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**IN BRIEF**

**3 Independent legislators stage protest in H.P.**

**CHANDIGARH**  
Three Independent MLAs from Himachal Pradesh, who recently resigned as legislators and joined the BJP, staged a protest on Saturday over the Speaker's delay in accepting their resignations. » Page 3

**ED takes Kailash Gahlot's statement in excise case**

**NEW DELHI**  
The ED on Saturday recorded the statement of Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot in connection with the excise policy case, in which the agency arrested CM Arvind Kejriwal. » Page 7

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# CAA Rules silent on fate of rejected applicants

CAA applicants can be rejected by an empowered committee if their documents fail scrutiny, or if there is any adverse security clearance report; no mention of review procedures in CAA Rules

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

As applications start coming in through the online citizenship portal of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), some potential applicants are worried about their fate if rejected. The law's Rules, notified earlier this month, are silent regarding any review process for applications rejected by the empowered committees, which have the final authority to accord citizenship under the Act.

Some potential applicants, including lakhs of people from the Matua community of West Bengal, entered the country decades ago and have been living as Indian citizens for many years. However, if their submitted documents now fail the scrutiny

## Hurdles in front

What happens after a citizenship application is uploaded online?

- 1 A district-level committee headed by the Superintendent of Post will verify the documents
- 2 The officer will forward the application to an empowered committee
- 3 The empowered committee on being satisfied with the suitability of the applicant, may grant him

the citizenship of India by registration or naturalisation, as the case may be, and issue a certificate



A protest rally held against CAA in Kolkata. AFP

of the empowered committee, or if there is an adverse security clearance report about them, their applications for Indian citizenship under the CAA could be rejected.

"If an application is rejected, people may end up in detention centres," warned Mamata Bala Tha-

kur, a Trinamool Congress parliamentarian who hails from a Hindu community that migrated from Bangladesh.

The parent law, the Citizenship Act, 1955, says that the applicant may file a review application before the Central government within 30 days and "the decision

of the Central government on such review shall be final."

## Review of rejection

According to Aman Wadud, an Assam-based lawyer who has worked extensively on citizenship cases in the State, "the review of the rejection is to be done by the same authority, the empowered committee (as per Section 15 A of the Act). In case the review is rejected, a writ petition can be filed before the High Court."

The ambiguity around the rejection of applications poses concerns, particularly for the Matua community in West Bengal, which stands to benefit from the CAA's provision of fast-tracked citizenship.

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# Four receive Bharat Ratna posthumously



Dr. Nitya Rao receives the Bharat Ratna from President Droupadi Murmu on behalf of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan on Saturday. ANI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday conferred the Bharat Ratna on former Prime Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh; former Bihar Chief Minister Karpooji Thakur; and agronomist Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. All four awards were presented posthumously at a brief ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The late Rao's award was received by his son,

P.V. Prabhakar Rao, while Singh's award was received by his grandson, Jayant Chaudhary. Dr. Swaminathan's daughter, Nitya Rao, received the award for her father, and Thakur's was received by his son, Ram Nath Thakur.

Ms. Murmu is likely to visit Mr. Advani, the other awardee this year, at his residence to honour him as his mobility is restricted because of frail health.

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# LS polls are a referendum on secularism, says Pinarayi

**G Anand**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has underscored that the upcoming Lok Sabha election is a referendum on "preserving India's secular democracy" and little else.

In an e-mail interview with *The Hindu* on Friday, Mr. Vijayan articulated the pivotal nature of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections ahead of the launch of his 24-day tour through Kerala's 20 Lok Sabha constituencies on Saturday.


Mr. Vijayan said it was reductive to depict the Left Democratic Front's (LDF) staunch resistance to the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act as a "question about minority or majority". Instead, the "question is about secularism", he added.

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2024 POLLS

## How far will Artificial Intelligence go?

MAGAZINE » PAGE 1



The dissident vocalist in the Carnatic music scene

PROFILES » PAGE 13

# Chargesheet filed against NewsClick

**Ishita Mishra**  
NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Saturday filed its first chargesheet against the news portal, NewsClick, and its founder Prabir Purkayastha, in a case lodged under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, following allegations that they received funds through Chinese firms to spread pro-China propaganda.

The chargesheet running into thousands of pages was brought in a trunk and filed before the Additional Sessions Judge, Hardeep Kaur, of the Patiala House Court.

It had named Mr. Pur-

kayastha and PPK NewsClick Studio Private Limited as accused, special public prosecutor Akhand Pratap Singh submitted in the court. The court posted the matter for further hearing on April 16.

## Arrests in the case

The chargesheet against NewsClick came nearly six months after the Delhi police arrested Mr. Purkayastha and the human resources head of the news portal, Amit Chakraborty, on October 3, 2023.

Mr. Chakraborty turned approver in this case in January 2024.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 7

# Epitome of elegance



Traditional affair: Girls perform Bihu after completing a dance workshop ahead of the Bohag Bihu festival in Guwahati on Saturday. Bohag Bihu will be celebrated in Assam from April 13 to mark the beginning of the Assamese New Year. RITU RAJ KONWAR

# Zakaat helps free inmates during Ramzan

Over the past few years, some organisations have a part of their savings during the holy month set aside for charity, to free prisoners who cannot afford bail, thereby helping them and their families

**Syed Mohammed**  
HYDERABAD

It is in the month of Ramzan that most Muslims busy themselves with calculating zakaat, a prominent manifestation of charity in Islam. Usually given to those in abject poverty, over the past few years, zakaat funds, calculated at 2.5% of an individual's annual savings and eligible assets, are being used to free inmates of jails who have served their prison sentences but have no support systems to pay fines associated with their convictions.

Moin Pasha, an octogenarian, says, "It was two years ago that I got to



A noble cause: MPJ secretary Shaik Kasim Sahah with Khammam district jail authorities. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

know of an organisation that uses zakaat money to pay those who cannot afford bail. Some of these prisoners are sole breadwinners and everything depends on

them," she says. The Movement for Peace and Justice (MPJ), a non-profit, is one such organisation that has been gathering zakaat from donors and channelling

these funds to secure prisoner release. "Since last year we have paid 130 fines that are associated with prison sentences. Additionally, we have paid bail money for 35 prisoners and have got them all released," Ahmed Hameeduddin Shakeel, finance secretary, MPJ, says.

The MPJ, an affiliate of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, a socio-religious organisation, after due diligence, identifies prisoners who are first-time offenders involved in small crimes, and who have no family or friends to pay bail or fines.

CONTINUED ON  
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# As nominations close, BJP has 10 of 60 Arunachal seats already in the bag

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has won 10 seats without a contest in the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Assembly. The party, however, fell short of the Congress record of 11 seats won unopposed in 2014.

While no Opposition parties fielded candidates in five constituencies, rivals of the BJP withdrew their nominations in five more by Saturday, the last day for withdrawal of candidature.

Among those who won uncontested were Chief Minister Pema Khandu from Mukto and Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein from Chowkham. The other winners are



Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu being congratulated by BJP leader Ashok Singhal after he was elected unopposed. PTI

Ratu Techi from Sagalee; Jikke Tako, Tali; Nyato Dukam, Taliha; Mutchu Mithi, Roing; Hage Appa, Ziro-Hapoli; Techi Kaso, Itanagar; Dongru Siongju, Bomdila; and Dasanglu Pul, Hayuliang.

"...It's all because of the people's love and trust in

#ModiKiGuarantee and our dedication in ensuring all-round development of the State," Mr. Khandu wrote on social media platform X (formerly Twitter).

'Confident of a win' Later, he told presspersons that the party was confi-

dent of bagging the remaining 50 Assembly seats and the two Lok Sabha seats in the State.

"We are confident that we will win the Arunachal East and Arunachal West Lok Sabha seats with a thumping majority because of the amount of love that we are getting from the people," the Chief Minister said, attributing the support for the BJP to the "unprecedented" development in the State under 10 years of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre.

Mr. Khandu also said the State has been used to uncontested electoral wins. Four candidates had won unopposed in 1999, one in 2004, three in 2009, 11 in 2014, and three in 2019.



## Kalpana Soren meets Sunita Kejriwal, vows to take 'this fight far'



The meeting between the two lasted nearly 20 minutes. ANI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Kalpana Soren, wife of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, met Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's wife, Sunita Kejriwal, on Saturday. Ms. Soren said the two women had pledged to "take this fight far". The meeting between the two lasted nearly 20 minutes.

On January 31, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Hemant Soren stepped down as Jharkhand's Chief Minister moments before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrested him on allegations of money laundering linked to a land "scam".

Nearly two months later, a similar situation played out in Delhi, said Ms. Soren, as Mr. Kejriwal was arrested on similar charges.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) posted a video on X, showing the two women hugging. Speaking to journalists after their meeting,

Ms. Soren said, "The incident that took place in Jharkhand two months ago is now taking place in Delhi. My husband, Hemantji, was arrested, and now, Arvind sir has been arrested, too."

### 'Shared sorrows'

Ms. Soren said she had "shared her sorrows" with the Delhi CM's wife. "She shared her story... We have decided to take this fight far. She will be with us and all of Jharkhand is with Arvind sir," said Ms. Soren. She, along with Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren, is scheduled to attend the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc leaders' rally, which was announced after Mr. Kejriwal's arrest.

Earlier this week, Ms. Kejriwal launched 'Kejriwal ko Aashirwad', a digital campaign under which citizens can send WhatsApp messages to the Delhi CM through a dedicated phone number.

# INDIA rally's aim is to save democracy, it's not about one individual: Congress

AAP leader Atishi says arrest of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was the final strike on democracy; BJP says AAP is seeking the support of those it had called corrupt when it initially came to power

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The "maha rally" being organised by the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) at the Capital's Ramlila Maidan on Sunday is not aimed at protecting one person, the Congress said on Saturday, stressing that it was focused on saving the Constitution and democracy.

Posters sporting the slogan "Main bhi Kejriwal (I am also Kejriwal)" could be seen at Ramlila Maidan, as part of a campaign being run by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) since the arrest of its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in an excise policy case.

However, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the "strong message" being sent out from the rally to Prime Minister Narendra Modi is that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's "time is up".

"It is not a person-specific rally. That is why it is called Loktantra Bachao Rally [Save Democracy Rally]. This is not one party's rally; about 27 to 28 parties are involved in it. All constituents of the INDIA bloc will be taking part in the rally," Mr. Ramesh said.

He added that Congress



Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh addressing the media at the AICC office in New Delhi on Saturday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR

chief Mallikarjun Kharge and former party president Rahul Gandhi will address the rally along with Opposition party leaders from across the country.

Asked about Mr. Ramesh's comments, senior AAP leader Atishi said Congress leaders had shown support to AAP as soon as the Enforcement Directorate (ED) arrived to arrest Mr. Kejriwal, adding that other parties participating in the rally have also extended support to AAP.

"The BJP has been constantly attacking the Opposition in various ways, whether it is via Central probe agencies or by poaching elected representatives via 'Operation Lotus'. Mr. Kejriwal's arrest was a final strike on democracy and the Constitution," the senior AAP leader said at a press

conference.

Mr. Ramesh said the rally would send out a message of solidarity among INDIA bloc members and would raise issues like the "misuse of Central agencies, rising prices, the highest unemployment rate in 45 years, economic disparities, social polarisation, and injustice against farmers".

### 'Ministers arrested'

"Two Chief Ministers [Mr. Kejriwal and former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren] and several Ministers have been arrested in a bid to target Opposition parties politically. This shows that the Prime Minister wants to cripple the Opposition politically and financially. We are gathering to save democracy and prevent the BJP from going ahead with its plans to rewrite the

Constitution," the Congress general secretary said.

Jharkhand CM Champai Soren, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Shradha Pawar, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav, Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D. Raja, CPI (Marxist) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Peoples Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's Tiruchi Siva, and Trinamool Congress's Derek O'Brien are scheduled to participate in the rally.

### 'Shocked and betrayed'

The BJP slammed this solidarity, claiming that the people of Delhi were shocked and felt betrayed to see that AAP had stooped to such a level that it was seeking protection from the very people it had called corrupt when it initially came to power.

"The Ramlila Maidan will cry when it watches AAP share the stage with the Congress and people like Mr. Pawar. It is these very people that the India Against Corruption movement, which gave birth to AAP, cursed and came to power," Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said.

## Ramlila Maidan gets final touches ahead of mega Oppn. rally



As per AAP's estimate, more than 1 lakh people will attend the mega Opposition rally. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

**Alisha Dutta**  
NEW DELHI

Canopies were being straightened out, and loudspeakers mounted on pillars as last-minute preparations for the mega Opposition rally were under way at Ramlila Maidan on Saturday.

The police have permitted up to 20,000 people to assemble at the venue. However, as per AAP's estimate, more than 1 lakh people will attend Sunday's event.

While AAP has been conducting a door-to-door drive to encourage people to attend the rally, the Congress has booked buses to bring people from various parts of the city to the venue.

A large stage has been set up to accommodate leaders from nearly 20 Opposition parties, near which the organisers have placed close to 10,000 chairs.

AAP's Delhi in-charge and Environment Minister Gopal Rai, who has been overseeing the party's out-

reach drive, said, "The BJP-ruled Centre first snatched away the rights of Delhi's people given by the Supreme Court, then it snatched the public's Chief Minister."

The police have made elaborate arrangements to secure the venue, given the number of high-profile political leaders scheduled to mark their presence at the historic protest ground. A senior officer said nearly a dozen companies of paramilitary personnel will be deployed around the Ramlila Maidan and other parts of central Delhi, including Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg.

### Traffic restrictions

The police have also decided to restrict traffic movement in central Delhi for six hours from 9 a.m. Traffic movement is likely to be affected at several key stretches, including Ranjeet Singh flyover, Barakhamba Road, Guru Nanak Chowk, Vivekanand Marg, Minto Road, Kamla Market roundabout, and Ajmeri Gate roundabout.

## 2020 riots: court denies bail to Tahir Hussain

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

A court here on Saturday rejected the bail plea of former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Tahir Hussain in a 2020 Delhi

riots case, saying the allegations against him were "prima facie true". The court also observed that Mr. Hussain allegedly funded the riots and participated in activities resulting in violence. The court added

that it was too early to conclude that the charges against him were not an act of terror. The prosecution lawyer cited an apex court verdict, as per which, under the UAPA provision rejection of bail is a rule.

## People on the streets divided over Kejriwal's arrest

**Satvika Mahajan**  
NEW DELHI

While the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has pulled out all the stops to muster public support for its national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is in Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody on corruption charges, the response of people on the streets seems divided between scepticism regarding the "intention" behind his arrest and the feeling that he must have committed some wrong.

Mr. Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 in an excise policy-linked money laundering case and sent to ED



AAP's Gopal Rai interacting with people during the 'Main Bhi Kejriwal' campaign. FILE PHOTO

custody a day later. On Thursday, a city court extended CM's ED remand till April 1.

For some, like Sitaram, an autorickshaw driver who lives in west Delhi, the CM's arrest does not

change anything. "Last week, the Chief Minister was arrested. Tomorrow, someone else will be held. But what does that change for the common man? He has to continue toiling every day," he said.

The sentiment was echoed by Ijtaba Mohammad, a cab driver, "Anything is possible in politics. These things are beyond the grasp of the common person."

However, Ashish Chandra, a south Delhi-based lawyer who works at a private firm, raised doubts about the grounds on which Mr. Kejriwal had been arrested. He said the evidence based on which

Mr. Kejriwal was arrested has still not been shared with the public.

"If a probe agency had proof of corruption against someone like the Chief Minister, they would have shared it publicly by now. The ED has done no such thing," the lawyer said.

