector 29 (Near Hotel PIlazio)
- PUNCHKUAN ROAD, Garwal Bhawan, (Near Jhandewalan, Gole Chkr.)
- WAZIRPUR A-5, Near Richi Rich Banquet (Opp. Shalimar Bagh)
- JANAKPURI B-1/2, Main Najafgarh Road, Opp. Metro Pillar 543
- NOIDA, Nirula's Sec-2, Near Metro Station, Sec-15, Noida, UP
- LAJPAT NAGAR, 49, Main Ring Road, Adj. Haldi Ram, Near Moolchand Crossing

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

Sixth Anniversary

Our Beloved and Only Son
RISHABH SRIVASTAV
who passed away on 22nd March 2018

Today it has been six years and not a Day passed without your Sweet, Loving and Everlasting Memories, You are eternally present among us.

Deeply and Deeply missed you beta and remembered by
Your Mummy, Papa and Friends
whom you loved a lot

In Memory of your loved ones
To dedicate a space in this section, Please contact:
011-43579797
from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.
For Placing Advertisements Online log on to
www.thehinduads.com
DONATE EYES - GIFT SIGHT

3 held for brandishing dagger on a moving bike

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Thursday arrested two persons and apprehended three juveniles for wielding a dagger and carrying beer bottles while riding a motorcycle in south-west Delhi, officials said. Action was taken after a purported video of the incident surfaced on social media, the police said. In the clip, the accused were seen sitting on the bike without helmets, carrying beer bottles and brandishing a dagger at other commuters.

Your feedback will keep us Cleaner, Sharper and Bolder

Call our toll-free number
1800 102 1878

Or write to us at
customercare@thehindu.co.in

Scan the QR code to register your feedback

THE HINDU businessline.
FRONTLINE SPORTSTAR youngworld THE HINDU

UTTARAKHAND POWER CORPORATION LIMITED
(A Govt. of Uttarakhand Undertaking)
Corporate Identity No. U40109UR2001SGC0288672358
Victoria Cross Vijeeta Gaba Singh Urja Bhawan, Kanwali Road,
Dehradun, Telephone: (0135) 2763672-76, Fax: (0135) 2760289

E-TENDER DATE EXTENSION NOTICE
E-tender Specification No. CCP-I/66/2023-2024 invited by this office for supply of LT XLPE AB Cable 1x16+25 Sq. mm are hereby extended due to unavoidable reasons. The e-tender can be purchased and submitted upto 17:00 hrs. of 3.4.2024. Part-I of the e-tender shall be opened on 4.4.2024 at 15:30 hrs.
Date & time of Pre-bid conference in online mode 28.3.2024 at 11:45 hrs. Other terms & conditions will remain same as per original tender notice. For further details, please visit our website www.uktenders.gov.in.
No.-: 159/EE(CM)/UPCLA-2 SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
Date:- 21.03.2024 CORPORATE (C&P-I)

SAVE ELECTRICITY IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION. Use LED Bulb, Save Electricity Toll Free No. 1912 "Pay Electricity bill online 24x7 from www.upcl.org". (For information on Electricity theft, informer may report to Toll Free No. 18001804185/Fax No. 0135-2760911)

'Arvind Kejriwal is and will remain Delhi CM'

Atishi says there are no two ways about it: AAP to stage a protest outside BJP headquarters at 10 a.m. today; party supporters, Opposition leaders rush to 6, Flagstaff Road in show of solidarity

Satvika Mahajan
Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

High drama prevailed outside Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's house on Thursday evening as Enforcement Directorate officials reached his official residence at 6, Flagstaff Road in north Delhi's Civil Lines area at 6.45 p.m. with a search warrant and Delhi police officers escorted him out of his bungalow around 11 p.m.

"Mr. Kejriwal is the AAP supremo, he is the Delhi CM, and he will remain the CM... there are no two ways about it," Delhi Minister Atishi told a battery of mediapersons gathered outside the residence.

Apprehending his arrest, AAP leaders rushed to the Chief Minister's residence. Amid heavy security blanket, supporters spilled onto the road while Delhi Ministers camped outside the bungalow. AAP MLAs Rakhi Birla and Sanjiv Jha, along with several party workers, were detained by Delhi Police amid chants of "Modi teri tamashahi nahi chalegi, nahi chalegi" and "Kejriwal zindabad". A few supporters were seen crying and sloganeering, claiming that their leader was innocent, and that the BJP has been using the ED as a tool to



Security personnel and mediapersons outside the Chief Minister's house on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

arm-twist the Opposition.

Several Opposition leaders, including Delhi Congress president Arvinder Singh Lovely and senior Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, also turned up in solidarity. "We are in coalition with AAP. The timing of the arrest raises very serious questions. They have arrested the Chief Minister of the national capital ahead of the elections," said Mr. Lovely.

The Congress and AAP have struck a 4-3 seat-sharing alliance in the Capital for the Lok Sabha election.

On the petition filed in the Supreme Court for an urgent hearing to quash the arrest, AAP leader Jasmine Shah said, "Our legal team is in constant touch with

Puneet Sehgal, Registrar of SC who handles the listing for CJI. A decision on whether a Bench is going to be constituted or not for urgent hearing is expected soon." There was no development on that front till the filing of this report.

Senior party leader and Delhi Minister Gopal Rai said the party will stage a protest at 10 a.m. on Friday outside the BJP headquarters, a stone's throw away from the Rouse Avenue court where Kejriwal will be produced. "We will hold protests across the country," he added.

Reacting to the developments of the day, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said, "Today every citizen of Delhi is satisfied that

the Chief Minister, who was involved in corruption, has finally been arrested. The arrest of Arvind Kejriwal is the defeat of corruption. He must resign immediately."

Giving a brief description of what transpired moments before the Chief Minister's arrest, senior AAP leader and Minister Saurobh Bharadwaj said, "Every corner of the CM's residence was searched, and the ED got just ₹70,000 in cash which it returned to the family." He said Mr. Kejriwal's phone was confiscated and no one in the house had access to phone. "They [BJP] can arrest the CM as they have the power to do so... But Arvind Kejriwal is an idea that cannot be destroyed."

HC to rule on CBI's plea against acquittal of Raja

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court is scheduled to pronounce on Friday its decision on whether it will admit the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) appeal challenging the acquittal of former Union Telecom Minister and sitting DMK MP A. Raja and others in the 2G spectrum allocation case.

The court had reserved its decision on the matter on March 14. The case is currently at the stage of "leave to appeal" - a formal permission granted by a court to a party to challenge the decision in a

higher court.

A Special CBI court in Delhi had, in December 2017, acquitted Mr. Raja in the CBI and Enforcement Directorate (ED) cases relating to the 2G spectrum case, noting that the prosecution had "miserably failed" to prove its charges.

Several others, including late DMK chief M. Karunanidhi's daughter Kanimozhi, wife Dayalu Ammal, and real-estate developer Vinod Goenka had also been acquitted.

On March 19, 2018, the ED approached the Delhi High Court, challenging the special court's order. A day later, the CBI, too, had challenged the acquittal.

Take action on Health Bill: HC to Bharadwaj

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The High Court admonished Health Minister Saurobh Bharadwaj and Health Secretary S.B. Deepak Kumar for not complying with judicial orders on enactment of a law to regulate clinical establishments, warning that they could be sent to jail for their inaction.

The High Court was hearing a 2018 petition by Bejon Kumar Misra, who has alleged that "around 20,000 to 25,000" unauthorised laboratories and diagnostic centres in the national capital were functioning with unqualified

technicians and were giving incorrect reports to patients.

The court had in February asked Mr. Bharadwaj and Mr. Kumar to be present before it after perusing an email which said the minister was not kept in the loop during discussions on the Delhi Health Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Bill.

The Delhi Health Bill was finalised in May 2022 but has not been sent to the Centre for approval.

The court said that if the Minister and the Secretary are incapable of handling the issue, it will ask a third party to take responsibility.

Buzz over Raj Thackeray joining ruling coalition continues as he holds talks with Shinde, Fadnavis

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE



MNS chief Raj Thackeray

Following up on his recent meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi, Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Thursday held prolonged discussions with Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis as political circles continued to hum with the anticipation of the MNS joining the Mahayuti coalition in the State and the NDA at the Centre ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Mr. Thackeray met with Mr. Shinde and Mr. Fadnavis at the plush Taj Lands End hotel in suburban Bandra in Mumbai, where the three leaders had a nearly two-hour meeting. Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, whose Nationalist Congress Party is the third constituent of the Mahayuti (the others being Mr. Shinde's Shiv Sena fac-

tion and the BJP), was not present at the meeting.

While all three leaders continued to remain tight-lipped about the meeting, sources said the discussions centred on the number of likely seats to be given to the MNS if Mr. Thackeray's party joins the ruling coalition.

The MNS is reportedly interested in contesting the Mumbai South and Nashik seats. The Shirdi LS constituency is also being considered for Mr. Thackeray's party to contest. The names of senior MNS leader Bala Nandgaonkar and Mr.

Thackeray's son, Amit, are being mooted as possible candidates.

Following the meeting with Mr. Shinde and Mr. Fadnavis, Mr. Thackeray held another round of meetings with his MNS leaders at his residence 'Shiv-tirth' in Mumbai.

Meanwhile, leaders in the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi alleged that the MNS candidate would be made to contest on the symbol of the Shiv Sena led by Mr. Shinde.

Reacting to this, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) MP Supriya Sule urged Mr. Thackeray to preserve his party's identity while, in a thinly-veiled jibe at the BJP, said there was "a conspiracy to finish off Maharashtra's independent and self-respecting parties by invisible forces from Delhi".

Despite the MNS not having a single MLA or MP, the BJP hopes to make use of Mr. Thackeray's still extant Marathi-speaking vote base.

Timings

DELHI		
FRIDAY, MAR. 22		
RISE	06:23	SET 18:34
RISE	16:07	SET 04:57
SATURDAY, MAR. 23		
RISE	06:22	SET 18:34
RISE	17:01	SET 05:26
SUNDAY, MAR. 24		
RISE	06:20	SET 18:35
RISE	17:53	SET 05:53

Delhi Weather	max	min
Delhi City	30	16
Safdarjang	30	16
Palam	29	17

Delhi Palam Today
31°C A dry weather to prevail. Morning will be cool with mist and haze. Day will be slight warm. Night also will be cool.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
32°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be cool with mist and haze. Day will be little warm. Night will be cool.

© Copyright Skymet Weather 2024
All rights reserved.

TO ADVERTISE
PLEASE CONTACT

Mr. N SELVA KUMAR

PH: 9820350726

selvakumar.n@thehindu.co.in

THE HINDU
India's National Newspaper

Forum IAS

Leading Institute for IAS/IPS preparation

Get mentored by the team
— which has mentored —



Rank 1, IAS 2017
ANUDEEP DURISHETTY



Rank 1, IAS 2021
SHRUTI SHARMA



Rank 1, IAS 2022
ISHITA KISHORE



Rank 2, IAS 2022
GARIMA LOHIA



Rank 3, IAS 2022
UMA HARATHI



Rank 4, IAS 2022
SMRITI MISHRA

Today More than 3500 Students of ForumIAS
Serve in India & her missions Abroad

ANNOUNCING



19th APRIL

D7- 8:30 AM Morning
D8- 4:30 PM Evening



Scan or Call

93117-40404

www.academy.forumias.com/

Inviting Applications for

FORUM RESIDENTIAL COACHING
(GURGAON)

- Merit based scholarship
- Limited Batch Size
- Accommodation and Mess Facility
- The same team which has mentored 3000+ students in achieving their UPSC dream

Starts
20th MAY

SCAN OR CALL TO REGISTER
9311740938
https://www.forumias.com/blog/frc3



MGP 2025

MAINS GUIDANCE PROGRAM

English & Hindi Medium

What is common between Shruti Sharma and Ishita Kishore? That they have both secured Rank 1 in the Civil Services Examination (CSE 2021 and CSE 2022 respectively). And that they were MGP students for two consecutive years.

When our MGP student Shruti filled up Hindi as a medium of examination for Mains 2020 by mistake, we stood by her and allowed her to write the MGP Tests in Hindi medium. When she did not make it, she enrolled in MGP 2021 again and secured the first Rank.

When Ishita did not clear her first prelims, she did not let go of MGP. She not only finished her MGP Tests, but also enrolled for MGP for her next attempt. With the right answer writing skills, mentorship sessions with ForumIAS mentors and high quality content, she was able to secure Rank 1 in CSE 2022.

The MGP has set a gold standard for self-study enthusiasts for a mentor guided, test based study plan for Civil Services Preparation.

English Medium Batch

Admissions Open

Hindi Medium Batch

09th APRIL

OPTIONAL FOUNDATION 2025

Sociology

Public Administration

Anthropology

PSIR

- Guaranteed completion of syllabus between 4 to 4.5 months
- Comprehensive coverage of syllabus with requisite value additions
- Regular answer writing for assessment and improvement
- Dedicated mentorship in both online and offline mode

Batch-1
25th APRIL
Offline & Online

FORUM RESIDENTIAL COACHING
GURGAON
Plot No. 894, Saraswati Vihar, Near MG Rd Metro Station, Gurgaon-122002

DELHI (KAROL BAGH)
19, Pusa Road, 2nd Floor, IAPL House, Opposite Metro Pillar #95-96, Karol Bagh, New Delhi-05

FORUM LEARNING CENTERS
DELHI (MUKHERJEE NAGAR)
862, Banda Bahadur Marg, 1st Floor, Dr. Mukherjee Nagar, Near Batra Cinema, Delhi - 110009

PATNA
2nd Floor, AG Palace, E Boring Canal Road, Patna, Bihar - 800001

HYDERABAD
1st Floor, SM Plaza, RTC X Rd, Indira Park Road, Jawahar Nagar, Hyderabad, Telangana - 500020

93117 40400, 93117 40900

Email: admissions@forumias.academy, Web: https://academy.forumias.com

INBRIEF



Chouhan hits campaign trail, takes train from Bhopal

Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and the BJP candidate from the Vidisha Lok Sabha seat, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, on Thursday hit the campaign trail by hopping onto a second-class coach of a train from Bhopal to Ganjbasoda, interacting with passengers. Mr. Chouhan, 65, has entered the Lok Sabha poll arena after two decades and will contest his sixth parliamentary election from Vidisha. This seat was earlier held by BJP leaders Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sushma Swaraj. Mr. Chouhan's home turf, Budhni, is part of the Vidisha Lok Sabha seat. The Congress is yet to announce its candidate for the seat. PTI

Three women in Congress list of candidates for Arunachal

The Congress on Thursday announced its first list of 34 candidates for the Assembly election in Arunachal Pradesh on April 19. The names announced by the central election committee of the All India Congress Committee include three women and three former Ministers. The rest are mostly newcomers. Two prominent names missing from the first list are State Congress president and former Chief Minister Nabam Tuki and vice-president Bosiram Siram, a former Minister. The party is likely to field the two for the Lok Sabha election in the State. While Mr. Tuki is being considered for the Arunachal West seat, Mr. Siram may be the party nominee for the Arunachal East seat.

KMC to continue search at collapsed building site: Mayor

The Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) will continue with round-the-clock search and rescue operations at the Garden Reach house collapse site till the last body is recovered from the rubble, Mayor Firhad Hakim said on Thursday. The announcement was made after the National Disaster Response Force called off its search operations on Wednesday evening, some 72 hours after the illegal under-construction five-storey building crumbled on adjacent dwellings and claimed 10 lives besides injuring 17 others. At least one person from the area is still reported to be missing and feared buried under the debris. PTI

ASI survey of Bhojshala complex to begin today

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will conduct a survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex situated in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh from Friday, officials said. The Madhya Pradesh High Court on March 11 had directed the ASI to carry out within six weeks a "scientific survey" of the Bhojshala complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple of Goddess Vagdevi. The Muslim community calls it Kamal Maula Mosque. In a letter to the Indore Divisional Commissioner as well as the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police of Dhar, the ASI has requested safe access to the site. PTI

Yusuf Pathan takes guard, launches his Lok Sabha campaign against Cong. heavyweight

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Yusuf Pathan, former India cricketer and the Trinamool Congress candidate from West Bengal's Baharampur, began his campaign for the 2024 Lok Sabha poll on Thursday.

Responding to barbs on him being an outsider, Mr. Pathan said, "The biggest example is our Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is from Gujarat, and we all know from where he is contesting the Lok Sabha poll." In what will be a high-stakes battle, the former cricketer, who was part of the Kolkata Knight Riders IPL team for seven years, is pitched against five-time MP and West Bengal Congress president Ad-



Former cricketer and TMC candidate Yusuf Pathan wields a signed bat as he starts his campaign in Baharampur on Thursday. PTI

hir Ranjan Chowdhury. Flanked by Abu Taher and Humayun Kabir, senior Trinamool Congress leaders from Murshidabad, Mr. Pathan said anyone in the country can contest polls from anywhere. "This is my home. I am here to stay," he said.

Pappu Yadav's Congress entry stirs the Mahagathbandhan pot

RJD leadership said to be miffed with the Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) leader's induction by its ally; Bihar Congress chief rushes to meet Lalu Prasad as buzz grows of the RJD president finalising candidates for Lok Sabha seats, including Purnia

Sobhana K. Nair
Amarnath Tewary
NEW DELHI/PATNA

The entry of Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav into the Congress has stirred the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD)-led Mahagathbandhan pot in Bihar, of which the principal national Opposition party is a constituent.

On Thursday, with buzz growing that RJD chief Lalu Prasad has finalised candidates for some Lok Sabha seats, especially those going to the polls in the first phase on April 19, State Congress chief Akhilesh Prasad Singh rushed to meet the RJD leadership in Patna.

The Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) leader had merged his party with the Congress on Wednesday and has staked claim to the Purnia Lok Sabha seat in north Bihar. Hours after his induction - in which Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra played an instrumental role - senior RJD leader and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Te-



New equation: Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav (left) joined the Congress in the presence of senior party leader Pawan Khera in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

jashwi Yadav had placed calls to the Congress leadership in the State to express his displeasure.

Sources said the RJD is zeroing in on Bhima Bharti, a woman leader from the Extremely Backward Classes, for the Purnia seat. "What new does Pappu Yadav bring to the table? The Yadav vote bank is already with us," a senior RJD leader said, explaining their opposition to his candidature. Out of the 19 lakh-odd voters in Purnia

Lok Sabha seat, 21% voters are Muslims and Yadavs make up 6%.

The names of other RJD candidates doing the rounds in political circles and on social media include Kumar Sarvajeet for Gaya (reserved) seat, Shrawan Kushwaha for Nawada, Abhay Kushwaha for Aurangabad, and Archana Ravidas for Jamui (reserved) seat. If confirmed, Mr. Sarvajeet would be pitted against Jitan Ram Manjhi, former Chief Minister

and NDA candidate from the Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular).

Party sources told *The Hindu* that Mr. Prasad has also finalised the names of Sudhakar Singh (the son of State RJD president Jagdand Singh) from Buxar, Surendra Yadav from Jehanabad, Alok Mehta from Ujiarpur, and Munna Shukla from Vaishali.

Mr. Pappu Yadav had met both Mr. Tejashwi and Mr. Prasad on Tuesday evening before flying to

Delhi, creating an impression that he had the RJD's blessings for the move. "We have been told now that Pappu Yadav did not keep them in the loop and had pushed for the meeting on the pretext of a courtesy call," a senior Bihar Congress leader said.

Other tiffs

This is not the only point of conflict for the Mahagathbandhan. The Congress has been demanding nine seats, but the RJD is willing to concede only six. Similarly, there are tensions between the RJD, Congress and Left parties too. The CPI wants to contest the Begusarai and Madhubani seats as both have traditionally been its "stronghold". The CPI(ML) wants to contest from Siwan, a seat that the RJD is unwilling to let go. "They want to restrict us with just three seats. This was justified when we had JD(U) too in the alliance. Now, as per our strength in the Assembly, they should concede at least five seats, including Siwan," a senior CPI(ML) leader said.

BJP fields Annamalai from Coimbatore, Murugan from Nilgiris for Lok Sabha poll

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The BJP on Thursday fielded some of its prominent leaders, including State president K. Annamalai, Union Minister of State L. Murugan, and former Telangana Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan, in the upcoming Lok Sabha election in Tamil Nadu. The party released its first list of nine candidates. Overall, the BJP, which is heading an alliance, will enter the fray in 20 seats in the State.

Mr. Annamalai, who undertook the 'En Mann En Makkal Yatra' over several months, will enter the fray from Coimbatore, a constituency where the BJP has a significant presence. He will take on the DMK's Ganapathy P. Rajkumar and the AIADMK's Singai G. Ramachandran, apart from the Naam Tamilar Katchi candidate. Initially, Mr. Annamalai was reluctant to contest the parliamentary



L. Murugan

election, and had set his sights on campaigning across Tamil Nadu. However, the party chose to field him in Coimbatore after having considered him for the Karur seat. He had unsuccessfully contested the 2021 Assembly election from Aravakurichi in Karur district.

Mr. Murugan's nomination from the Nilgiris (SC) seat, where he will take on the DMK's former Union Minister A. Raja, came as a surprise, as he was recently renominated to the Rajya Sabha from Madhya Pradesh.

Dr. Soundararajan, who recently resigned from her



K. Annamalai

gubernatorial posts in Telangana and Puducherry and rejoined the BJP, will face the electoral battle from Chennai South. She would be pitted against the DMK's sitting MP, Thamizhachi Thangapandian, and the AIADMK's former MP, J. Jayavardhan.

Another prominent candidate is the party's floor leader in the Assembly and Tirunelveli MLA, Nainar Nagendran. He has been fielded from Tirunelveli. It was not immediately known if he would resign from the Assembly before contesting the Lok Sabha poll. Mr. Nagendran previously served as a Minister

in the Jayalalithaa Cabinet.

The party also paved the way for former Union Minister Pon. Radhakrishnan to contest from Kanniyakumari. Earlier, there was speculation that the seat would be given to former Congress MLA from Vilavancode, S. Vijayadharani, who recently joined the BJP.

Other key candidates

The other BJP candidates include Vinoy P. Selvam from Chennai Central and C. Narasimhan from Krishnagiri. Indhiya Jananayaka Katchi founder T.R. Parivendhar will contest from his existing seat of Perambalur, but this time on a BJP ticket. In 2014, he came third as a BJP candidate in the same constituency, but in 2019, he tasted success as a DMK nominee.

New Justice Party founder A.C. Shanmugham will contest the Vellore Lok Sabha seat on the 'Lotus' symbol.

No alliance with Apna Dal (K) for poll, says Akhilesh Yadav

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party (SP) does not have any alliance with the Krishna Patel-led Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) for the 2024 Lok Sabha election, SP president Akhilesh Yadav said on Thursday.

His declaration comes a day after the Apna Dal (K) unilaterally announced that it would contest three Lok Sabha seats as part of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in Uttar Pradesh. The SP is the largest member of the Opposition INDIA bloc in the State.

'Broken alliance'

"We had an alliance with Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) in 2022, which has now broken," Mr. Yadav told reporters at the party's State office in Lucknow. The Apna Dal (K) had been part of the SP-led Opposition al-

'Co-accused' arrested in U.P. double murder case

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh police on Thursday arrested Javed, the 'co-accused' in the double murder case in which his brother Sajid is alleged to have killed two minor boys in Budaun.

The double murder led to communal tensions in the area as a mob burnt shops belonging to the Muslim community. Heavy police force was deployed to maintain law and order.

Sharing details of Javed's arrest, Budaun Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Alok Priyadarshi said the police received information about his surrender in Bareilly and a team was sent to bring him to Budaun, where he was interrogated for several hours.

Mr. Priyadarshi added that the police, during investigation, managed to find the shop from where the murder weapon, a knife, was purchased.

The police had on Tuesday claimed that Sajid was killed in retaliatory firing as he first fired at the police.

However, the Opposition parties in Uttar Pradesh had questioned the veracity of the encounter.

liance in the 2022 Assembly election in U.P., with its leader Pallavi Patel elected from Sirathu on the SP symbol, defeating Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya.

'Unilateral decision'

On Wednesday, the Apna Dal (K) said it would contest the Phulpur, Mirzapur, and Kaushambi Lok Sabha seats under the INDIA umbrella. The SP, however, called the announcement unilateral. The SP and the Congress have already inked a seat-sharing arrangement for the INDIA bloc to contest U.P.'s 80 Lok Sabha constituencies. The SP will contest 63 seats, leaving 17 for the Congress.

In his interaction with the media, Mr. Yadav targeted the BJP for weakening democracy in India, and called on the electorate to vote the ruling party out of power.

Multiple cases against Karnataka BJP leaders for hate speech, violation of model poll code

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU/
CHIKKAMAGALURU

Following the directions of the Election Commission of India, multiple cases have been filed against Udupi-Chikkamagaluru MP and Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya, and former MLA C.T. Ravi for alleged hate speech and poll code violations.

Meanwhile, the Bengaluru City Police registered an FIR against three BJP MPs Mr. Surya, P.C. Mohan and Ms. Karandlaje for violating a High Court order and holding a protest at Nagarathpete on March 19.

Acting on a complaint by an assistant returning



Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje

officer, the Chikkamagaluru Town Police registered an FIR against Mr. Ravi over his tweet targeting senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. He has been booked under Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for promoting enmity between groups.

The Halasuru Gate Police, Bengaluru, registered

an FIR against Mr. Surya, Mr. Mohan, and Ms. Karandlaje, and 44 others for organising a protest in Nagarathpete despite their request for a gathering being turned down by the police.

The BJP protested on March 19 demanding the arrest of those who assaulted Mukesh, a shopkeeper in the area, on March 17.

The police charged the three leaders and 44 BJP workers under Sections 144 (unlawful assembly), 188 (disobedience of order duly promulgated by public servant), 283 (obstructing public way), and 290 (public nuisance) of the IPC.

Participating in the Nagarathpete protest, Ms. Karandlaje had claimed that

the bomber at The Rameshwaram Cafe blast came from Tamil Nadu and that a man from Delhi came and raised pro-Pakistan slogans and a man from Kerala threw acid on a college student. This remark kicked up a row in Tamil Nadu, where the State government registered its strong objection.

FIR against Surya

The Halasuru Gate Police have also registered an FIR against Mr. Surya for hate speech for his social media posts in connection with the Nagarathpete protest. He has been booked under Section 153A of the IPC for creating enmity between groups and under various sections of the Representatives of People's Act, 1951.

The Music Academy replies to vocalist duo after award row

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The latest development in a sequence of events in the world of Carnatic music that has set social media abuzz is a strongly-worded response from The Music Academy, to the vocalist duo Ranjani and Gayathri, who declared their intention to withdraw from participating in the Academy's 2024 conference, opposing the selection of vocalist T.M. Krishna as this year's Sangita Kalanidhi.