In December last year, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) ran a month-long signature campaign called 'Main Bhi Kejriwal', seeking people's feedback on whether the CM should resign in the event of his arrest. The party claimed that a majority of the one crore people it reached out to said that Mr. Kejriwal should continue running

the government even if he gets arrested.

Dinesh, a rickshaw puller, said the AAP's drive was pointless because "Kejriwal is doing what he wants anyway". Mr. Dinesh, who lives in a JJ colony in Munirka, believes that "if Kejriwal has been arrested, he must have committed some wrong. There is no smoke without fire".

Sonia, a south Delhi-based banker, said, "I am not aware of such a campaign, but it is very important to run drives like those at this stage. Citizens should be allowed to decide what happens with their elected representatives."

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**THE HINDU**

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## ED files chargesheet in DJB case, says AAP got kickbacks

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed its first chargesheet in a money laundering case linked to the "irregularities" in the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) case. It has alleged that part of the bribe paid to award a contract was passed on to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as "election funds".

The agency had earlier summoned Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for questioning but he did not do so before it. The chargesheet was filed on March 28 in a court dealing with crimes under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act. The next hearing is scheduled for April 1.

The ED has named former DJB Chief Engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora, contractor Anil Kumar Agar-

wal, former National Buildings Construction Corporation general manager D.K. Mittal, and NKG Infrastructure Limited as the prime accused.

The ED probe is based on an FIR registered by the CBI, alleging that Mr. Arora awarded a DJB contract worth over ₹38 crore to NKG Infrastructure Limited even though it did not meet the eligibility criteria.

The ED said NKG Infrastructure had submitted fake documents to get the contract, which involved the supply, installation, and testing of electromagnetic flow meters.

It is alleged the company subcontracted the work to Integral Screws, a firm of Mr. Aggarwal.

On the receipt of the funds, he transferred ₹3 crore to Mr. Arora through cash and bank accounts.

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# Independent MLAs protest against H.P. Speaker's delay in accepting resignations

The three MLAs had resigned from the Assembly and then joined the BJP; the Speaker has issued notices to them seeking an explanation; they quit voluntarily and not under pressure, they say

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHANDIGARH

Three Independent MLAs from Himachal Pradesh, who recently resigned as legislators and later joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), staged a sit-in protest in Shimla on Saturday.

The three MLAs — Ashish Sharma, Hoshiyar Singh, and K.L. Thakur — picketed outside the State Assembly, protesting the non-acceptance of their resignations by Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania.

Demanding that the Speaker accept their resignations immediately, they said that they had quit voluntarily, and were not under any pressure. Instead of accepting their resignations, the Speaker had issued notices to them, seeking an explanation for their actions, which they said



The Independent MLAs sitting on a protest at the Himachal Pradesh Assembly in Shimla on Saturday. ANI

was "unjustified".

The three Independent MLAs had voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha poll held on February 27, and subsequently tendered their resignations on March 22. They joined the BJP a day later.

Six former Congress MLAs had also cross-voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha

poll and joined the BJP thereafter as well. All six were disqualified from the State Assembly for defying a party whip, leaving their constituencies vacant.

**Bypoll for empty seats**  
The Election Commission had announced byelections for these six Assembly seats, and the BJP has declared the former Congressmen as its candidates

for these seats.

The byelections will be held on June 1, on the same day as the voting for the State's four Lok Sabha seats in the upcoming election. However, as the resignations of the three Independents have not yet been accepted, it is unclear if bypolls will also be held for their Assembly constituencies of Hamirpur, Nagargh, and Dehra.

# IAS officer, 4 others booked for murder of gurdwara official

**Press Trust of India**  
RUDRAPUR

Five people, including a retired IAS officer, have been booked in connection with the killing of the *dera kar seva* chief of the Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara in Uttarakhand's Udhham Singh Nagar district, police said on Saturday.

Baba Tarsem Singh was shot dead on Thursday on the shrine's premises by two men on a motorcycle.

Those named in the FIR include the two assailants, Sarabjit Singh and Amarjeet Singh; IAS officer Harbans Singh Chugh, who heads the Nanakmatta Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee; Baba Anup Singh; and Pritam Singh Sandhu, the vice-president of a regional Sikh outfit, said Senior Superintendent of Police Manjunath T.C.

Of the accused, Sarabjit Singh is a resident of Tarn Taran in Punjab, while Amarjeet Singh hails from Rampur in Uttar Pradesh. They have been booked under sections 302 (murder), 120b (criminal con-

**The *dera kar seva* chief was shot dead in Uttarakhand by two assailants on Thursday morning**

spiracy) and 34 (common intention) of the Indian Penal Code, the police officer said.

**Retired officer named**  
Three others, including the retired IAS officer, have been named in the FIR as the complainant had raised suspicion about their role, the SSP said.

The *dera kar seva* chief of the Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara was sitting in a chair when he was shot with a rifle by the shooter, who was riding pillion.

The victim was rushed to a hospital in Khatim, where he died during treatment.

The Nanakmatta Sahib Gurdwara, around 50 km from Rudrapur, is a revered Sikh shrine located on the Rudrapur-Tanakpur route in the Udhham Singh Nagar district of the State.

## IN BRIEF



### Punjab farmers fear wheat crop damage due to rain

After rain lashed Punjab on Saturday, wheat farmers expressed fear that the unseasonal showers could damage their standing crops. The rain was accompanied by strong winds and hailstorms, and hit several parts of the State. Farmers, who faced a hailstorm earlier this month too, said the rain had flattened their crop, which will ultimately impact the wheat yield. PTI

### Security forces hold flag marches in Kashmir valley

Security forces conducted flag marches across Kashmir on Saturday to instill a "sense of security and confidence" among voters ahead of the Lok Sabha election, officials said, adding that the marches were conducted by the police and the Central Armed Police Forces in several districts, including Shopian, Pulwama, and Budgam. Of the three Lok Sabha seats in Kashmir, Anantnag-Rajouri will go to polls on May 7, Srinagar on May 13, and Baramulla on May 20. PTI

### 172 roads closed after H.P. receives fresh snowfall

The higher reaches and tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh received another spell of snowfall, while low and middle hills were lashed by intermittent hailstorms and moderate rains on Saturday. A total of 172 roads, including four national highways, were closed for vehicular traffic, mainly in Lahaul and Spiti, where some regions received as much as 15 cm of snow. The meteorological department has predicted a wet spell over the State until April 4. PTI

### Decomposed tiger carcass found in Maharashtra

A highly decomposed tiger carcass was seen in a forest range in Maharashtra's Gondia district, an official said on Saturday, adding that it had been found by forest guards on patrol duty in the South Deori range who had been drawn towards the stench. Samples were collected from the carcass, after which it was burnt, as per National Tiger Conservation Authority guidelines. PTI

# Modi sheds crocodile tears over his love for Tamil

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI/SALEM

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of shedding "crocodile tears" over his love for Tamil.

"He [Mr. Modi] said he was not fortunate to have Tamil as his mother tongue. But the very next day, there was an announcement that *Akashvani* would continue [as name for All India Radio], instead of *Vaanoli*. Even his eyes will not believe his tears. How will the Tamil people believe him," Mr. Stalin posted on social media. He also pointed out that Mr. Modi, who used to address meetings in English while touring T.N., had switched to Hindi now.

### PM's promise

Recalling Mr. Modi's promise that announcements in flights operating from Tamil Nadu would be in Tamil, Mr. Stalin said that today, there was not even a single Tamil speaker in the security personnel at airports. "The only achievement of the Modi government is making Hindi ubiquitous," the Chief Minister contended. Earlier in the day, the CM campaigned for the DMK candidate from Salem.

# 'BJP's drama won't work in T.N. even in 100 elections'

**M. Sabari**  
SALEM

DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Saturday that the "drama" by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would not work in Tamil Nadu even if it faced 100 elections. He was speaking at a public meeting held at Pethanaickenpalayam while canvassing for Salem DMK candidate T.M. Selva-napathy and Kallakurichi DMK candidate D. Malaiyarasan.

Mr. Stalin said that a few days ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Sa-



M.K. Stalin speaking in Salem on Saturday. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

lem that the DMK had lost its sleep owing to the support shown by the people of Tamil Nadu for the BJP. But the people had lost their sleep "owing to 10 years of BJP rule at the

Centre", he alleged.

"The BJP has also lost its sleep because its corruption has been exposed through electoral bonds, as intelligence agencies reported to the Union go-

vernment that the issue would impact the BJP's prospects in north Indian States too. Because of this, the BJP government arrested Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren through the Enforcement Directorate and issued notices to the Congress and the Communist Party of India through the Income Tax Department. The people are angry with the BJP's dictatorial actions and so many BJP leaders, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, are not contesting in the election," Mr.

Stalin said.

"The Prime Minister is praising former Chief Ministers M.G. Ramachandran and Jayalalithaa. In the past, he did not praise Jayalalithaa and had even claimed that AIADMK rule in Tamil Nadu was the most corrupt in India," he said.

"Why did the Prime Minister not visit Tamil Nadu during floods and provide a single rupee for relief? The drama of the BJP will not work even in the next 100 elections in Tamil Nadu. While the DMK is in power, the BJP's tactics will not work," Mr. Stalin said.

### Timings

DELHI

SUNDAY, MAR. 31	RISE 06:12	SET 18:39
	RISE 00:00	SET 09:41
MONDAY, APR. 01	RISE 06:11	SET 18:39
	RISE 00:29	SET 10:34
TUESDAY, APR. 02	RISE 06:10	SET 18:40
	RISE 01:28	SET 11:35

**Delhi Weather** max min  
Delhi City 35 22  
Safdarjang 35 22  
Palam 35 24

**Delhi Palam Today**  
37°C A mostly dry weather to prevail. Morning will be pleasant with mist & haze. Day will be very warm afternoon. Night will be pleasant.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
38°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be pleasant with mist & haze. Day will be slight hot with uneasy afternoon. Night also will be pleasant.

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**DEATH**  
**OBITUARY**

**CA. R.A. VISWANATH (83 YRS)**  
Founder Partner  
*Anand & Kalyan*  
Died & Cremated on 26.03.2024  
10<sup>th</sup> day Ceremony @ ARUMBARKAM  
98410 26426  
98410 54702 / 044 2363 5735

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## IN BRIEF



### BJP hatching plan to remove slums, says Aaditya Thackeray

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Saturday accused the BJP of hatching a plan to "forcibly remove slums" from Mumbai and relocate those living in them to salt pan lands. Addressing a news conference, Mr. Thackeray referred to the remarks of Union Minister Piyush Goyal, the BJP candidate from the Mumbai North Lok Sabha seat, where he had said that if elected, he intends to clear his constituency of slums. "The BJP's policy is not to eradicate poverty, but poor people," alleged Mr. Thackeray. PTI

### BJP using Central agencies to harass Oppn. leaders: Cong.

Senior Congress leader and former Uttar Pradesh CM Harish Rawat on Saturday accused the BJP of using Central agencies such as the CBI, ED, I-T department, and the NIA to harass Opposition leaders and eliminate any challenge from them in the upcoming Lok Sabha election. Democracy and constitutional institutions are in danger under the BJP rule and people want change, he said. "The BJP first filled its own coffers in the name of electoral bonds and then seized the accounts of the Congress and donations it had received to paralyse the party. Now income tax notices are being issued." PTI

### CPI(ML) Liberation names candidates for three LS seats

The CPI(ML) Liberation, an ally of the Mahagathbandhan in Bihar, on Saturday nominated two sitting MLAs and a former one for the Lok Sabha poll. Sudama Prasad, MLA from the Tarari Assembly seat, will contest from the Arrah Lok Sabha constituency, while its Paliganj legislator Sandeep Saurav has been fielded from the Nalanda constituency. Its former legislator, Rajaram Singh, will be the Mahagathbandhan nominee from the Karakat seat. The party also announced the candidature of Vinod Singh from the Koderma Lok Sabha seat in Jharkhand. The party also named senior leader Shivprakash Ranjan from the Agiaon Assembly seat in Bhojpur district where a byelection will be held on June 1. PTI

### LJP (Ram Vilas) finalises candidates for 5 Bihar seats

The Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), headed by Chirag Paswan, on Saturday announced candidates for all the five Lok Sabha seats that it will be contesting as an NDA ally in Bihar. While his brother-in-law, Arun Bharti, has already filed nomination papers from Jamui, Mr. Chirag, who has represented the seat twice in a row, will try his luck from Hajipur, his late father Ram Vilas Paswan's pocket borough. For the remaining three seats of Samastipur, Kharagaria, and Vaishali, the LJP (Ram Vilas) has named Shambhavi Choudhary, Rajesh Verma, and sitting MP Veena Devi, respectively, according to a statement issued by the party. PTI

# It's Pawar vs Pawar as rival NCP factions lock horns in Baramati

Ajit Pawar's group announces his wife Sunetra Pawar as the ruling Mahayuti candidate, pitting her against Sharad Pawar's daughter and incumbent MP Supriya Sule; MVA-allied NCP faction releases first list of five candidates for Lok Sabha election

Shoumojit Banerjee  
PUNE

The Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on Saturday officially announced the name of his wife, Sunetra Pawar, as the ruling Mahayuti candidate for the high-stakes Baramati Lok Sabha seat in Pune district. While Ms. Sunetra Pawar's name was long expected, it was formally announced by NCP State chief Sunil Tatkare.

She will be pitted against Sharad Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule, the incumbent MP, whose candidature was also announced on Saturday in the first list of five Lok Sabha candidates put out by the Opposition party, NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar).

#### Poll on May 13

The election in Baramati will be held in the fourth phase on May 13. Besides Ms. Sule, the other seats and candidates announced by NCP (SP) State chief Jayant Patil are: Amol Kale (Wardha), Bhaskar Bhagare (Dindori), Dr. Amol Kolhe (Shirur), and Nilesh Lanke (Ahmednagar).

A three-term MP from Baramati, Ms. Sule's candidature for the Pawar clan's stronghold was already declared by her father some time ago. Both Ms. Sule and Ms. Sunetra Pawar have thrown themselves into the Baramati poll campaign, given that this Lok Sabha seat is arguably the most keenly contested of all 48 seats in Maharashtra.

A number of developments preceded the an-



All in the family: The contest in Baramati between three-time MP Supriya Sule and her sister-in-law Sunetra Pawar (right), who will be making her electoral debut, will be keenly watched. FILE PHOTO

ouncement of Ms. Sunetra Pawar's candidacy, with the Mahayuti — comprising the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the BJP, and Mr. Ajit Pawar's NCP — resolving disagreements on not only Baramati but also other key Lok Sabha seats.

#### Finally pacified

Earlier on Saturday, Vijay Shivtare, the senior Eknath Shinde camp leader and former two-term MLA from Purandar (part of Baramati), who had vowed to make things tough for Mr. Ajit Pawar by proposing to enter the Baramati fray as a third challenger, publicly announced he would not be contesting the seat.

Having publicly called for the overthrow of the Pawar clan in Baramati some

days ago, Mr. Shivtare was finally pacified after a night meeting with Mr. Shinde, Mr. Ajit Pawar and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis. They prevailed on him to obey 'coalition dharma'.

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Shivtare pledged to campaign in full strength for Mr. Ajit Pawar's candidature while assuring that over 1.5 lakh votes will be given to the 'clock' symbol (of the NCP) from the Pu-

randar Assembly segment.

In another key move, the ruling NCP faction announced the candidature of Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP) chief Mahadev Jankar for the Parbhani Lok Sabha seat.