In a letter that was sent to them, the Academy's president N. Murali said he was shocked by "its vituperative content, which is replete with unwarranted and slanderous assertions and insinuations verging on defamation, and its vicious tone against a respected senior fellow musician".

"The choice of Sangita Kalanidhi made year after year is a prerogative of The Music Academy and has always been made after careful deliberation, with the sole criterion being musical excellence demonstrated over a significant and sustained career. This year the Executive Committee of the Academy chose T.M. Krishna for this accolade based on his excellence in music over a long career, with no extraneous factors influencing our choice," Mr. Murali said.

"We regard your decision to withdraw from the upcoming annual conference because the Academy has chosen for the award a musician you dislike and malign as unbecoming of artists and in



T.M. Krishna

poor taste. I note that you have shared your letter addressed to me and the Academy on the social media, which apart from being discourteous, raises doubts about the intentions behind and the purpose of your letter," Mr. Murali said in the note.

"Normally, a missive of the kind you have addressed to me and the Academy posted on the social media before you have received a reply would not warrant a response. But I would not like to deny you the courtesy of a response in consideration of your contributions to the field of Carnatic music," he added. "It looks like they are upset because they have not received the award," he said later, speaking to *The Hindu*.

Since Wednesday night, a flurry of activity on social media followed the public announcement by Ms. Ranjani and Ms. Gayathri, who also took objection to what they called "Mr. Krishna's glorification of a figure like EVR aka Periyar" to make the case that he was undeserving of the award. They heaped accusations on Mr. Krishna for vilifying the Carnatic music fraternity, while declining

to participate in the Academy's conference this year.

Others, including Harikatha exponent Dushyanth Sridhar and vocalists Trichur Brothers, also declared their intention to skip this year's conference for the same reasons. Vishaka Hari, Harikatha exponent, also issued a statement questioning the selection of the Sangita Kalanidhi candidate. Chitravina Ravikiran, who was the Sangita Kalanidhi in 2017, put out a note saying he would return his award. The family of the late Palghat Mani, in a missive addressed to Mr. Murali, also publicised on social media late on Thursday evening, said they would return his award (conferred in 1966), in opposition to this year's choice, and sought to be informed of the process to do so.

CPI(M) backs Krishna

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) State secretary K. Balakrishnan on Thursday backed Mr. Krishna and also lauded The Music Academy for standing by its decision.

"Mr. Krishna has been raising his voice against caste discrimination and condemning Brahminical dominance in the Carnatic music world, and has been taking initiatives to take music to all sections of the society. He has been facing various threats from Sangh Parivar," Mr. Balakrishnan said. "Mr. Krishna would overcome this firmly and boldly and the CPI(M) would stand with him. Democratic forces should come forward and support him," he said.

Karnataka Governor returns amendments to Endowments Bill

Move comes as a setback to the Congress government; the amendments seek to draw more money from rich temples to provide aid to poor ones

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a setback to the Congress government, amendments to the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Act, 1997, that were cleared in the recently concluded Budget session amid opposition from the BJP, has been returned by Governor Thaa-warchand Gehlot.

Seeking clarifications on the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Governor has sought to know if the State government has conceptualised any legislation to encompass other religious bodies in similar fashion. The Governor's move is the first such since the Congress government came to power in May 2023, and comes close to the Lok Sabha election.

The Governor has also pointed out that amendments brought to the Bill earlier in 2011 and 2012 had been struck down by the Dharwad Bench of the Karnataka High Court. The High Court's decision has been challenged in the Supreme Court, which has stayed the High Court order. The case is in the stage of final hearing, he said. It is necessary to get more clarification on whether



Thaa-warchand Gehlot

the amendments can be made while the case is pending, his office informed the State government while returning the Bill.

Meanwhile, speaking to reporters, Muzrai Minister Ramalinga Reddy said that issues raised will be clarified to the Governor.

The amendments to the Endowment Act, to expand social security measures to over 40,000 archakas (temple caretakers) in Muzrai temples and also develop C category temples using funds from the income of richer temples, had been defeated in the Legislative Council by the combined opposition of the BJP and the Janata Dal (Secular) before it was passed again by the Legislative Assembly and cleared by the Council during the recently concluded Budget session.

With the Bill, the State government proposed to seek 10% of the gross income of 87 temples with

annual income of over ₹1 crore and 5% of gross income from 311 temples with an annual income of over ₹10 lakh to be transferred to a Common Pool Fund, administered by Raja-ya Dharmika Parishath. It proposed to utilise the money for the welfare of archakas and development of over 34,000 'C' category temples whose annual income is less than ₹5 lakh.

The proposal was to bring an amendment to an earlier amendment in 2011 where 5% of the net income of temples with annual income between ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh, and 10% of the net income of temples with annual income of over ₹10 lakh, would come to the fund.

The government is hoping to collect approximately ₹60 crore from the move of which ₹25 crore would be spent on developing 'C' category temples.

The BJP argued that since the government already provides approximately ₹170 crore to Muzrai department, it should allocate money to temple development and archakas' welfare from the budgetary allocation rather than levy more tax on richer temples. It also said instead of seeking money from the gross collection of temples, the government should take money from the net income.

Locals, alumni fume over felling of 234 trees on century-old college campus in Srinagar



The poplar avenue of Amar Singh College, Srinagar (left); after the felling of the trees. JUNAID DAR

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The felling of 234 trees on the 111-year-old campus of Amar Singh College in Srinagar, which secured the Award of Merit in the 2020 UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation for its restoration after the 2014 floods, has created a furore among locals.

Around 182 poplar trees were planted many decades ago to create an avenue in front of the main facade of the building; they had grown to a height of 20-30 feet. The trees lent a distinctive character to the heritage stone-and-brick structure in an Indo-British style of architecture. The college, established in 1913, is also home to rare paintings and murals.

"First, they constructed a high masonry wall when the [original] plain chain link fence looked good. Now this disaster. Wish someone would get fired for this," Hakim Sameer Hamdani, design director of IN-

TACH Kashmir, said.

Scores of alumni took to social media to criticise the college's move. "The so-called 'development administration' has cold-heartedly butchered the aesthetics of Amar Singh College, my beloved alma mater, by mercilessly axing the picturesque poplar tree tunnel. The shameless destruction of our beautiful landscapes is unforgivable," Junaid Dar, a former student who works as a journalist, wrote on X.

"It's disheartening to witness the destruction of such natural beauty in the name of development. Preserving the environment and maintaining the aesthetic appeal of places like Amar Singh College should be a priority," netizen Sahil Parry posted on social media platform X.

However, Sheikh Ajaz Bashir, Principal of Amar Singh College, defended the move. "These trees had grown old and posed a threat. These trees were dangerous, especially during windy weather."

After two weeks of search, elusive tiger captured in Kannur

The Hindu Bureau
KANNUR

An elusive tiger, which had left residents near the forest fringes at Adakkathodu at Kelakam in Kannur panic-stricken, was captured by the Kerala Forest department on Thursday.

After over two weeks of search, the tiger, approximately two years old, was tranquillized and caught. Forest officials used chemical immobilisation to capture the weakened animal, which reportedly bore injuries from porcupine encounters on its face. The tiger has been transferred to the facility at the Kannam forest range office for

treatment and is likely to be shifted to Thrissur.

Continuous reports of a tiger roaming the area prompted the Forest department to form a committee under the National Tiger Conservation Authority's guidelines. Initially suspected to be a big leopard, the animal's presence was confirmed by a resident's video. Subsequently, four cages were set up in the area.

A team of 60 personnel from the Kannur forest division, Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary, and Rapid Response Force from Wayanad was set up to catch the tiger following the panel's recommendation.

Kerala HC declines to stay Chancellor's order to Sanskrit University V-C to vacate post

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Thursday stayed the order of Governor and Chancellor Arif Mohammed Khan declaring ab initio void the appointment of M.K. Jayaraj as the Vice-Chancellor of Calicut University and directing him to vacate the office forthwith.

Justice Mohammed Nias C.P. however, declined to stay the Chancellor's order directing M.V. Narayanan, Vice-Chancellor of Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, to vacate the post in view of the Chancellor's finding that his ap-



Arif Mohammed Khan

pointment was also ab initio void. The court passed the interim orders on a writ petition filed by Dr. Jayaraj and Dr. Narayanan. Refusing the plea for a stay made by Mr. Narayanan, the court pointed out that the Supreme Court in the Rajasree case had

clearly held that the appointment of the Vice-Chancellors must be in terms of the UGC regulations 2018.

The court noted that only one name was forwarded by the selection committee for appointment of V-C to the Sanskrit university to the Chancellor, which is in total violation of 7.3 of UGC Regulations, 2018 and "the ratio in Rajasree's case applies on all fours". The continuance of the petitioner as Vice-Chancellor consequent to a selection that was totally contrary to the statutory provisions could not be permitted, it added.

Depleting water level forces leopards to stray out of forests

K. Umashanker
ANANTAPUR

The death of three leopards in undivided Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh within a span of 45 days suggests that water resources in the wild are on the verge of drying up, with soaring mercury levels. The fact that all three casualties occurred well away from the forests clearly indicates that the animals strayed into human habitations in search of food and water, say experts.

On February 6, a leopard was fatally knocked down by a vehicle in Sri Sathya Sai district. On

March 18, the carcass of a leopard was found in the hillocks of Settur mandal. On March 19, a leopard was electrocuted when it scaled a transformer at an agriculture field in Kuderu mandal. In all three incidents, forest officials ruled out the angle of poaching or hunting.

District Forest Officer Vineet Kumar said the region does not have any major forest cover. "It is quite depleted, and runs in patches. Wild animals, particularly leopards, find shelter in the denuded forests atop hillocks. The terrain forces leopards to move from one place to the other," he said.

19-year-old dies after falling on Metro tracks

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A 19-year-old youth fell onto the Namma Metro tracks at Attiguppe Metro Station in Bengaluru on Thursday. He was hit by an oncoming metro train and was killed on the spot.

Dhruv Jatin Thakkar, who was a Mumbai native, was studying in Bengaluru.

A senior police official said preliminary investigations have indicated that the youth jumped on to the tracks and ended his life. However, police are still examining CCTV footage to arrive at a conclusion. (Those in distress can call 104 for help).

Gorkha Rifles seek ivory from Kerala for display at unit; forest dept. rejects request

K.S. Sudhi
KOCHI

Military establishments are increasingly seeking ivory from the Kerala Forest department to be displayed at their units after the State government recently cleared three such requests.

The 4th Battalion of the 8th Gorkha Rifles is the latest military unit to approach the department for ivory.

Though the unit sought two pairs of ivory, the request was turned down by the department stating that the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 did not encourage the display of wildlife trophies, including elephant tusks. The issuance and possession of



The Forest department has said the issuance and possession of such animal articles cannot be encouraged. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

such animal articles cannot be encouraged, according to the Forest department.

However, the decision may land the department in the soup as it had set a precedent by recently clearing the requests for 46 pairs of wildlife trophies, including elephant tusks,

deer horns, and mount/horn for the Pangode Military Station, the Grenadiers RC and the Madras Regiment for its "safe custody".

The State government issued an order for providing the trophies after overlooking the objections raised by the Forest

department.

The government had also imposed certain conditions for handing over the wildlife trophies for its "safe custody".

The three Army units will be provided the ivory of wild elephants and not that of the captive ones, which are brought to the office by the owners of the dead animals. Once the animal is dead, its owners should entrust the ivory with the department after completing the legal formalities, according to officials.

Earlier, the department had unsuccessfully tried to obtain government clearance for incinerating a portion of the nearly 12 tonnes of ivory stocked in its vaults.

DMK's stand against Mekedatu in election manifesto triggers row in Karnataka

B.S. Satish Kumar
BENGALURU

The declaration of Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in its poll manifesto for Tamil Nadu that it would stop any efforts by Karnataka to construct Mekedatu balancing reservoir has triggered a political row in Karnataka ahead of the Lok Sabha poll.

The Opposition BJP asked the ruling Congress whether it would oppose this to protect the interests of people of Karnataka or support its political ally DMK, which is a partner in INDIA bloc.

Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok asked, "Will Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah now follow Raja Dharma and protect



The spot identified by Karnataka government for construction of a balancing reservoir, at Mekedatu in Ramanagara. FILE PHOTO

the interests of Kannadigas or will he adhere to Maithri Dharma to save Rahul Gandhi's INDIA bloc by compromising Karnataka's interests?"

Using the occasion to ridicule the Congress government that had launched "My Tax, My

Right" protest in Delhi against the alleged injustice by the Centre in devolution of State's share of Central taxes and grants, Mr. Ashok remarked: "Will troubleshooter Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar now organise 'My Water, My Right' protest

taking all the Congress MLAs from Karnataka to Chennai?"

The DMK in its poll manifesto has said, "Efforts to construct Mekedatu dam will be stopped. Measures will be taken by the DMK through firm legal action to protect the interests of farmers in the delta region and to ensure water supply to various parts of Tamil Nadu, countering the SC's decision against construction of Mekedatu dam."

Replying to a query, Mr. Shivakumar said, "Let them do anything in their State. I have taken up the Major Irrigation Ministry to build the Mekedatu project. The Cauvery Water Tribunal is aware of the water issue, they will have to give us justice."

SPOTLIGHT



Lights out: Employees of the Power Development Department repairing an electric line during heavy snowfall at Kukroosa in Kupwara district in February this year. J&K's power generation capacity is around 3,633 MW, far below its potential of 18,392 MW. FILE PHOTO

In the dark of the Valley

The long spell of power outages has added to the pangs of residents of Kashmir valley already worried about mandatory installation of smart meters. With no explanation provided by the authorities overseeing the generation and distribution of electricity, the unprecedented rise in power cuts this year during Ramzan have overwhelmed the residents. **Peerzada Ashiq** finds out why the UT continues to remain a dark spot

Ramzan, the Islamic holy month marked by dawn-to-dusk fast, was never easy, but it has been particularly hard this time in Kashmir with people mostly beginning and breaking their fast in the dark.

With the fasting period beginning on March 11, chronic power outages that last 10 to 16 hours make cooking, washing and showering before prayers difficult.

Gruelling, unscheduled power outages are not new to Kashmir but the situation, residents say, usually improves after mid-winter and is almost restored by March-end. The unprecedented rise in power cuts this year during Ramzan have overwhelmed the residents with no explanation provided by the authorities overseeing the generation and distribution of electricity in Kashmir valley. "Power outages continue unabated throughout Jammu & Kashmir. One would think that the PDD [Power Development Department] would make more efforts to ensure adequate power supply during Ramzan," Iltija Mufti, daughter of former J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti, said.

The long spell of outages has added to the pangs of residents already saddled with the mandatory installation of smart meters. J&K's power department has started a large-scale drive to install prepaid smart meters, increased tariffs and cracked down on consumers defaulting on their bills to reduce its losses. This has caused anxiety among residents, especially from lower-income groups, which describe electricity bills as "exorbitant and unaffordable".

Amir Wani, a salesman, is among hundreds of anxious locals of Saidapora Achan area, a suburb in Srinagar mostly inhabited by lower-income groups. "Electricity supply was cut off for prolonged hours as a collective punishment in freezing weather. PDD officials have threatened several times to permanently cut off supply if smart meters were not installed and monthly charge not paid as per usage, unlike the flat rate offered to us in the past," Amir, who is the sole breadwinner of a family of eight, said.

J&K, like many other regions in India, has both unmetered and metered connections. The UT has a total of 21.95 lakh electricity connections. A senior PDD official, speaking on the condition of anonymity, put the meter coverage at 51%.

People with unmetered connections pay a flat rate every month while those with meters pay according to actual usage. Also, in both cases, electricity bills were payable in monthly cycles and the power department rarely cut the connections in case of payment delays.

The installation of smart meters, a nationwide exercise, will change that since consumers will have to recharge their meters before consuming electricity - just like they recharge prepaid mobile phones. If the



Our party [when it comes to power] will provide 500 units of free electricity to consumers of the Valley in winter and 300 units in summer.

GHULAM HASSAN MIR,
JKAP leader

meters aren't recharged, electricity supply will automatically stop.

"With most people earning around ₹15,000-₹20,000 a month in Saidapora, who can afford to pay ₹3,000-₹4,000 every month to keep two rooms warm in winters? The power bill is around 20-25% of the total monthly income," said Amir. According to him, the monthly power bill far exceeds the school fees that he pays for his two children every month.

Abrogation of Article 370

The Centre's move to end the special constitutional status of J&K in 2019 was followed by a massive structural revamp of the power sector in J&K. The Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 of Parliament repealed the J&K Electricity Act, 2010, and installed, in its place, the Central Electricity Act, 2003.

In October 2019, the J&K administration approved the unbundling of the PDD into several corporations - J&K State Power Transmission Company Ltd, J&K State Power Trading Company Ltd, Jammu Power Distribution Company Ltd (JPDC) and Kashmir Power Distribution Company Ltd (KPDC). The aim, a government spokesman said, was to make these utilities self-reliant and cost-efficient.

While smart meters are being installed in phases, the utilities have already increased tariffs for various categories of consumers.

"There has been a unilateral increase in the flat rates from ₹900 to ₹1,500. Notwithstanding the increase, unmetered areas suffer more than 10 hours of power cuts a day," Nazim Dar, a teacher and Saidapora resident, said.

He said the non-availability of power supply has affected the health of old patients, especially those suffering from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Just for context, Kashmir valley, home to over 70 lakh people, reports a high prevalence of COPD cases at 17.3%, and doctors prescribe long-term oxygen therapy that extends up to 15 hours a day. "Besides oxygen supply, they need a warm room to survive the winter," Nazim said, adding that power cuts are also taking a toll on students' education.

Loose connection

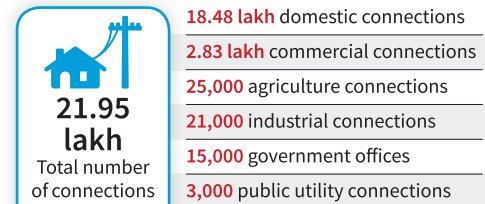
J&K's power scenario has been grim over the years, given the growing demand and poor revenue generation.

For decades, it has suffered from power liability. The UT borrowed ₹32,000 crore in the past two years to pay outstanding dues to suppliers - NHPC Ltd and NTPC Ltd, which are both owned by the Central government. Official figures point out ₹6,234 crore revenue deficit, with the government spending ₹9,886 crore on buying electricity annually and generating revenue of around ₹3,652 crore.

The tariff hike and the smart

Powering down

A snapshot of electricity connections in J&K



The poor electricity scenario has become a source of constant street protests in Kashmir after 2019. Women protesters in many areas resisted the installation of smart meters. FILE PHOTO

meter drive are aimed at bridging this deficit. The PDD says it has covered 1.5 lakh consumers in Jammu and Srinagar cities under smart meters. It plans to step up coverage to 5.50 lakh smart meters this year and target 14 lakh consumers by 2026.

"The flat rate bills, based on rough estimates, do not reflect the actual usage... In the present era, where energy measurements are digitally done right from the generating end, it is paramount to ensure accurate measurement at the consumers' end too," the PDD said in a statement.

Payment delays and power thefts have also prompted the authorities to impose penalties and disconnect supply. Mussarat Islam, Managing Director of KPDC, informed earlier this year that 26,746 electricity connections were disconnected in January 2024 for non-payment of dues. "Around ₹7.50 crore was collected on account of penalties imposed on those consumers who were stealing power by unauthorised means," he added.

On March 18, a KPDC spokesman warned the consumers: "This is the financial year's closing month. Please clear your outstanding dues and avoid auto/remote disconnection."

In central Kashmir's Budgam, the KPDC has started confiscating faulty transformers till dues are cleared, leaving hundreds of consumers in darkness.

Residents of Budgam's Ichgam area recently took to the streets against the "high-handedness" of the power department. "We are not rich people. Most residents rely on small-time income sources. We cannot afford more than ₹700 per month. The department changed our flat rate from ₹660 in November last year to ₹1,560 now - more than doubled in five months. This is *zulm* (oppression)," a protester said.

Shaming on social media

As if the long hours of darkness were not enough to break the fortitude of residents battling the worst power crisis in decades, what added insult to their injuries was the electricity department's

attempt to hit back at public criticism by shaming alleged pilferers. The KPDC posted hundreds of such videos on social media in an apparent attempt to shame those who delay bill payments or who allegedly steal electricity by installing a direct hook on the service line. However, the absence of a similar 'shaming' campaign in Jammu has led to murmurs of regional discrimination.

"This naming-and-shaming exercise has tarnished the reputation of tax-paying consumers like me. Our houses reflect the savings of many generations. Many of us inherit big houses but remain without employment," a consumer, whose house was listed online, said on condition of anonymity.

The poor electricity scenario has become a source of constant street protests in Kashmir after 2019. Women protesters in many areas resisted the installation of meters. In response, the power department imposed blackouts in those areas. In February, an online video went viral where women were seen singing *Wanwun*, a style of lyrical singing meant for weddings, as a mark of protest in Srinagar's Eidgah area - *Aab to sonuy, power te sonuy, meter kazi lag chuniyah?* (Water belongs to us, power belongs to us, why would you install a meter). The KPDC's iron-hand approach has also resulted in frequent confrontations between consumers and the KPDC staff. Two police cases were registered against agitating consumers in Budgam and Baramulla by the discom.

Descent into darkness

Tariffs and smart meters aside, the origins of J&K's power problems lie in inadequate generation and high aggregate technical and commercial losses (AT&C). According to official figures, J&K's power generation capacity is around 3,633 MW, far below its potential of 18,392 MW. NHPC is the highest power generator with a capacity of 2,339 MW from eight hydro projects, followed by the JKPDC with 1,220.96 MW from 23 projects and 10-25 MW from nine private producers.

This year, as winter demand rose to 3,200 MW, local generation fell to 300-600 MW due to reduced water levels in the rivers.

Meanwhile, the AT&C losses, which take into account the Average Cost of Supply (ACS) and the Average Revenue Realised (ARR), stood at a staggering 58% in Kashmir and 44% in Jammu. The losses were projected to come down to 48.77% in Kashmir by 2023, according to the J&K Economic Survey report. In contrast, the national level AT&C losses have reduced from 22.3% in 2020-21 to 16.4% in 2021-22.

Locals also complain that, unlike some better-off States, consumers in J&K don't get any free units and pay similar tariffs even though its per capita income is far lower. For instance, Punjab's per capita annual income is ₹1.81 lakh and it offers 300 free units a month. Delhi, which has a per capita income of ₹4.44 lakh, and Karnataka, with ₹3.01 lakh per capita income, give 200 units free each. J&K, with mere ₹1.36 lakh per capita income, offers no free units to its consumers.

According to official figures, J&K has 56.31 lakh people under Priority Household category and nearly 9.21 lakh under Antyodaya Anna Yojana category. This population is dependent on subsidised or free ration but is still expected to pay for electricity.

Many residents believe that in the absence of an elected government, even political parties are not interested in taking up their cause.

J&K Apni Party (JKAP) is the only political party that has made electricity a poll plank. "Our party [when it comes to power] will provide 500 units of free electricity to consumers of the Valley in winter and 300 units in summer. In Jammu, 500 units of electricity would be given free in summer and 300 units in winter. Also, we will give four gas cylinders free to every household annually to reduce dependence on electricity," Ghulam Hassan Mir, a senior JKAP leader, said.

But until the time such promises turn into reality, residents can only wait for the dark period to get over.



Shilajit Mitra
shilajit.mitra@thehindu.co.in

Sara Ali Khan, who read History at Columbia University, sees lessons for today's youth in the Indian freedom struggle. Her upcoming film, *Ae Watan Mere Watan*, premiered on Prime Video on March 21. It unfurls the fascinating history of Congress Radio, also known as Azad Radio, an underground radio station that stoked the heady flames of the Quit India Movement in 1942, fighting imperial propaganda and mobilising the masses without the aid of hashtags and phones. It was organised by a band of inspired amateurs, led by Usha Mehta, a 22-year-old student and political activist from Bombay's Wilson College.

It is Mehta's spirit and ingenuity that Sara has attempted to embody in *Ae Watan Mere Watan*. "She was one of the countless female heroes who contributed to India's freedom with their courage and sacrifice," says the actor.

Excerpts from an interview...

Question: Your producer, Karan Johar, has described 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' as a 'Gen Z story'. Could you expand?

Answer: It's a parallel we have drawn between the current generation and the youngsters who banded together and fought for India's freedom. Their slogan was *Karo Ya Maro* (do or die). Obviously, the stakes are different today. We are a free, democratic nation, having overcome things like international subjugation and colonialism, but we need to have our voice. We are very lucky to live in a country where freedom of speech is encouraged and is a right given to us. So I think standing up for what you believe in, not just politically but socially, environmentally or at your workplace, is important.

A brave voice

Sara Ali Khan on books, freedom of speech, her upcoming film, *Ae Watan Mere Watan*, and what Gen Z could learn about freedom movement

Q: As a History student, what aspects of Usha Mehta's life did you find most invigorating?

A: When we think of bravery, we think of a physically strong, masculine figure, but there can be emotional and mental fortitude and a degree of femininity that is needed in strength, which is what Usha Mehta embodies. She raised the tricolour at Gowalia Tank Maidan (now August Kranti Maidan), from where the Quit India Movement was launched. She was a Gandhian and a *brahmachari* (celibate). It's a level of sacrifice to wonder about... when your love for the country, *desh prem*, is so overwhelming that there's no scope for any other kind of love or distraction in your life.

Q: This is your first period film. A pitfall of the genre is that, sometimes, the performances begin to reflect the mannerisms in the movies of that era...

A: I tried to watch no films of the 1940s. We didn't have much archival footage of Usha Mehta to go on. I decided not to have a Gujarati accent although she was Gujarati. The language of the film is easily understandable Hindi. This is not a biography but an ode



to multiple unsung heroes of the Indian national struggle. The period design of the film is fairly accurate. We recreated the trams, the broadcast equipment, and the *charkhas* (spinning wheels) ...we shot in real locations around Horniman Circle Gardens in South Mumbai. Unlike Hindi film heroines of the past, I was de-glamorised in a khadi sari with a side-parting, waves and bindi. All of these details were geared towards making the world seem more true.

Q: You have been acting for a while now. What's your process of evaluating your own work?

A: I like to re-watch my performances. It's important to see what I did right, and what I did wrong. I have always believed I am in this profession for the love of my audience. For instance, I received a lot of love for *Atrangi Re* (2021) and *Zara Hatke Zara Bachke* (2023). So it was useful to go back and see what clicked. But having said that, as an actor, I'm beginning to realise more and more the importance of unlearning. It's important to come to each new set with a clean slate because each director has their own process and each character is different. Bambi Todi from *Murder Mubarak* and Usha Mehta from *Ae Watan* don't have anything in common. To get into the skin of both these characters, with equal conviction on different sets at the same time, was tricky. It takes objectivity, unlearning and surrender.

Q: The last time we spoke, you were reading Flaubert's 'Madame Bovary'. What are you reading right now?

A: I'm reading a book called *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder. I've read it before but it's just so amazing to revisit. It has little bits of different philosophies, all woven in a fiction versus non-fiction setting. It's a beautiful book. I love physical books because I like to annotate. Recently, in fact, I was going to Jannagar for Anant Ambani's pre-wedding celebrations and it was really funny because my father and I were the only two people on the flight with our books and our pencils. My brother had headphones on and went off to sleep.

Sikkim on a platter

The New Sikkim House in Chanakyapuri serves *shaptas* and *thupkas*, as well as steamed momos. Try the Nepalese thali

Rahul Verma

There is something to be said about having a *Thakali thali* surrounded by snow-peaked mountains. If that is not possible, the next best thing is to think of the mountains and have it at the New Sikkim House in the Capital.

I first had a *Thakali thali* in a small village near Pokhran in Nepal. Since then, every time I have had this Nepalese thali (including once at a scenic restaurant near Dehradun), I have been struck by the simple yet delicious fare.

Many years ago, the New Sikkim House was our favourite haunt. The food was excellent, and the prices were low. It, however, downed its shutters and reopened a few years ago under a new management. I went there last week, and found the place in Chanakyapuri humming. Clearly, it is a popular lunch spot for people from all over.

Region's specialities

The menu has quite a few Sikkim specials. There is *thakali*, of course, as most of the Sikkimese people are of Nepalese origin. There are Tibetan dishes such as *shaptas* and *thupkas*, and I was happy to find a section devoted to pork and buff preparations. I had thought of starting with a bowl of *thankthuk* – flat noodle soup with vegetable and meat (₹200-230) – but opted instead for steamed chicken *momos* (₹220). The



Delectable fare The vegetarian Thakali thali served at the New Sikkim House. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT AND GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK



prices on the menu, by the way, are a little different from those you see on the food delivery sites.

For mains, we ordered three *Thakali thalis* – vegetarian (₹250), one with chicken (₹299), and the third with meat curry (₹350). It had a mound of rice at the centre, surrounded by little bowls – one with *kali dal*, another with a sweet dish, and the third with the non-vegetarian curry. Around the rice were small helpings of sautéed spinach, a dry dish of potatoes and mustard greens, fried bitter gourd, a fermented dish of leafy greens called *gundruk*, roasted tomato chutney, green salad with a slice of lemon and a *papad*.

The food was good. The *dal* was light, and the vegetables, mildly bitter, added to the taste. The mutton and chicken were the way they are cooked in homes on Sundays – tender pieces in a light, somewhat hot gravy. The sago pudding was rather tasty. You

get unlimited helpings of the vegetables, *dal* and rice.

The spread

I asked for some pork dishes – *shapta* and chilli pork (both ₹350) – as a takeaway. The *shapta* consisted of thin strips of stir-fried pork, cooked with chillies. The chilli pork had some juicy pieces with fat on the side. The dishes, though good, did not come close to a Sikkimese friend's preparation – fatty pork boiled with garlic and chillies.

New Sikkim House has *butter chicken* and *shahi paneer* on the menu, too – but do not let that trouble you. Stick to what they are good at – Nepalese and Tibetan food.

I will be happy if they add some dishes of the Lepcha community of Sikkim, such as nettle soup and ferns, stir-fried with garlic and red chillies. That will be Sikkim on a platter.

At Panchsheel Marg, Block F, Diplomatic Enclave, Chanakyapuri; Ph: 7303547032.

STEP OUT



Art power

Aalekh Foundation is holding an exhibition titled Women Empowerment Through Art featuring Kerala murals by Pooja Kashyap. At Travancore Palace, Kasturba Gandhi Marg; March 22 and 23; 12 noon to 7 pm

Music fete

The 32nd edition of Tyagaraja Music Festival organised by Shanmukhananda Sangeetha Sabha features vocal duets by Madurai T N S Krishna, Amrutha Venkatesh, Bhargavi Swaminathan and Radhika Ramakrishnan. At Vasuki auditorium, Lok Kala Manch, Institutional Area, Lodhi Road; March 23 and 24; 6pm; Entry free on first-come-first-served basis

Shankarlal music fest

Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra's annual music festival is spread over three days with vocal and instrumental recitals by eight artistes. At Kendra lawns, Copernicus Marg; From March 27; 6.30pm onward



Amna Mannan

On a tranquil Sunday morning, a group of history enthusiasts and eager walkers gather near Hauz Qazi to learn about the architecture of Chawri Bazaar and the people who lived there in the past. But first, there was a question to be answered. What did they understand by the word *tawaif* (courtesan)?

In response to the question from Anoushka Jain, founder of Enroute Indian History (EIH), a women-led education venture that conducts heritage walks in Delhi, some participants name iconic movies such as *Pakeezah*, *Umrao Jaan*, *Mughal-e-Azam*, *Devdas*...

"It is important to relearn and deconstruct concepts attached to the word *Tawaif*," says Anoushka, as the group begins its heritage tour in the locality of Chawri Bazar, once a promenade of old Delhi, housing sprawling mansions of *tawaifs*. Several women of Chawri Bazaar had a complex identity.

Learned and skilled
"It is true that the *tawaifs*

Lost histories of courtesans

Inside the lanes of Chawri Bazaar are hidden the edifices of Old Delhi

were indeed women of desire, but they were also independent, learned and highly skilled in various arts," she adds.

The *Tawaif* and *Kotha Walk*, initiated by EIH in 2019, has completed over 100 walks.

"The walk is an experience that seeks to reshape perceptions of women by offering a woman's perspective and empathy, countering patriarchal distortion," says Anoushka, as the tour begins with a visit to the Masjid Bagh-e-Nabiullah, built in 1719.

The 400-year-old mosque is near Hauz Qazi, a reservoir



from the Mughal times, which traces itself from the Yamuna. Named after the founder of Bagh-e-Nabiullah, Qazi Nabiullah, the mosque is a quiet and serene place with simple but beautiful marble architecture. It has a courtyard with *wudu* taps and a place for prayers. Abul Misbah, imam of the

masjid, and a descendant of Qazi Nabiullah, says "We allow people to visit and also offer prayers in the mosque five times a day.

Nearby is another mosque, the Masjid Mubarak Begum, with elaborate engravings on the entrance. It was built by courtesan Mubarak Begum, in memory of her husband,

Heritage trail (Clockwise) Walkers in Chawri Bazaar, view of the Masjid Mubarak Begum and an olden-day Kotha. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



David Ochterloney, a military officer of the East India Company. Originally, it used to be white with three golden domes. But now, it is painted in red and white. "During a storm in Delhi in 2020, the middle dome fell. A historical edifice was in shambles," says Anoushka, as we walk through the now congested lanes of Chawri Bazaar known as Bazaar-e-Husn during the Mughal era.

Earlier there were wide, straight streets that led directly to the majestic Jama

Masjid. Behind the Jama Masjid, resided the *tawaifs*, who were skilled in the arts of entertainment. Religion and entertainment coexisted harmoniously and the word *tawaif* was associated with women well-versed in Persian and Urdu, proficient in singing, dancing, and the art of *tawaf*, which derives its name from "circumambulation." These women would gracefully circle the *mehfil*, creating a unique fusion of culture and entertainment.

For identification

In the interiors of Chawri Bazaar lane, stand the courtesans' *kothas*, that have now turned into warehouses, shops and houses. The different colours of the old buildings mark their identification.

The architecture of the *kothas* is fascinating as they can be identified easily from their beautiful pillars, ornately carved floors also known as *atariyas*. The *kothas* were decorated with the finest carpets and chandeliers and the finest wines were served.

Anoushka explains that since the *tawaifs* were wealthy women, only the elite had

access to their entertainment. However, they were forced into prostitution during the colonial rule when the British introduced the anti-naught movement.

Another remarkable architectural gem is the residence of Guzari Mal, a property dating back to 1897, that served as a *kotha*. A magnificent structure with an abundance of courtyards and 200 rooms, the grandeur of the house is striking.

The resemblance

Anoushka holds up a picture of a beautiful painting by William Carpenter portraying the rear of Jama Masjid and the streets of Chawri Bazaar, with *kothas* painted on each side. A *tawaif* sits on the first floor of the *kotha* with a musician or *ustaad*. The resemblance of the street with where the walkers were standing was uncanny.

At the end of the Heritage Walk, each participant was given a bookmark with a couplet of Meena Naqvi: "Ye aurton mein *tawaif* toh dhund leti hain, *tawaifon mein inhe aurtein nahi mili*." - They find courtesans in women, but they cannot see the women in courtesans.



New capabilities

The choice of MIRV on Agni-V gives it range and ability to defeat defences

On March 11, Prime Minister Narendra Modi used social media to announce India's entry into a small club of countries capable of delivering multiple nuclear warheads on a single missile. This was accomplished with the maiden flight test of Agni-V, India's longest range ballistic missile with a range of over 5,000 kilometres, with multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) technology under 'Mission Divyastra' by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Since its first test in April 2012, Agni-V has undergone several tests and developments including canisterisation to improve its ease of handling and operation. The MIRV system's indigenous avionics systems and high accuracy sensor packages ensure that the re-entry vehicles reach the target points accurately. The DRDO said the mission accomplished the designed parameters. The test also comes five years after India's maiden anti-satellite (ASAT) test under Mission Shakti. On March 27, 2019, a live satellite in the low earth orbit of around 300 km was shot down using a modified interceptor of the Ballistic Missile Defence system.

This is a significant technological breakthrough that furthers India's nuclear weapons programme and strengthens second strike capability. This is particularly important given India's nuclear doctrine based on a no-first-use policy, credible minimum deterrence and massive retaliation in case of a first strike, which was espoused in 2003, after the nuclear tests of 1998. The choice of the MIRV on Agni-V, a three-stage solid fuelled engine, is significant as it is focused towards China given its range and multiple warheads give it the ability to defeat missile defences. India completed the nuclear triad when Mr. Modi declared in November 2018 that the country's first nuclear powered ballistic missile submarine *INS Arihant* had finished its first deterrence patrol. The MIRV is the next technological threshold in this direction and it is now only logical and a matter of time before the MIRV is deployed on submarine-launched ballistic missiles. China, which is fast expanding its nuclear arsenal, has already deployed MIRV technology – first deployed by the U.S. in 1970. Pakistan claims to have tested it as well. In this regard, the other side of this development is the factor of escalation dynamics that is going to accelerate in the region with China and Pakistan. This spiral race of one-upmanship is only going to deepen, get more technology-intensive and turn out to be an expensive endeavour as well.

Three is a crowd

The DMK alliance has gained strength, but the opposition is split in T.N.

Unlike in 2019, Tamil Nadu, in 2024, seems poised for a three-cornered contest, with the ruling DMK-led front remaining cohesive, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) roping in one more party, i.e., the PMK, and the AIADMK being left with smaller organisations. The DMK leadership has retained all its allies, accommodating them in the best possible way. Of 39 seats in the State, the DMK will be trying its luck in 22 constituencies, after taking into account one seat allotted to the Kongunadu Makal Desiya Katchi and contesting under the DMK's 'rising sun' symbol. As in the past, the Congress has 10 seats, including Pudukchery, and the two Left parties two each. The MNM, headed by veteran actor Kamal Haasan, is a recent addition to the DMK's coalition – the party could not be allotted even a single constituency this time but has been assured a Rajya Sabha seat. Mr. Haasan has done the right thing perhaps realising that it would be next to impossible to stay afloat without the backing of either of the two principal Dravidian parties.

Other than the DMDK, the AIADMK does not have any ally to contribute to its vote base even minimally. Six months ago, it left the NDA over differences with the BJP's State leadership, especially its president K. Annamalai, who criticised former Chief Ministers C.N. Annadurai and Jayalalithaa. Though there have been reports that the BJP's national leadership is for joining hands with the AIADMK – Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been making laudatory references to Jayalalithaa – the AIADMK's general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami is firm in his resolve not to have any truck with the BJP. Consequently, many parties (such as the TMC (Moopanar) and the PMK), which were with the AIADMK in 2019, have veered towards the BJP, possibly sensing the advantage of allying with a national party. The AIADMK's breakaway group, led by former Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam, and the ANMK of T.T.V. Dhinakaran are a part of the NDA. Contrary to what Mr. Palaniswami might have visualised, after declaring that he would form a "mega alliance", there has been no migration from the DMK-led front. Whether his conciliatory moves towards religious minorities will have an effect remains to be seen given that they are perceived to be the DMK's supporters. Mr. Annamalai's high-decibel campaigning over 36 months and frequent visits by the BJP's senior leaders, including Mr. Modi, have given the party greater visibility, but the moot question is whether this will translate into votes, or even significant seat wins. The AIADMK remains the principal Opposition party. Ordinarily, the arithmetic in Tamil Nadu politics is a lead factor, but there is no indication so far that the election results will be dramatically different from what they were in 2019, even if the DMK has had to deal with anti-incumbency.

WORLD WATER DAY

World Water Day, which falls on March 22, is a global initiative backed by the United Nations, and has been observed every year since 1993. Under different themes, the attempt has been to raise awareness among stakeholders about the importance of freshwater. The theme this year is "Water for Peace". As everyone knows, there was a time when clean water was available in wells, ponds, streams, rivers and other sources, but the situation is vastly different now. There is a problem of water availability with respect to quantity or quality.

India too faces problems

This water crisis may be physical or economic based on multiple factors such as rapid urbanisation, industrialisation, unsustainable agricultural practices, climate change, erratic rainfall patterns, water overuse and inefficient water management, pollution, inadequate infrastructure, a lack of 'belongingness' among stakeholders, runoff due to high rain along with soil erosion and sedimentation. Water scarcity leads to the poor functioning of ecosystems, threatens food and water security, and, ultimately, affects peace. According to the World Resources Institute, 17 countries face 'extremely high' levels of water stress which is threatening to result in conflict, unrest and peace among people. India is not an exception to these problems. In India, water availability is already low enough to be categorised as water stressed, and is expected to reduce further to 1341m³ by 2025 and 1140m³ by 2050. Also, 72% of all water withdrawals are for use in agriculture, 16% by municipalities for households and services, and 12% by industries.

In almost every State and in the main cities of India, there is groundwater table depletion. The example of Bengaluru is one prominent example. In Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Haryana, the ratio of groundwater consumption to availability is 172%, 137%, 137% and 133%, respectively, which is cause for alarm. In contrast, in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, it is 77%, 74%, 67%, 57%, and 53%, respectively. Most perennial rivers/streams now have intermittent flows or have run dry. In most areas after April-May, there is Less water availability even for drinking and other uses. Springs in India's hilly areas are almost dry. In



Susama Sudhishri

is Professor and Principal Scientist, Water Technology Centre, ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, and an expert in soil and water conservation engineering, watershed management, water harvesting and conservation, precision irrigation management and modelling

The theme this year is 'Water for Peace', pointing to the need for better water security, sustainable agricultural production, and environmental integrity

India, the total number of water bodies is 5,56,601 whose irrigation potential covered 62,71,180 hectares. But, due to a lack of or inappropriate catchment treatment measures, bad design and poor maintenance of water bodies, most of the reservoirs/waterbodies/wetlands have silted up, resulting in reduced storage capacity and lower efficacy.

In most areas, tubewell density and networks have increased. Groundwater discharge is now more than groundwater recharge. The letting out of sewerage water and other sources of grey water into water bodies and rivers is causing a deterioration in water quality. There is a lack of proper surface and groundwater management. Rainfed regions in India which comprise over 48% of land area produces nearly 45% of the gross agricultural product.

So, a large amount of India's food grains is from the rainfed region. The Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, recently laid stress on having a judicious mix of 'traditional indigenous and new technologies to improve soil health and conserve water' and pitched for the efficient use of every drop of water. Hence, paying attention to these points is important.

The vital role of rainwater harvesting

Enhancing water availability with respect to quantity and quality and blue and green water is vital since water is more than just a basic human right. Water is also an instrument of peace-building and enhances the overall quality of life. Promoting sustainable agricultural production, ensuring water security and maintaining environmental integrity are increasingly becoming important issues. This can only be possible by adopting different resource conservation measures in general and rainwater harvesting (in-situ and ex-situ) and ensuring roof top rainwater harvesting in particular. Rain water harvesting (RWH) enables resilience against water scarcity and drought by augmenting recharge and aiding irrigation. The optimum use of surface water by large-scale RWH structures, conjunctive use with groundwater and safe reuse of waste water are the only viable solutions to boost and maintain the current level of food grain production.

The government's emphasis on 'per drop more crop', 'Gaan ka pani gaan mein', 'Khet ka pani khet mein', 'Har Medh per ped' under various programmes such as the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY), watershed

management, Mission Amrit Sarovar and the Jal Shakti Abhiyan programmes. There is an emphasis on water conservation and rainwater harvesting, rejuvenation of waterbodies/tanks/wetlands, recharge of borewell and other recharge structures, watershed development and intensive afforestation. But there is the need for a protocol of the revival of ponds/waterbodies (it is unavailable right now). To tackle all these problems there is a great need to study the condition of every waterbody, its water availability, water quality and the state of ecosystem services it supports. (This writer has done some of these in Mewar, Haryana, NCT of Delhi and Odisha.) There is a need also to create more waterbodies and their revival in every village by looking into the catchment-storage-command area of each waterbody.

Additional steps

There is a need also for these additional interventions to ensure 'water for peace': monitoring the groundwater table; the reclamation of the water quality of groundwater, rivers and waterbodies; the pricing of water use; having a circular water economy; ensuring efficient irrigation techniques such as integrating water resources with micro-irrigations systems and IOT based automation; having integrated water resource management; installing water meters to reduce water use for domestic purposes; no free electricity, having a convergence and linkages of line departments; fostering community awareness and peoples' participation, awareness campaigns about water conservation; ensuring groundwater use neutrality; land neutrality, growing low water requirement crops; optimal crop plan having integrated farming system models; building resilience against climate change and ensuring the needs of a growing population by adopting an integrated and inclusive approach to manage water which is a finite resource; reducing losses from water distribution systems, and ensuring safe wastewater reuse, desalination and appropriate water allocation, tubewell/borewell development and finally, enabling the integration and collaboration of research, industry and academia to implement different developed and new technologies.

With these solutions, the theme of World Water Day 2024 can be strengthened and India can become water secure. These are also steps to ensure a more peaceful world.

Navigating the global waterscape, its challenges

WORLD WATER DAY

The global challenge for securing access to clean water persists for about two billion people and its demand keeps rising. Beyond threatening our basic individual human needs, this scarcity also poses a risk to our collective prosperity and peace.

Today, March 22, 2024, is the 31st World Water Day, with the theme, "Leveraging water for peace". Under the "World Water Assessment Programme", UNESCO led the development of the 2024 edition of the flagship United Nations World Water Development Report, "Water for Prosperity and Peace" as a part of UN Water (an interagency coordination mechanism on water and sanitation of 35 UN entities along with 48 other international partners).

Throughout history, water has been a pivotal resource for some of the greatest civilisations such as those that arose around the Indus, the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates. But it is also true that in these civilisations, conflicts arose on account of this resource, like the well documented tensions between the Mesopotamian cities of Lagash and Umma. This conflict, one of the oldest known wars in human history, centered around a fertile piece of land and water resources. Notably, this historical episode also yielded what is considered the world's first peace treaty, the Treaty of Mesilim, recognised as one of humanity's oldest legal documents.

Water diplomacy in a time of extremities

Today, the world is also experiencing countless meteorological extremities: from intense heat waves to turbulent floods, magnifying concerns about the climate crisis as well as its continuing implications over water insecurity. For example, here in India, the monsoon has become erratic over the years and brings with it major uncertainties for agriculture, which lies at the heart of India's \$3 trillion economy.



Tim Curtis

is the Director of UNESCO New Delhi Regional Office for South Asia and UNESCO Representative to India (UNESCO New Delhi is part of Team UN in India)

In the context of climate change-related pressures, the world also needs to foster improved cooperation over water-sharing

Within the added climate change-related pressures we face, the world needs to foster improved cooperation over water-sharing and embrace universal principles for International Water Law. By governing the use of shared waters and encouraging the use of water sustainably, we can strive for better water diplomacy – making water a force for peace.

The shared recognition that water is a vital resource, with limitations in quality and availability, necessitates collaborative governance to ensure effective and equitable water allocation among nations, fostering regional stability and peace, and an understanding of the intricate relationships between water, climate, and international stability.

Water diplomacy also requires inclusive approaches, acknowledging the indigenous and local communities' extensive cross-border networks, as well as involving civil society and academic networks, who can also play an important role in facilitating political processes to prevent, mitigate, and resolve water-related disputes.

This year's report also highlights a general shortage of water quality data globally and points more specifically to a prominent urban-rural divide, finding that "four out of five people lacking at least basic drinking water services live in rural areas".

Addressing rural India's needs

Within India, a total of 70% of the rural population relies on water to run their households, where agriculture remains the principal source of livelihood. This is even more striking as we know that agriculture also accounts for 70% of the total freshwater use, globally.

With improved water accessibility, these differences can be erased, and increased water investments in the rural areas have the potential for returning positive outcomes – in health, education and employment, not to mention basic human needs and dignity.

In the agrarian sector, the efficient use of

emerging artificial intelligence (AI) technology in the conservation of water, ranging from tackling crop and food loss, to minimising chemicals and fertilizers, and saving water, is starting to show that outputs that are both productive and sustainable can be enabled.

The issue of transboundary waters

The report reminds us that a "large proportion of the world's freshwater resources are in transboundary waters" including in India. With its expansive landmass, India boasts a network of long rivers, not only serving its own needs but also shared with its neighbours. And, yet, in the South Asian region, the extent of water pollution has worsened considerably in recent years, especially the Meghna, Brahmaputra, Ganga and Indus, warns the 2024 report.

To solve these problems, the world needs a sophisticated form of cross-border water governance, promoting effective and equitable water allocation among nations that share water resources. Out of UNESCO's 194 member-states and 12 associate members, 153 countries can be classified as water-sharing nations, and all transboundary waters account for 60% of the world's freshwater flows.

Of these 153 countries, just 24 have managed to reach a 100% cooperation agreement on their shared waters, as per a 2021 UNESCO progress report on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 6.5.2 titled "Progress on transboundary water cooperation."

Since time immemorial, we have of course made significant progress in fostering peace; however, if freshwater runs scarce, it threatens our collective well-being and peace. This is also crucial for the 2030 Agenda and achieving the SDGs. Through transboundary cooperation on the sustainable management of water, we can realise benefits across various sectors including health, food and energy security, protection from natural disasters, education, improved living standards, employment, economic development, and numerous ecosystem services.

of 'power'. He vowed to fight that power represented by the top leader. He did not use it to mean 'divine power' or 'female deity' or 'women's power'. Mr. Gandhi's clarification has fallen on deaf ears. It is a fact that large sections of the media kowtow to 'that power' and fall in its orbit.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

The comment by Mr. Gandhi on 'shakti' is unwarranted

and unfortunate. 'Shakti' is a word that needs to be used with caution and respect.

A.J. Rangarajan, Chennai

Player's return

Rishabh Pant's much-awaited return to cricket is nothing short of miraculous. His fortitude and determination are praiseworthy, and inspire us to rise above challenges.

Anusha Pillay, Raipur, Chhattisgarh

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bonds and goal

If the avowed objective of the Electoral Bond Scheme was to eliminate black money from politics, it fell like ninepins when it is now known that many of the purchasers bought bonds that seem to be disproportionate to their business income (Editorial page, March 21). The Supreme Court of India-mandated disclosures show that several purchasers may have been forced to purchase bonds

when they were arm-twisted or about to be arm-twisted by the central agencies – a classic case of political skulduggery, deception and corruption. If political parties are not bound to disclose the names of those who are associated with the bonds, a level-playing-field is denied to the donors. We, the people, genuinely "crave for political parties with a difference".

Ayyasserri Raveendranath, Aranmula, Kerala

The Vechur cow

In the article on the conservation of the Vechur cow (Editorial page, March 20), one cannot 'blanket blame' cross-breeding as the culprit, as during the 1960s and 1970s, the nation's priorities were rightly focused on self-sufficiency and nutritional requirements to feed a burgeoning population. It was the lack of appreciation of indigenous breeds and indiscriminate

cross-breeding that has led to the present need for a revival of local breeds.

Dr. R. Unnikrishnan, Cherthala, Kerala

'Shakti' remark

The top leader has focused on one word, 'shakti', that the Congress's Rahul Gandhi used in his speech recently, which has caused 'controversy'. The leader could not have been unaware that his principal political opponent used the word in its mundane sense

Should judges accept official posts after retirement?



Justice Deepak Gupta
is a former judge of the Supreme Court



Sanjay Hedge
is a senior advocate based in Delhi

PARLEY

Recently, hours after resigning as a judge of the Calcutta High Court, Abhijit Gangopadhyay announced that he was joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The judge's decision to join politics and the manner in which it was taken has raised questions of judicial impropriety. Some people disapprove of the practice of judges holding official posts after retirement; they believe that this may impinge upon the independence of the judiciary. Others, including those in the government, have pointed out that such posts often require judicial personnel of the highest integrity and there is no Constitutional bar to this effect. Should judges accept official posts after retirement? Justice Deepak Gupta and Sanjay Hedge discuss this question in a conversation moderated by **Aaratrika Bhaumik**. Edited excerpts:

Should Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay's decision to resign and join the BJP be considered a breach of judicial conduct by the Supreme Court? If yes, is it time for judicial reforms to expressly prohibit judges of Constitution courts from joining official posts?

Justice Deepak Gupta: Although I don't approve of Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay's decision, I don't think there is any legal bar. However, I think the time has come for the Supreme Court to restate the values expected from judges of superior courts. The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct (2002) needs to be worked out again. The manner in which the judge resigned and joined a political party doesn't speak well of judicial independence. You cannot expect any government to impose a ban or a cooling-off period because they are the gainers of the existing system. Instead, the judiciary should lay down some norms on how a judge should behave after he demits office, whether on retirement or resignation.