#### Quelling challenge

Mr. Jankar, a Dhargar (shepherd) community leader who wields considerable influence in Baramati, had given Ms. Sule a stiff fight during the 2014 Lok Sabha election. However, despite being a BJP ally, Mr. Jankar was disgruntled with the Mahayuti dispensation of late.

There was much speculation about whether he would switch sides to the Sharad Pawar faction after it had offered to field him

from the Madha Lok Sabha seat in Solapur.

Mr. Jankar decided to remain within the ruling coalition after being promised the Parbhani seat.

The quelling of the potential revolts of Mr. Shivtare and Mr. Jankar has made things easier for Ms. Sunetra Pawar in the upcoming fight.

In Kolhapur, the Mahayuti effected another reconciliation after bitter rivals, Minister Hasan Mushrif (of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP) and the BJP's Samarjitsinh Ghatge, finally came together and pledged that they would work to ensure the victory of the Sena candidate, Sanjay Mandlik.

#### MVA rifts continue

Meanwhile, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi struggled to quell the schism within its ranks.

The Congress is having a hard time in the Ramtek seat (which goes to polls in the first phase on April 19) after Congressman and former IAS officer Kishore Gajbhiye said on Saturday that he remained firm on contesting the seat as an Independent.

Rifts within the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena (UBT) continued to persist over the Sambhajinagar seat amid rumours that Thackeray confidant Ambadas Danve was planning to defect to the Mahayuti.

However, Mr. Danve categorically refuted the speculation, clarifying that he was not upset at having been denied a ticket in lieu of Chandrakant Khaire, who has been named as the Sena (UBT) candidate.

### TMC dares BJP to launch scheme like 'Lakshmir Bhandar'

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Trinamool Congress (TMC) general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday said the entitlements in West Bengal's 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme will be doubled from April 2024 and dared the Bharatiya Janata Party to implement the social welfare scheme in States ruled by the party.

In this year's budget, the assistance was increased to ₹1,000 from ₹500 for the general category, and to ₹1,200 from ₹1,000 for the SC/ST category. The State government had spent ₹25,000 crore for the scheme to empower women, Mr. Banerjee said.

He dared the BJP to offer cooking gas cylinders free of cost. "[If the] government ... promises cooking gas cylinders free of cost for the next five years, I will take back candidates from the 42 constituencies..." he said while addressing a gathering at Mathurapur in South 24 Parganas district.

He also raised the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a conversation with a BJP Lok Sabha candidate, saying ₹3,000 crore in cash confiscated during ED raids would be distributed among the people. "If ₹3,000 crore were to be divided among 140 crore Indians, every person would get ₹21. The BJP is asking for people's votes in exchange for only ₹21."

Mr. Banerjee also took a swipe at the investigation agencies. "... the ED-CBI should enter the poll fray. The BJP has not been able to find a candidate for Diamond Harbour."

## BJP fields ex-BJD MP Bhartruhari Mahtab from Cuttack LS seat

Satvasundar Barik  
BHUBANESWAR

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Saturday fielded Bhartruhari Mahtab, veteran MP from Cuttack, as its candidate for the Cuttack Lok Sabha seat, days after he joined the party following his resignation from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD).

Mr. Mahtab has represented the seat six times in a row on a BJD ticket since 1998. He resigned from the

BJD on March 22, alleging amassing of wealth by individuals in the party.

He was reportedly being sidelined within the BJD. He joined the BJP along with former Berhampur MP Sidhant Mohapatra and tribal litterateur Damayanti Beshra in New Delhi.

The BJP central election committee also approved the names of Sukanta Kumar Panigrahi and Rabintra Narayan Behera for the Kandhamal and Jajpur Lok

Sabha constituencies, respectively. With this, the BJP has announced candidates for all 21 parliamentary seats in Odisha.

Mr. Mahtab, son of former CM late Harekrushna Mahtab, edits the Odia daily Prajatantra, published from Cuttack.

Mr. Panigrahi lost in the 2014 general election. Mr. Behera is an old party member and the upcoming election will mark his electoral debut.

## BJP replaces Sunny Deol with three-time MLA from Gurdaspur

The Hindu Bureau  
CHANDIGARH

Days after the BJP said it would contest the Lok Sabha poll in Punjab alone, the party on Saturday announced names for six of the 13 seats in the State.

The BJP has dropped Sunny Deol, its sitting MP from Gurdaspur, and fielded Dinesh Singh Babhu, a three-time MLA and former Deputy Speaker of the Assembly, instead. Preneet

Kaur, former Congress leader and MP, will contest from Patiala.

Taranjit Singh Sandhu, who was the Ambassador of India to the United States, will contest from Amritsar. Former Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Lok Sabha MP Sushil Kumar Rinku, who recently joined the BJP, has been fielded from Jalandhar. In 2023, Mr. Rinku joined AAP after leaving the Congress ahead of the Jaland-

har parliamentary byelection, which he won.

Ravneet Singh Bittu, former Congress leader and Lok Sabha MP from Ludhiana who joined the BJP on March 27, is the party's Ludhiana candidate.

Hans Raj Hans, BJP MP from North West Delhi, has been shifted to Punjab, where he will contest from the Faridkot (SC) constituency. Elections to Punjab's 13 Lok Sabha seats will be held on June 1.

# Keeping the Jat farmer swagger alive, RLD chief Jayant walks a fine line with BJP

Anuj Kumar  
HAPUR

With the Bharat Ratna having been officially and posthumously bestowed on former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, his grandson, the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief, Chaudhary Jayant Singh will share the stage in Meerut on Sunday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the first time after he joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Having secured two Lok Sabha tickets, one Cabinet berth in Uttar Pradesh, and one MLA in the State, political observers feel that Mr. Singh has got a good bargain from the BJP, and is now following a calibrated approach to keep his own core constituency intact.

At the Amroha rally for the BJP candidate, Kanwar Singh Tanwar, earlier this

week, Mr. Singh was the star speaker. Before he took the mic, a local BJP leader was screaming, "Jai Shri Ram". Mr. Singh calmly opened his address with "Ram Ram ji".

#### Wrestling for farmers

The next stopover was Bijnor, where the RLD has fielded its MLA Chandan Chauhan. There, Mr. Singh told the raucous crowd that the figure of 400 does not just mean the number of Lok Sabha seats that the NDA is confident of winning. "It also means that the State-approved price of sugarcane will also cross ₹400 per quintal after the polls," he said, looking across at his BJP counterparts, who had no other option but to nod.

His party had zero MPs in the 2019 Lok Sabha, but Mr. Singh nonchalantly claimed that when the two



Locals at Chaudhary Charan Singh's statue, unveiled by George Fernandes in December 1990, in Noorpur village on Saturday; (right) Mahavir Singh shows the space where the ex-PM was born in 1902. ANUJ KUMAR

biggest wrestlers of the region join hands, there is no contest left.

#### Aggressive edge

This means three things. One, Mr. Singh is not buying into the age-old polarising agenda of his new ally. RLD posters still carry the images of Maulana Azad and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Second, he is nurturing the Gurjar vote base. Both Mr. Tanwar and Mr. Chauhan hail from a community that is often hyphenated with Jats; those who understand the caste politics of the region, however, know that the two agrarian castes share a turbulent relationship in the battle for political clout here.



Third, he is retaining an aggressive stance, what he calls keeping the "haua (fear)" of the Jat farmer swagger alive.

#### Disarming accusations

Mr. Singh has dismantled the parivarvad (dynasty) jibe that the BJP used to make against his party by giving a ticket to veteran

party worker Rajkumar Sangwan from his family's stronghold, Baghat. Now, he is using the same stick of dynasty politics against Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, who was, till recently, his partner.

The RLD leader is carefully drawing parallels between his grandfather and the Modi-led government. While comparing the two, he emphasises their common ichchhashakti (political will) to fulfil their promises and anti-graft stance.

#### Farmer agitation fallout

At Noorpur (Hapur), the birthplace of Chaudhary Charan Singh, the locals rejoiced at the award given to the son of their soil on Saturday. The sense was that, whatever numbers the BJP can get in the Lok Sabha, it cannot do without the RLD in western U.P. "It was the gain of the farmers' stir-

Even if they win all seats in the region, we can force them to roll back any anti-farmer policy," said Bijendra Singh, an elder member of the Tewatia clan.

Mahavir Singh, the oldest surviving member of the clan who had closely interacted with Chaudhary Charan Singh, said the alliance had given RLD strength. The SP was playing tricks with RLD but it had to make the BJP listen to the farmers' voice, he said, adding, "The immediate problem is stray cattle and pricing of urea. I am wary of the BJP people who keep educating me on gau mata."

Mr. Bijendra said the comparison of "Chaudhary sahib with Mr. Modi" was misplaced. "Chaudhary sahib didn't have an autocratic streak and it is his legacy that minorities feel secure in this area."

RLD national secretary Kuldeep Ujjwal said the farmers have genuinely gained whenever the RLD has been in power.

"We have joined the NDA for the cause of farmers. At the same time, we are for political representation for minorities and will continue to give tickets for legislative bodies to our Muslim brothers," he said.

Padam Singh, the BJP-supported pradhan (village head) of Noorpur, said the alliance would prevent the division of the Jat votes. In the neighbouring Muslim-dominated Bhameda, pradhan Mohd. Aslam said his community sees Mr. Singh as a "madhyam (medium)" to connect with the BJP. "There is no discrimination in the government schemes and the RLD will hopefully continue to provide us political representation," he said.



# Classifieds

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

# Matrimonial

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

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## BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

### COSMOPOLITAN

**ARYAVYSYA, 28Y**, 5ft 5inch, DM Neurology, very beautiful bride seeks suitable groom, Jayasimha Parinaya Vedika, Whatsapp: 9000803380

**DOCTOR**

**MD ANESTHESIOLOGY** Doctor, 1989 born 165cm fair, beautiful, cultured and homely. Settled in Chennai. Father Doctor Kerala Nair - Mother Tamil CSI. Doctor and Engineer's groom preferred. Ct: 9840050381/ 9840985383

**DOCTOR GIRL** 30/156 MBBS MD General Medicine, seeks Doctors/ Suitable grooms 9447493034, 9497168001

**VANNIAR, AFFLUENT** Family (Divo) aged 33 years, Dr. MS (O&G) seeks same profession bridegroom, sub caste no bar. Call: 98941 34981

**NAIDU/MBC** 24/ 167 Fair, MBBS, Avitam, Makaram, both parents doctor, own hospital seeks M.S./M.D clinical doctor groom from affluent/doctor family TN/Pondy contact: 6380069015 / 9790286125.

**SC AD, 30 yrs**, MBBS, Doctor, working in NHS, UK, Hashtam, Kannai seeks groom preferably in UK 900301702

**INTERCASTE (NAIDU-SC)** 30/F doctor divorced no child. Wanted Groom - TN/ 30s/ divorced no child/ Caste no bar. Ph: 9442145470

**TAMIL HINDU SC AD** 32year Doctor MBBS, DCH, DNB (Pediatrics) working in Pondicherry seeking suitable groom Contact: 9443634719

**PARENTS OF Obs & Gynaecologist MBBS MS FMAS (OBG)** 32/ 156 Gaurava Naidu invite alliance from suitable groom doctors/ business/ EX service CNB 9159150101/ doctorgm @ Gmail.com

## DOCTOR

**MUDALIAR DR.** Subashree Balakrishnan MBBS / Doctor Age 32 Ayilam/ Kadagam sks Doctor Groom only 9176514141

**HINDU NADAR** Chennai, Only Daughter, Fair & Charm Girl, MBBS, MD-YI, 24/160, Rich Affluent, well-Educated family seeks suitable Groom with clean habits from Hindu Naidu only. Ct: 94447 59246 ct: 94449 68235

## KANNADA

**WANTED Doctor** Groom from Kannada Devaraga Chettyar with PG for a PG NEET doing Bride 165 cm 25yrs fair looking. Ph: 9443729425.

## NRI

**WANTED GROOM** working in USA for a Tamil, Naidu girl, 28 years working in IT USA. Caste no bar. Contact: naturalpath93@gmail.com

## TAMIL

**ELITE TAMIL** Muslim 37 B.E seeks qualified, employed, never married Tamil Muslim Groom. 9444235779

**Govt Doctor** M.D 37yrs, never married Fair, seeks RC/ CSI Christian Groom Doctor, Engr 9444808870/ 8072910380

**RC 34/ 165 MDS** Associate Prof Dental college Chennai seeks PG Dst/ Engr/ IT Caste no bar. Contact: 9444157888

**CHRISTIAN GROOM** professionally qualified from well to do family, in India/Abroad, for a well qualified CSI Christian girl age 34 fair, beautiful, from affluent family, working in a reputed international institution Chennai as Senior Manager. Parents Contact: 9840101011.

**RC NADAR** unmarried Bride, 34/57, M.E., SWE seeks BC/FC unmarried Groom. Ct: 98868 88775.

**CHRISTIAN NADAR:** Girl-27, MBBS, DCH, Seeks Doctors / or Any Suitable Other Professionals Ok: 93635 70731

**NADAR 33/56** MBA working in Chennai Elite Family seeks qualified Groom working in Chennai. CNB 9962991972

**VANNIAR FAIR** Girl Uthiram 25/166 M.S. (Engg) Australia. Father S.E (Retd) TNEB Seeks Smart handsome groom with M.S (Engt) Ct: 97894 61060

**VANNIYAR KULA** Kshatriya Hindu Avitam 27/158, B.E seeks Well Settled Groom. Contact: 9840028346

**HINDU TAMIL** Veg 39/165 MS(UK) Divorcee No issues Entrepreneur, Chennai seeks Veg Groom 38-41yrs well settled affluent family. Ct: 9884816309

**GROOM WANTED** Elite Mudaliyar, 33yrs, LL.M. Well Educated background in Chennai. Ct: 982791888/ 939691888

**HINDU DEVAR** 39Yrs B.Com MBA 1st marriage seeks suitable Groom from FC/BC caste only. CT: 9442001440.

**B.Tech (IT) MBA (IIM-C)** Tamil/Telugu Chettiar girl 33/170 AGM/MNC seeks suitable Edu Groom CNB 8300665039

**HINDU SC/AD** 31/160 BE, MS in US, employed in US HB Visa seeks suitable groom from US/CANADA/UK Ct: 8073030092

**HINDU SAMBAVAR** Girl fair 35/163cm graduate State government employee 50 Thousand Salary. Seeks Suitable Bridegroom Contact: 7845213551

**IYER-VADAMA**, Bharadwaja Gothram, 31Y, Fair, 5ft. M.S.(IT), working in MNC (UK), seeking groom in the UK. Ct: 9884024668/ 9080512599

**SC ARUNTHATHIYAR** Thiruvathurai 9-9-1985 MSc employed 1st Marriage seeks groom. CNB. Ct:9150331377

**TAMIL YADAVA** CNB - A Business family from Ooty wants Groom for their Daughter 25 Years very Fair Bachelor in Fashion Designing Sadayam / Kumbam Business / Family from Yadava/Pillai/Mudaliyar.CT:9443115000

**HINDU SC AD** 28 yrs MBA Chennai Bride seeks same community Chennai qualified employed below 34 yrs Life partner groom. Ct 7338901952 Whatsapp

**AGAMUDIYAR** : 26y, Fair, Caste No Bar, MBBS, DCH, Seeks Doctor ok. Any Other Suitable Groom - Chennai / Any Dist : 7824023030

**HINDU MARUTHUVAR** 30/159cm CA Audit- Fair Legally Divorced Seeks Groom Caste No Bar 8667868854

**PILLAI 29/165** BE MBA(IIM) Fair good-looking girl Uthirattathi BIG4 consulting Chennai looking for groom with similar qualifications. Ct: 7358116081, arasubous08@gmail.com

**TAMIL YADAVA** - Tirunelveli based - Chennai settled - parents seeks alliance for their Daughter from same native, age 28, Kannai, Chithirai - 3rd patham, B.A.L.L.B(HONS), practising at Madras High Court expecting Supportive and Preferably Employed / Professional / Progressive bridegroom. 9884933237

**NAIDU, 50YRS**, beautiful, Unmarried, employed seeks suitable Groom. Age/ Caste No Bar. Ct: 7092569171.

**NAIDU GIRL**, Good Looking 28/165cm Aswini, BE, ME, pursuing PhD Doctoral studies in Satellite Communications Neuroimaging Computing - Europe seeking suitable Groom PhD / MS in IVY League Colleges in USA from good family background. Contact: 98401 03686 / bvrvi1962@gmail.com

## TAMIL

**MD(ANAES)** 36Y 165cm Chettiar (Caste No Bar) Divorcee, fair, slim. Seeks well-educated settled groom from Chennai-934509363.