Sanjay Hedge: Justice Gupta is right that there is no constitutional bar but expecting judges to stay away from all official posts after retirement is too much to ask for. There are certain posts for which some judges maybe uniquely qualified. The real problem as far as Justice Gangopadhyay is concerned is that he had resigned ahead of time, solely to contest the Lok Sabha elections, which is now apparent. The feeling that you get here is that can you can ask a judge to resign so that he is available for elections. That too, the ask is by a ruling party at the Centre. This does not speak highly of judicial independence. As far as political jobs are concerned, I think the time has come for the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greets former judge Abhijit Gangopadhyay during a public meeting in Siliguri, West Bengal. PTI

judiciary to clearly restate its values and even take an undertaking from fresh entrants that they will not join active politics before a cooling-off period of two or three years.

The Law Commission has also recommended a cooling-off period previously. If it were to be implemented, how long should it be for?

Sanjay Hedge: A cooling-off period is a healthy convention to have. It should be of at least two years. A judge retires from the High Court at 62 years, so after two or three years, they can still have an active career. Similarly, a retired Supreme Court judge will be 68 years old after the cooling-off period ends.

Justice Deepak Gupta: I am strongly of the view that there should not be any post-retirement appointments for judges as I have expressed in my minority judgment in *Roger Mathews v. South Indian Bank Ltd* (2019). For me, the bigger issue is the perception of the people. Sometimes judges may decide rightly, but the public may believe that since the judgment has come on the verge of retirement, it has been tainted by some expectation of a post-retiral benefit. Ordinary citizens are frequently up against the state, which is the largest litigant in India. If a judge accepts a post-retirement appointment from the government, they are bound to doubt whether their judgments were delivered for extraneous reasons. In *Roger Mathews*, I had written, "One cannot expect justice from those who, on the verge of retirement, throng the corridors of power looking for post-retiral sinecures."

Do you believe that judges who decide salient cases in favour of the government are more likely to secure post-retirement benefits? If so, does the remedy lie in the enactment of Central legislation since the Supreme Court has shown reluctance in the



If a judge accepts a post-retirement appointment from the government, people are bound to doubt whether their judgments were delivered for extraneous reasons.

JUSTICE DEEPAK GUPTA

past to frame guidelines?

Justice Deepak Gupta: Unfortunately, the government is not going to bring any law. My view is that any competent lawyer can do the job reserved for a retired judge. They should just be men of integrity and calibre. When judges hanker for the trappings of power, it is a sad day for the judiciary.

Sanjay Hedge: Yes, it is often a public perception that a judge looking forward to something after retirement is more likely to benefit those who might be in a position to help him. So, the power to appoint or recommend appointments should lie within the judiciary itself. If a reasonably fair and transparent method of allotment is worked out, then one could conceivably use the services of judges in judicial functions to a greater degree. The Chief Justice of the day can be apprised of the upcoming vacancies by the government and the next available judge can thereafter be allotted the concerned post.

Increasing the age of superannuation of judges is often pitched as a solution for curbing such a practice. Some experts even say that India should follow the U.S. precedent of granting Supreme Court justices lifetime tenures. Do you concur with these proposals?

Sanjay Hedge: Yes, increasing the retirement age is a possible solution. However, it might do injustice to one generation of lawyers with judicial expectations. Given the increased life expectancy and better healthcare, judges who have been performing well should possibly be allowed to continue beyond the existing retirement age.

I think the U.S. itself is in the process of reconsidering lifetime appointments. One of the greatest jobs that any presidential administration can do is to appoint younger judges so that they are able to shape the law of the nation for the next 40 years or so. A lifetime appointment for Supreme Court judges in India would possibly leave the institution burdened and negate the entry of fresh talent.

Justice Deepak Gupta: I agree with Sanjay. It is a dangerous trend and after some time your

mental and physical faculties tend to get affected. Having said that, there should be a higher retirement age. But it should be equal for High Court and Supreme Court judges. The senior judges of the Supreme Court exercise a rather unholy hold over senior judges of the High Courts only because retirement ages are different. According to the constitutional scheme, Chief Justices of High Courts are equal to Supreme Court judges, but that is not the case in reality.

Statutes regulating tribunals and commissions often provide for the chairmanship of retired judges of the higher judiciary making them indispensable to these appointments. Is a common service or written test to secure such appointments a plausible alternative?

Sanjay Hedge: At that age, I don't think a written test will really work. The more you get into all this service jurisprudence, the less likely you are to have independent creatures to man judicial or quasi-judicial institutions. You will only end up getting a series of judicial bureaucrats. We should ultimately learn that public belief in our profession rests largely on our ability to be of service to the nation and to harassed litigants irrespective of which side of the bench we are at.

Justice Deepak Gupta: I am strongly of the view that there should be different types of tribunal services. For instance, a tax administrative service for tax matters and a service tribunal service for the Central Administrative Tribunal and State Administrative Tribunals. Young people can be taken in for these services and then they can go up the ladder and head these institutions. Why should there be lateral appointments from the High Courts or the Supreme Court to head these bodies?

Justice Gupta, should post-retirement monetary perks such as pension be increased to reduce the reliance of judges on these appointments?

Justice Deepak Gupta: When you join the service as a judge, you know what you are going to get after retirement. I am not sure that people want post-retirement jobs for money; they want it for the power. If you are competent enough, you can get sufficient work as an arbitrator or a legal advisor after retirement.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

WORLD WATER DAY

How water insecurity affects women

The time burden of collecting water inevitably falls on the women and girls of the household

Sujatha Srinivasan & Aparna Anand

While India has made remarkable progress in expanding household access to water, the National Sample Survey 78th round multiple indicator survey (2020-21) suggests that over 41% of rural households lack access to safely managed drinking water within their households, and geographical disparities in household access to safe water, though declining, continue to persist. The distance to the principal source of drinking water for these households falls in the range of 0.2 to 1.5 km or more. India makes up 18% of the world's population, with a share of water resources of less than 5%.

Evidence suggests that lack of access to water can cause considerable stress among households. In water-scarce areas or among households whose principal water source lies outside their household premises, water collection is typically perceived as a gendered activity, with the time burden of collecting water inevitably falling on women and girls of the household. Water insecurity affects women's everyday lives, household dynamics, and social relationships. It also affects the school attendance and academic performance of girls. Women also face gender-based violence during the commute for water collection, which has an adverse impact on their mental health.

Research suggests that lack of access to adequate water leads to the practice of open defecation. This, in turn, has a multitude of effects on women. Apart from the health impacts like diarrhoea, typhoid and cholera, and impacts on menstrual health, women who practise open defecation also face psychosocial stress as well as a greater risk of non-partner sexual violence.

The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) and the National Water Mission present an important shift in the policy for water management. The JJM enables access to drinking water through household tap connections. This reduces the drudgery of women and gives them more time for gain-

ful activities. The programme seeks to measure this through increased participation of women in community engagement, including in gram panchayat and self-help group activities. To this end, the programme is designed to empower women by encouraging their involvement in Pani Samitis constituted for the purpose of planning, implementation, operations and maintenance, and monitoring of the programme at the village level. JJM guidelines also recommend that at least five women from every village are trained in periodic water quality monitoring. This serves the dual objective of empowering these women as well as ensuring the delivery of quality water to all rural households under this programme.

In a recent study conducted across rural areas in three districts in Tamil Nadu, we sought to examine these intended outcomes. We found that household access to safe drinking water enabled under the JJM reduces the time spent on collecting water from off-premises, leading to time gains among women, which they spent on better management of household tasks, children's schooling, and childcare. Women who performed well on overall empowerment indicators also spent less time seeking water and showed a better mental health index. The study also showed positive correlations between water access and sanitation access.

Even as India continues its progress on access to water and sanitation, it is imperative that it continues to uphold a policy environment that mainstreams gender considerations in water access. Beyond reporting on progress in terms of water access or quality, it is also imperative that we measure progress against intended gender goals - be it in terms of reduction in the drop-out rates among school-going girls or reduction in drudgery among rural women and the extent to which this translates to improved socio-economic outcomes for these women.

Sujatha Srinivasan is Senior Research Fellow, LEAD at Krea University and Aparna Anand is Lecturer, Teachers College, Columbia University

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Sticks and colours



A woman plays Lathmar Holi with policemen, in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The festival is said to be a recreation of a famous legend in which Lord Krishna, who hailed from Nandgaon, visited the town of his beloved Radha, Barsana. It is said that he teased Radha and her friends, who in turn playfully hit him and drove him out of Barsana. PTI

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 22, 1974

Attempt to kidnap Princess Anne

London, March 21: An attempt was made to kidnap Princess Anne, 23-year-old daughter of Queen Elizabeth II, last night in a wild shooting affray in the heart of London, in which four persons were wounded, the British Home Secretary, Mr. Ray Jenkins, told the House of Commons. The Princess and her



husband were unhurt - but reported badly shaken - in the dramatic ambush and shooting as they were driving home to Buckingham Palace after an official West-End engagement. A white Ford compact Sedan forced the royal car to the kerb, police said. A man jumped out, ran towards it and pumped six shots into the car with a pistol which was found later in the street. Eyewitnesses said the Rolls Royce was peppered with bullet holes. The bodyguard of the Princess, her chauffeur, a policeman who tried to intervene and a newspaper reporter in a passing taxi were injured, the policeman gravely.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 22, 1924

Wanted: A federation of Indian States

A Special Cable to the "Daily Express" dated London March 21 says: In a letter to the "Times" Sir Fredrick Lagard suggests that the best and possibly the only way of conferring Home Rule to India is by a federation of a member of autonomous states on the model of Canada, Australia, South Africa or the United States. The first step, he says, would be setting up of the principal units claiming a distinct nationality based on race, religion, language and history as a substitution for the existing "Provinces."

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Weekly domestic flights to be operated in summer schedule

24,275 The weekly domestic flights to be operated during the summer starting from March 31, has shown a 6% increase compared to the year-ago period. PTI

IMF reaches staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for bailout

337 in \$ million. The International Monetary Fund said it has reached an agreement with Sri Lanka for the next phase that would enable it access to the amount from bailout approved in 2023. PTI

India's fertility rate in 2021, as per The Lancet report

1.91 India's fertility rate dropped from nearly 6.2 in 1950, and is projected to fall further to 1.29 and 1.04 in 2050 and 2100, respectively, according to research published in *The Lancet*. PTI

The missiles fired by Russia at Kyiv in the first attack in 44 days

31 The ballistic and cruise missiles fired at Kyiv were shot down by Ukraine's air defences, though 13 people were injured by falling wreckage. Ukraine said that around 80 people were evacuated from their homes. AP

India's coal imports during the April to January period

212 in million tonnes. India registered a marginal rise of 1.65% in coal imports in the April-January period of the ongoing fiscal, over the year-ago period. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](https://www.facebook.com/thehindu) twitter.com/the_hindu [instagram.com/the_hindu](https://www.instagram.com/the_hindu)

Nuclear energy: fixing the finance

Why is there an urgent need to reassess nuclear financing policies in Multilateral Development Banks to accommodate private capital or blended financing models for the generation of nuclear energy? Why is the state of nuclear infrastructure development and finance mobilisation not proportional? Where does India stand?

EXPLAINER

Syed Ali

The story so far:

In March 21, Brussels hosted the first-ever Nuclear Energy Summit, co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo and the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi. Several world leaders joined the summit to highlight the role of nuclear energy in addressing climate change.

How did this come about?

The UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai (UAE) in December 2023 stated the indispensable role of nuclear energy to meet climate goals. The declaration signed by 22 world leaders mentioned the need to triple nuclear energy capacity by 2050. The Nuclear Energy Summit, an initiative in collaboration with the IAEA's 'Atoms4Netzero' programme, is part of the multilateral approach to decarbonisation. Nuclear power emits four times less carbon than solar farms or other renewable sources such as wind, hydropower, and geothermal. Most importantly, nuclear power has the capacity to supply uninterrupted energy irrespective of geographical constraints making it a crucial component of the wider renewable energy mix. Nuclear power plants (NPP) also have low operating costs, smaller land imprint and a longer life cycle compared to all the other renewable energy sources.

How can nuclear energy be financed?

Two key motives for the large-scale adoption of nuclear power as the base load energy source are technology and finance. Recent developments in nuclear technology including Small Modular Reactors (SMR), radiation proofing in existing plants, and extended fuel cycles, have the potential to substantially



Energy of the future: The Kudankulam nuclear power project in Tamil Nadu. REUTERS

mitigate nuclear-related risks. Signifying the destigmatisation of nuclear energy is the entry of technology startups in an otherwise government-run industry. The role of technical advancements in reducing carbon emissions is highlighted by an IAEA study, which predicts that while existing technologies will play a significant role, by 2050, half of carbon reductions will come from technologies currently in the prototype stage.

However, in spite of technical advancements, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and private investors have not made any significant contribution to the industry. The World Bank has not provided financing for a nuclear project since its \$40 million loan to Italy in 1959. There is a pressing need to reassess nuclear financing policies of MDBs to accommodate private capital or blended finance models.

Has the cooperative model worked?

There are successful financial practices that can be replicated, for instance the cooperative funding models of France, South Korea, Russia, and the U.K. where a group of investors raise credit from the market and take full responsibility for project delivery. In Finland, large power plants have been funded by multiple private companies since the 1970s using a cooperative finance model called 'Mankala'. Under this model, companies jointly own energy producers and share the costs of building and operating plants. They don't pay dividends but can buy the energy at a cost based on their ownership share, with investors being wholesalers, retailers, or large industrial firms. Financial creativity and market support with low interest rates can unravel the potential of nuclear energy at scale. There are 440 nuclear reactors in the

world, accounting for a quarter of the world's low-carbon energy. The number of nuclear reactors is increasing, with 60 reactors under construction and 110 in the planning stage, most being in Asia, particularly China, which is soon to overtake the U.S. and the nuclear giant France. China has set a target to produce 10% of its electricity from nuclear energy by 2035 and 18% by 2060. However, the state of nuclear infrastructure development and finance mobilisation is not proportional. NuScale Power, previously expected to be the first U.S. company licensed to build a 462MW SMR in Utah, terminated its planned project due to rising costs. Nuclear powerhouses Westinghouse and Areva also filed bankruptcy due to project overruns.

What about India?

India's first commercial NPP in Pahalgarh, Tarapur offers reliable energy at 2/kWh lower than solar power tariffs. At Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu, a newer power plant offers electricity in the range of 4-6/kWh comparable to coal-fired thermal power plants. Despite its versatile nature, nuclear power contributes only 1.6% of the total renewable energy mix in India. Stigma, weaponisation risk, radiation leak, regulation, high upfront cost, and long project overruns are the reasons for low adoption rate of nuclear energy.

Recently, the nuclear industry has been undergoing novel liberalisation, with ambitious plans for growth in India and abroad. Beginning with the invitation of \$26 billion in private investments, a phase-wise tripling of nuclear capacity from 7,480 MW to 22,480 MW by 2031-2032, and Prime Minister Modi's attendance at the core loading of the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) all mark a positive future for the industry. The PFBR's ability to generate fuel and power at the same time represents a significant advancement in India's mostly self-reliant nuclear industry.

The author is a policy professional and a consultant at RIS, New Delhi. Tweets @Alinyst

THE GIST

On March 21, Brussels hosted the first-ever Nuclear Energy Summit, co-chaired by the Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo and the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Mariano Grossi.

Two key motives for the large-scale adoption of nuclear power as the base load energy source are technology and finance.

India's first commercial NPP in Pahalgarh, Tarapur offers reliable energy at 2/kWh lower than solar power tariffs. At Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu, a newer power plant offers electricity in the range of 4-6/kWh comparable to coal-fired thermal power plants.

Why did Pakistan carry out airstrikes in Afghanistan?

Who was the target? What is the current status of the relationship between the two countries?

Sumeda

The story so far:

In a major escalation of tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan this week, Pakistani fighters carried out airstrikes inside the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost. At least eight civilians were killed in the pre-dawn attacks, Afghan officials said. The Taliban strongly condemned the strikes, and as retaliation, attacked Pakistani military posts along the border using "heavy weapons." Although the fighting across the Pakistan-Afghanistan border has stopped for now, the incident highlights the increasing tension between the two countries as Islamabad has accused the Taliban of providing refuge to terrorists launching frequent attacks on its territory.

Why has Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban soured?

The 2,670-kilometre Durand Line which marks the international land border between Pakistan and Afghanistan has

long been a point of contention between the two nations. Successive Afghan governments have disputed the demarcation, claiming Pashtun territories in Pakistan, including the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and parts of the North West Frontier Province. Tensions became apparent after the Taliban firmly rejected the Durand Line as a permanent border, dividing ethnic Pashtuns, following its return to power in 2021. A series of skirmishes between the two forces along the border were reported in the following days.

The tensions escalated after the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also known as the Pakistani Taliban, called off a ceasefire in November 2022 when talks brokered by the Afghan Taliban broke down. The Afghan Taliban and the TTP are separate groups with common ideological links. A regrouped TTP ordered nationwide attacks after the ceasefire ended, which resulted in an unprecedented surge in terror incidents across Pakistan. The country saw a 69%

increase in attacks in 2023, an 81% rise in resultant deaths, and a 60% surge in the number of injuries, according to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS). The total violence-related fatalities reached a record six-year high last year, with over 1,500 deaths from 789 terror attacks and counter-terror operations. Amid a multifaceted crisis, Pakistan urged the Afghan Taliban to control the TTP. While the Taliban assured that they wouldn't permit anyone to use Afghan soil for attacks against any country, the surge in attacks since 2021 created distrust between Pakistan and the Taliban.

What triggered the airstrikes?

On March 16, seven Pakistani soldiers were killed after a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden truck into a post in North Waziristan. The next day, while offering the funeral prayers, President Asif Ali Zardari vowed to "respond strongly." Hours later, the Taliban released a statement, alleging that

Pakistani planes had bombed the Barmal district of Paktika province and Sepera district in Khost at 3 a.m. on March 18, resulting in the deaths of civilians.

Pakistan confirmed the airstrikes hit rebels belonging to the TTP's Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group after the outfit claimed responsibility for the March 16 attack. The Pakistan Foreign Office said the country conveyed its serious concerns to the Afghan government over the presence of terror outfits including the TTP inside Afghanistan over the past two years. "These terrorists pose a grave threat to Pakistan's security and have consistently used Afghan territory to launch terror attacks inside Pakistani territory," it added. Notably, this was not the first time Pakistan launched airstrikes against Afghanistan. In April 2022, the Pakistani military carried out a similar operation in Khost and Kunar provinces.

What has the Taliban said?

The Taliban have warned Pakistan of "very bad consequences which will be out of Pakistan's control" in case of continued attacks inside its territory. The Taliban spokesperson claimed that attacks took place on houses of civilians, killing five women and three children. The Taliban denied Pakistan's Special Representative to Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Durrani's recent charge that Afghanistan was providing shelter to 5,000 to 6,000 TTP militants, but acknowledged the possibility of their presence due to Afghanistan's rugged terrain.

THE GIST

In a major escalation of tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan this week, Pakistani fighters carried out airstrikes inside the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost.

On March 16, seven Pakistani soldiers were killed after a suicide bomber rammed an explosive-laden truck into a post in North Waziristan. The next day, while offering the funeral prayers, President Asif Ali Zardari vowed to "respond strongly."

The Taliban has warned Pakistan of "very bad consequences which will be out of Pakistan's control" in case of continued attacks inside its territory.

IN THE LIMELIGHT



A scene from *Dune: Part Two*. AP

Echoes of Arrakis: unravelling the sonic splendour of 'Dune: Part Two'

In 'Dune: Part Two', the shifting sands murmur sinister secrets, echoing familiar melodies that render sound an almost tangible presence, and proving that on Arrakis, silence may be as scant as water itself

Ayaan Paul Chowdhury

Did your friendly-neighbourhood cinephile drag you to the nearest IMAX screen exalting the cinematic prowess of their French-Canadian messiah to ensure the most 'complete' cinematic experience? Though IMAX screens in India don't have quite as much of the 'oomph' factor as their original American counterparts, purists take great pride in relishing the most premium movie-watching experience that money can offer. Especially when it comes to the likes of the film in question.

Beyond visual spectacle

Few films possess the power to transport audiences to realms beyond imagination quite like Denis Villeneuve's follow-up to 2021's *Dune*. What most of us tend to forget, however, is that the "IMAX experience" in question has more to offer than Greg Frasier's jaw-dropping wide shots, sprawled from ceiling to floor. As the curtain rises on Arrakis once again, it's not just the awe-inspiring visuals that captivate; it's the audacious aural landscape that beckons the audience into this notoriously unforgiving world, where the scorching sands whisper under the light of the eclipsed Arrakeen sun.

The philosophy of sound design

In a departure from conventional approaches to sci-fi sound design, Villeneuve and his team opted for documentary-style realism, eschewing flashy effects to make way for authenticity

and immersion. From the subtle rustle of spice-saturated sands beneath Fremen feet to the ominous buzz of the Ornithopters, nothing is superfluous; every sound serves to deepen our understanding of the world.

Principal to the ethos of *Dune*'s sound design was the concept of "distant familiarity." In crafting the sonic landscape of Arrakis, the filmmakers sought to strike a delicate balance between the alien and the familiar – imbuing the world with a sense of otherworldly mystique while tethering it to recognisable elements that resonate with audiences on a primal level.

This approach gave the film a sense of verisimilitude (previously employed by the late Icelandic composer Jóhann Jóhannsson while crafting his haunting score for Villeneuve's 2016 sci-fi, *Arrival*) allowing us to escape the confines of our theatres and escape for three odd hours to a world far, far away, while fully retaining a visceral connection to our own experiences and emotions.

Sandworms and the power of myth

Central to this sonic tapestry are the 'Shai-Hulud' themselves – towering colossi that stalk the desert with an almost godlike aura. Instead of portraying them as mere monsters, Villeneuve wanted to evoke a sense of reverence, a feeling of awe and wonder, that he has even likened to the iconic (and now Oscar-winning) *kaiju*, *Godzilla*. The result is a subtle yet powerful symphony of sounds, from the low, guttural groans of the sandworms to the chilling ophidian hissing as they approach. The venerated

beasts are even summoned through the ritualistic (and oddly satisfying) 'gunking' of the Fremen thumpers. It's a testament to the power of sound to evoke emotion, turning these creatures into something mythical and truly unforgettable.

But it's not just the natural wonders of Arrakis that captivate; it's the power of the Voice, wielded by the formidable Bene Gesserit. The distinct (and often terrifying) resonance when characters use the Voice, with a marked explosion of bass, becomes a tangible force, rattling the very theatre itself. This sonic manipulation, which Villeneuve admits to have drawn inspiration from the techniques used by dub reggae legend, Lee Scratch Perry, imbues the spiritual journey with tactile sensations, drawing viewers deeper into the mysteries of the Bene Gesserit sisterhood.

Evolution of musical ideas

Of course, none of this would be possible without the visionary work of a certain veteran German composer. From the outset, it's clear that Hans Zimmer and Villeneuve share a deep-seated reverence for Frank Herbert's seminal novel. Having already won his second Oscar for its predecessor, Zimmer's gorgeous original score for its sequel feels like a living, breathing entity, pulsating with raw emotion and energy. His score is the sonic embodiment of Villeneuve's vision, a testament to the power of collaboration and creative synergy. Together, they have crafted a film that doesn't just sound good; it sounds like nothing else before it: the perfect confluence of sound and vision.

What sets Zimmer's work apart is his refusal to adhere to the tired tropes of traditional science fiction scores. Instead of defaulting to European orchestral sounds or romantic period tonality (à la *Star Wars* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*), Zimmer's experimentation draws from Arabic scales, incorporates the unorthodox instrumentation of industrial scraping and sand falling over metal, and renounces traditional harmonies in favour of a hard-hitting minimalism.

For the second *Dune* film, Zimmer's musical progression delves into a deeper, more intimate exploration of the themes established in the first instalment. Embracing a back-to-basics approach, Zimmer re-examines his previously released musical sketchbook from the first film, weaving together echoes of Loire Cotler's gravely timbre of vocals to establish a more intimate bond with the characters, as heard in the track, "Only I Will Remain". In the same vein, "A Time of Quiet Between the Storms" serves as a fitting example of how Zimmer strips Paul and Chani's motifs established in the first film bare, intertwining their themes throughout the story, only to strike the devastating blow of betrayal and heartbreak as the credits roll.

In the end, the aural landscape of *Dune: Part Two* is an excellent reminder that film is not just a visual medium, but a sensory experience that taps into more primitive instincts. And as the sands of Arrakis continue to shift and swirl, one thing becomes abundantly clear: in the world of the *Lisan al-Gaib*, sound is not just heard; it's felt, it's feared, and it's fiercely unforgettable.

THE DAILY QUIZ

The IPL starts today in Chennai. In the IPL, a maximum of four overseas players figure in any team in a match. A quiz on some of their wonderful exploits over the last 16 editions

Soorya Prakash. N

QUESTION 1

Who is the only overseas player to have the Orange Cap thrice, which is the most by any player in IPL history?

QUESTION 2

Who is the only overseas player to hold the wicket keeping record of five dismissals in an innings, the most by a wicket keeper in an innings?

QUESTION 3

Who is the only overseas player to have scored a century in an IPL final?

QUESTION 4

Which overseas player holds the record for having played the most number of matches for a single franchise and also the record for

holding on to more than 100 catches in IPL history?

QUESTION 5

I am the only overseas player to have taken five or more wickets in an innings twice. In fact, I achieved this feat in the same season against the same opponent. Who am I?

QUESTION 6

Who holds the record for having won the most number of 'player of the match' awards?

QUESTION 7

Who is the overseas player to have played in the most finals?

QUESTION 8

Who is the only overseas player from a non-test playing nation to have been part of the final?



Visual question:

I have received an IPL award which no other overseas cricketer has won. Who am I and what is the award? AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

- This person said about Achebe, "There was a writer named Chinua Achebe...in whose company the prison walls fell down." **Ans: Nelson Mandela**
 - Achebe rejected this honour conferred by the Nigerian government twice. **Ans: Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic**
 - The title of *Things Fall Apart* was taken from this poem by this poet. **Ans: The Second Coming; William Butler Yeats**
 - The writer of the book *Weep Not, Child*. **Ans: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o**
 - Along with *Things Fall Apart*, these books form the African Trilogy. **Ans: Arrow of God and No Longer At Ease**
- Visual: Identify this author. **Ans: Nadine Gordimer**
- Early Birds:** K.N. Viswanathan| Prashant Nain| Sunil Kannada| Muhammed Shahid Surji| Animesh Mohan

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



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Tabloid (K. V. Ramana Murthy)"

"Tabloid" is a newspaper of which two pages make up one printing plate and which contains news in condensed form and much photographic matter. It is also used to mean anything in a compressed or concentrated form. Tabloid is also used as an adjective.

I do not like the tabloid style.

Tabloid journalism has its own special characteristics. "Tabloid" does not have a good connotation. Tabloids are not respectable as they are considered sensational and rather vulgar. The word tabloid is from *Tabloid*, the proper name of a medicine sold in tablets.

"Success, Victory (Padmapriya)"

"Victory also means 'success,' but it is success of a special kind. Victory is 'the overcoming of an enemy or antagonist.' It also means 'an achievement of mastery or success in a struggle or endeavour.'

Each candidate claimed victory in the election.

He led the army to victory.

This book contains stories which deal with the victory of good over evil.

"Conquest," "triumph," "mastery" are some synonyms for "victory."

Pyrrhic victory is victory won at great cost. Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, won a war at Asculum in 279 B.C. at a heavy price. He lost many of his best officers and men.

He said, "One more such victory and we are lost." "Pyrrhic" rhymes with "lyric"; 'h' is silent. An indisputable, notable victory is a "resounding" victory."

"Presently (S. Ramanathan, Tumkur)"

"The original meaning of 'presently' was 'now, at present.' This meaning became obsolete in the 16th century and the word came to mean 'immediately.' Shakespeare used it in this sense. There has been a shift in the meaning of the word since the 19th century. It means 'soon, after a short time.'

I will see him presently.

The original meaning of the word 'now, at the moment' became established in American and Scottish English. Now the word is more frequently used in the sense of 'currently, at present' in British English also. Some grammarians disapprove of this but they are fighting a losing battle. Presently, 'presently' has two meanings: (a) soon, shortly, (b) now, at present.

Presently he got up and left the room.

Here the word means 'soon.'

Presently he is working on his autobiography.

Here the word means 'at the moment'. It is the context that will determine the meaning. More and more people are using the word in the sense of 'now.' Before long the other meaning may become obsolete."

"To give the cold shoulder (M. Gomathi)"

"It means 'to display indifference, to ignore or snub.'

I went to seek his help but he gave me the cold shoulder.

One can also 'get the cold shoulder.'

I got the cold shoulder when I went to him for help.

It is believed that in the past the cold shoulder of meat was served to unwelcome guests to discourage them from further visits! This idiom has been in use since the 18th century"

Published in The Hindu on July 9, 1991.

Word of the day

Querulous:

habitually complaining

Synonyms: whiney, fretful

Usage: *He was a querulous old man.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/querulouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈkwɛr(j)ʊləs/

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

From Page One

MEIL's ₹584 crore is top donation to any party

Haldia Energy donated bonds worth ₹281 to the Trinamool and ₹81 crore to the BJP. Vedanta Ltd. gave bonds worth ₹229 crore to the BJP, followed by ₹125 crore to the Congress.

Keventer Food Park Infra Ltd., MKJ Enterprises Ltd., and Madanlal Ltd. — all registered with the same address in Kolkata and with at least one director in common — donated ₹573 crore together. Of this, 60%, or ₹346 crore, went to the BJP, while 21% (₹121 crore) went to the Congress.

Ponmudy case: CJI raps Tamil Nadu Governor

"We are seriously concerned about the conduct of the Governor in this case. We did not want to say it aloud in court. He is defying the Supreme Court of India... When a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court stayed the conviction of Ponmudy, the Governor had no business to tell us that the suspension order did not wipe out the conviction or made it non-existent," Chief Justice Chandrachud told Attorney-General R. Venkataramani, appearing for the Governor.

"If we don't hear from you [the Governor] in a positive manner tomorrow, we will pass an order... We thought of passing an order right now, but we want to give you an opportunity to act in accordance with law. We will give you overnight," Chief Justice Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, made the stand of the court clear to Mr. Venkataramani.

The Attorney-General questioned the conduct of Tamil Nadu for approaching the Supreme Court to defend a man convicted of moral turpitude. "What fundamental right of the State is violated here?" Mr. Venkataramani challenged.

What else can State do, asks CJI

Chief Justice Chandrachud asked what else the State was supposed to do. "If the Governor does not follow the Constitution, what does the State do except come to a constitutional court?"

The Chief Justice asked Mr. Venkataramani whether this was the "best argument the Governor had — that 'I will defend my constitutionally illegal conduct by pointing fingers at how the State has come to the Supreme Court'".

"We don't know who had advised the Governor, but the advice was not in accordance with the law," the Chief Justice told the Attorney-General.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin wrote to the Governor on March 13 communicating the State Cabinet's decision to have Mr. Ponmudy back as Minister, saying he was the best man suitable for the job. The State had moved the top court after the Governor wrote back refusing to play ball on the ground of constitutional morality.

"Does the Governor mean the Supreme Court also acted against constitutional morality by suspending his conviction?" senior advocate A.M. Singhvi appearing for Tamil Nadu asked.

Senior advocate P. Wilson, also for Tamil Nadu, said the Governor had no individual discretion in the appointment of a State Minister or suitability of a candidate.

"The Governor has to follow the advice of the Chief Minister-led State Cabinet under Article 164 (1) of the Constitution," Mr. Wilson, assisted by advocate Sabarish Subramanian, submitted.

ED arrests Kejriwal in excise policy case

The High Court posted the AAP leader's application seeking protection for a further hearing on April 22, when Mr. Kejriwal's main petition challenging the ED summons is scheduled for hearing. "We heard both sides and we are not inclined at this stage [to grant protection]," the court said.

The ED officials, accompanied by Delhi policemen, turned up at Mr. Kejriwal's official residence in the evening. As the news of ED action spread, State Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj rushed to the spot, but he was not allowed in.

Protesters detained

Units of the Rapid Action Force and the Central Reserve Police Force were deployed outside the premises. The police also mounted surveillance in the area using drones, in anticipation of protests. Following a brief round of questioning, the agency arrested Mr. Kejriwal. Around 9.15 p.m., AAP supporters staged a protest. The Delhi police detained some of the protesters.

The senior AAP leadership said that the main purpose of the Delhi CM's arrest ahead of the election was to stop him from campaigning, and to stifle the voice of the Opposition. Senior party leader Atishi said that what Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP do not understand is that they will not be able to silence Mr. Kejriwal by using the ED.

Mr. Kejriwal is the fourth Aam Aadmi Party leader to be arrested in the case, after former Deputy CM Manish Sisodia, Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh and the former party's communications in-charge Vijay Nair. Delhi's former Health Minister Satyendar Kumar Jain was arrested in another case.

Earlier this week, the ED had alleged that Bharat Rashtra Samithi legislator K. Kavitha, along with others, had conspired with the top AAP leaders for getting favours in the formulation and implementation of the erstwhile Delhi excise policy. The AAP had refuted the charges, raising suspicion that a ground was being prepared to arrest the Chief Minister.

Companies under ED, I-T scanner donated poll bonds to BJP, BRS, Cong.

Hetero Drugs Ltd., Hetero Labs Ltd., Hetero Biopharma Ltd. donated ₹50 crore to BRS, followed by ₹10 crore to BJP; Mankind Pharma Ltd. gave all the bonds it purchased for ₹24 crore to BJP

Vignesh Radhakrishnan
CHENNAI

Many companies that faced regulatory action in the past five years have donated electoral bonds to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in some measure, data released by the Election Commission to comply with the orders of the Supreme Court show.

The Hindu previously reported that Divi's Labs, Micro Labs, Kalpataru Projects International, and other companies purchased bonds worth considerable sums of money between 2019 and 2023. These companies were also under the scanner of the Income Tax Department, the Enforcement Directorate or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration over alleged bad business practices or quality control.

On March 21, the com-



Youth Congress workers protesting against the BJP over the electoral bonds issue, in New Delhi last week. PTI

mission shared the bond numbers associated with each purchase, thus allowing the lists of donors and the parties they were donating to be matched.

Micro Labs purchased electoral bonds worth ₹16 crore, of which ₹7 crore went to the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, ₹6 crore to

the BJP, and ₹3 crore to the Congress.

Hetero Drugs Ltd., Hetero Labs Ltd., and Hetero Biopharma Ltd. donated ₹50 crore to the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), followed by ₹10 crore to the BJP.

Similarly, MSN Pharma-chem Pvt. Ltd. and MSN

Laboratories Pvt. Ltd. donated ₹20 crore to the BRS and ₹16 crore to the BJP. Divi's Laboratories Ltd. gave ₹30 crore to the BJP, ₹20 crore to the BRS, and ₹5 crore to the Congress.

Mankind Pharma Ltd. gave all the bonds it purchased for ₹24 crore, to the BJP. Aurobindo Pharma Ltd. gave bonds worth ₹34.5 crore to the BJP, ₹15 crore to the BRS, and ₹2.5 crore to the Telugu Desam Party (TDP).

Besides pharmaceutical companies, Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd. gave ₹40 crore to the TDP as well.

Kalpataru Projects International Ltd. donated all the ₹25.5 crore worth of poll bonds it bought to the BJP. My Home Infrastructures gave bonds worth ₹15 crore to the BRS, ₹5 crore to the BJP, and ₹4.5 crore to the Congress.

(With inputs from Vasudevan Mukunth)

Vedanta is biggest donor for Congress, Essel Mining for BJD

Jasmin Nihalani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan
CHENNAI

Vedanta Ltd. was the biggest donor of electoral bonds for the Congress, while Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd. (MEIL) was the biggest donor for the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS).

The Congress was the third largest beneficiary of the electoral bonds scheme, followed by the BRS.

The Congress encashed ₹1,422 crore in total, of which Vedanta Ltd. contributed ₹125 crore, followed by ₹110 crore from Western U.P. Power Transmission Company Ltd., a subsidiary of MEIL, and ₹91.6 crore from MKJ Enterprises.

The BRS encashed ₹1,214 crore in total, of which ₹195 crore came from MEIL, ₹94 crore from Yashodha Super Speciality Hospital, and ₹50 crore from Chennai Green Woods Private Ltd.

Of the ₹6,060.5 crore encashed by the BJP through electoral bonds, ₹584 crore, or 9% of all donations, came from MEIL.

Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited came second with ₹375 crore, or 6% of all donations encashed by the party during the period. Vedanta Ltd. (₹229 crore) and Bharti Airtel (₹197.4 crore) were the other big donors to the party.

Trinamool kitty

The Trinamool Congress, which encashed ₹1,609.50 crore through this route, received ₹542 crore, or 33.7% of all its donations, from Santiago Martin's Future Gaming and Hotel Services. Haldia Energy Ltd. was the second largest donor with ₹281 crore, or 17.5% of all donations encashed by the Trinamool.

The Biju Janata Dal, encashed a total of ₹775 crore, of which ₹174.5 crore was from Essel Mining, followed by ₹100 crore from Jindal Steel and Power Ltd., and ₹70 crore from Utkal Alumina International Ltd.

The YSRCP, encashed ₹337 crore in total, of which ₹154 crore was from Future Gaming and Hotel Services, followed by MEIL's contribution of ₹37 crore and Ramco Cements' contribution of ₹24 crore.

All details about poll bonds handed over to EC, SBI tells SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The State Bank of India (SBI) on Thursday informed the Supreme Court that it has made a "complete disclosure" of all the details regarding the purchase and encashment of electoral bonds in its possession to the Election Commission (EC) for publication on its website.

In an affidavit, SBI chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said the information shared with the poll body included the names of the purchasers of the bonds, denominations, and specific numbers of individual bonds, the names of the parties that encashed the bonds, the last four digits of the bank account numbers of parties, and the denominations and numbers of the bonds encashed.

The SBI, however, said the complete bank account numbers and KYC details were not disclosed, as making them public may compromise the cyber security of the bank accounts. Similarly, the KYC details of purchasers were also not made public for "security reasons", it said.

KYC details

The SBI assured the court that the KYC details were not necessary for identifying the parties who received anonymous funding through the bonds.

On March 18, a five-judge Bench asked the bank to be "candid and fair" and not selective while directing it to make a "complete disclosure" of the data, including their unique hidden alphanumeric and serial numbers, to the poll body.

SC dismisses applications to stay appointment of poll commissioners

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed applications seeking to stay the appointment of Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Gyanesh Kumar as Election Commissioners (ECs) in accordance with a new law giving the dominant role to the Central government in the selection process.

The applications filed by the NGO, Association for Democratic Reforms, and others had urged the court to stay the implementation of the Chief Election Commission and other Election Commissions (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023. Section 7 of the Act had countermanded the Supreme Court judgment by replacing the Chief Justice of India on the high-level selection com-

We cannot stay the 2023 legislation... There will be a lot of chaos, says Bench, pointing to the upcoming polls

mittee with a Union Minister of the Centre's choice.

The applicants had asked for fresh appointments to the posts of the two ECs on the basis of the Supreme Court judgment.

"We cannot stay the legislation... There will be a lot of chaos," a Bench of Justices Sanjeev Khanna and Dipankar Datta said, pointing to the Lok Sabha election already waiting at the doorstep, ready to commence on April 19.

Advocates Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl D'Souza, for the NGO, argued that the selection of ECs could not be left in the

hands of the Central government. "This is against free and fair elections," Mr. Bhushan argued. But Justice Khanna said there was no allegations against Mr. Sandhu or Mr. Kumar.

The judgment was a stop-gap arrangement until Parliament brought in a law on the appointments of ECs.

"For 70 years, from 1950 to 2023, the appointments were made by the government and we had people like Mr. T.N. Seshan..." Justice Khanna said.

Short notice

However, the Bench was critical of the manner in which the details of candidates were given to Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, the leader of the single largest party in the Opposition and a member of the high-level selection committee, merely hours before the

committee was to meet.

"You could have been transparent. Just two hours to read 200 bio profiles? You should have been fair. Justice must not only be done, but seen to be done," Justice Datta addressed Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre.

The two ECs were appointed on March 14 and took charge on March 15. The election schedule was announced on March 16.

The Centre said it would not have been "humanly possible" for Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar to steer the "world's biggest electoral exercise" scheduled from April 19.

The government said the 2023 law had introduced a far more democratic, collaborative and inclusive appointment process than what had existed for the past 73 years.

INDIA bloc leaders rally behind Arvind Kejriwal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate has united the anti-BJP coalition that has been struggling to set aside its differences over seat-sharing arrangements for the Lok Sabha election.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and his predecessor Rahul Gandhi expressed their outrage without naming Mr. Kejriwal. Mr. Kharge wrote on X that the BJP is trying to weaken the Opposition because though it is making false claims of victory each day, it is scared of the expected results.

Party general secretary K.C. Venugopal called the arrest a "diversionary tactic" on a day when the full data on poll bonds were released, which he said, would expose the BJP's "extortion racket". Nationalist Congress



AAP supporters protesting outside Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence on Thursday. PTI

Party leader Sharad Pawar slammed the "vindictive misuse of Central agencies to target the Opposition".

Criticising the arrest, DMK chief and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin posted on X: "Not a single BJP leader faces scrutiny or arrest, laying bare their abuse of power and the decay of democracy. The relentless persecution of Opposition leaders by the BJP govt smacks of a desperate witch-hunt".

CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said the latest arrest would only cement people's desire to defeat the BJP. CPI general secretary D. Raja too called it a desperate action by the government.

In a post on X, Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien asked: "How can we expect fair elections in India if sitting CMs & prominent Opposition leaders are arrested weeks before polls?"

ED files chargesheet against Karti Chidambaram

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a prosecution complaint (chargesheet) against Congress leader Karti P. Chidambaram, Advantage Strategic Consulting Private Limited and others, in connection with an alleged money laundering case.

Among those arraigned under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) provisions are Mr. Chidambaram's alleged aide S. Bhaskararaman, and Talwandi Sabo Power Limited.

The agency said the case pertains to the allegation that Mr. Chidambaram took an illegal gratification of ₹50 lakh through Mr. Bhaskararaman for getting the approval for reuse of Chinese visas by Talwandi Sabo Power Limited, which was establishing a power project in Punjab.

Zomato drops 'pure' from its new feature

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Zomato on Thursday said it has dropped the word "pure" from the name of its new mode meant to cater to the dietary preferences of "100% vegetarians". This mode will now be called "Veg-Only Mode".

Amid fears that this mode, which will have a "dedicated" delivery fleet, will allow users to select delivery partners of a particular community or die-

tary preference, the company clarified that there will be no such option.

A company spokesperson said that this "dedicated" fleet of delivery partners for the vegetarian-only mode will in no way be visually distinguishable from its other delivery partners.

Gig workers' unions and delivery partners had been concerned about the composition of the new fleet — whether any filters based on community or religion will be applied.

APPEAL
Master Harsh Khanchandani, Son of Kailash Khanchandani 13 years admitted in Mazumdar Shaw Medical Center, is suffering from Beta Thalassemia Major. One of the curative treatment is Bone Marrow Transplant. He is planned for conditioning with Treosulfan/ Thiotepe. The estimated cost of transplant at this hospital is approximately Rs. 43,00,000/-.
Please send donation however small and save the boy. Cheque/D/D/M.O favouring Save Poor Lives A/c Harsh Khanchandani. Our Account Details: S/B Account No. 20000913487, State Bank of India, R.A. Puram, and IFSC CODE: SBIN001855; you can donate through Google Pay No. 984607377, UPI ID: savepoorlives@oksbil. All donations are exempted under 80G of I.T. ACT.
SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, Floor No. A1, Ceebros Garden, Ground Floor, Old No. 76 Kamarajar Salai, Rajiv Annamalaiapuram, Chennai - 600 028. Contact No. 044-42044165 & 044-35691848, Mobile: 984607377, Email: savepoorlives@gmail.com. Our website: www.savepoorlives.com

Not yet fascist, but they are getting there: Haasan on BJP, Modi

He says he felt this was not the moment to think about furthering his own political career; the MNM chief criticises idea of 'Hindu revivalism'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) founder Kamal Haasan on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government was "not yet fascist, but they are getting there" and reiterated the need "to ring the alarm bells".

During an interaction with the board members and senior journalists of *The Hindu* in Chennai, Mr. Haasan said the path that the BJP government is on currently was not new and "it is the same script".

"I am saying they are not yet fascist, but they are going in that direction. Calling them fascist is a bit early, but it is important to ring the alarm bells. They could change, but I don't see any signs of them changing. We have seen this pattern before. They are not inventing anything. It is the same script," the actor-politician said.

While the MNM has been given a Rajya Sabha seat next year as part of an agreement with the DMK, Mr. Haasan said he felt this was not the moment to think about furthering his own political career.

"I could have selfishly moved forward for the progress of my party and



Calling them fascist is a bit early, but it is important to ring the alarm bells. They could change, but I don't see any signs. We have seen this pattern before

further my own political career but this is not the moment. I am an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi. After the Independence, he said that Congress can be dissolved as its purpose has been served. And I am also of that mindset. It was formed for a reason, and it can be dissolved if the reason is achieved. Looking at the number of MLAs or MPs in my party is not important," he said.

Mr. Haasan said the Lok Sabha elections were "crucial" as they could decide what political "tint" the politics in the nation is going to adopt in future.

"I could have easily demanded three or four seats but strengthening this alliance seemed to be more important for us. They even insisted that I take part in the election to prove my point but I said it could be used by somebody else and let the alliance become stronger. There

were offers from other parties also. The purpose was very clear: for me, Tamil Nadu seems to be the last bastion [for the BJP], in my view," he said.

He was critical of the notion of "Hindu revivalism" in India that has been put forward by the Hindu right-wing organisations as a ruse to distract people from real livelihood issues.

'Caesar's trick'

"It is an old Caesar's trick of distracting them: Circus Maximus, religion and dole. Rome has done it, many successive governments have done it. Circus maximum has been split into various other forms of entertainment... Cricket, cinema... today now," he said. Mr. Haasan also explained why he chose to support the DMK after criticising them so harshly in the past.

"Right now, the important battle is for the whole nation. Instead of thinking that it was MNM that came up with the idea of monthly stipend for housewives, DMK implemented it. Instead of thinking MGR and Kamaraj implemented free noon meal scheme, they added onto it. I thought this is a good enough reason for now to appease my conscience and I have supported them," he said.

'I will get back to my criticism of parties but this is not the time for it'

The actor and founder of Makkal Needhi Maiam says it is important for people from all sections to come together in the fight against fascism because the way things move forward will decide what tint the country's politics will have

INTERVIEW

Kamal Haasan

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Actor and founder of Makkal Needhi Maiam, Kamal Haasan, on Thursday said he would come back to his criticism of political parties but this was not the right time to move in that direction. Answering queries from journalists and board members of *The Hindu*, Mr. Haasan explained why he had decided to back the DMK-led INDIA bloc in Tamil Nadu in the Lok Sabha polls after having projected himself as an alternative to the Dravidian parties. Excerpts:

Could you first tell us what led you to launch your political party?

As a *Narpani Iyakkam* (welfare movement of his fans), we copied Rotary Club, Lions Club or whatever we could...we didn't reinvent the wheel. But then, slowly over 35-40 years, we found that the buck stopped at the political table, always. We couldn't move any further. Any good we wanted to do had to be done through laws. Slowly over time, I thought this (politics) is the best way to go for-



ward. I was averse to politics, like most upper middle class people, which, I think, is a social sin now. And entering politics is not infra dig, because we always associated it with corruption, avarice and all that. It need not be that. There will be corruption but sacrifice and vision will also be there. So, I chose to participate, and that's how I came into politics.

How important do you think is the 2024 general election for the country?

This is precisely the moment where I will have to justify the name of my party. Great equipoise and equilibrium is required now. We have to think about the people. That's very important. 2024 election is very important because it will drift away from a certain vision we had de-

cidated for the country. This is a crucial moment - how we move forward will decide what tint the country's politics will have.

You supporting the DMK after criticising them harshly by "throwing the remote at the television" and not fighting elections, isn't that strange?

Very simple: the TV, cinema, cricket... all can wait. My TV remote and the TV can wait. I will get back to it. Right now, this is not the time. I will get back to my criticism. I have done it before. But, right now, there is a requirement to go in this direction. It has happened before during the Independence struggle: we had people of various ilk coming together and fight against imperialism. Now, it is a fight against fascism. There are times when you

should do this and do that (fight elections). I love Periyar's ideology and also that of Gandhiji. If you pull back, the purpose seems very similar. If you go further, you find Ramanuja's purpose, Gandhiji's purpose and Periyar's purpose all smudge together with one social purpose. Right now, the important battle ahead of us is for the whole nation. Instead of only criticising anything in the Opposition, I thought this is a good enough reason for now to appease my conscience and I have supported them.

Opinion polls have predicted a clear advantage for the BJP...

I have never predicted... even when I had invested in my movies. We cannot underestimate the voter who may not be literate enough to read an editorial from *The Hindu*, but somewhere he might speak the same language... he understands and that's why we were able to stitch the nation together.

I am very confident that, as the old adage goes, you can fool some people for some time, not all of them all the time. They will strongly come with a voice. I would love a 39-0 in Tamil Nadu.

What's your take on Rahul Gandhi as the

leader of the INDIA bloc?

It is the present situation that frightens me. We should look beyond the personalities and use anyone willing to do the required deed to move this forward. We need a symbol and that's him... right now.

What is your view on the Centre-State relations and Governors overstepping their mandate?

You cannot simply say that the Hindi is the national language because a majority of the people speak it. But, it is not traitorous to say that English is a useful language. English is useful... apart from that... languages should flourish. This is how I see Centre-State relationship to be... not through emissaries like the Governor. They are acting like the propaganda secretaries for the party. It is one thing to talk about corruption and refuse to reinstate an under trial Minister, but he is impeding the progress of the State by not passing 17-18 legislations. His commitment should be to this State and the progress of it. They are saying that Dravidianism will be destroyed, but as long as national anthem is there, Dravidianism will exist. (Full interview is at thlink.in/Kamal)

PM is trying to crush Congress financially: Sonia

Sandeep Phukan
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is making a "systematic effort" to cripple the Congress financially and deny a level playing field in the Lok Sabha election, Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi alleged on Thursday.

At a press conference, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and Ms. Gandhi mounted an all-out attack on the Union government and the BJP over the Income Tax Department's action to restrict the operation of its bank accounts, following a tax dispute.

Mr. Kharge demanded that the government immediately "defreeze" his party's bank accounts, while Mr. Gandhi claimed the idea that "India is the world's largest democracy is a complete lie".

"A systematic effort is under way by the Prime Minister to cripple the Indian National Congress financially. Funds collected



Taking head on: Sonia Gandhi, Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi addressing the media on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

from the public are being frozen, and money from our accounts is being taken away forcibly. However, even under these most challenging circumstances, we are doing our best to maintain the effectiveness of our election campaign," Ms. Gandhi said.

Ms. Gandhi said the BJP had "hugely benefited" from the now-scrapped electoral bond scheme, while the Congress's financial capabilities were under a "determined assault".

"[This] affects not just the Indian National Con-

gress, it impacts our democracy itself most fundamentally...This is truly unprecedented," she said.

'BJP looted our funds'

Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said, "The BJP has looted donations given to our party by the common public by freezing our accounts and forcibly withdrawing ₹15.32 crore from them".

In February, the I-T Department had put a lien on 11 accounts of the Congress, as penalty over discrepancies in filing tax returns for 2018-19, which

Fighting against 'Asuri Shakti', says Rahul Gandhi

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said his party was fighting a "hate-filled *Asuri Shakti* (demonic power)", a jibe directed at the BJP.

"*Humari Asuri Shakti se ladaai ho rahi hai, nafrat bhari Asuri Shakti* (We are fighting a demonic power, hate-filled demonic power)," he said.

affected the party's operations. Mr. Maken said the I-T Department had now sent a fresh notice, seeking details pertaining to 1993-94 when Sitaram Kesri was the Congress president.

Describing the I-T action as "a criminal action against the Congress by the Prime Minister and Home Minister", Mr. Gandhi said, "There is no democracy in India today and the idea that India is the world's largest democracy is a complete lie."

"All of you can imagine what happens when your bank account, your ATM

card and your entire financial identity is erased. If this happens to a family, they will starve to death. If this happens to a business, they will be crippled. This is what they are doing to the Congress," he added.

Mr. Gandhi wondered why independent institutions, be it courts, the Election Commission, or the media, preferred to be silent and not intervene. "There are institutions that are supposed to protect the democratic framework but nothing is happening, he said. "About 20% of India votes for us and we are not able to pay even ₹2 for anything. We can't book slots for advertisement or even buy a rail ticket for our leaders to travel. Our ability to fight elections has been damaged."

Mr. Kharge said a dangerous game was being played out that put a question mark on the ability to hold impartial elections. "I appeal to the constitutional authorities to ensure free and fair elections. Our accounts should be allowed to function normally," he said.

Instead of correcting its errors, Congress is playing victim: Nadda

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Thursday responded to the Congress party's contention that the government had frozen its bank accounts, creating difficulties for the party just ahead of the Lok Sabha election, by terming it an "alibi" for "a historic defeat" facing the Congress.