**GROOM WANTED** Elite Mudaliyar, 25yrs, MA(HRM), Own Textile business in Chennai. Ct: 971009399/ 9710091999

**HINDU VANNIYAR** 26/165cm, B.COM, CA, Elite Family, well settled. Seeks Suitable Groom, CNB. Ct: 9047192999

**HINDU GROOM** with moral values for well to do Mudaliar girl BE/25y/ 155cm working at Bengaluru. Ct: 7975421774

**NADAR PRETTY** Girl Rich Family Divorcee No Child Seeks Groom 38-38/5-6ft income 1/L Chennai Only 9940456098

**45,BA HINDU** Divorcee, 2 Children Very Fair,Seeks Below 50yrs Good Family Back Ground Chennai - 9025791355

**34yrs BA** Govt. Bank employee seeks Govt Job groom age upto 37, caste no bar. Ct: 9597061541

**MUDALIAR 26/163**, Beautiful, MBBS, MS-OG,Doing, Father Builder, Elite Family, CNB. 9363986547, 9363767415

**MUDALIAR:** 25/ 1. Fair & Beautiful, B. Tech, Accutense, Sr. Analyst, Bangalore, Rs-200000 PA, Well settled Family - Seeks groom India / Abroad - 8925019776

**HINDU NADAR** Fair 162cm 28yr BE Chennai Bride Seeks Engineer Groom Work in Chennai /Bangalore 93810 44905

## BRIDES WANTED

### BUSINESS

**AGE 37** Handsome, Comfortable Groom needs VIP Girl and first Marriage, Remarriage, Divorce. Ct: 740148982

### COSMOPOLITAN

**GAVARA, 28Y**, Jr. Doctor in Delhi AIIMS, Very handsome Groom seeks suitable bride, Jayasimha Parinaya Vedika, Whatsapp: 9000803380

### DIVORCEE

**SEEKING BRIDE** for 60/178 cm issueless groom - she is ready to embrace a association and build a meaningful relationship. If you are a well-settled, kind-hearted woman seeking a loving and committed partner, we invite you to reach out. Serious inquiries are welcome. GSM 88387 44120

**COIMBATORE, 41/155CMS**, employed in MNC expecting educated girl preferably a doctor/ a professional/ a well settled family. Contact: 9840211389.

**Bangalore based Own Business** 52/ 173 cm Naidu - Brahmin Inter caste Father of 2 Girls : 22 Employed, 16 having Special Needs. seeks Divorcee / Widow 36 to 45 yrs, Caste No Bar. WhatsApp 95382 98949. Email: vjrnjb@gmail.com

**Looking for Hindu** veg life partner around 40 yrs, for a divorcee man of 50 yrs settled MNC chennai. Contact: 9840211389.

## DOCTOR

**KAMMA** Pursuing MD Radiology Chennai Mugasra 174 cms 50c 9.9.93 very fair & cultured, seeking alliance from PG KAMMA DOCTOR BRIDES only. Ph: 9396366200

**HINDU NADAR**, 26/165cm, MBBS (ENT), working in UK. Seeks Suitable Bride Ct: K.Raman Nadar 9380791999

**BRAHMIN BUSINESS/ AFFLUENT FAMILY**

A Corporate and Big Business Brahmin Family in South India invites alliance for their daughter 30/165 (who has finished masters from top class university). Matching from Affluent Family or Corporate Group.

The Boy should be tall, well educated from big business family / corporate group

megawedding2021@gmail.com

**BRIDEGROOM WANTED SENGUNTHA MUDALIAR, 26, BTECH MBA, Fair looking, into father's business, family is financially well off, looking for a business family match within Pondicherry (or) around in Pondicherry only**

**9443469444**

**ELITE MUDALIAR** 33yrs PG divorcee seeks Employed or Business Groom in Chennai Caste no bar. Ct:9025049388

**YADHAVA VEG** 29/172cm B.Tech MBA bangalore seeks bangalore based USA Groom CNB Ct: Geetham 9884858014

**DOCTOR MD (Pathology)**, DCH, 38 yrs, Hindu BC, Divorcee without child, placed in private medical college seeks well settled, compatible & affectionate Groom. CNB. Ct:805686890

**Reputed Senguntha Mudaliar fmlly seeks Chennai based MD/ MS/MDS / M.Tech boy for their 27/5/6/5/5 fair slim nonveg MDS girl. 9444274644**

**Vanniakula kshatriya**, 29yrs/165cms, MBBS, MD, (Paediatrics) on going, Govt. Doctor, seeks professional Groom (prof. Doctor) Ct: 9884244151.

**RC GIRL** 28/170cm Working in Microsoft Parents Kerala Settled in Chennai Own Business Seeks Chennai Based Groom from a Good Family Background. 9345262574

**Viswakarma Dentist**, 1996/172cm, own Clinic in Chennai, seeks Qualified, well settled Groom from Chennai, caste no bar Contact: 9841041225

## TELOGU

**GROOM WANTED** Rich Naidu 25yrs MBBS MS Own Hospital in Chennai Elite Business Family 971009399/ 8939691888

**KAMMA BE, MS, USA** 1980, Uthiram 160cms seeks BE MS USA Groom. Contact: 99762 54300.

**KAMMA NAIDU** 25yrs, MBBS, Elite Business family in Chennai. Seeks Suitable Groom Ct:971009399/ 9710091999

**HINDU TELUGU** Naidu Born Aug 1990/ 165cm Ph.D Scholar smart medium complexion from a Reputed family seeks well educated and settled groom in India born after 1987 Ct:9790908109

**KAMMA, 98** born/ 180cm pretty smart girl, very affluent with engineering colleges and business looking for tall handsome affluent kamma grooms preferably Chennai. 7305010105

**RICH NAIDU** 23yrs, MA(UK), Elite business family in Chennai. Seeks Suitable Groom Ct:9962791888/ 7094991999

**CHENNAI, BALIJA** naidu, only daughter, upper middle class 25yrs/57 MCA working in Bangalore seeks well educated well settled groom. Subsect no bar. Ct: 87542 29161.

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**WANTED BRIDE** in 40Yrs, entrepreneur, unmarried, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada & English knowledge for our son aged 54 Years. kb-9449817937

## MALAYALAM

**VELLALA BOY** 35/ 172, SWE(Canada). Origin: Tvandrum. Seeks alliance from an educated family (caste no bar). Preference: Malayales/ Tamilians. Cont: 9994724482/ 9994724483

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**Kerala Brahmin (Nambisan) age 37, Film Maker B.Sc., Visual Communications MFA Newyork University, TISCH School of Arts, Singapore. Currently working for Amazon Prime and Gayathri Cinemas as Director, Editor for new Projects, 5feet 10Inches, Vegetarian, Handsome, Teetotaler with Good Family Values. Family Settled in Chennai for 50 years, seeking Kerala or Tamil Brahmin, Educated, Compassionate Bride between 24-34 years.**

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Contact: 9444067776 Email: hariharan.gce@gmail.com

## MALAYALAM

**PALGHAT BRAHMIN** Aiyar Vadamal boy 34 MA 172cm Ayilam working in Andhra Pradesh seeking Alliance from Kerala / Tamilnad brides 9946451193

## PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

**BRIDE WANTED** My son is a 20-year-old boy, an Australian Citizen, Studying Software Engineering and Finance Technology at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia, 55th best in the World); Physically challenged, cannot walk, and is Super Intelligent, has Good hearing and Good vision. Ancestral Native Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. We are looking for a girl of Non-Consummation. Caste no bar, religion no bar, education no bar, money no bar, must speak Tamil or English and must be interested in taking care of her physically challenged husband. WhatsApp your details to +61 492 279 067

## TAMIL

**RC MUDALIAR** 28 MBA 170 V. Fair. Multimillionaire Seeks RC Own Factory Business V.VIP Family Caste No Bar Contact: 7550113468

**HINDU NADAR** BE, MS Texas, 27/175cm 5.00.000 p/m Seeks Suitable Bride. Contact: KA Raman Nadar 9380791999

**ALLIANCE INVITED** from parents of any Tamil Hindu girl aged 29 to 35yrs for 36yrs self propelled Teetotaler - 9043631278. 8100gops@gmail.com

**59, HANDSOME**, Clean Habits, Comfortable Person Needs Widow / Divorcee. Ct: 9360663852

**AGAMUDAYA MUDALIYAR**, 42 Mugasiradam PhD TN Govt Job Rs 1.35 Lakh P/M. 'No Broker' Divorcee: 7904550883

**NAVAKKAR, SR.ELECTIONIST**, 32/ 167cm, 4.5Lacks PA, cast no bar. Ct:9025230151

**SC, 31Years**, ME, Team Leader, 18Lacs PA. Seeks Any One Degree. Fair/Normal Family Ok. Ct:7824023030

**Tamil Mudaliar**, 33 years/183 cms Hashta Star Data Scientist MNC fair seeks good looking bride with good Family background. Contact 9441088542.

**PILLAI 36** Swathi/ Tula Govt officer Chennai 13 LPA looking bride caste no bar employed Ct 8056033532

**32 YRS** Naidu Boy 5.10, BE,MS & PhD employed in USA seeks suitable Bride Tamil / Telugu born between 1992-1995 with professional background. Contact Sairams2002@hotmail.com

**WE ARE** seeking a bride for our only son, aged 30, who holds B.Tech degree and a PG from IIM. He manages our family business in the Logistics industry with a turn over of around 15 Cr. We are primarily based in Hosur & Chennai. He has a younger sister who is yet to be married, parents intercaste marriage and managing the family business. Earlier marriage ended in a divorce. We are open to any community from a decent Hindu family. Looking forward to a prospective bride with recent photograph and horoscope. Parents from Government services are preferred. Contact us at devtara093@gmail.com

**WANTED** HOMEY girl (age 33-37) for a Hindu (Mutharaiyar) smart boy, 38yrs, 5ft 2inch, Degree holder own business. Widowed or divorcee accepted. Contact 9942365552

**RC CHRISTIAN**, 41yrs/170, B.E. Software Engineer, never married, working for mnc, Chennai, CT- 9500188067

**CSI CHRISTIAN NADAR** 30/175/B.E. M.S./Smart, Work in Europe. Seeks Suitable Bride. Contact: 8610774283

**Vanniakula Kshatriya** 48/175 M.Arch, MBA, Barani Bachelor Sr.Consultant Employed in Chennai medium fair upper middle class seeks Employed Medical, Bank & SWE bride. CT:9434-27045.

**SAIVA PILLAI,36,Rohini**, IT, 35K pm, Madurai, Own House. Caste No Bar. Ct: 8056588515

**NADAR, SECOND** Marriage, 47.B.E. 15L CTC. Fair, Seeks Bride, Chennai. Call: 9962355158

## TAMIL

**CHRISTIAN CSI** Protestant Nadar Boy, 29/5.9. B.Tech, MBA, IT MNC, Chennai Ct: 9445447952

**CHRISTIAN NADAR**, Doctor, Divorcee 35yrs/178cm, MBBS, Dip in Cardiology better earning lives in Nagercoil seeks qualified/ Divorced Bride. 9003983230

**RC CHRISTIAN**, 41yrs/170, B.E. Software Engineer, never married, working for mnc, Chennai, CT- 9500188067

**CSI CHRISTIAN NADAR** 30/175/B.E. M.S./Smart, Work in Europe. Seeks Suitable Bride. Contact: 8610774283

**Vanniakula Kshatriya** 48/175 M.Arch, MBA, Barani Bachelor Sr.Consultant Employed in Chennai medium fair upper middle class seeks Employed Medical, Bank & SWE bride. CT:9434-27045.

**SAIVA PILLAI,36,Rohini**, IT, 35K pm, Madurai, Own House. Caste No Bar. Ct: 8056588515

**NADAR, SECOND** Marriage, 47.B.E. 15L CTC. Fair, Seeks Bride, Chennai. Call: 9962355158

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# 'This poll is about preserving secular state'

Kerala CM says a diverse coalition of believers and non-believers won India's freedom and founded a secular state; he criticises BJP-RSS combine's politics of 'violence and hatred' and adds that Congress 'big brother attitude' is an impediment in bringing secular, regional forces on same platform

G. Anand  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan has underscored that the upcoming Lok Sabha election is a referendum on "preserving India's secular democracy" and little else.

In an e-mail interview with *The Hindu* on Friday, Mr. Vijayan articulated the pivotal nature of the 2024 Lok Sabha election ahead of the launch of his 24-day tour through Kerala's 20 Lok Sabha constituencies on Saturday.

Mr. Vijayan said it was reductive to depict the Left Democratic Front's (LDF) staunch resistance to the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act

as a "question about minority or majority". Instead, the "question is about secularism", he added.

The CPI(M) veteran pointed out that a broad and diverse coalition of believers and non-believers won India's freedom and founded a secular state. He said the Constitution did not envisage religion as a criterion for citizenship.

## 'Defections a worry'

Mr. Vijayan said the Congress's disintegration was not in the interest of the CPI(M)-led LDF. However, pursuing a soft Hindutva line would not keep the more extreme BJP from the door. Only an uncompromising position against communal politics could



Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan embarked on a 24-day campaign trail across Kerala on Saturday. THULASI KAKKAT

defeat the BJP, he said.

Mr. Vijayan said defections from secular and democratic parties empowered the right wing, which was disconcerting.

Mr. Vijayan said Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's candidature from Waya-

nad would have no effect on Kerala in 2024. The people of Wayanad would evaluate him for his work as an MP, which was hardly any. He said Mr. Gandhi's constituents were sceptical about the latter's "presence and performance" in

the Lok Sabha on issues such as human-wildlife conflict, CAA, and Ayodhya.

"If the Congress is keen on fighting the BJP, it would contest directly against BJP candidates. What message are you giving to the Indian public if even your topmost leaders are reluctant to fight the BJP?" Mr. Vijayan asked.

He said the Congress, as the biggest party in the Opposition, seemed unable to bring secular and regional forces on the same platform. "Its big brother attitude was an impediment," Mr. Vijayan said.

## BJP's actions instil fear

Mr. Vijayan rejected the BJP's accusation that the LDF had sown seeds of fear

in the minority community to reap electoral dividends. "It is the BJP-RSS combine's politics of violence and hatred, and policies of discrimination and profiling, such as the CAA, which are instilling fear in various sections of the Indian society," he said.

Mr. Vijayan said the Congress-BJP recriminatory campaign, often bordering on the personal, would have no traction among voters. "They are barking up the wrong tree," he said. 'Nava Kerala Sadas', the government's outreach programme, had stirred people to question the Congress-led United Democratic Front's jarring silence about the Union government's discrimination against Kerala, he said.