Reacting to the press conference held by Sonia Gandhi, Congress party president Mallikarjun Kharge, and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi, BJP chief J.P. Nadda posted on X that the Congress was playing victim instead of "correcting its own errors".

"The Congress is going to be totally rejected by the people and fearing a historic defeat, their top leadership addressed a press conference and ranted against Indian democracy and institutions. They are conveniently blaming their irrelevance on 'financial



J.P. Nadda ANI

troubles," he said. "Instead of correcting their own errors, the Congress is blaming authorities for their troubles. Be it the ITAT or the Delhi High Court, they have asked the Congress to comply with the rules, pay the taxes due but the party never did so," Mr. Nadda added.

"For a party which has looted from every sector, in every State and at every moment of history, to talk of financial helplessness is comical. Congress can use the money accumulated from all their scams starting from jeep to chopper scam via Bofors for their electioneering," he said.

Cong. leader questions party stand on caste census

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Senior Congress leader Anand Sharma, in a letter to party president Mallikarjun Kharge, has questioned the party's promise to hold a nationwide caste census, and said it could be construed as contradicting the position taken by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

Ms. Sharma said caste census cannot be a panacea nor a solution to unemployment and inequalities in society.

His letter, written on March 19, has been sent to all Congress Working Committee members, leaders of the Congress Legislature Party and Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) chiefs. Mr. Sharma mentioned that the party's leadership should have strived for internal consensus among party workers at the district-level as well as the State units.

EC issues more transfer orders of senior officials in five States

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) on Thursday issued transfer orders for non-cadre officers who are posted as District Magistrate and Superintendents of Police in the four States of Gujarat, Punjab, Odisha and West Bengal.

The officers to be transferred are Superintendent of Police of Chhota Udaiapur and Ahmedabad Rural districts in Gujarat, SSP of Pathankot, Fazilka, Jaland-

har Rural and Malerkotla districts of Punjab; District Magistrate of Dhenkanal and SPs of Deogarh and Cuttack Rural districts in Odisha; and DMs of Purba Medinipur, Jhargram, Purba Bardhaman and Birbhum districts.

Additionally, the EC has also directed for transfer of Bathinda SSP in Punjab and Sonitpur SP in Assam in view of their "kinship or familial association" with the elected political representatives. "The officials in these two districts have

been transferred as pre-emptive measures to dispel any apprehensions of administration being biased," it said.

While Sonitpur SP Sushanta Biswa Sarma is the brother of Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, Bhatinda SSP Harmanbir Singh Gill is the brother of Congress MP Jasbir Singh Gill.

Under the directive, all respective State governments have been asked to issue the transfer orders and submit a compliance report to the EC.

Do not send 'Viksit Bharat' messages: EC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The EC directed the Centre to immediately halt sending "Viksit Bharat Sampark" messages on WhatsApp to the electorate.

Sources said complaints were received that such messages highlighting the Center's initiatives are still being delivered on citizens' phones despite the announcement of the election on March 16 and the Model Code of Conduct coming into force.

Adhir, Kharge's son-in-law, Shinde's daughter in Congress third list for Lok Sabha election

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday released its third list of 56 candidates for the Lok Sabha election across seven States and the Union Territory of Puducherry while leaving one seat for the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Rajasthan.

So far, the party has announced 138 candidates in three lists. The party has fielded its leader in the Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury,

from Baharampur in West Bengal, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's son-in-law Radhakrishnan D. from Karnataka's Gulbarga, and former Union Home Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde's daughter, Praniti Shinde, from Solapur in Maharashtra, among others.

Congress leader V.E. Vaithilingam will be the party's candidate for the lone seat of Puducherry.

As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, their names were cleared by the Cen-

tral Election Committee (CEC) that has been meeting every day since Tuesday.

The CEC also met on Thursday in which senior leader Digvijaya Singh's name is said to have been cleared for the Rajgarh Lok Sabha seat in Madhya Pradesh.

The party has left the Sikar Lok Sabha seat for the CPI(M) while announcing five names in Rajasthan. In West Bengal too, the two parties will have an alliance as the party has

named candidates to only eight Lok Sabha seats so far.

Maharashtra scene

Even without a formal seat-sharing arrangement in Maharashtra, the party has announced seven names, including Shahu Shahaji Chhatrapati from Kolhapur seat. The party has announced five candidates from Telangana, 17 from Karnataka, 11 from Gujarat, two from Arunachal Pradesh, and one from Puducherry.

IN BRIEF



CBI and Europol officials sign working arrangement

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) on Thursday signed a working arrangement, establishing cooperative relations between the law enforcement authorities of India and the Europol. The working arrangement was signed by Europol Executive Director Catherine De Bolle and CBI Director Praveen Sood during a virtual event, in the presence of senior CBI and Europol officials. "This arrangement promotes direct cooperation between both organisations to build on their respective mandates, strategies and to explore the potential for synergies," said the agency.

'Influencers shall refrain from endorsing betting platforms'

The Union Information & Broadcasting Ministry on Thursday cautioned social media influencers against endorsing offshore online betting and gambling platforms, stating that failure to comply with the advisory might lead to the removal of social media posts and accounts. It said such advertisements had financial and socio-economic implications on consumers, particularly the youth. The online advertisement intermediaries have also been advised not to target such promotional content towards the Indian audience. The Ministry has also asked them to conduct sensitisation efforts among their users.

SC stays govt. notification on establishing fact check unit

The court's stay will operate till the third judge in the Bombay High Court decides the question of validity of provisions of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the Information Technology, Rules, 2021

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday stayed a government notification of March 20 establishing the Press Information Bureau's Fact Checking Unit (PIB FCU) to act as a "deterrent" against the creation and dissemination of fake news or misinformation regarding the "business" of the Centre.

The order was passed by a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on petitions filed by the Editors Guild of India (EGI) and stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra.

The Bench said the implementation of the March 20 notification would remain stayed until a third judge of the Bombay High Court took a final call on the validity of provisions of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. It is under this provision that the March 20 notification was issued. The case had gone to the third judge of the High Court following a split ver-



dict by a Division Bench.

The notification was issued by the Centre after the third judge found no reason to stay Rule 3 on March 11.

The Supreme Court did not comment on the merits or legality of Rule 3(1)(b)(v), saying the impact of the provision on the fundamental rights to free speech and expression would be analysed by the High Court.

Appearing for Mr. Kamra, senior advocate Darius Khambata said the establishment of the FCU would result in "every social media intermediary pulling down content for fear of consequences".

Mr. Khambata said the Centre setting up an FCU was like "Caesar judging Caesar". "Why does only

The Rule coerces intermediaries to execute a regime of self-interested censorship of content relating to the business of the Central govt.

KUNAL KAMRA
Petitioner

the business of the Central government need protection from misinformation and fake content," Mr. Khambata asked. He said individuals needed more protection from fake content.

Mr. Khambata informed the Bench that the Centre had assured the High Court on April 27 last year that it would not implement Rule 3 till a final decision was taken by the court. He pointed to the timing of the issuance of the March 20 notification barely days before the Lok Sabha polls were due to start.

Advocate Shadan Farasat, for the EGI, said the implementation of the FCU run by the government would ensure that only the Centre would have a monopoly over the truth.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta referred to several instances in the past when fake news had proliferated on social media.

He said the statutory mechanism was found inadequate to combat the dissemination of false content. He said the social media intermediaries had not challenged the Rule.

Mr. Kamra, in his petition, argued that the sweep of the Rule operated to "muzzle speech against the Central government".

"By threatening intermediaries with the loss of their statutory safe harbour should they fail to take down content that the Central government's FCU identifies as fake, false or misleading, the Rule coerces intermediaries to execute a regime of self-interested censorship of online content relating to the business of the Central government," the petition argued.

It said the intermediaries, who were profit making commercial enterprises, would choose to bend rather than risk civil or criminal liability for third-party content on their online platforms.

Panel to study scope of altering power lines in bustard habitat

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Great Indian Bustard

The Supreme Court on Thursday constituted an expert committee to balance the conservation and protection of the endangered Great Indian Bustard bird population with the country's international commitments to promote renewable sources of energy.

The large-winged birds are on the brink of extinction, and one of the causes is the frequent collision with high-powered power cables running adjacent to its core habitats in Gujarat and Rajasthan.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said a blanket direction given by the top court in April 2019 for moving high voltage and low voltage power cables underground required "re-calibration".

The court appointed the Director, Wildlife Institute of India; wildlife and forest conservation experts, including Hari Shankar Singh, Niranjan Kumar Vasu, B. Majumdar, and D. V. Ghosh; and Joint Secretary with the Renewable Energy Ministry Lalit Bohra and his counterpart in the Envi-

ronment Ministry.

The committee would also include Ashok Kumar Rajput, Member, Power Systems, Central Electrical Authority, and P.C. Garg, Chief Operating Officer, Central Transmission Utility of India Limited as special invitees.

The remit of the panel would be to determine the scope, extent and feasibility of underground and overhead electric lines in areas identified as priority spots for the birds in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

The committee would explore alternatives to balance sustainable development goals and conservation of the birds. It could recommend additional measures to identify additional priority areas. The panel has to file its report in the top court on or before July 31.

Thankful for ₹13,000 cr. but need more, Kerala tells SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The State of Kerala on Thursday thanked the Union government for ₹13,000 crore but said it will continue with its legal battle in the Supreme Court for an additional amount to which it is entitled.

"I am very thankful that ₹13,000 crore has come to us. But we are talking about an additional amount to which we are entitled," senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for the State, submitted before a Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan.

Opening his submissions in a suit filed against the Union government for unduly interfering and placing limits on Kerala's borrowing powers, Mr. Sibal said the State immediately needed a little over ₹10,000 crore more.

The State had sought a

The State had sought a total of about ₹24,000 crore to 'tide over a looming financial emergency'

total of about ₹24,000 crore before March 31 to tide over a looming financial emergency. The focus of the hearing on Thursday was Kerala's push for some interim relief.

Kerala had earlier accused the Centre of trying to nudge it to withdraw the suit in return for financial help. The State said its demands for financial leeway and help was well within the framework drawn by the Constitution and the Finance Commission.

Mr. Sibal said the Centre had "put a spin" on the demands made by the State, portraying it as a "delinquent" that splurged its funds.

The senior lawyer said history showed how dur-

ing the years of the command economy the Centre would give 98% of money to the States.

"Today, our borrowings have come down to 2.84%. This is translated into ₹12,000 crore when our State budget is ₹1.8 lakh crore..." Mr. Sibal said. He said 63% of the State's earnings go to the Union government.

Additional Solicitor General N. Venkataraman argued that Kerala had a long history of fiscal deficit.

A note submitted by the Attorney General in the apex court had said the "fiscal edifice of Kerala has been diagnosed with several cracks".

The Centre had said Kerala's poor financial indicators pointed to a "lack of proper management of its public finances". The note highlighted that debts run by States affect the credit rating of the whole country.

At IFFI last year, govt. denied nod to screen four foreign films

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Union government denied permission to screen four films set in the Gaza Strip, Turkey, Hungary, and Bhutan at the 54th International Film Festival of India held in Goa last November, according to records from the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

The films are *A Gaza Weekend*, a satire directed by Basil Khalil set in a post-epidemic Israel where the Gaza strip becomes the safest place in the Levant; *Explanation for Everything*, a Hungarian drama directed by Gábor Reisz; *The Monk And The Gun*, a satire directed by Pawo Choyning Dorji, featuring mock elections in Bhutan; and *Dormitory*, a drama by Nehir Tuna about a teenager sent to a residential Islamic seminary by his father.

Film festivals usually feature a range of international cinema, and considering the smaller overall size of the audiences, the government waives the requirement for a certificate from the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).

The Ministry still requires government clearance for films to be played in festivals in India. For this exemption from a CBFC certificate, organisers must form a "preview committee," "compris[ing] persons who are related to the film industry or are critics/writers connected with film," the guidelines framed in 2006 state.

The Monk And The Gun was Bhutan's official entry to the Oscars. Though it was denied a screening in November at IFFI, it was shown at the Jio MAMI Film Festival in Mumbai the previous month and even won an award.

Ministry of Environment tightens rules on bioplastics

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Environment Ministry has introduced rules that make it harder for makers of disposable plastic ware to label such products as 'biodegradable', introducing a stipulation that they must not leave any microplastics behind. Biodegradable plastic and compostable plastic are projected as the two broad kinds of technological fixes to India's burgeoning problem of plastic waste pollution.

Biodegradable plastic involves plastic goods being treated before they are sold. Compostable plastics, on the other hand, do degrade but require industrial or large municipal waste management facilities to do so.

A new set of amendments to India's Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2024, made public last week, defines biodegradable plas-



Microplastics are reported as a major source of pollution.

tics as not only capable of "... degradation by biological processes in specific environment such as soil, landfill..." but also as materials that do not leave "any microplastics..."

The caveat about microplastics in the updated rules does not specify which chemical tests can be used to establish the absence of microplastics, or to what extent microplastics must be reduced in a sample in order to consider them eliminated, says Sunil Panwar, CEO, Symphony Environmental India. The company offers technologies that, when

added to regular single-use plastics, make them biodegradable.

"... The current standards [in India] only recommend tests that can be done to determine the levels of microplastics but don't prescribe a definitive test... Should a standard for microplastics be eventually determined, it should, for fairness sake, include both compostable and biodegradable plastics," he told *The Hindu*.

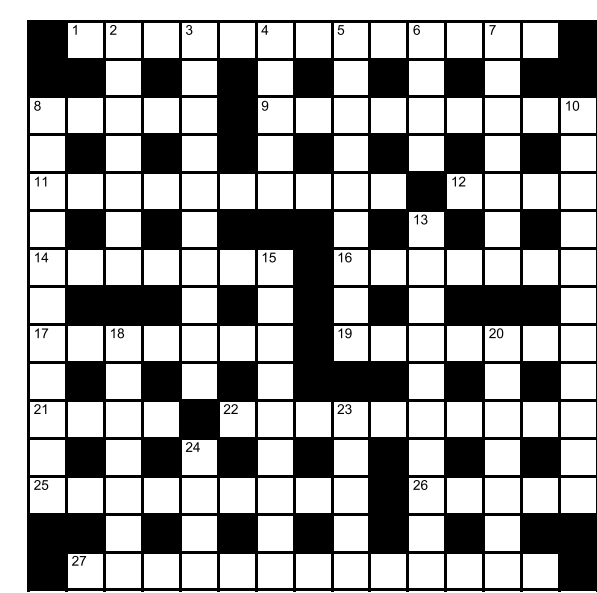
Microplastics have been reported as a major source of pollution affecting rivers and oceans.

Several firms were left in the lurch as the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) refused to provide them with a 'provisional certificate' to license their products as biodegradable. This is because the CPCB only considers biodegradable a plastic sample that has 90% degraded, and such a process takes at least two years.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14129
(set by Dr. X)

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

SCAN TO PLAY



- Across**
- 16 Report relating to last section of bowel, describing source of incontinence (7)
 - 17 Device in department, reviewed and scrutinized (7)
 - 19 Champion enters, performing a slow jump in figure skating (7)
 - 21 Heart crushed by break-up, it hurts (4)
 - 22 Engrossed in losing pounds? Guilt with paunch developing (6,2,2)
 - 25 Report of mob violence over beef (5,4)
 - 26 Ferries with new rotors leaving Thailand (2-3)
 - 27 Worried state blaring about Russia's leader threatening military action (5-8)
- Down**
- 2 Gives playing cards to entertain company (7)
 - 3 Outfits I found in trunk, most garish (10)
 - 4 Rechargeable battery in most delightful commercial (5)
 - 5 Loyal supporters of jerks introducing atrocious law (9)
 - 6 Trek in sharp-pointed hill, hard for prince (4)
 - 7 How nun might appear to people (7)
 - 8 Deliver a little package in thin wrapping material (6,5)
 - 10 Model casually entertains director, secures films - ultimately sick game (11)
 - 13 Son enlightening about principle of process relating to art of carving (10)
 - 15 Leader of gangsters, arranging for death? (9)
 - 18 Liqueur with fantastic taste of almonds at fair (7)
 - 20 It delays clotting of blood near hip fractures (7)
 - 23 Attack gun-wielding alien (3,2)
 - 24 Make out with girl around afternoon (4)

SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

E	X	P	E	D	I	T	I	O	N	O	W	L	S
F	A	I	R	P	C	A	R	E					
F	I	R	E	P	L	A	C	E	O	R	G	A	N
I	E	P	G	R	A	P	O	D					
C	O	N	C	E	N	T	R	A	T	I	O	N	
I	T	D	O	T	I	E	A						
E	V	I	L	F	R	I	E	N	D	S	H	I	P
N													
C	I	G	A	R	E	T	T	E	S	O	R	A	L
Y													
U	N	D	E	R	S	T	A	N	D	I	N	G	
O	P	E	N	R	A	N	D	C	L				
P	A	S	T	E	A	M	E	R	I	C	A	N	S
E	E	S	D	M	I	N	N	E					
N	O	T	E	F	O	R	E	I	G	N	E	R	S

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

MADGALDEEP Try Our New Sandal With Sandalwood Oil

PREMIUM QUALITY INCENSE

FOLLOW US FOR MORE CONTENT

FAITH
Siva's supreme status

Kumaraguruparam was born in a village called Kailasapuram near Sri Vaikuntham in the Tirunelveli region of Tamil Nadu. He was unable to speak, and so when he was five years old, his parents took him to Tiruchendur. The temple priest waved a flower before the child and asked, "What do I hold in my hands?" The child replied, "Poo." That is the Tamil word for flower. The child then composed Kandar Kali Venba, beginning with the word "poo," said T. Rajarathinam, in a discourse. The work is recited in the Tiruchendur temple every day as it contains prayers to Lord Muruga. The work shows that Lord Siva and Muruga are one and the same. The qualities of Siva are also those of Muruga. The first 36 verses establish this, and are therefore considered a condensed version of the Kanda Puranam. The philosophy known as Saiva Siddhanta explains the Jnana Kanda portions of the Vedas. Keeping this in mind, Pamban Swamikal praises Kandar Kali Venba as the ultimate explanation of the Saiva Agamas.

Kandar Kali Venba begins with a description of Lord Siva's supreme status. In the svarupa state, God has no name, colour, form, qualities, or actions. The qualities of Lord Siva given in Kandar Kali Venba are exactly the same as those given in Saiva Siddhanta texts. That is why Kandar Kali Venba is important to followers of Saiva Siddhanta.

IN BRIEF



IOB unveils gold card for borrowers, jewel loan Suvidha

Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) has unveiled two jewel loan products - Gold Powered Card and Jewel Loan Suvidha. Gold Powered Card offers loan from ₹25,000 to ₹25 lakh, can be withdrawn at ATMs and used for POS and e-commerce transactions. Jewel loan Suvidha has been crafted to cater to the needs of housing loan borrowers and addresses critical requirements such as margin money and registration charges. The loan amount ranges from ₹25,000 to ₹50 lakh.

TVS Holdings declares ₹94 interim dividend

TVS Holdings Ltd. has declared an interim dividend of ₹94 per share on 2,02,32,104 equity shares of ₹5 each, absorbing a sum of ₹190 crore for FY24. The interim dividend will be paid to the shareholders within 30 days of its declaration, the company said in a regulatory filing. Further, the board approved a proposal to raise up to ₹650 crore by way of non-convertible debentures in FY25 on a private placement basis in one or more tranches, over a period of time.

Dvara raises \$14.4 mn from Impact Investment Exchange

Dvara Kshetriya Gramin Financials Pvt. Ltd. has raised \$14.4 million from Impact Investment Exchange (IIX) through a \$100-million Women's Livelihood Bond 6 (WLB6). "The funds raised through the NCD issuance will be utilised to disburse Joint Liability Group (JLG), Micro Enterprise Loan (MEL), and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) loans for the benefit of women borrowers," said Dvara KGFS chief financial officer Shilpa Bhatler.

NMDC slashes iron ore prices by up to ₹250 a tonne

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

State-owned mining major NMDC has reduced iron prices by ₹200 per tonne for the lump-ore variety and ₹250 for a similar quantity of fines with effect from March 21.

Consequent to the revision, made after maintaining prices for almost two months and coming amid global cues, a tonne of lump ore will cost ₹5,800 and fines ₹5,060.

Setting the backdrop for the latest price cut are falling iron ore prices globally triggered by a dip in steel demand in China. Iron ore is a key raw material in steel manufacturing.

India, an oasis amid a barren economic landscape, says Kant

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

India has been growing in the last three quarters at 8.3% plus and emerged as a resilient powerhouse in a world that's starved for growth, said Amitabh Kant, India's G20 Sherpa.

India, according to the IMF, would be contributing close to 20% of the world's economic expansion in the next decade. The Southern region is currently the country's engine of growth and all States in the country have to grow at a fast pace to take the Indian economy to the \$35-trillion mark by 2047, he said while delivering the keynote address at an event organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry



Amitabh Kant. PTI

(Southern Region) here. "We are an oasis of growth amid a very barren economic landscape across the globe," he said.

Generational shift
The world's economic trajectory was witnessing a 'once-in-a-generation shift,' and to sustain growth, India has to aim at high growth rates of 9-10% for

the next 30 years.

"India needs to accelerate to a high pace of growth and make the country grow at 9-10% for a three-decade period. For that, change needs to happen at the State level while a lot of efforts are already happening at the Central level," he added.

He said countries such as Japan, South Korea, China, and Singapore sustained an economic growth of about 10% for a three-decade period.

"Such economic growth is possible only if the country fires on all cylinders and not just depend on services. This will also require higher output from manufacturing and better productivity in the agriculture sector," he opined.

India 'screwed up': How U.S. lobbied to reverse laptop rules

Reuters
NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

India reversed a laptop licensing policy after behind-the-scenes lobbying by U.S. officials, who however remain concerned about New Delhi's compliance with WTO obligations and new rules it may issue, according to U.S. officials and government e-mails seen by Reuters.

In August, India imposed rules requiring firms like Apple, Dell and HP to obtain licences for all shipments of imported laptops, tablets, personal computers (PCs) and servers, raising fears that the process could slow down sales. But New Delhi rolled back the policy within weeks, saying it would only monitor the imports and decide on next steps a year later.

The U.S. government e-mails - obtained under a U.S. open records request - underline the level of alarm the Indian curbs caused in Washington, and how the U.S. scored a rare lobbying win by persuading Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government to reverse policy.

U.S. officials have often been concerned about India's sudden policy changes, which they say create an uncertain business environment. India maintains it announces policies in the interest of all stakeholders and encourages foreign investments, even though it often promotes local players over foreign ones.

Some of the language in the documents was blunt, despite the bonhomie often displayed by both sides in public. U.S. officials



Fickle stand: U.S. often raises concerns about India's sudden policy changes, which creates an uncertain business environment. REUTERS

were upset India's changes to laptop imports came "out of the blue", without notice or consultation, and were "incredibly problematic" for the business climate and \$500 million worth of annual U.S. exports, the documents and e-mails showed.

Counterpoint estimates India's laptop, PC market is

worth \$8 billion annually. U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai met Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal in New Delhi on August 26, soon after the policy was announced.

Although the USTR's public readout said Ms. Tai "raised concerns" about the policy and "noted" that stakeholders needed to be

Volkswagen to begin selling first EV, 'ID.4' in India by year-end

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Volkswagen India on Thursday announced it will unveil ID.4, its first electric vehicle by the year-end. Without announcing a price band, the company also said the EV will be imported from Germany as a completely built unit.

Volkswagen showcased ID.4 at its Annual Brand Conference this year, along with new ICE variants.

"ID.4 will be the first battery electric car to be introduced in India. Globally Volkswagen is leading electrification and our goal is to take our products to other market," Michael



Volkswagen ID.4

Mayer, ED, Sales International, Volkswagen said.

Volkswagen also unveiled GT Plus Sport and GT Line variants of Taigun-SUV that are available for booking now. It also showcased a concept based on the Virtus sedan likely to begin sales in the second half of 2024.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

New orders and output levels in India's manufacturing sector may have hit a 42-month high in March, lifting overall private sector output to an eight-month peak despite a slight moderation in services sector activity, as per the HSBC Flash PMI for this month.

The Manufacturing sector Flash PMI stood at 59.2 for March from a 56.9 PMI reading in February, while

Flashing green

Manufacturing sector helps sustain growth despite a slight moderation in services sector activity



- Manufacturing sector Flash PMI stood at 59.2 for March from a 56.9 PMI reading in February, while Services PMI eased
- The Flash PMI scores are based on responses from about 75% to 85% of 800 services and manufacturing players
- With work backlogs rising, firms reported an increase in hiring activity at the fastest pace in six months

the Services PMI eased from 60.6 last month to 60.3. A reading of 50 on

the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) indicates no change in activity levels.

RBI finalises framework for SROs in regulated entities

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Thursday said it had finalised the Omnibus Framework for recognising Self-Regulatory Organisations (SRO) for its Regulated Entities (REs).

Each sector of regulated entities (RE), including fintechs, will have separate SROs and with the finalisation of the framework the RBI will receive applications from various entities seeking to get SRO status.

With the growth of the REs in terms of number as well as scale of operations, increase in adoption of innovative technologies and



enhanced customer outreach, a need was felt to develop better industry standards for self-regulation, the central bank said.

"The omnibus framework contains broad parameters viz., objectives, responsibilities, eligibility criteria, governance standards, application process

and other basic conditions for grant of recognition, which will be common for any SRO proposed to be recognized by the RBI," the RBI said in a circular.

Other sector-specific guidelines like number of SROs, membership etc. will be issued separately by the respective departments of the Reserve Bank wherever a sectoral SRO is intended to be set up.

An SRO is expected to operate with credibility, objectivity and responsibility under the oversight of the regulator, to improve regulatory compliance for healthy and sustainable development of the sector to which it caters.

AMFI must decline fresh investments in overseas ETFs: SEBI

Suresh P. Iyengar
MUMBAI

Capital markets regulator SEBI has directed the Association of Mutual Funds to stop accepting fresh investments in overseas exchange-traded funds from April 1 as it is approaching the overall limit of \$1 billion set by the RBI.

In January 2022, SEBI stopped fund houses from taking fresh subscriptions in overseas stocks. After the recent fall in the overseas market, it allowed investments but with an overall industry cap of \$7 billion.

particularly for services players, firms reported an increase in hiring activity at the fastest pace in six months.