## After much drama, Congress announces candidate for Kolar

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

After much internal turmoil and high drama, the Congress central election committee on Saturday approved the candidature of K.V. Gowtham, president of the Bengaluru Central District Congress Committee, for Kolar reserved (SC) constituency for the Lok Sabha election. With this, the Congress has announced candidates for all the 28 constituencies in Karnataka.



K.V. Gowtham

The AICC had to delay the announcement of the candidate for Kolar owing to factionalism in the Kolar District Congress Commit-

tee. Mr. Gowtham, former State Youth Congress and NSUI office-bearer, belongs to the SC 'left' sect.

Food and Civil Supplies Minister K.H. Muniyappa had lobbied hard for a ticket for his son-in-law Chikka Peddanna, which had been strongly opposed by some legislators. Some supported the candidature of Dalit leader M.C. Muniappa.

The AICC's decision to field a "neutral" candidate who does not belong to either camps is seen as a setback for both.

## Court acquits three accused in madrasa teacher murder case

The Hindu Bureau  
KASARAGOD

The District Principal Sessions Court here acquitted three accused in a case involving the murder of Mohammed Riyas Maulavi, 27, a teacher at Pazhaya Choori Madrasa, due to lack of evidence.

Ajesh alias Appu, 29, Nithin Kumar, 28, and Akhilesh alias Akhil, 34, all hailing from Kasaragod in Kerala, were absolved of all charges by the court.

The verdict was deli-

vered after three adjournments. The trial, which began in 2019, faced delay due to the pandemic and transfer of judges.

The court identified eight reasons for the acquittal, emphasising the lack of evidence linking the accused to the crime.

Among the reasons cited, the court noted the prosecution's inability to prove allegations of the accused having Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh affiliations. Additionally, the court found insufficient

evidence to support claims that hatred against the Muslim community motivated the murder.

Riyas was murdered at his residence in the mosque on March 20, 2017.

"In this case, the courts did not grant bail to the accused for the past seven years. The accused were not connected with Riyas. Even the police chargesheet clearly mentions that the crime was an attempt to create communal unrest in the region," Riyas' relatives told reporters.

## IN BRIEF



### Special Category Status among 9 poll promises of A.P. Cong.

Andhra Pradesh Congress president Y.S. Sharmila on Saturday unveiled the 'Nine Guarantees' of the party and exhorted cadres to work together for the victory of its candidates in the election. The nine guarantees include grant of Special Category Status to Andhra Pradesh for 10 years, a monthly aid of ₹8,500 to women from the underprivileged sections, waiver of farm loan of up to ₹2 lakh, free KG to PG education under fee reimbursement scheme, and a monthly pension of ₹6,000 for the physically challenged persons.

### 60 acres of forest affected by fire at BRT Tiger Reserve

Nearly 60 acres of forest were affected by a major fire, ostensibly triggered by some unidentified miscreants, at Biligiri Ranganathaswamy Temple (BRT) Tiger Reserve, in Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka on Saturday. The fire was first noticed around 9.30 a.m. Extreme heat and wind were fanning the flames, according to authorities. The fire was brought under control by evening. Authorities said the miscreants had lit the fire to the ridge line near a dam in the Byalur wildlife range. A case has been registered under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.

### Shocked to receive I-T notice though case was settled: DKS

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar on Saturday said he had received an Income Tax notice though the case against him was a "settled matter". However, he did not give details of the specific case in question. Accusing the Centre of harassing the Opposition, Mr. Shivakumar alleged that the BJP was afraid of the Congress and the INDIA bloc. "I got a notice from the Income Tax Department, which is already a settled matter. I was shocked," Mr. Shivakumar told reporters in Bengaluru.

## Kannada film *Blink* thwarts 'Premayugam Boys' dominance in Karnataka theatres

Vivek M.V.  
BENGALURU

Between February and March, the Malayalam film industry produced three blockbusters. The romantic comedy *Premalu*, the horror drama *Bramayugam*, and the survival drama *Manjummel Boys* broke records. Such was the dominance of these movies that fans online called the phenomenon 'Premayugam Boys', the Indian version of Hollywood's famous 'Barbenheimer', involving *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer*.

In this kind of tough competitive market, sci-fi Kannada film from debutant Srinidhi Bengaluru -



A still from the Kannada movie *Blink*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

*Blink* - was released on March 8 alongside two big Kannada films: *Karataka Damanaka* and *Ranganayaka*.

With a time-travel concept enhanced by tight writing and fine performances, *Blink* emerged as the unlikely winner at the Kannada box office. Start-

ing as the clear underdog with just 17 shows across Karnataka in the first week, the movie in its third week, secured 87 shows, a commendable feat for a film made by unheralded names.

Producer Ravichandra AJ, a data engineer, banked on clever promotional strategies. "We ensured at least 30 videos of the audience response were out on our different social media sites every day. We shared a form on social media, asking people to mention the city they wish to see the movie. We got around 25,000 responses. Based on the data, we emailed multiplexes, asking them to provide more shows. They responded positively," explains Mr. Ravichandra.

"When we interacted with people outside theatres showing *Blink*, many said they had watched a Kannada film after 4-5 years. We are in danger of losing our audiences," says Mr. Srinidhi.

## Will support NDA, says Paras; stops short of calling truce with Chirag

Press Trust of India  
PATNA

Former Union Minister Pashupati Kumar Paras on Saturday made it clear that he will "continue to support the NDA" in the Lok Sabha polls, but fell short of calling a truce with nephew Chirag Paswan.

Mr. Paras, who has been avoiding the press since he returned to Bihar after giving up his ministerial berth, made a statement on the social media site X. Tagging Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president J.P. Nadda and party's Bihar in-charge Vinod Tawde, Mr. Paras wrote in Hindi, "Our Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party is a part of NDA and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is our leader".

## 'Modi's decision'

He said Mr. Modi's "decision is supreme for us. Our full support will be there to ensure that the NDA crosses the 400-mark and wins all 40 seats in Bihar".

Mr. Paras had quit the Union Cabinet after the NDA gave five seats to Mr. Chirag's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), including the Hajipur seat, while leaving him high and dry.

His party had come into being in 2021 after he split the Lok Janshakti Party founded by his late brother and Mr. Chirag's father, Ram Vilas Paswan.

Although Mr. Paras had then succeeded in getting the support of all LJP MPs,



Pashupati Kumar Paras made a statement on the social media site X. FILE PHOTO

except Mr. Chirag, they have now deserted him, trying to curry favour with his nephew or exploring prospects in the BJP.

Speculation had been rife that Mr. Paras, who had been hopeful that the BJP would back him for a second consecutive term in Hajipur, might enter the fray as a rebel candidate and get support from the INDIA bloc.

However, on Friday the RJD, the largest Opposition party in Bihar, made it clear that it would field its own candidate from the reserved seat, which late Paswan had represented several times and now his son is contesting, to drive home the point that Mr. Chirag, and not Mr. Paras, was the true heir to his father's legacy.

The BJP has been of the view that the nephew and the uncle should "come together", though Mr. Chirag has maintained that the ball was in the court of Mr. Paras, who was "the one to cause a split in the family and the party".

## 'Will announce my decision on April 3'

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU

The keenly watched political move of Independent MP Sumalatha Ambareesh, which could impact the equations in Mandya, will be known on April 3.

"I will announce my decision on April 3 at a public meeting in Mandya after consulting with my well-wishers," she told the media here on Saturday.

The actor-turned-politician is upset that the BJP did not give her ticket from Mandya. The seat has gone to the BJP's ally JD(S), which has fielded former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy from the Vokkaliga heartland.



Sumalatha Ambareesh

She had contested the 2019 Lok Sabha election from Mandya with the BJP's support and won.

Asked if she got any invitation from other parties, she said: "I am in touch with all parties. I am getting phone calls."

## Temperature crosses 40 degree Celsius mark in Kerala

Dhinesh Kallungal  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

For the first time since 2019, mercury crossed the 40 degrees Celsius mark in Kerala with Palakkad recording the season's highest temperature on Friday and Saturday.

The temperatures recorded at the meteorological station in Palakkad were 40.4 degrees Celsius and 40 degree Celsius, respectively, on Saturday and Friday. The station had earlier recorded 40.2 degree Celsius and 40.8 degree Celsius in 2019 (on March 28 and 29, respectively). Vellanikkara in Thrissur was another station that recorded 40.4 degree Celsius in 2019.

Meanwhile, large parts of the State continue to simmer in the heat as summer thundershowers remain elusive, especially in central and northern Kerala. The summer rain is around 69% deficient in Kerala with the State netting only 10.1 mm of rainfall so far against the average of 32.4 mm during the period from March 1 to 30.

Adding to the woes of the public, the humidity level in the atmosphere is also ruling high. Though some thundershowers are expected in southern districts by next week, a widespread shower is unlikely across the State, say India Meteorological Department (IMD) sources.

## Fish otolith ornaments make market debut

Otoliths are biomineralised ear stones that help fish hear and provide it a sense of balance; it is the first time ornaments from otoliths are being produced and sold in an organised manner in India

K A Martin  
KOCHI

Otoliths from fish otoliths, named 'Sea gems', have made a market debut, thanks to efforts of a group of enthusiastic fishermen in Vizhinjam, trained by scientists from Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI).

The otolith ornaments crafted by fishermen under self-help group Sea Gems Mahila Sahrudam Group recently went on display at Kerala Arts and Crafts Village showroom in Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram. Fish otoliths are biomineralised ear stones



Jewel from the sea: A file photo of earrings made of fish otoliths exhibited at CMFRI. THULASI KAKKAT

that help fish hear and provide it a sense of balance. Otoliths are important in fish studies as they have species-specific shapes and grow throughout their life.

This is the first time ornaments from fish

otoliths, known to the Romans and Egyptians as lucky stones and which continue to be used in countries like Brazil, are being produced and sold in an organised and sustainable manner in India, said CMFRI sources. Sameena Naseer, who

heads the Sea Gems MHG, said that CMFRI scientists Abdussamad and Surya S. explained the group, all drawn from the coastal community in Vizhinjam, about otoliths and their unique qualities.

A score of fishermen expressed their desire to be trained and brought together for a training programme.

"The results have been a pleasant surprise. The fact that these ornaments are from a unique raw material makes it all the better", she said.

T.U. Sreepadas, CEO of Crafts Village, said that the idea is unique because it has come out of a research institute in support of fishermen.



From Page One

## CAA Rules silent on fate of rejected applicants

Lakhs of people belonging to the Scheduled Caste community migrated from Bangladesh (earlier East Pakistan) before and after the 1971 war with Pakistan. Many came without any papers but subsequently acquired all documents proving their Indian citizenship, such as passports and voter identity cards.

Ms. Thakur, a Matua leader nominated to the Rajya Sabha by the Trinamool Congress in February, said that the Rules were akin to making people slaves. "No one has applied for CAA here. Even Union Minister Santanu Thakur has not applied yet, his ancestors are from Bangladesh. If an application is rejected, people may end up in detention centres," she said.

According to the Rules, the applicant must declare the country they belong to along with their "date of entry into India", and upload on the citizenship portal any of the nine documents issued by government authorities in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh to support their claim. This means that though the CAA was envisaged for undocumented migrants belonging to the six communities from the three neighbouring countries, the Rules indicate that documents are essential.

## Four receive Bharat Ratna posthumously

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP national president J.P. Nadda, Congress president and Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar were among those who were present at the ceremony in the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"As the ninth Prime Minister of India, Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao led far-reaching economic reforms. Earlier, in his youth, he had taken an active part in the freedom struggle, especially against the misrule and oppression in the Nizam-ruled Hyderabad," the official handle of the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X.

Recalling the late Charan Singh's role during the freedom struggle in another post on X, President Murmu said, "His contribution to zamindari abolition and land reforms, and his deep understanding of the economy, especially rural and agricultural economy are respectfully remembered."

President Murmu said Dr. Swaminathan played a major role in making India self-sufficient in food production.

Recalling the simple living and selfless actions of Karpoori Thakur, the official handle of Rashtrapati Bhavan said: "Working tirelessly to improve the lives of the disadvantaged people, he commanded high regard and had earned the honorific, 'Jan-Nayak'."

## Chargesheet filed against NewsClick

Under Section 43 D of the UAPA, the time granted to file a chargesheet in a case extends from 90 days to up to 180 days. In the case in hand, the court granted three extensions to the special cell of the Delhi Police to file the chargesheet.

The matter pertains to an FIR registered by the Delhi Police against the news portal, under Sections 13, 16, 17, 18 and 22 of the anti-terror UAPA pertaining to unlawful activities for raising of funds for "a terrorist act". They were also booked for threatening witness under Sections 153 A and 120 B of the IPC.

The FIR was registered days after *The New York Times* published a report on August 8, 2023, that the portal received money from American businessman Neville Roy Singham, an "active member of the propaganda department of the Communist Party of China" to distort the map of India by projecting Kashmir and Arunachal Pradesh as disputed territory. The police said the accused received foreign funds of ₹115 crore.

## Zakaat helps free jail inmates during Ramzan

"We have been active since 2007-08 and have seen cases in which family members have no idea of the whereabouts of the prison inmate. It is only much later, maybe after weeks or months, that they get to know that they are in jail. The situation is so bad that families cannot even afford to pay ₹500. The aim and object of our organisation is to help everyone. Of our varied activities, we also work as facilitators for prisoner release," he says.

Like Ms. Pasha, Ghazala Ahmed (name changed upon request), an entrepreneur, too has been earmarking a part of her *zakaat* funds for this cause. She says that Islam prescribes the freeing of prisoners within the legal system, and it is considered an important act. "Usually, people give *zakaat* to madrasas and those in need, especially poor relatives. But the goodness here is twofold: a religious injunction is being fulfilled, and we help a family in dire need.

The All India Milli Council, another socio-religious group, has secured the release of 68 inmates lodged in prisons in and around Hyderabad, since last year, according to its office-bearer Mufti Omar Abedeen Qasmi Madani.

# ED takes statement of Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot in excise policy case

Gahlot was among those who drafted policy; AAP leader Atishi says the questioning is part of attempt by BJP to break AAP as it could not defeat the party the democratic way; BJP expresses shock at the alleged involvement of a 'silent Minister'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Saturday recorded the statement of Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot in connection with the excise policy case, in which the agency arrested Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

Mr. Gahlot was one of the Ministers who had drafted the excise policy. He reached the ED headquarters around 11.45 a.m. and was questioned for about five hours.

After recording his statement, Mr. Gahlot told presspersons that he answered whatever questions he was asked and that there was no cross-questioning. "I have never been part of the Goa election campaign and I am unaware of what happened," he said.

He confirmed that AAP leader and accused in the case, Vijay Nair, lived in the bungalow allotted to him at Civil Lines. "The government bungalow was allotted to me but I have always stayed in my private resi-



**Detailed inquiry:** Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot speaks to the media after appearing before the ED for questioning in connection with the excise policy case, in New Delhi on Saturday. ANI

dence in Vasant Kunj because my wife and kids didn't want to move from there," he said, refuting allegations of corruption in the matter.

The ED's chargesheet mentioned that some meetings related to the excise policy happened at Mr. Gahlot's residence.

Reacting to the questioning of Mr. Gahlot, senior AAP leader Atishi said

it was part of a continued attempt by the BJP to break the party as it could not defeat the AAP the democratic way. "Today it was Mr. Gahlot, tomorrow it will be me or Saurabh Bharadwaj or other elected AAP representatives. It is all an effort to break the party by using the probe agencies to make false cases," she said.

The BJP said that Mr. Gahlot was a comparative-

ly silent Minister in the AAP government and that it was beyond shocking that his role was being probed. "The people of Delhi now believe that all of AAP's MLAs are inundated in corruption," said Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachedva.

The ED had earlier summoned the AAP's Goa unit chief Amit Palekar and some of his party col-

leagues from the State for questioning at its Panjim office, after it arrested Mr. Kejriwal on March 21.

On the agency's request, a special court on Thursday extended Mr. Kejriwal's remand till April 1. He was the fourth AAP leader arrested in the excise policy case, the others being former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, Rajya Sabha Member Sanjay Singh and the party's former communications in-charge, Mr. Nair.

The ED had also arrested Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) legislator K. Kavitha on March 15. Subsequently, it alleged that she and a few others had conspired with the top AAP leaders, including Mr. Kejriwal and Mr. Sisodia, to get favours in the formulation and implementation of the liquor policy. The agency accused her of being involved in paying ₹100 crore in advance to the AAP leaders as illegal gratification.

The agency has so far arrested 16 accused persons and attached properties worth ₹128.79 crore in the excise policy case.

## Arrested IIT student's parents in Guwahati to meet their son

Press Trust of India  
GUWAHATI

The parents of the IIT-Guwahati student, who had allegedly pledged allegiance to ISIS, have arrived here to meet their son who has been arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a senior police officer said.

The parents of Touseef Ali Farouqui, a fourth-year B.Tech. student of the bioscience department, arrived here on Friday. They had gone to the police station where he is currently in 10 days of police custody since Sunday.

The official did not confirm whether they have met their son yet. The accused was detained on March 23 at Hajo in Kamrup district and arrested the next day under various sections of the IPC and UAPA.

Assam Police's Special Task Force (STF) Inspector General Parthasarathi Mahanta had earlier said that after interrogating him, police found credible evidence of his links with ISIS and he was arrested.

The student had allegedly pledged allegiance to the terror group.

## ED must probe 'direct nexus' between BJP and 'South lobby', says AAP

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday said it has found "another link" between the witnesses in the alleged Delhi excise scam and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and has demanded that the Enforcement Directorate (ED), which is currently investigating the case, should also probe the links between the "South lobby" and the ruling party if it claims to be an "independent body".

According to Delhi Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj, Magunta Srinivasulu Reddy - the father of Raghava Magunta Reddy, who was arrested by the ED in connection with the case - was fielded by the BJP's ally, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), in the upcoming Lok Sabha election, thus



Atishi

proving a "direct nexus" between the BJP and the "South lobby".

"Magunta Reddy said in two statements that there was no discussion between him and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal regarding the excise policy, but after his son's arrest, he succumbed and gave a third statement against the CM. His son Raghava Magunta also did not mention the CM's name in six statements, but issued a seventh state-

ment against him, and after being turned into a government witness, managed to secure bail," Mr. Bharadwaj said.

"The ED should also investigate Magunta Reddy and Raghav Magunta's direct association with the BJP. They will find details of their mutual phone calls dating back years," he added.

Delhi Minister Atishi said that after the "exposition" of how Sarath Reddy, the director of Aurobindo Pharma, became an approver in the case and then donated money in the form of electoral bonds to the BJP, this was another "big revelation".

A close observation of the probe reveals that until statements against the CM are obtained, every witness may have been "intimidated", Ms. Atishi added.

## Congress targets Centre, BJP over CBI closure report in aviation corruption case

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Targeting the Narendra Modi-led government and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the Central Bureau of Investigation's closure report in a 2017 corruption case involving Air India during former Civil Aviation Minister Praful Patel's tenure, the Congress on Saturday held a press conference with a washing machine and detergent powder to underscore how "stains" against politicians are "washed away" the moment they join the BJP or become a part of its alliance.

Eight months ago, Mr. Patel joined the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) that is part of the BJP-led coalition in Maharashtra.

Addressing a press conference, Congress spokes-



Pawan Khera holds a T-shirt next to a washing machine during a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

person Pawan Khera said the ruling party's "fully automatic washing machine" works on the principle - "join BJP, case closed".

Giving a "live demo", the Congress leader put a heavily stained T-shirt into the machine and after switching it on, a sparking white T-shirt was brought out.

Mr. Khera claimed that the "BJP washing machine costs over ₹8,500 crore" -

the money that the ruling party got through electoral bonds - and it is effective in cleaning all types of "stains of corruption" when used with "Modi washing powder".

The Congress claimed that there are, at least, 21 important leaders who have been whitewashed "clean" after the saffron party made allegations of corruption and illegality against them.

## Many countries yet to fully implement steps to prevent misuse of virtual assets, says FATF

Devesh K. Pandey  
NEW DELHI

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog, has found that many countries are yet to fully implement its requirements aimed at preventing misuse of virtual assets and virtual asset service providers (VASPs).

Virtual assets (crypto assets) refer to "any digital representation of value that can be digitally traded, transferred or used for payment". The FATF plenary had in February 2023 agreed on a road map to strengthen the implementation of its standards on virtual assets and VASPs. Recently, it carried out a survey on the current levels of implementation

and has now published a paper on the "Recommendation 15 by FATF Members and Jurisdictions with Materially Important VASP Activity".

"Following a 12-month process to collect and evaluate information, the FATF is publishing a table which sets out the status of implementation of Recommendation 15 by FATF members and other jurisdictions with the most materially important VASP activity. This table is based on the work of the FATF's Virtual Assets Contact Group members as well as the extensive input by the FATF Global Network of FATF members and FATF-Style regional bodies," it has said.

The FATF also had consultations with representatives of the private sector,

**Virtual assets refer to 'any digital representation of value that can be used for payment'**

besides the virtual assets and VASP community.

The study, which involves 58 FATF and non-FATF jurisdictions, found that India has already conducted a risk assessment covering virtual assets and VASPs.

Although it has explicitly prohibited the use of virtual assets and VASPs, it is compliant on issues such as enactment of legislation/regulation requiring VASPs to be registered or licensed and application of Anti-money Laundering/Counter-Terrorism Financing measures.

India, a member country, has conducted a supervisory inspection or included VASPs in its current inspection plan; has taken enforcement action or other supervisory action against VASPs; and has passed or enacted the travel rule for VASPs. The FATF is yet to evaluate and rate India's performance with respect to the revised standards on virtual assets and VASPs.

The countries which have explicitly prohibited the use of virtual assets and VASPs are China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, while it is in progress in Seychelles and Indonesia.

"The table includes all FATF members plus 20 jurisdictions with materially important VASP activity. These jurisdictions were identified based on two cri-

teria: trading volume and user base, based on open-source datasets from January to December 2022 and cross-checked against data from blockchain analytics companies," said the FATF.

It added: "It is important to note that large-scale trend data related to virtual assets is difficult to obtain, incomplete, and may change rapidly. This table provides a snapshot in time of jurisdictions that are identified as having materially important VASP activities as well as jurisdictions that are FATF members."

Listing the reasons for issuing the table, the FATF said as virtual assets were inherently international and borderless, any failure to regulate VASPs in one jurisdiction could have serious global implications.

## Delhi Bar Council leaders flay criminal laws

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Expressing serious concerns over the implementation of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam, the vice-chairman, secretary, and two members of the Bar Council of Delhi (BCD), in a letter to Home Minister Amit Shah, have urged him not to implement them.

In the letter, they objected to the extension of the police remand period from 15 days to 60-90 days in the new laws, among others.

They also maintained that the police cannot be given such free hand, since it may lead to a Police Raj rather than a rule of law as per the Constitution.



## Rajnath Singh to head BJP's manifesto committee

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president J.P. Nadda on Saturday notified the setting up of the party's manifesto committee for the Lok Sabha election. The committee will be headed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman and Piyush Goyal will be the conveners of the committee. The Chief Ministers of four States – Bhupendra Patel of Gujarat, Himanta Biswa Sarma of Assam, Mohan Yadav of Madhya Pradesh, and Vishnu Deo Sai of Chhattisgarh – are members of the 27-member committee.

So are senior leaders including Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Vasundhara Raje.

**Suggestions from public**  
The BJP had in January set off vehicles across the country to collect suggestions from the public on what the party should include in its election manifesto.

In 2019, the BJP had promised the setting up of a mission for tap water connections in all households, which resulted in the 'shar ghar jal' (water to every house), once voted back to power.

# In Bengal, Left seeks to iron out differences between allies

Differences have emerged over the Coochbehar and Purulia seats, with both the Congress and All India Forward Bloc looking to contest them; it also has the challenge of accommodating ISF

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Left Front chairperson Biman Basu on Saturday joined senior Congress leader and Kolkata Uttar Lok Sabha candidate Pradip Bhattacharya as the Congress nominee began his election campaign from Gandhi Bhavan in the Belehata area of West Bengal.

Mr. Basu said the Left Front and the Congress are united as a third alternative against the Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"We want similar campaigns for all the constituencies. Those against the BJP and the Trinamool should come together," the Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader said.

The CPI(M)-led Left Front has announced candidates for 23 Lok Sabha constituencies in West Bengal and the Congress has fielded candidates for seven. For 12 of the 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal, neither of the two has announced any candidate.

Differences have emerged over the Coochbehar and Purulia seats. The Congress and the All India Forward Bloc (AIFB) – a constituent of the Left



Standing together: Left Front chairperson Biman Basu campaigning for Congress candidate Pradip Bhattacharya in North Kolkata on Saturday. DEBASISH BHADURI

Front – have both fielded candidates for the Coochbehar seat. In Purulia, the Congress has announced its candidate and the AIFB too wants to join the poll fray.

"We will iron out our differences. The seven-phase election gives us some time to do so. We want to break the politics of binary of the Trinamool Congress and BJP," Mr. Basu said.

The challenge is not only to accommodate the Congress and the Left Front constituents but also

the Indian Secular Front (ISF). The ISF has announced candidates for eight seats. The West Bengal Congress leadership says it has nothing to do with the ISF, a party led by Furfura Sharif religious leader Abbas Siddique and his brother and Bhangar MLA Naushad Siddique.

### Names of candidates

The Congress has announced candidates for seats such as Baharampur, where State Congress president Adhir Ranjan

Chowdhury is contesting, Purulia (Nepal Mahato) and Kolkata Uttar.

For the Left Front, CPI (M) State secretary Mohammed Salim is contesting from Murshidabad, Sujjan Chakraborty from Dum Dum, Srijan Bhattacharya from Jadavpur, Dipsita Dhar from Serampore and Sayan Banerjee from Tam-luk. ISF MLA Nausad Siddique is keen to contest from Diamond Harbour against Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee.

## BJP names candidates for 11 more Lok Sabha seats

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday named its candidates for 11 more Lok Sabha seats, fielding a number of leaders who joined it from different parties recently such as Bhartruhari Mahab, Ravneet Singh Bittu, Sushil Kumar Rinku and Preneet Kaur.

All these leaders have been fielded from the seats they represent in the outgoing Lok Sabha, while former Indian Ambassador to the U.S., Taranjit Singh Sandhu, will be making his poll debut from Amritsar.

Hans Raj Hans, who had won from North West Delhi in 2019 on BJP ticket, will contest the Faridkot seat, which is reserved for members of the Scheduled Castes.

Mr. Mahtab, who quit the BJD recently, will contest from Cuttack, Mr. Bittu from Ludhiana, Ms. Kaur from Patiala, and Mr. Rinku from Jalandhar, a seat reserved for SCs.

Both Mr. Bittu, the grandson of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh, and Ms. Kaur, the wife of former Punjab CM Amarinder Singh, were in the Congress before joining the BJP, while Mr. Rinku was in the Aam Aadmi Party.

The BJP has announced candidates for 411 seats.

## INBRIEF



## BJP MLA rebels, to contest as Independent from Darjeeling

The BJP's Kurseong MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma on Saturday filed nomination papers to contest from the Darjeeling Lok Sabha seat as an Independent against the party's nominee and sitting MP Raju Bista. After filing his papers, Mr. Sharma said he has done what he had promised the people of his constituency. Mr. Sharma had said that a 'local bhumi-patra' should contest from Darjeeling. Mr. Bista is a Gorkha but hails from Manipur. The rebellion by the Kurseong MLA has embarrassed the West Bengal BJP leadership. Asked about Mr. Sharma's candidature, Mr. Bista said, "If anyone wants to contest, they do not need my permission."

## Sharad's NCP files complaint with EC against Sena, BJP

The Sharad Pawar camp on Saturday said it has filed a complaint with the Election Commission against the BJP and the Shiv Sena for violating the Representation of the People Act and poll code by publishing the names of individuals from other parties as their star campaigners. The NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) is part of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra. It claimed Shinde's Sena, published the names of various people holding high public office such as the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, Chief Minister. "This is not only a violation of the Representation of People Act, but of the MCC as the representatives of the party in power in Centre or State are categorically barred from using their official positions for the purpose of election campaign," it said. PTI

# A popularity test between two MPs in Kozhikode

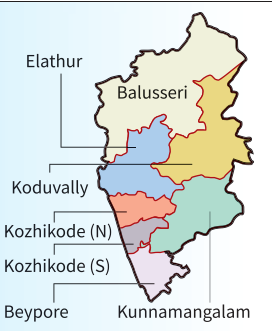
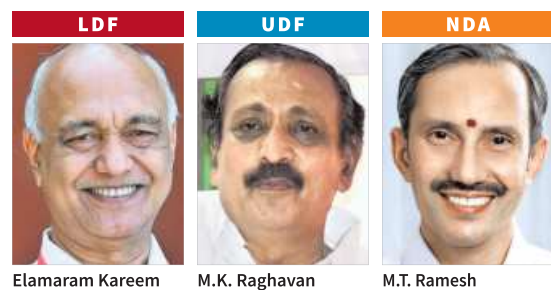
Aabha Raveendran  
KOZHIKODE

In the lead-up to the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, when the Congress leadership was scouting for a candidate for the Kozhikode seat, senior leader A.K. Antony, then Defence Minister, backed M.K. Raghavan, then Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee general secretary in charge of Kozhikode, to reclaim the constituency, once a stronghold of the party.

The Congress was then concerned about the potential loss of influence in the constituency as the polls were being held after delimitation. Two Assembly segments, Bepore and Kunnamangalam, perceived to be Left bastions, were amalgamated to it, while Thiruvambadi in Kozhikode district, Kalpetta, and Sulthan Bathery were severed to carve out the Wayanad Lok Sabha constituency.

Mr. Raghavan won by 838 votes, defeating P.A. Mohamed Riyas in a direct fight between the Congress and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)]. In the 2014 polls, Mr. Raghavan fortified his

## Kozhikode



mandate with a margin exceeding 16,000 votes against the CPI(M)'s A. Vijayaraghavan. In 2019, he scored a hat-trick, securing a bigger margin of over 85,000 votes against CPI (M) legislator A. Pradeepkumar.

As Mr. Raghavan sets his sights on a fourth consecutive term, the CPI(M) has rallied behind its Rajya Sabha MP and former In-

dustries Minister Elamaram Kareem. Mr. Kareem was a three-time legislator, twice from Bepore and once from erstwhile Kozhikode-II, now Kozhikode South, segments. As the State general secretary of CITU, Mr. Kareem has a good rapport with trade union leaders across Kozhikode's political spectrum. During his tenure in the V.S. Achuthanandan Ministry from 2006-11, he had ensured that industries in Kozhikode such as the Kerala Soaps and Oils, the Thiruvannur Cotton Mill and the Steel Complex Limited (now SAIL-SCL Kerala Limited) that were under the threat of closure did not shut down.