Input costs rose for both manufacturing and services firms, with the latter reporting higher cost surges like metals and plastic as well as transportation, labour and food costs. However, only manufacturers faced a margin squeeze as services firms were able to raise output prices broadly in tandem with input costs.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,641	0.75
US Dollar	83.13	0.07
Gold	67,450	-1.70
Brent oil	85.45	-0.61

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	3066.50	15.05
Adani Ports	1262.45	17.05
Apollo Hosp.	6183.50	8.45
Asian Paints	2821.15	-3.75
Axis Bank	1035.60	0.85
Bajaj Auto	8750.60	115.00
Bajaj Finserv	1602.60	17.90
Bajaj Finance	6715.75	66.25
Bharti Airtel	12280.80	-11.00
BPCL	587.80	21.15
Britannia Ind.	4806.70	3.80
Cipla	1448.70	31.30
Coal India	432.05	12.55
Divis Lab	3465.30	37.00
Dr Reddys Lab	6128.20	24.90
Eicher Motors	3918.95	45.35
Grasim Ind.	2205.55	38.05
HCL Tech	1595.80	8.70
HDFC Bank	1445.75	14.70
HDFC Life	622.25	-1.15
Hero MotoCorp	4519.90	9.45
Hindalco	539.70	11.85
Hind Unilever	2242.35	-0.40
ICI Bank	1081.80	-2.70
IndusInd Bank	1484.10	42.55
Infosys	1554.70	-0.25
ITC	421.25	5.55
JSW Steel	812.35	17.70
Kotak Bank	1772.15	6.75
L&T	3560.00	50.30
LTIMtree Ltd.	5159.90	58.85
M&M	1865.85	21.45
Maruti Suzuki	11908.15	-33.00
NestleIndia	2553.65	3.40
NTPC	325.00	11.35
ONGC	262.95	-0.90
PowerGrid Corp	273.75	-9.10
Reliance Ind.	2901.95	14.45
SBI Life	1468.05	-9.65
State Bank	744.30	8.05
Sun Pharma	1565.20	15.85
TataConsumerProduct	1133.95	9.90
Tata Motors	964.90	24.45
Tata Steel	150.10	4.45
TCS	3972.95	2.05
Tech Mahindra	1282.75	18.45
Titan	3627.55	37.05
UltraTech Cement	9600.75	116.20
UPL	455.55	0.10
Wipro	500.45	6.95

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 21

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.95	83.27
Euro	90.59	90.94
British Pound	106.01	106.43
Japanese Yen (100)	54.96	55.17
Chinese Yuan	11.52	11.57
Swiss Franc	92.84	93.20
Singapore Dollar	61.97	62.21
Canadian Dollar	61.52	61.76
Malaysian Ringgit	17.58	17.66
Australian Dollar	54.87	55.08

Source: Indian Bank

कोचीन शिपयार्ड लिमिटेड
(भारत सरकार का उद्यम)
COCHIN SHIPYARD LIMITED
(A GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ENTERPRISE)

संख्या/ REF: SB-OSD/ GEN/ 849/ 2024 तिथि/ Date: 22.03.2024

अभिरुचि की अभिव्यक्ति/ EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

कोचीन शिपयार्ड लिमिटेड (सीएसएल) में निर्माणधीन पोतों में निम्नलिखित कार्यों के लिए विक्रेता पैनलिकरण के लिए अनुभवों प्रतिष्ठित फर्मों से "अभिरुचि की अभिव्यक्ति" आमंत्रित करता है:

Cochin Shipyards Limited (CSL) invites "Expression of interest (EOI)" from experienced reputed firms for vendor empanelment for the following works in Ships under Construction in CSL:

क्र.सं./ S.No.	कार्य विवरण/ WORK DESCRIPTION
1	"उप असेंबली / हल ब्लॉक निर्माण" / "Sub-Assembly / Hull block Fabrication"
2	"हल निर्माण कार्य" / "Hull Erection works"
3	"ब्लास्टिंग एंड पेंटिंग कार्य" / "Blasting and Painting Works"

विवरण के लिए हमारी वेबसाइट: www.cochinshipyard.in या <https://eprocure.gov.in/cpppl/> देखें। यदि कोई सुझाव है तो कृपया सीएसएल/सीएसपीएल में जारी किया जाएगा।

For details visit CSL web site: www.cochinshipyard.in or <https://eprocure.gov.in/cpppl/>. Corrigendum if any will be issued in CSL/ CPPP only.

मुख्य महाप्रबंधक (पोत निर्माण)
Chief General Manager (Ship Building)

CENTRAL ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION

3rd & 4th Floor, Chanderalak Building, 36 Jangpach, New Delhi-110001, Phone: 23353503, Fax: 23753923, Website: www.cerind.gov.in

Petition No. 32/TL/2024 Dated: 14.3.2024

NOTICE UNDER CLAUSE (a) OF SUB-SECTION (5) OF SECTION 15 OF THE ELECTRICITY ACT, 2003

An application under Sections 14, 15 and 79 (1) (e) of the Electricity Act, 2003 (the Act) has been made by Gadag Transmission Limited, 138, Ansal Chambers II, Bhikaji Cama Place, New Delhi- 110066 for the grant of a separate transmission licence for the implementation of "Augmentation of transformation capacity at 400/220kV Gadag PS in Karnataka by 1x500 MVA, 400/200 kV ICT (6th)" under the Regulated Tariff Mechanism (RTM) mode (hereinafter referred to as "transmission scheme") in line with Office Order dated 28.10.2021 (hereinafter referred to as the "Office Order dated 28.10.2021") issued by the Ministry of Power. The scope of the project for which the transmission licence has been sought is as under:

Name of the scheme and Implementation time frame	Estimated Cost (₹ crore)	Remark
Augmentation of Transformation Capacity at 400/220kV Gadag PS in Karnataka by 400/220kV, 1x500 MVA/ICT (6th)	57.59	18 months from the date of issue of OM by CTUIL

- The Central Transmission Utility of India Limited vide its letter dated 12.2.2024 has recommended for the grant of transmission licence to the applicant to establish the proposed transmission system.
- Based on the material available on record, the Commission vide order dated 14.3.2024 in Petition No. 32/TL/2024, has proposed to issue transmission licence to the applicant for establishment of the transmission scheme as noted in para 1 above.
- A copy of the application, along with its annexures and enclosures, made by the applicant for the grant of an inter-State transmission licence to Gadag Transmission Limited before the Commission can be accessed at the website <http://www.renew.com/renew-india> or inspected by any person in the Commission's office by following the laid down procedure.
- Notice is hereby given in pursuance of clause (a) of sub-section (5) of Section 15 of the Act that suggestions or objections, if any, to the Commission's proposal to grant a transmission licence to the applicant, as aforesaid, be sent to the undersigned by 5.4.2024 at the above noted address. The suggestions or objections received after the specified date shall not be considered.
- The application shall be taken up for the further hearing by the Commission on 10.4.2024. Any person who files suggestions or objections may in his/her discretion attend the hearing, for which no TA/DA shall be paid by the Commission.

Sd/-
(Harpreet Singh Pruthi)
Secretary

MOSCOW

Russia formalises Putin's victory in election, dismissing criticism



Russia formalised on Thursday President Vladimir Putin's victory in last week's presidential election, dismissing scathing criticism by the West and independent Russian observers that it was the most corrupt vote in post-Soviet history. The three-day vote saw Mr. Putin cruise to an easy victory for a fifth Kremlin term. AFP

CARACAS

Venezuela Opposition leader denounces the arrest of aides



Venezuela's Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado condemned on Wednesday the arrest of two of her staffers over an alleged anti-regime conspiracy and accused the government of attacking her party for fear of losing July's presidential election. Official nominations for presidential candidates open on Thursday. AFP

KABUL

At least 3 killed, 12 hurt as suicide bomber attacks Afghanistan bank



A suicide bombing in front of a bank in Afghanistan's Kandahar city killed at least three people and injured 12 others on Thursday. Later on Thursday, Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, the group said on its Telegram channel. The blast killed civilians who had gathered to withdraw cash, the Kandahar police said. REUTERS

JAKARTA

Indonesia Opposition candidate calls for new vote after poll loss



Failed Indonesian presidential candidate Anies Baswedan (in the photo) challenged 72-year-old Prabowo Subianto's decisive victory with 58.6% of the vote at the Constitutional Court on Thursday, alleging rules were unfairly changed to allow the outgoing leader's son to run as his Vice President. AFP

U.S. calls for 'immediate' ceasefire as Gaza war rages

Any immediate truce must be linked to the release of hostages snatched by Palestinian militants during the October 7 attack, Blinken says; the latest Israeli attack pushes the toll towards 32,000

Agence France-Presse
GAZA STRIP

The United States has circulated for the first time a draft UN resolution calling for an "immediate" ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war, as warnings grow of famine in besieged Gaza.

Washington had blocked previous Security Council texts using the word "immediate" but U.S. top diplomat Antony Blinken confirmed the shift in position on Wednesday.

Mr. Blinken, who is to meet five Arab foreign ministers in Egypt on Thursday, stressed any immediate truce must be linked to the release of hostages snatched by Palestinian militants during the October 7 attack that set off the



Clutches of life: A woman carrying three babies as she flees the Al-Shifa hospital compound in Gaza City. AFP

war. The Israeli bombardment of Gaza continued overnight with the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory saying at least 70 people had been killed, pushing the overall toll towards 32,000.

Gaza's biggest hospital has emerged as a major flashpoint after Israel ac-

used Palestinian militants of hiding out there and launched a days-long raid, which it said on Thursday had killed more than 140 fighters.

Hamas said the ongoing attack on the vast Al-Shifa hospital complex, crowded with patients and people seeking refuge, was a

crime. Gaza's civilian infrastructure has largely collapsed and UN agencies are warning that the territory's 2.4 million people are on the brink of famine.

The United States has vetoed previous UN Security Council texts on the nearly six-month war, objecting even last month to the term "immediate" in a draft submitted by Algeria.

A new version circulated by the United States stressed "the need for an immediate and durable ceasefire" to protect civilians and allow aid into the territory.

No vote has been scheduled on the text but Mr. Blinken told Saudi media outlet *Al-Hadath* on Wednesday that support for the resolution would send a "strong message".

Sri Lanka may secure moratorium from IMF on debt owed to India

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka is close to finalising a debt treatment plan with India and the Paris Club, sources familiar with the negotiations said, pointing to a likely moratorium of up to six years and a reduced interest rate during the repayment period.

"The discussions are at an advanced stage. A formal agreement on the terms can be expected very soon," the Colombo-based source told *The Hindu* on Thursday, after a recent discussion among members of the Official Creditor Committee (OCC).

As many as 17 countries that have extended loans to Sri Lanka formed the Committee last year for ease of debt restructuring negotiations. China opted to stay out of the platform, but has been attending its meetings as an observer.



IMF Senior mission chief for Sri Lanka Peter Breuer looks on during a press conference in Colombo on Thursday. AFP

Meanwhile, Colombo has repeatedly assured the OCC that it would negotiate repayment of Chinese loans on comparable terms.

Finalising agreements with the official creditors and reaching "in principle" agreements with the key private creditors would be "critical next steps" in Sri Lanka's economic recovery plan, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said on Thursday. After defaulting on its

nearly \$50 billion external debt in April 2022, Sri Lanka has been engaging with its diverse lenders to work out a debt treatment plan that is compatible with its pace of recovery. While Colombo is said to have made considerable progress in negotiating a deal with its bilateral creditors, private creditors holding the largest chunk of Sri Lanka's foreign debt continue to pose a challenge.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka got a step closer to receiving the next instalment of the IMF's assistance, as part of the \$3 billion package it obtained last year, to recover from the unprecedented financial crash witnessed in the island nation in 2022. Authorities reached a staff-level agreement with the Fund on the second review of its four-year Extended Fund Facility (EFF) arrangement. Upon completion of the IMF Executive Board's review, Sri Lanka would have access to about \$337 million, taking IMF assistance it has received so far to \$1 billion, the Fund said in a statement.

Commending Sri Lankan authorities for "making good progress" in implementing an "ambitious" reform agenda, IMF officials told a media gathering in Colombo that the government had shown "commendable outcomes".

Arab League lauds India's Palestine policy

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India has displayed "steadfast dedication" to the cause of Palestine by extending humanitarian assistance and by supporting a "two-state solution" to the Israel-Palestine crisis, the Ambassador of the Arab League said on Thursday.

In a statement to mark the anniversary of the formation of the Arab League on March 22, Ambassador Yusuf Mohamed Abdulla Jameel supported Indian

position and called out Israel for its military campaign in Gaza Strip.

"We appreciate India's principled stand towards Palestinian cause advocating for two-states solution. By voting in favour of Palestine and extending humanitarian aid, India showcases its deep-rooted empathy and steadfast dedication to alleviating the suffering of those in need. In standing with Palestine, India reinforces its status as a beacon of hope and solidarity in the global community," Mr. Jameel said.

China's top diplomat meets former Australian PM for controversial sit-down

Agence France-Presse
SYDNEY

China's top diplomat capped his trip to Australia on Thursday with one of the most controversial meetings on his agenda, hosting outspoken ex-Prime Minister Paul Keating at the Chinese consulate in Sydney.

China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi spent an hour and five minutes with Mr. Keating, a veteran centre-left leader who has pilloried his own party in govern-

ment for stirring trouble with Beijing.

In a statement, Mr. Keating said the meeting with Mr. Wang discussed "the geostrategic balances and influences in the world".

Mr. Keating, whose push for deeper ties with Beijing was a central facet of his 1991 to 1996 term, added that the pair talked about Australia's historic relationship with China.

They also discussed China's urban development and Mr. Wang's "productive" meeting with his Aus-

The meeting with Wang discussed 'the geostrategic balances and influences in the world', Keating said

tralian counterpart Penny Wong on Wednesday.

Mr. Keating said that Mr. Wang "was very positive" about putting bilateral difficulties aside and was encouraged by efforts to restore stability between the two countries.

"He both encouraged

and welcomed Australia's continuing integration with East Asia where he believed Australia's future lies," Mr. Keating said.

Mr. Wang's trip to Australia, the first since 2017, had been pitched as an easing of troubled relations between the two countries.

But there were evident tensions over the high-profile case of an Australian prisoner being held in China, trade and a renewed crackdown on rights in Hong Kong.

Pak. rejects U.S. warning over 'poll irregularities'

Agence France-Presse
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's government on Thursday dismissed a warning from the United States that relations between the two countries would suffer if it did not probe irregularities in last month's election.

A shaky coalition of two dynastic parties took power in Islamabad following allegations of poll rigging which kept jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan from power.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch,

the spokesperson for Pakistan's Foreign Ministry, said the warning from Donald Lu, the top U.S. diplomat for South Asia, "reflects a misunderstanding of Pakistan's political situation and electoral laws".

Mr. Lu told lawmakers on Wednesday that the United States had "serious concerns" about the conduct of the February 8 election and ongoing disruptions of media and social media, including a prolonged shutdown of social media platform X, and called for an investigation.

Sport

Calicut Heroes takes the honours in style

PVL
Saikat Chakraborty
CHENNAI

Calicut Heroes emerged victorious in the Prime Volleyball League season three final, defeating the Delhi Toofans 15-13, 15-10, 13-15, 15-12 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium, here on Thursday.

The opening set was a nail-biter, with both teams trading powerful spikes. Calicut's Jerome Vinith and Delhi's S. Santhosh went blow for blow to keep the score close. At a crucial 11-12, Toofans attempted a 'Super Point' to gain the lead, which attacker Rohit Kumar successfully converted. However, Heroes didn't back down and with the score tied at 13-all, Brazilian attacker Luiz Pelippe



We did it! Calicut Heroes players celebrate their success. R. RAGU

Perotto delivered a winning 'Super Serve' to steal the set 15-13.

The Calicut team rode the momentum into the second set, taking an early lead thanks to Vinith and Chirag's powerful attacks. While Toofans tried to fight

back with Rohit and Santhosh, Calicut's Iranian middle-blocker Daniel Moatzedi shut them down with crucial blocks as the team took the set 15-10 to go 2-0 up.

Facing defeat, Toofans launched a desperate co-

meback in the third. Colombian middle-blocker Daniel Aponza and Santhosh rose to the challenge with key interceptions.

Although Perotto displayed his serving prowess again, Aponza and Rohit kept Toofans alive, forcing

a fourth set with a 15-13 win.

The Delhi team grabbed an early lead in the fourth set, but Calicut's veteran setter Mohan Ukkrappandian and Vinith orchestrated a magnificent fightback, swinging the lead back in their favour.

In a final attempt to extend the match, Toofans gambled on two consecutive 'Super Points', but only managed to convert one.

With the score at 14-12, Vinith delivered a final, decisive spike to seal the championship in Calicut Heroes' favour.

Vinith won both the 'Best Spiker' and Most Valuable Player (MVP) awards.

The result: Calicut Heroes bt Delhi Toofans 15-13, 15-10, 13-15, 15-12.

Treesa-Gayatri make it to the last-eight stage

SWISS OPEN

Press Trust of India
BASEL

The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand progressed to the quarter-finals of the Swiss Open with a straight-game win over compatriots Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra here on Thursday.

The eighth-seeded Commonwealth Games bronze medallists hardly broke any sweat as they brushed aside compatriots Priya and Shruti, ranked 75th in the world, 21-10, 21-12 in 36 minutes.

Later, World No. 20 Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa, who are

in the 12th spot in qualification race, lost 17-21, 16-21 to Japan's World No. 30 Rui Hirokami and Yuna Kato.

Meanwhile on Wednesday, P.V. Sindhu, who had claimed the title in 2022, beat Thailand's Pornpicha Choeikeewong 21-12, 21-13 to set up a meeting with Japan's Tomoka Miyazaki in the second round of women's singles.

The results:
Women's singles (first round): P.V. Sindhu bt Pornpicha Choeikeewong (Tha) 21-12, 21-13.
Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand bt Priya Konjengbam & Shruti Mishra 21-10, 21-12.
Rui Hirokami & Yuna Kato (Jpn) bt Tanisha Crasto & Ashwini Ponnappa 21-17, 21-16.



Sindhu...moving ahead. SWISS OPEN

IN BRIEF



Smriti and Richa only Indians picked in The Hundred Draft

Women's Premier League-winning captain Smriti Mandhana and wicketkeeper-batter Richa Ghosh were the only Indian players who found takers during The Hundred Draft in London. Smriti was drafted in by Southern Brave Women's while teammate Richa found a new home at Birmingham Phoenix Women's.

Powerlifters Ashok, Parmjeet qualify for Paris Paralympics

Asian Games bronze medallist Ashok and Parmjeet Kumar qualified for the Paris Paralympics by winning a silver medal each at the Para Powerlifting World Cup in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt on Thursday. Competing in the 41kg category, Manpreet Kaur earned a bronze medal after lifting 86kg. Ashok lifted 192kg and 196kg respectively, which gave him the silver medal. In the 49kg category, Parmjeet lifted 160kg and 166kg in his first two attempts.

Arjun and Jeevan in Challenger semifinals

Arjun Kadhe and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan beat the second seeds Bart Stevens and Petros Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-2 in the doubles quarterfinals of the €74,825 Challenger tennis tournament in Murcia, Spain, on Thursday.

Other result: Francisco Cabral & Hendrique Rocha bt Sriram Balaji & Andre Begemann 4-6, 6-3, [10-7].

Mumbai City FC signs Slovakian attacker Vojtus

Mumbai City FC has signed Slovakian attacker Jakub Vojtus for the remainder of the season, the Indian Super League (ISL) club said on Thursday. The striker will don the No. 9 jersey for the Islanders and replaces Spaniard Iker Guarrotxena, who has been ruled out of the season due to a knee injury. The 30-year-old striker kicked off his career with a stint at MSK Zilina, before catching the attention of Italian giants Inter Milan and Chievo. He has previously also turned out for various clubs in Poland and Romania as well.

LIVE TELECAST

Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, day 1, FanCode, 9.30 a.m.
IPL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema, 8 p.m.



Saeed Ahmed.
THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Ex Pakistan captain Saeed Ahmed passes away

Press Trust of India
LAHORE

Saeed Ahmed, the former Pakistan Test captain and a dashing batter of his time, passed away in Lahore after leading a largely reclusive life away from cricket since his retirement. He was 86. Saeed played 41 Tests, scoring 2,991 runs with five centuries and 16 half-centuries. He also took 22 wickets with his off-spin. He made his Test debut against West Indies in the famous drawn Bridgetown Test in 1958 when he was 20 and played his last match for Pakistan in Melbourne against Australia during the 1972-73 tour.

SNAPSHOTS

Chirag to meet Ramkumar in quarters

Qualifier Chirag Duhan beat Mitsuki Leong of Malaysia 6-4, 6-4 in the pre-quarterfinals of the HPCL-Mittal \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the CLTA Complex in Chandigarh on Thursday.

The results: Pre-quarterfinals: Khumoyun Sultanov bt Hitesh Chauhan 2-6, 6-2, 6-1; Siddharth Vishwakarma bt Yuvan Nandal 7-6(3), 6-4; S. Mukund bt Madhwin Kamath 6-2, 4-6, 6-4; Bang Shuo Yin bt Dhruv Hirpara 6-7(2), 6-3, 6-1; Thanapet Chanta bt Sidharth Rawat 6-3, 6-4; Nam Hoang Ly bt Nitin Kumar Sinha 6-2, 6-3; Chirag Duhan bt Mitsuki Leong 6-4, 6-4; Ramkumar Ramanathan bt Woobin Shin 6-2, 7-5.

Doubles: Quarterfinals: Chanta & Kazuma Kawachi bt Kabir Hans & Khumoyun Sultanov 6-4, 6-4; Yuseok Jang & Woobin bt Parth Aggarwal & V.M. Ranjeet 6-2, 6-2; Siddhant Banthia & Karan Singh bt Bharath Kumaran & Rishi Reddy 4-6, 6-4, [17-15]; Manish Sureshkumar & Vishnu Vardhan bt Chirag & Yuichiro Inui 6-3, 6-2.

Praneel, Samarth lose in semis

Praneel Sharma lost in three sets to Oswaldo Tiarado of Mexico in the boys' semifinals of the ITF junior tennis at the Shanti Academy in Dehradun on Thursday.

The results: Semifinals: Boys: Oswaldo Tiarado (Mex) bt Praneel Sharma 2-6, 6-2, 7-6; Hyu Kawanishi (Jpn) bt Samarth

Sahita 6-4, 7-6(4); **Doubles:** Kether Gonzalez & Oswaldo Tiarado (Mex) bt Hyu Kawanishi (Jpn) & Samarth Sahita 6-4, 6-7(3), [10-6]; Dev Kanbargimath & Aarjun Pandit bt Aashravya Mehra & Adhiraj Thakur 6-7(4), 6-3, [10-4].

Girls: Rioko Umekuni (Jpn) bt Viktoriia Sedova 6-3, 6-2; Polina Nikitina bt Dinara De Silva (Sri) 6-1, 6-0; **Doubles:** Polina Nikitina & Viktoriia Sedenkova bt Viktoriia Sedova & Alina Sogomonyan (Arm) 6-4, 6-1; Diya Ramesh & Harithashree Venkatesh bt Angel Patel & Anvi Punaganti 6-3, 6-3.

Veer Mane and Udayan Ahlawat share lead

Veer Ahlawat and Udayan Mane carded an identical five-under 67 to share the lead after the opening round of the Kolkata Challenge at the Royal Calcutta Golf Club course here on Thursday.

The Indian duo was one shot clear of 11 others, including last week's Delhi Challenge winner John Parry and another home golfer Akshay Sharma.

The scores (first round; Indians unless specified): 67-Veer Ahlawat, Udayan Mane; 68-Charlie Lindh (Swe), Andrew Wilson (Eng), Wil Besseling (Ned), John Parry (Eng), Andoni Etchenique (Fra), Maximilian Steinlechner (Aut), Matt Oshrine (USA), Robin Scot-Siegrest (Fra), Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen (Den), Brandon Robinson Thompson (Eng), Akshay Sharma.

IPL-17

Sports Bureau

Delhi Capitals' head coach Ricky Ponting and director of cricket Sourav Ganguly shared some insights on team skipper Rishabh Pant's readiness ahead of the Indian Premier League beginning on Friday.

"He has probably batted more in the last week than he has ever batted leading into most of the IPLs. I think from his point of view, he wants to get a bit of trust back in his body again," said the Australian great about Pant's approach at the pre-season camp.

"He has been putting

himself through a few different paces and playing all the shots that he plays. He has been great, and more importantly, he has got a smile on his face, which is what all we love to see."

Improvements

"I'm surprised with the improvements he has made. Hopefully, it's a good season for him because he has gone through a lot emotionally. It's never easy when you go through that sort of injury. It will be great to see him back not just for the Delhi Capitals, but for the Delhi Ranji team and for India as well because he is a special talent, a special player," said Ganguly.

Speaking about Pant's qualities as captain, Pont-

ing said "we all love his infectious attitude and smile around the group. Although he is still young in age, he has actually played a lot of cricket. He sets an example, he has a lot of energy and that's why other people tend to follow."

Former India Captain Ganguly said he would follow Pant's captaincy closely. "He is not the conservative type of batter, so you expect that character in his captaincy. Nobody comes as a ready-made captain. You learn as you go and I think captaincy is by instinct. I'm looking forward to watching him during the tournament."

Capitals take on Punjab Kings in their first match of IPL 2024 in Chandigarh on March 23.



Happy times: Ponting was all praise for Pant's infectious attitude. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

I would be more than happy to help Shubman, says Williamson

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

With the IPL season set to roll on Friday, one captain who has 100 Tests under his belt is willing and ready to mentor a newbie captain who will be taking over a leadership role for the first time.

"He (Gill) is a great player and like I said a great cricketing brain, and I would certainly encourage him to walk that path and take his decisions. No doubt what he will look to do the same," Williamson said in an interview.

"I will be more than happy to help Shubman in any way I can and Shubman knows that," said Williamson.

Williamson said that the youngster has the calibre to navigate his way through choppy waters.

"As for the team and myself, I would generally like to share some ideas. It is a long season ahead. It will be quite a journey and we will all be learning through



Mentorship: Williamson believes Gill has what it takes to be a successful captain and is willing to ease him in his new role. ANI

it," he said.

With no Mohammed Shami available due to recuperation from heel surgery, it won't exactly be a walk in the park for Gill but Williamson said such challenges are a routine for any captain.

"Obviously, there has

been a few changes in the camp, that's a challenge for every team as every year you have some adjustments to make, really exciting opportunity for Shubman and we need to focus what's there in front of us," he said.

As far as his own batting position is concerned, Williamson hinted that it would be his usual No. 3 slot.

"I think it will be a top order option. There are so many quality players, whether that's local Indian players, who have been exceptional or the overseas ones. So, it will come down to balance and I think a top order option," he said.

Williamson quite liked the idea of bowlers being allowed two bouncers per over from this IPL as he feels it will ensure a more balanced contest.