**In 1980**  
The last CPI(M) victory in

**The last time the CPI(M) won in the Kozhikode Lok Sabha seat was in 1980; it has now fielded Rajya Sabha MP Elamaram Kareem in a bid to unseat three-time Congress MP M.K. Raghavan**

the constituency dates back to 1980, when E.K. Imbichi Bava defeated Arangil Sreedharan of the Janata Party. Congress leader K. Muraleedharan and the late socialist leader M.P. Veerendra Kumar had represented the constituency twice.

**BJP candidate**  
Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has nominated its State general secretary M.T. Ramesh. He is no stranger to the constituency, having contested in the 2004 polls.

The candidature of former All India Congress Committee president Rahul Gandhi in Wayanad, coupled with Left parties' endorsement of the Supreme Court's decision to permit women of all ages

to enter the Sabarimala temple, and Mr. Raghavan's accessible public persona, were instrumental in his success in 2019.

Besides, a pre-election sting operation by a Hindi news channel, purportedly showing Mr. Raghavan soliciting kickbacks for a proposed land deal, swayed sentiments in his favour.

**Impressive margins**  
In 2019, Mr. Raghavan secured leads in all seven Assembly segments, especially a margin of over 35,000 votes in Koduvally.

However, in the 2021 Assembly polls, the LDF swept all seats – Balussery, Elathur, Kozhikode North, Kozhikode South, Bepore, and Kunnamangalam – except Koduvally.

The delay in setting up the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and the proposed Uniform Civil Code reverberate in the campaign scene.

As on January 2024, the constituency has 14,00,113 voters of whom 6,77,512 are males, 7,22,575 are females and 26 transgender voters.

## Assam CM cites 'reign of peace', bats for Muslim votes

Rahul Karmakar  
UDALGURI (ASSAM)

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that the BJP is banking on the "equal treatment" of all communities and the "unprecedented" reign of peace to get Muslim votes in the Lok Sabha election.

Elections to the 14 Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam are scheduled in three phases. "We have not discriminated against Muslims. Developmental projects and beneficiary schemes have been distributed equally to all communities, including Muslims, who I do not think want more than what they have received," Mr. Sarma told presspersons after a meeting of the NDA constituents in Udalguri.

"For the first time, the minorities are getting a taste of good governance and equal treatment in the true spirit of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas'. And unlike the communal violence in the past, they are living in peace," he said.

## Cong. leader's daughter-in-law Archana Patil joins the BJP

Archana Patil, the daughter-in-law of former Union Home Minister and senior Congress leader Shivraj Patil, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday. The induction took place in the presence of Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, BJP's State unit president Chandrashekar Bawankule, and other party leaders, in Mumbai. Ms. Patil's addition will strengthen the BJP's presence in Maharashtra ahead of the Lok Sabha election, Mr. Fadnis said. "It is a matter of pleasure for us that someone from the family of Shivraj Patil, who was a senior leader of Congress is joining our party," he told presspersons on Friday. "I have been working at the grass roots level in Latur for many years now. After joining politics, I will devote myself with the same amount of dedication to the party (the BJP)," she said.

## National Conference, Lone's JKPC engage in war of words

The National Conference (NC) and the J&K Peoples Conference (JKPC), are engaged in a war of words ahead of the Lok Sabha elections in the Kashmir Valley. "One of the most heavily guarded VIPs in India happens to be the ex-Chief Minister of J&K, Mr. Omar Abdullah. And Mr. Abdullah, feeling fully secure behind the impenetrable security grid, has absolutely no qualms in scripting a discourse which has the greatest probability to end in violence and consume the lives of unguarded innocents," JKPC chairman Sajad Lone said. His reaction comes in the wake of recent speeches made by Mr. Abdullah, where he made oblique references to the JKPC being "a crony of the BJP".

# Cong. seeks to downplay Pappu Yadav's Purnea claim

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

A screening panel to shortlist potential Congress candidates for Bihar for the Lok Sabha election met on Saturday but it did not discuss the contentious Purnea seat.

"We are not bothered who is saying what as we are focused on doing our best in the nine seats that has been allotted to us," said a senior Congress leader, trying to downplay the threat of five-term MP Rajesh Ranjan, alias Pappu Yadav, standing as rebel candidate from the Purnea seat.

"Look at Nikhil babu

[former IPS officer Nikhil Kumar]. He can't contest from Aurangabad but he hasn't made any public statement. We won't be encouraging any friendly fight at Purnea," the leader added.

The Purnea seat has not only gone to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) that is leading the mahagatbandhan or grand alliance in Bihar but the party has already declared Bima Bharati as the official candidate.

But Mr. Yadav, who merged his Jan Adhikar Party with the Congress on March 20, has staked claim to the seat. He had represented it thrice earlier and was hoping to contest on



Pappu Yadav

Congress ticket. But a few leaders questioned his induction, given his image of being a "baahubali".

"In the early 2000s when Lalu Prasad was the Chief Minister, people feared Pappu Yadav's gang.

Of course, now he has tried hard to acquire a Robin-hood-like image in Kosi-Seemanchal," senior leader of Bihar Congress Kishore Kumar Jha said.

The party, the source said, was banking on the calculation that Mr. Pappu Yadav's induction would have strengthened it in Seemanchal region in north-eastern Bihar that has important Lok Sabha seats like Madhepura, Supaul, Katihar and Kisanganj.

Mr. Pappu Yadav, whose wife Ranjeet Ranjan, who is a senior Congress leader and a Rajya Sabha MP, had credited Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with his induction.

"When Priyanka Gandhi called me to come and join the Congress, I did not think twice," Mr. Pappu Yadav said while speaking to presspersons in Purnea on Friday.

However, the Congress did not factor the frosty relationship between Lalu Prasad's family and Mr. Pappu, who had been expelled from the RJD earlier. Mr. Pappu Yadav, who detests being called a baahubali now, still battles the tag of being an outsider by many Congress veterans.

"This seems to be new tradition that outsiders are made to feel important and old-timers are ignored," Mr. Jha said.

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**IN BRIEF**



**Nine pirates being brought to India to face legal action: Navy**

A day after rescuing a hijacked Iranian fishing vessel and its 23-member Pakistani crew under an anti-piracy operation at sea, the Indian Navy on Saturday said the nine surrendered pirates are being brought to India for further legal action. Legal action will be initiated under the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022. The Indian Navy's specialist teams have completed sanitisation and seaworthiness checks of fishing vessel *Al-Kambar* (in picture), according to the Navy's spokesperson. "The crew, comprising 23 Pakistani nationals, were given a thorough medical check-up prior to clearing the boat to continue with her fishing activities," it said. PTI

**PAN fraud: M.P. student gets I-T notice of over ₹40 crore**

A university student in Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh approached the police after he got an Income Tax notice over transactions of more than ₹40 crore done by a company created fraudulently using his PAN details, an official said on Saturday. The company formed by unidentified person/s using the details of Jiwaji University student Pramod Dandotiya has also not paid GST, the official said. "As per Mr. Dandotiya's complaint, a company was being operated by misusing his PAN details and it had carried out transactions of more than ₹40 crore. The complainant found this out after he got an IT notice," Additional SP Shiyaz K.M. said. PTI

**Alchemist group case: ED attaches assets worth ₹29 cr.**

The ED has provisionally attached properties estimated to be ₹29.45 crore of the Alchemist group companies in a money laundering case. The group was headed by Kanwar Deep Singh, a former Rajya Sabha member of the Trinamool Congress, it said on Saturday. Earlier, it had attached ₹10.29 crore belonging to the Trinamool in the same case. "The probe also revealed that an amount of ₹10.29 crore was paid by Alchemist Airways Private Limited to various aviation/helicopter companies for the aviation services availed by All India Trinamool Congress (AITC)...during the campaigning for 2014 Lok Sabha elections," it had said.

**Land grabbing case: ED questions Shahjahan in jail**

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday questioned suspended Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan in the Basirhat Correctional Home in connection with cases involving land grabbing in Sandeshkhali. The ED officers interrogated him inside the jail for over four hours after getting permission from Basirhat court in West Bengal. Mr. Shahjahan was arrested on February 29 after 55 days on the run following violent protests led by women, alleging sexual atrocities and land grab. He went missing after a mob attacked an Enforcement Directorate (ED) team that went to search his house in the alleged ration scam on January 5. PTI

**SUDOKU**

				5		9		3
3		6					5	
	9		1			8	6	
8		1						2
	4					7		
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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

**Police dismiss info on police protection to V.K. Pandian**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BHUBANESWAR

A day after the Odisha Soochana Adhikar Abhijan (OSAA), a forum for the State's Right to Information (RTI) activists, alleged that 74 police personnel were deployed for the protection of V.K. Pandian, Chairperson, 5T (Transformational Initiatives), the State police administration on Saturday said there was no veracity to the claim.

"We have not supplied any information under the RTI Act that talks about security cover provided to Chairperson of 5T (Transformational Initiative) to the applicant," Prateek Singh, Deputy Commissioner of Police, Bhubaneswar, said on Saturday.

Mr. Singh is also the designated public information officer under the RTI Act for the Commissionerate Police here. "We are assessing the veracity of the purported letter which is claimed to be in existence," he said.

Prakash Chandra Dash, an RTI activist, asserted that the Reserve Inspector of Police, Bhubaneswar had said that two armed sub inspectors, 11 havildars, 53 constables, and four women constables, in addition to a protection vehicle, were deployed for Mr. Pandian's security in response to his RTI application.

**250 rescued from cyber fraud centres abroad: MEA**

**Govt. working with Cambodian authorities to crack down on those responsible for the scam; recruits forced into cybercrime; online recruitment scam is linked mainly to Chinese firms**

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

The Union government is "collaborating closely" with Cambodian authorities and has rescued about 250 Indians from Cambodia, who had been lured there by cyber fraud and fake online recruitment scams, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Saturday. About 75 of them have returned to India over the past three months.

The return of the Indians comes as investigating agencies launched a nationwide operation against agents - many of them believed to be linked to companies in China - that operate in Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar to recruit job seekers across South Asia and South East Asia on the promise of working in the information technology industry there. Once they go abroad, the recruits are instead forced to work in cyber fraud centres, and coerced into defrauding others over the telephone and online.

**Prompt response**

"Our Embassy in Cambodia has been promptly responding to complaints from Indian nationals who were lured with employ-

**Vicious network**

A nationwide hunt against agents involved in such scams has revealed some insights into their operations



- Job seekers from across South Asia and South East Asia are recruited by agents operating in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and India
- They are promised IT jobs but once there, are forced to work in cyber fraud centres
- They then work over the phone and through social media and get people to invest in fraudulent cryptocurrency trading and other schemes
- MHA says they get over 2,000 calls a day about such scams involving firms in Cambodia and Myanmar
- MEA cautions people against accepting job offers from South East Asia region, asking them to go through authorised agents

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

ment opportunities to that country but were forced to undertake illegal cyber work," the MEA said in a statement on Saturday. "We are also working with Cambodian authorities and with agencies in India to crack down on those responsible for these fraudulent schemes," it added.

The statement followed reports that the MEA has been coordinating with the Home Ministry and law enforcement agencies to help bring back about 300 of those who have reached out to the Indian Embassy in Phnom Penh.

In January this year, the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and the Home Ministry had said that about half of the 5,000 calls received on the

**Over the past year, arrests have been made in many States, including Odisha, Punjab and Kerala**

cybercrime helplines on an average day relate to such scams involving companies based in Cambodia and Myanmar, linked mainly to Chinese apps.

**Caution advised**

The MEA and the Indian Embassy have issued several advisories warning job-seekers against accepting such job offers. "All Indian nationals who are travelling to jobs in Cambodia and the South East Asia region are advised that there are many fake agents oper-

ating in the region, who along with the agents in India, are luring people to scam companies, involved especially in cyber crimes," said one such advisory, counselling the job-seekers to only go through authorised agents approved by the MEA.

Over the past year, police in several Indian States, including Odisha, Punjab, and Kerala, have made arrests in such cases. Officials conceded that there were likely to be many more victims across South East Asia, but said that they were working mainly with those who have reached out to Indian embassies abroad, and those whom the local police officials in those countries have managed to rescue.

**Ex-MLA Mukhtar Ansari laid to rest in Ghazipur amid heavy security**

**Mayank Kumar**  
LUCKNOW

Gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari was laid to rest at the Kali Bagh burial ground in Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh, on Saturday amid heavy security.

The former MLA, who had been in jail since 2005, suffered a cardiac arrest on Thursday. While his family alleged that he had been poisoned in jail, Opposition leaders have sought a high-level investigation into his death.

The body was brought to the family's ancestral burial ground at Yusufpur in Mohammadabad, roughly a kilometre from the Ansaris' residence, on Saturday morning. A sea of supporters accompanied the body in procession to the burial ground.

The district police faced difficulty in managing the crowd that tried to force its way into the burial ground where entry was restricted. Security personnel, in-



Supporters of Mukhtar Ansari take part in the funeral procession of the politician at Mohammadabad in Ghazipur on Saturday. ANI

cluding from the paramilitary, were deployed in thousands around the Ansaris' residence and the burial ground.

**Plea to supporters**

Earlier, the family requested supporters to pray for the deceased. In a post on X on Friday, Suhaib Ansari, MLA and nephew of the deceased, said: "My younger uncle Mr. Mukhtar Ansari Sahib passed away last night. Tomorrow at 10 a.m. he will be buried in the Ka-

libagh graveyard of our Yusufpur Mohammadabad (Ghazipur). You all are requested to pray for the forgiveness of the deceased." Mukhtar Ansari, a five-time former MLA, died on Thursday night within hours of his admission to the Rani Durgawati Medical College in Banda district.

"Around 8.25 p.m., convicted/undertrial prisoner Mukhtar Ansari, son of Subhanullah, aged 63, was brought by jail staff to the

emergency department at the Rani Durgawati Medical College in an unconscious state. The patient was treated by a team of nine doctors and given all possible medical facilities, but despite all the attempts for recovery, the patient died due to cardiac arrest," reads the medical bulletin from the hospital.

On March 26, he was admitted to the same hospital after he complained of abdominal pain and later discharged. His family had alleged that he was being "poisoned".

Mr. Ansari faced more than five dozen cases and had been languishing in jail since 2005. Opposition leaders in the State have demanded a high-level investigation into the death, with Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav calling for an investigation under the supervision of a Supreme Court judge, and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati pushing for a high-level probe.

**Anticipatory bail must not be norm in many cases, rules SC**

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has in a judgment said that bail may be the rule in many cases, but anticipatory bail is certainly not the norm.

A Bench of Justices C.T. Ravikumar and Sanjay Kumar said the power of the courts to grant anticipatory or pre-arrest bail is an extraordinary one, and not to be given for the asking.

"Though in many cases it was held that bail is said to be a rule, it cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be said that anticipatory bail is the rule. It cannot be the rule and the question of its grant should be left to the cautious and judicious discretion of the court, depending on the facts and circumstances of each case," the top court said.

The judgment was based on an appeal for anticipatory bail filed by persons booked under provisions of the Indian Penal

**The Bench said the power of the courts to grant anticipatory or pre-arrest bail is an extraordinary one**

Code for offences, including assault on a woman, wrongful restraint, causing grievous hurt, and the provisions of the Prevention of Witch (Daain) Practices Act, 1999 in Bihar.

The court observed that anticipatory bail should not lead to miscarriage of justice, especially in cases of crimes against women.

"The court concerned has to be very cautious as the grant of interim protection or protection to the accused in serious cases may lead to miscarriage of justice and may hamper the investigation to a great extent as it may sometimes lead to tampering or distraction of the evidence," Justice Ravikumar cautioned.

**Facing pressure from Google, NCPDR, Ullu drops adult content**

**Aroon Deep**  
NEW DELHI

Pressure has been mounting on the adult streaming platform Ullu on its content, with the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPDR) asking the government to act against the firm. Separately, the Digital Publisher Content Grievance Council (DPCGC) has issued a rebuke of the streaming service's catalogue. The DPCGC is a streaming self-regulatory body, and Ullu is a member.