"I think it is a good addition and it will bring slightly different dynamic to the game. It is a nice extra option for the fast bowlers," said Williamson.

"There could be smaller grounds around country and some very good surfaces which offer some high scores. Also addition of Impact Players, weighed more towards the runs side of the things. So, it is a nice addition and will play a role for sure."

Mary Kom named chef de mission



Huge honour: Sharath and Mary would hope to excel in their new roles. FILE PHOTOS: M. VEDHAN & AFP

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Indian Olympic Association on Thursday named Olympic medallist and multiple-times World champion boxer M.C. Mary Kom as the chef de mission for the Paris Olympics. Veteran table tennis star A. Sharath Kamal will be the country's flag-bearer at the opening ceremony of the Games.

Mary, who is also the chairperson of the IOA Athletes Commission, will be accompanied by six-time Olympian and member of the Athletes Commission Shiva Keshavan as

her deputy. "Her unparalleled dedication to sports and inspiring journey make her a natural choice to guide and mentor our athletes at the Olympics. Keshavan, a former Olympian in luge, brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to support the team's management and coordination efforts," the IOA said in a statement.

IOA vice-president and shooter Gagan Narang will be in charge of overseeing the village operations for the Indian shooting contingent while Dr. Dinshaw Pardiwala has been named the Chief Medical Officer.

Max Verstappen to see out Red Bull contract

FORMULA ONE

Reuters
MELBOURNE

Formula One World champion Max Verstappen has backed Red Bull's handling of a complaint against boss Christian Horner and said the saga has had no impact on how he feels racing for the team.

Verstappen started the season by winning both races so far, but those victories at Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have been overshadowed by unspecified allegations of misconduct against Horner by a female employee at Red Bull.

Horner, who has denied the accusations, was cleared of misconduct but the unidentified woman lodged an appeal after her complaint was dismissed, British media reported last week, ensuring the controversy has continued to rumble on in the leadup to Sunday's Australian Grand Prix.

Verstappen said he did not want to be too involved in off-track issues because his role was to worry about performing in the car.

"But from what I know everything is handled in



Staying put: Verstappen did not rule out a move to Mercedes in the long term but said he was comfortable at Red Bull. REUTERS

the right way," the Dutchman told reporters in the Albert Park paddock on Thursday.

"I'm not going into any further details from that side because I don't know more than that. And I also don't want to know because that's not my job or my task within the team."

Verstappen, who has won the last three World championships with Red Bull, said the internal strife had no impact on his performance.

"For me, all the things that have been going on, it's very easy to jump back in the car and perform," he added. "There are so many great people also in the garage, for example."

"That has never changed ... as you can see

(from) results that we've had as a team."

Verstappen's father Jos, a past F1 driver, said after Bahrain that Red Bull risked being torn apart if Horner stayed in charge.

Those comments triggered fears Verstappen may look elsewhere from 2025 despite his contract running to 2028.

Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said he would love to have Verstappen on his team, with Lewis Hamilton departing for Ferrari next season.

Verstappen did not rule out a move to Mercedes in the long term but said he was comfortable at his "second family" Red Bull and that it would be a great story for him to finish his F1 career with them.

NEW DELHI ROUND-UP

Big wins for Bank of Baroda and Golden Eagle

Varun Sood scored an 51 and took five wickets while Rajesh Sharma made 103 as Bank of Baroda thrashed Kranti Star Club by 214 runs in the DCCA League.

In other games, Yuvraj claimed three for 19 and Ronak Waghela and Manthan took two wickets each as Golden Eagle Club beat Mishra Sports by 10 wickets and half-centuries by Shivam Sharma and Gourav Gutam saw Central Secretariat beat Delhi Cricket Hub by five wickets.

The scores: Bank of Baroda 334/5 in 40 overs (Rajesh Sharma 103, Varun Sood 51) bt Kranti Star 120/9 in 23 overs (Kashish Jain 52, Varun Sood 5/18); Mishra Sports 66 in 19.4 overs lost to Golden Eagle 68/0 in 11.3 overs; Delhi Cricket Hub 220/8 in 40 over (Ayush Sachdeva 67) lost to Central Secretariat 225/5 in 33 overs (Shivam Sharma 83, Gourav Gutam 51); Friends 171/9 in 15 overs lost to FCI 173/5 in 24.3 overs (Priyansh Arya 65); Raghuraj Willowers 309/5 in 40 overs (Saurabh Gupta 122, Shubham 61, Aditya Verma 51) bt Canara Bank 180 in 30 overs (Kabeer Sachdeva 4/35); Mohan Meakins 345/7 in 35 overs (Ashish Swach 124, Ahtesham Choudhary 67, Vishesh 50) bt MCD 154 in 29.4 overs (Punit Chahal 5/19).

Sahara Warriors in final

Chris Mackenzie fired in five goals to guide Sahara Warriors to a 7-5 victory over Jindal Panther in a league match of the Indian Open polo championship at the Jaipur Polo ground on Thursday.

With its second successive victory, Sahara Warriors ensured its berth in the final.

In the last league match, Jindal Panther will take on Sujan Indian Tigers to decide the other finalist.

The results, league:

Sahara Warriors 7 (Chris Mackenzie 5, Daniel Otamendi 2) bt Jindal Panther 6 (Santiago Marambio 3, Siddhant Sharma 2, Shamsheer Ali).

National eventing championship

The National equestrian eventing championship began at the Army Polo and Riding Centre on Thursday.

This is the first three-day with almost 200 riders taking part. The second and final event will begin on March 28.

Competition will be in pre-novice, novice and CCN categories with around 36 teams participating, the EFI said on Thursday.

Sajeevan Sajana: Of guts, glory and grand ambitions

Modelling her career on Harmanpreet Kaur, the 29-year-old allrounder from Wayanad hopes to top a remarkable WPL debut at Mumbai Indians with an India call-up



SPORTSPICS/WPL

Lavanya Lakshminarayanan

Let's go back in time to roughly a month ago. February 23. It's the first match of the second edition of the Women's Premier League. Chasing 172 for victory against Delhi Capitals, Mumbai Indians needs 12 runs to win off the last over. Alice Capsey removes Pooja Vastrakar and Harmanpreet Kaur in the span of five deliveries. MI needs five runs off the last ball. In walks debutant Sajeevan Sajana. Capsey fires one into the slot, and Sajana comes down the track to heave it over the long on fence for six. Sajana screams in delight. DC skipper Meg Lanning can't help but shake her head, a little disappointed, but a little in awe. A talent had arrived and what a way to announce yourself on one of the biggest stages in the game!

Starting with a bang

India and players who hit last ball sixes have a very special relationship. And this one, 29-year-old Sajana, is a special player. Her memorable finish was a product of months of planning and a lot of faith.

"After I joined the MI camp, Charlotte (Edwards), Kiran (More) and Jhulan (Goswami) told me that in this setup, I am a batter," Sajana told *The Hindu*. "In training, they told me to keep in mind that I might not get more than 10 balls when I went out to bat. Less balls, more runs - this was the duty given to me."

"In my very first match, forget 10 balls, I got just one. My nerves were all over the place," Sajana chuckled, with her hand calming her beating heart as she relived the emotions of that night.

"I did not have any other option. I had to hit. Devieka Palshikaar ma'am (MI batting coach) would say, 'don't watch the bowler, watch the ball.' See ball, hit ball is all I needed to do."

"Everyone knew I was capable of hitting sixes, but they didn't know if I could execute. The commentators were also talking about me being a debutant... that I didn't have experience. I knew how big this opportunity was and that I might not get a platform like this again. I knew whatever the ball was, I could hit it. I had that faith. That the team won because of me.... I had the guts and so I could make it happen," Sajana beamed.

Multi-sport upbringing

Sajana's move to cricket came quite late. In school, she dabbled in athletics, kho kho, javelin and shot put among other sports.

"I'd do everything but study," she sheepishly said.

"My P.E teacher, Elsamma Baby suggested that I should take up cricket after I became an individual champion in the sport in my district. I had been playing gully cricket with the boys for so long. I then moved to the district level."

"We'd get a daily allowance of Rs. 150. It was a big amount for me. When I started saving, 150 would become 300, 500 and so on. At that time, I thought that if I continued playing, I could handle my playing expenses too without troubling

my parents. Financially, it proved to be very helpful and because I was earning and saving, my decision to stay with cricket only strengthened."

Sajana's parents, Sajeevan and Sarada, enrolled their daughter in a government residential school when she was in class six. Spending formative years, when one should be in one's parents' care, taking decisions for yourself makes you extremely independent.

"There was never a case of 'Can I go?'. It was always 'I am going.' And they could blame me if things went wrong because I was doing it on my own terms. They were confident in what I was doing and knew I wouldn't go astray. They knew that I knew my limits. That faith in me has helped me get so far in life."

Sajana cheekily admitted that the monetary incentives helped in manipulating her parents to warm up to her career in cricket.

Her journey in the game wasn't always a bed of roses. However, she always managed to find a way to cross adversities with a generous dose of drama and a big smile.

"I went to Thiruvananthapuram for a state trial and got rejected on my first attempt because I didn't have enough experience. In the second trial I gave, I got picked as the first reserve. Eventually, a senior player in the state team had to be ruled out and I got an opportunity to take her place. The money I got there, that earning was very special as it helped me afford a new bat, pads, gloves and kit. It was very emotional."

"I then got to play for Kerala in Hyderabad. Again, one run was needed off the last ball. I hit a boundary, Kerala won. That was my mass entry! From the 2013 season, I have been a steady part of the Kerala team and also took up captaincy."

When the sorting hat listened

"I gave trials for all five WPL teams... I might be the only player to do that," Sajana remembered. She recalled walking into the MI setup knowing no one besides Jhulan Goswami, who she has faced in domestic cricket. 'Daunting' doesn't quite cut how scary it was for her.

"I was able to show my skills right from day one and got a lot of encouragement and praise from Charlotte (Edwards) and (Kiran) More sir."

"After the trials, I returned to the domestic scene, and in my first match back against Baroda, I scored a century. More sir called me immediately and Charlotte ma'am

sent me a congratulations text on Instagram. That such legends were reaching out to me was, by itself, a big deal. I then went for the second camp for MI. By then, the staff knew what I was capable of and our dealings were smoother. They began moulding me as a finisher. At that stage, we still didn't know if I'd end up here. They gave equal opportunities to everyone who came for trials and that really set this franchise apart," she reminisced.

Sajana was not intimidated by the prospect of playing with the biggest names in the sport. She was worried that she might not get a chance to do so yet again, after not finding takers in the league's first edition. So she ended up not watching the auction.

"When I found out I had been selected, *manasitu laddu potti* (I was incredibly happy)," she exclaimed.

Joining Harry chechi

Another motivation in working hard to break into MI was the prospect of sharing a dressing room with her idol Harmanpreet Kaur.

"I remember watching that 171 (vs Australia in the 2017 Women's ODI World Cup semifinal in Derby). Getting to watch that kind of gear change again (in the 48-ball 95 against Gujarat Giants)... *Bayangaramaya oru feel aanu adhu* (it was an incredible feeling)," she gushed.

Sajana wears her emotions on her sleeve. Anytime she talks about something she feels passionately about, her hand makes its way to her chest as she declares just how deep her feelings go. Talking about Harmanpreet went no differently.

"I have never had a personal conversation with Harry di. I have

practised in front of the mirror so many times, polished my English and rehearsed what I want to say over and over again. I look in the mirror and practise what sounds right. I prepare and go, but when I get in front of her, my mind goes completely blank," Sajana revealed.

"I'd love to speak to her about how to handle crunch situations, especially as captain. In a sense, I don't have to ask her... I get to see her do it day in and day out. One can just see and learn. I want to ask her about mental toughness. If you look at her career, there are games where she has scored and where she hasn't. When one doesn't score, there are people who will say all kinds of things. During that phase, how she has handled herself is also one thing I wanted to talk to her about. When we perform, there'll be a lot of people around you. But in bad times, one often has to handle things alone. How she deals with that is also another thing I wanted to know," Sajana explained.

She has dealt with naysayers herself, especially being someone who is nearly 30 and still looking for an India break.

"After playing for Kerala, when there was a time I didn't get South Zone or Challenger call-ups, a lot of people asked me why I wasn't playing or why I didn't score. People in the ecosystem would say age is a factor and that time is running out for me to do something solid. They'd say, 'why don't you look for other opportunities?' One or two people saying this is fine. But when many people keep saying the same thing, it builds a lot of self doubt in you. Two years... scores aren't great, no progress is happening... you'll begin to lose faith in yourself. Life has never been predictable. Whatever happens, we need to believe in our process and just keep moving forward," she said.

It's that faith in the process that keeps Sajana going, with just one thing on her mind - an India cap - and she will let no one and nothing, particularly her age, come in the way.

"If a 35-year-old Shabnim Ismail can bowl those scorchers, what is a better example?"

"Can any of these naysayers do that? If these *chechis* (Shabnim, Harmanpreet) can play like this, I have no reason to back down."

"If we show our talent here, selectors can't ignore us. Look at the IPL. All I wanted to do is show who I am on this platform. The consequence is not in my hands.

"Cricket will continue in my life. If not this year, there's still the next. I will keep at it."

THE GIST

▼ Sajana was picked up by Mumbai Indians for ₹15 lakh in the WPL 2024 auction

▼ Sajana is the second player (after Minnu Mani who plays for Delhi Capitals) from the Kurichiya tribe, a community in Wayanad, to feature in the WPL

▼ She led Kerala to victory in the 2017-18 Under 23 Championship. In 2015 and 2017, she won the Woman Cricketer of the Year award from Kerala Cricket Association

▼ Sajana has played 81 T20 games, scoring 1,093 runs and taking 58 wickets for Kerala. She has 78 List A games to her name (one hundred, five fifties). Sajana also represented South Zone in one domestic red-ball game in 2017

▼ In the nine games she played in WPL 2024, Sajana scored 87 runs at a strike rate of 158.18 averaging 29. She also has two wickets to her name. Her big-hitting abilities prompted teammate Yastika Bhatia to call her the 'Kieron Pollard' of the MI women's outfit

▼ Sajana featured in a Tamil film, *Kanaa*, starring Aishwarya Rajesh. She played the role of a cricketer nursing India ambitions



SCIENCE

Focus on prevention to preserve and protect your kidney function

World Kidney Day signals to us the importance of awareness and diligence in treatment of kidney disease. Care faces an infrastructure challenge. A total of 2,200 kidney specialists, skewed in distribution with a majority in the four southern States and metropolitan cities, leaves a critical gap in providing timely care to kidney disease patients

Georgi Abraham
Latha A. Kumaraswami

As India faces innumerable challenges in providing healthcare to its 1.44 billion people, kidney disease is emerging as an illness to reckon with. The diversity of India especially with regard to socio economic status, literacy, food habits, cultural beliefs, and access to healthcare are all important and complex issues facing the State and central governments. A total of 2,200 kidney specialists, skewed in distribution with a majority in the four (advanced) southern States and metropolitan cities leaves a critical gap in providing timely care to kidney disease patients.

In 2019, chronic kidney disease (CKD) was responsible for over 3.1 million deaths, ranking it as the 7th leading cause of death worldwide. The global mortality attributed to all kidney diseases is estimated to range between 5 and 11 million annually, particularly impacting low and middle-income countries (LMICs). These countries are disproportionately affected by acute kidney injury and face challenges related to insufficient access to kidney replacement therapy, including transplantation and dialysis.

Compliance with treatment

The burning issues are that people with high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease do not comply with treatment and follow up after the diagnosis is made, which more often than not, lead to complications. Therefore it is important at this juncture to spread the message of prevention; besides addressing and evaluating the disease state periodically for the success of management strategies. Chronic Kidney Disease of unknown origin (CKDu) predominantly affecting the farming and fishing community in different geographic locations and salt pan workers calls for more research. The genetic predisposition to kidney disease is not apparent in the majority of people in India as it is different from Caucasian, Africans, Chinese and Japanese ethnic groups. A separate forum for this should be constituted and diagnosis with management strategies should be implemented.

As a renal community we, at Tanker Foundation, become aware that early-detection focussed programmes can identify large numbers of patients with undiagnosed kidney diseases, with minimal interventions, which are cost effective. We have a moral and ethical imperative to advocate for the implementation of such programmes.



Auto drivers participate in an awareness programme and screening camp on World Kidney Day conducted by TANKER foundation in Chennai. FILE PHOTO

How can we deliver our message of prevention globally. Ignorance about kidney diseases is the greatest challenge we face. Surveys have shown that less than 5% of the populations knows where the kidneys are located in the body. This ignorance spills over into a reluctance to seek treatment on time, eventually leading to a preventable death.

Management strategies for Non Communicable Diseases such as diabetes, and hypertension include counselling, nutrition, medical therapy and drugs. The newer drugs for slowing down the progression of diabetic kidney disease are available in India and marketed by many pharmaceutical companies. These drugs are called as SGLT2 inhibitors such as dapagliflozin, canagliflozin, empagliflozin which also protect the heart. The RAAS blockade is an effective treatment modality with telmisartan, losartan and olmesartan. The introduction of a new drug, Finerenone, which is a mineralocorticoid receptors antagonist is useful in slowing the progression of kidney and heart diseases.

Effective blood pressure control with different group of medications to <math><130/80\text{mmHg}</math> is a very useful measure to slow down kidney disease progression and heart failure and stroke. Also exercise and appropriate food intake to reduce weight (measured as body mass index >math>>22.9\text{kg/m}^2</math>). The use of alternate medications and continuous consumption of Non Steroid Anti Inflammatory drugs as painkillers and proton pump inhibitors such as pantoprazole for over 3 months are not advisable unless absolutely necessary. There is a trend of buying over the counter, the aforementioned drugs, which should be discouraged. Individuals who are working under direct heat in the open should reduce exposure to the sun



In 2019, chronic kidney disease was responsible for over 3.1 million deaths, ranking it as the 7th leading cause of death worldwide

in summer and consume salt and fluids to prevent dehydration and hence, kidney injury.

Handheld devices

Small handheld devices estimate serum creatinine using a drop of blood in 40 seconds. By deploying these tools in the community, visits to hospitals and franchised laboratories can be avoided. Using this tool in the 30,000 odd primary health care centres in India will boost detection of kidney disease and its management through simple protocols. Though drugs are provided free of cost in government facilities, cost and supply continue to be deterrents for poorer people. 'Equity of kidney care' therefore is an appropriate slogan for (World Kidney Day) WKD 2024. It will serve to spread awareness on treatment of kidney disease caused by NCD.

Masomi Nangaku, president of the International Society of Nephrology, and Latha Kumaraswami, president of the International Federation of Kidney Foundations – World Kidney Alliance, the two organisations that lead the World Kidney Day campaign, emphasise that overcoming barriers to optimal medication practice pose multifaceted challenges: including economic burdens, limited access to affordable treatments, gaps in disease knowledge, inadequate focus on prevention and early diagnosis,

challenges in medication adherence, global policy gaps, a shortage of primary care professionals, and the harmful impact of patient misinformation. "Addressing these issues is essential to ensure fair access and promote a culture of well-informed and effective medication management," they said.

The first World Kidney Day was held on March 9, 2006 and was celebrated in 45 countries. The events held to commemorate the day include walkathons, marathons, street performance by children, adults and celebrities, screening programmes, educational seminars and media interviews. Tool kits made available to nephrologists, renal organisations and all others affiliated organisations contain suggestions for events, posters and media releases in different languages. People should be encouraged to ask "Are your kidneys ok?"

The World Kidney Day slogan in 2024 is 'Advancing Equitable Access to Care and Optimal Medication Practice'. In this mission, the kidney community world-wide including physicians, scientist, nurses, patients, other health care providers, administrators, health policy experts, Government officials, local, regional and national kidney organisations and foundations should be in the forefront to spread the message. Everyone has to be an outspoken advocate for patients to provide equity of kidney care to all. The epidemic of diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases, obesity, lack of exercise, use of alternative medications and lack of knowledge and follow up of those with prior kidney disease or family history of kidney diseases are all drivers for kidney disease and progressions.

The message of World Kidney Day is, kidney disease is common, harmful and treatable. The platform by the Ministry of Health in Tamil Nadu – *Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam* – is a great initiative for detection of both non-communicable (NCD) and communicable disease such as Tuberculosis and other chronic infections which can have an impact on kidney functions.

With all these initiatives the future looks bright for kidney disease patients in India. The WKD will definitely accelerate the knowledge base every year and will help platform common people.

(Dr. Georgi Abraham is Founder Trustee, TANKER Foundation and Consultant Nephrologist & Transplant Physician, MGM Hospital, Chennai. email: abraham_georgi@yahoo.com. Latha A. Kumaraswami is Managing Trustee, TANKER Foundation and President, International Federation of Kidney Foundations- World Kidney Alliance. email: info@tankerfoundation.org)

THE GIST

The burning issues are that people with high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease do not comply with treatment and follow up after the diagnosis is made, which more often than not, lead to complications. The message of prevention is therefore important

Ignorance about kidney diseases is the greatest challenge. Surveys have shown that less than 5% of the population knows where the kidneys are located in the body. This ignorance spills over into a reluctance to seek treatment on time

Small handheld devices estimate serum creatinine using a drop of blood in 40 seconds. These tools can reduce the need to visit hospitals and franchised laboratories

'Timely treatment can limit disability in children with Juvenile Arthritis'

Serena Josephine M.

Another World Young Rheumatic Disease Day (WORD Day) went by (on March 18) with experts drawing attention to raising awareness and knowledge to help in the early diagnosis of rheumatic diseases among young people. Lack of awareness and delayed diagnosis remains a cause of concern for specialists.

Narendra Bagri, additional professor, Division of Paediatric Rheumatology, Department of Paediatrics, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi laid emphasis on prompt diagnosis and timely treatment of Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) to prevent complications as well as the need to increase awareness in the community.

JIA, he said, is a broad spectrum of inflammatory arthritis encompassing various subtypes and is the most common paediatric rheumatic disorder. "The worldwide prevalence of JIA is variable, ranging from 0.07 to four per 1,000 children. There is a global variation in the distribution of various subtypes; for instance, oligoarticular JIA (fewer than four joints

are involved) is more common in the western world, while enthesitis-related arthritis characterised by pain over heels and lower back pain is the common subtype in the Indian subcontinent accounting for nearly one-third or more of cases," he said.

Though there is a lack of a national registry, given the population of the country, a sizeable number of children with arthritis suffer from JIA, he said.

Symptoms, treatments

Children often present with joint pain and swelling with functional limitations such as limping, he said, adding: "the symptoms are more pronounced when they get up from bed or after a long period of rest. This phenomenon of morning stiffness may be reported by older children, while smaller kids may find it difficult to express. However, parents must look out for poor activity levels early in the morning, which may improve as the day passes."

Depending on the subtype of JIA, the number of joints may vary from a few to many, and accordingly, the resultant functional limitations would also va-



There is a window of opportunity early in the course of the disease, during which appropriate management improves outcomes. GETTY IMAGES

ry. For example, involvement of joints of the lower limbs (knee, ankle) and lower back (sacroiliitis) may impair walking, while wrist joint and upper limb involvement would affect writing. The temporomandibular joint (jaw joint) can lead to a difficulty in opening the mouth and eating. Delayed diagnosis and uncontrolled arthritis can leave children crippled and bedridden, Dr. Bagri said.

Apart from arthritis, these children can have other symptoms such as

pain where the ligament or tendon originate (known as enthesitis). This may manifest as heel pain. Fever, rash and redness of the eyes may be other accompanying features, depending on the subtype of JIA. Young children with JIA can also develop asymptomatic inflammation in part of the eye (uveitis), which may be vision-threatening, and these children should also be proactively screened for this complication. In addition to JIA, arthritis can also be a manifestation of other paediatric

rheumatic disorders, such as childhood lupus and juvenile dermatomyositis, which might be identified by a peculiar skin rash.

Numerous drugs are now available for the management of JIA. "Unlike in the past, the current era has challenged the therapeutic nihilism clouding the treatment of these disorders. Today, there are many effective drugs for the treatment of JIA. Broadly, the drugs used are steroids (intra-articular - injected locally in the joint or in some cases, prescribed systemically), disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) or newer drugs such as biologics. As these drugs modulate the heightened immune system that causes arthritis, and may have side effects, they must be used under the close supervision of a physician, and self-prescription is a strict no," Dr. Bagri said.

Effective drugs

There are effective drugs, including biologics/biosimilars in addition to the conventional DMARDs which are not only effective but also minimise the side effects of systemic steroids used for some of these children. "Although

effective, they are still out of reach for the common man and hence, there is a need for a collective effort to ensure their availability," he said.

Studies demonstrate that there is a window of opportunity early in the course of the disease during which appropriate management improves outcomes.

A paper has been written on factors that predict a visit to a paediatric rheumatologist within 3 months, or periodic reviews. It is titled: 'Factors impacting referral of JIA patients to a tertiary level paediatric rheumatology centre in North India: a retrospective cohort study in Paediatric Rheumatology by Manjari Agarwal et al'. It found these factors to include: proximity to the doctor, family history of inflammatory disease, history of fever, history of acute uveitis (inflammation in the eye) or a high ESR, indicating inflammation in the body. The authors averred that cost of care and a remote treatment centre delayed consultation; acuity of complaints and family history of rheumatologic condition hastened referrals. Among their solutions would be to

increase the number of centres with paediatric rheumatologists and to improve medical insurance coverage

In addition to drugs, physiotherapy is also an integral pillar for the management of JIA.

"With effective and timely treatment, the burden of disability in these children can be curtailed to a minimum and a functionally independent adulthood can be ensured."

However, there are a number of challenges; one of the most important being the lack of awareness about these disorders in the community.

"People often are not aware of the fact that rheumatic disorders can affect kids too. Another alarming concern is delayed diagnosis as many of these children may display slow development of the disease, which may delay seeking of appropriate medical advice. Additionally, they may also be misdiagnosed under the rubric of infec-

tious arthritis. Infections are common in our settings, but the pattern of arthritis in children with JIA is usually different from infectious arthritis, such as tubercular arthritis (not every chronic arthritis is tubercular). So, it is pivotal to ascertain the cause of arthritis before initiating treatment," he elaborated.

Better awareness of JIA and its symptoms among primary care providers could help in streamlining the referral pattern of children. They should be managed by a team comprising paediatric rheumatologists, physiotherapists, ophthalmologists and other physicians.

The consequence of an untreated and prolonged illness would be a permanent disability, the extent of which would depend on the subtype of JIA.

Apart from limb-threatening complications, systemic JIA can have serious life-threatening complications as well, he said.

(serena.m@thehindu.co.in)

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