Under notice from Google, the Android version of the app has been cleansed of much of the content it has built its business on. Google's action was re-

vealed to the NCPDR in a reply obtained by *The Hindu*.

As streaming platforms find their content increasingly restricted against political and religious themes - often due to self-imposed restraint - the government has set its sights on smaller players who put out mature content intended for adults. Eighteen such sites and apps were blocked earlier this month for "obscene and vulgar content".

These sites include "Hot Shots VIP," Mojflix, MoodX, and Uncut Adda". While there is no explicit ban on pornography in India, many international websites offering such content have been ordered ofline by the Uttarakhand



The Ullu app has been cleansed of much of the content it has built its business on.

High Court, in a *suo motu* 2018 judgment that the government and Internet providers continue to comply with.

The DPCGC was established under the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and

Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

From all the appeals that DPCGC's grievance redressal board has heard and issued orders on, only one outcome has been published on its website - a June 2023 order against Ullu finding the firm had a "solitary aim" to "depict sexual contents," and to take down some content that fit this description. The board is headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice A.K. Sikri (retd).

Ullu CEO Vibhu Agarwal did not respond to a message seeking comment. Last year, though, the firm defended itself to the DPCGC saying that it "offers a wide variety of genres

from drama, horror, suspense, thriller to comedy and beyond which targets audience[s] above eighteen years of age," and that it has safeguards to prevent minors from viewing its content, according to Justice Sikri's summary of arguments by Priyanka Chaurasiya, a lawyer for the firm.

Google told the NCPDR that it found no inappropriate content featuring children on Ullu, indicating that the commission's concern was around such content being accessible to minors, and not featuring them. The IT Rules have mandatory provisions for streaming services to provide age-restricting features for mature content,

and most streaming providers are in compliance with this requirement.

An advisory by Justice Sikri in December 2023 to streaming services, previously unreported, "strongly advises the platforms to undertake suitable measures to ensure that all the content on their respective platforms must comply with the test of obscenity and pornography as enumerated under the various laws of the land." The advisory does not name Ullu.

Ullu had set itself apart from rival adult streaming outfits by abstaining from depicting graphic nudity or other acts that could trigger immediate backlash from authorities.



## IN BRIEF



### 'CUB exceeds ₹1-lakh cr. total business milestone in FY24'

City Union Bank (CUB) has crossed a milestone in FY24 as the private sector bank's total business exceeded the ₹1 lakh-crore mark for the first time. The lender achieved this in its 120th year of operations. Total business of the bank crossed the ₹50,000-crore mark in FY17 with the second ₹50,000 crore coming just seven years later. In the December 2023 quarter, the bank's total business stood at ₹96,744 crore, and the lender reported a profit after tax of ₹253 crore.

### 'Unsold homes in 9 cities slid 7% in last 3 months on sales'

Unsold housing inventories fell 7% in the last three months across nine major cities to about 4.81 lakh units on higher sales than new supply, PropEquity said. Real estate data-analytic firm PropEquity data showed unsold housing stock slid to 4,81,566 units at the end of March this year from 5,18,868 units at the end of December 2023 across 9 major cities. The cities are Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Thane, Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai and Kolkata.

### Bengaluru, Mumbai lead in office space absorption: C&W

The Indian office market reported a net absorption of 11.5 million square feet (MSF) across the top 8 cities in Q1 24 (January-March quarter of 2024), as per the office-segment data released by Cushman & Wakefield (C&W). "This is the third-highest level recorded in the last five years, demonstrating a robust appetite for office space among businesses. Net absorption is a barometer of real demand or expansion of occupied space in the market," C&W said.

## 'Fashion industry should shun discounting, adopt hyper-personalisation'

Mini Tejaswi  
BENGALURU

The fashion retail industry is contemplating moving away from "discounting" and embracing hyper-personalisation (close to bespoke model) to shore up its balance sheets and stop margin erosion, hinted industry captains.

Domain experts, who spoke at the India Fashion Forum (IFF), an industry intelligence summit, held in Bengaluru, further said several pressing challenges constantly confronted the industry and therefore urged the fashion retail community to move away from conventional discounting practices and embrace data-driven personalisation which may lead to better business impacts and enhanced customer satisfaction.

Suparna Mitra, CEO, Titan Watches & Wearables, highlighted the detrimental impact of unsold inventory resulting from heavy investments in large-scale production.

"The perpetual cycle of excess stock leading to discounted rates threatens the financial health of fashion businesses. However, a deeper understanding of consumer behavior presents a potential solution," she recommended.

Echoing similar sentiments, Shailesh Chaturvedi, Managing Director and CEO of Arvind Fashions cautioned the industry against discounting and commoditisation.

"Today's consumers are discerning and savvy. They recognise the facade of discounts and demand authenticity. Our industry must



**New fads:** Gen-AI, client-data algorithms will allow fashion brands to know consumer desires more precisely, says Chaturvedi. REUTERS

### Experts noted the detrimental impact of unsold inventory resulting from heavy investments

transcend pricing and differentiate through innovation to remain competitive," he asserted.

By harnessing disruptive technologies such as generative AI and customer data algorithms, fashion brands would know consumer desires more precisely, Mr. Chaturvedi, who is also the Chairman of the India Fashion Forum, added.

Shivane Dutt, Director, Brand Marketing & Merchandising, Snapdeal, emphasised the critical role of personalised experiences in engaging discerning consumers. "Tailored communication strategies driven by consumer data insights are essential for resonating deeply with today's audience," she said.

According to participants, the integration of generative AI, from chat-

# IT Act change yet to aid MSMEs

Section 43 b (h) of the IT Act allows payments due to MSMEs to be deducted if they were made within a stipulated time; experts note that while this will benefit MSMEs in the long-run, some buyers may choose to source from other suppliers

M. Soundariya Preetha  
COIMBATORE

An intervention introduced in the Union Budget last year to ensure timely payments to micro- and small-scale manufacturing and service units is yet to help them and even hurting some.

Section 43 b (h) of the Income Tax Act says payments due to UDYAN-registered micro- and small-scale industries would be allowed as deduction only if the actual payment was made within the time stipulated in the MSME Act.



**Payment rules:** If MSMEs have a written agreement with a buyer, payments need to have been made within 45 days. REUTERS

Otherwise, the payment would be taxed as income.

If a micro or small-scale unit had a written agreement with a medium- or

large-scale industry for supply of components, spares, or any other product or service, the payment should be made by

the buyer within 45 days. If there was no agreement, the payment should be made within 15 days.

However, the risk for micro units was that the buyers would prefer to source from suppliers who were not UDYAN-registered, said B. Kandavel, organising secretary of the Federation of Tamil Nadu Powerloom Associations. For instance, weavers in Tamil Nadu supplying textile products to large buyers got paid once in three months or so. Buyers are now either reducing payment as the credit pe-

riod has dropped or are preferring unregistered suppliers, he said.

Still, MSMEs would benefit in the long run as they would get payments on time, asserted Anil Bhardwaj, secretary general of the Federation of Indian Micro, and Small & Medium Enterprises.

The intervention will aid MSMEs though it will take time for the system to settle down and may also temporarily affect the working capital of buyers, said V. Thirugnanam, president, Coimbatore District Small Industries Association.



Nirmala Sitharaman

## GDP set to grow 8% or more in Q4: Sitharaman

Reuters  
NEW DELHI

India's gross domestic product (GDP) is on track to grow by 8% or more in the quarter ending March 31, Union Minister of Finance Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

The economy is expected to show the same rate of year-on-year expansion for the 2023/24 financial year, Ms. Sitharaman added, citing the impact of improved inflation management and macroeconomic stability.

"Hopefully the fourth quarter... will also have (growth) of 8% or above 8% resulting in 2023/24 having an average growth in GDP of 8% or over 8%," she said at an event in Mumbai.

GDP data for the January-March quarter is due to be released on May 31.

Asia's third-largest economy grew 8.4% in the October-December quarter, outpacing the 7.6% logged in the previous quarter.

India's economy is projected to grow at 7.6% in the current fiscal year, according to the latest government estimates.

## Gem and jewellery exports to cross \$100 bn. soon: Ambani

Lalendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

India's gem and jewellery industry would achieve exports of \$100 billion in a few years and Indian-designed jewellery would make its mark globally, Mukesh Ambani, Chairman and Managing Director, Reliance Industries Ltd., said on Friday.

"Evolving remarkably over the years, the industry has emerged as a leading player in the global luxury market, and as a pivotal contributor to India's export economy. It has also become a major generator of large-scale employment opportuni-



Mukesh Ambani

ties," Mr. Ambani said.

"As a result, the industry is poised to achieve exports of \$100 billion in the coming years from \$40 billion currently."

Vipul Shah, Chairman, Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council, said, "Today, India's exports continue to rise, our dom-

estic market flourishes, and our artisans inspire the world with their intricate creations. This progress is a direct reflection of the hard work, dedication, and collective vision of the industry stakeholders".

"We must empower our artisans, invest in research and development, and leverage technology to unlock new horizons of growth. As we mark the 50th India Gem & Jewellery Awards (IGJA), we not only applaud the remarkable achievements of individual exporters but also acknowledge the collective endeavours of the industry at large," he added.

## Russian central bank lends more yuan under currency swap

Reuters  
MOSCOW

Russia's central bank said it had provided banks with 2.5 billion Chinese yuan (\$346.25 million) for the equivalent 31.8 billion roubles on Friday under currency swap transactions.

The banks' maximum demand for yuan swaps was recorded on February 29, when the entire 10 billion yuan limit was used.

The central bank launched swap transactions for yuan and roubles in January 2023. The total amount of currency swap

operations last year was 59.7 billion Chinese yuan, the central bank said.

### 'Reserves sufficient'

The bank also said its liquid reserve assets were sufficient to maintain financial stability and perform necessary operations.

Opportunities for further diversification of reserve assets into currencies and financial instruments of "unfriendly" countries were limited by the risks inherent in these currencies and economies.



Chai Kings CEO Sadique (left) and COO S. Balaji are eyeing 1 lakh cups in sales daily.

## Chai Kings eyes \$2-mn fundraise for expansion

N. Anand  
CHENNAI

Chai Kings is planning to raise \$2 million to open 80 outlets in 18-20 months, said CEO Jahabar Sadique.

"We have initiated talks with venture capitalists to raise the much-needed funds [the lack of which] that derailed our expansion plans," he told *The Hindu*. "We need it during FY25 and FY26 to foray aggressively into neighbouring States," he added.

Currently, Chai Kings has 56 outlets of which 50 are in Chennai. As per the original plan, the B2C firm was to open more outlets in Chennai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru. But the plan couldn't take off on account of the pandemic. "Before the pandemic, we were selling 25,000 cups per day. We have crossed the pre-COVID level and are selling around 30,000 cups. Our aim is to sell one lakh cups per day in 20 months," he said.

"The series A funding of ₹16 crore will help us to move into Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Tier-II cities of Tamil Nadu," said Chief Operating Officer S. Balaji.

Chai Kings is likely to end FY24 with a revenue of ₹45 crore.

THE HINDU GROUP

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# Naturally occurring bile acid can blunt statin-induced diabetes

Vasudevan Mukunth

Administering ursodeoxycholic acid (UDCA) can stave off the tendency of statins to induce glucose intolerance and diabetes, a study by a group of researchers in China has found.

Statin are prescribed to people with a high risk of cardiovascular disease. They work by blocking the activity of an enzyme involved in the metabolic pathway that produces LDL, or "bad", cholesterol.

Statin are on the World Health Organization's list of essential medicines and among the most sold drugs worldwide.

However, many studies have found statins could increase the risk of developing diabetes.

## 'Frank diabetes'

"It has been known for a few years now that statins can induce glucose intolerance and even frank diabetes in some people," Dr. V. Mohan, chairman of the Madras Diabetes Research

Foundation, Chennai, told *The Hindu*.

He added that doctors have continued to prescribe them because statins' benefits "far outweigh the risk". Nonetheless, the mechanism by which statins have this effect has been unclear.

In the study, published in February in the journal *Cell Metabolism*, the researchers reported one mechanism through which statins could increase glucose intolerance, involving UDCA, a bile acid.

The team recruited 30 people with atorvastatin and 10 without and tracked their metabolism for four months.

They reported that the faeces of those taking atorvastatin had a reduced abundance of bacteria of the genus *Clostridium* and that these individuals had "altered serum and faecal bile acid profiles" as well.

## Gut microbiome

The gut microbiome is a community of bacteria in the gut in a symbiotic relationship with the body.

The researchers found that the *Clostridium*-deficient microbiome inhibited enzymes called hydroxysteroid dehydrogenases and lowered UDCA.

They also verified an idea that "the decreased *Clostridium*-rich microbiota might influence bile acid synthesis and excretion and impair glucose metabolism" in a 12-week study of mice.

To check the role of UDCA, they recruited five participants on statins and ad-

ministered 10-13 mg/kg (of body weight) of UDCA per day. After two months, they found the individuals' HbA1C levels, among others, were "substantially decreased".

They concluded that "UDCA restored impaired glucose homeostasis without limiting the lipid-lowering effect of statin".

Dr. Mohan called the finding "good news" and "a new angle" but also said the underlying hypothesis will have to be tested in randomised clinical trials.

## SNAPSHOTS



### Imaging detects hypoxic pockets in the mouse brain

Using a bioluminescent oxygen indicator, scientists discovered a spontaneous, spatially defined occurrence of "hypoxic pockets" in the mouse brain. Their technique offers a way to learn more about brain oxygen tension (pO<sub>2</sub>), a measure of oxygen delivery and demand in brain tissue that changes dynamically but is not well understood. The findings could have implications for how rest and exercise affect pO<sub>2</sub> in the human brain, including the role of these activities in conditions such as dementia.



### Microbes may seed an autoimmune kidney disease

A member of the gut microbiome may help spark an autoimmune disease in the kidneys by leaking antigens that trigger the immune system, experiments on mice and samples from 118 people showed. Gut microbiomes of 33 patients with the disorder were skewed toward bacterial species that degrade mucin. The bacterium modified IgA1 and converted it into the deglycosylated form associated with IgA nephropathy. This created antigens that crossed from the intestines to the glomeruli region.



### 4 mpox vaccines in animals reveal correlates of protection

Scientists have made new discoveries about the effectiveness of four vaccines for the mpox virus – and have uncovered potential signs of immune activity that correlate with protection. Their head-to-head comparison could inform further research into safer and improved vaccines for mpox. All four vaccines protected the macaques from infections when exposed to the current outbreak strain of mpox. However, one vaccine provided almost complete protection.

# Tropical cyclones of higher intensity demand a new category

Tropical cyclones with peak wind speeds far exceeding category 5 scale of 252 km/hour are increasingly seen due to global warming, making a case for introducing category 6 for wind speed above 309 km/hour

Madhavan Nair Rajeevan

Tropical cyclones are powerful and destructive weather systems that form over warm tropical ocean basins, where sea surface temperatures are above 26.5 degree C. These storms are characterised by strong winds, heavy precipitation and storm surges and can cause significant damage to coastal communities and infrastructure.

Climatologically, tropical cyclones form mainly in the North Atlantic, East Pacific, West Pacific, South Pacific and the Indian Ocean. Out of 85 tropical storms that develop annually over the warm tropical oceans, more than half (45) of them intensify into tropical cyclones. The Western Pacific basin is the most active region for tropical cyclones and accounts for about a third of the world's tropical cyclones. The North Indian basin accounts for only about 4% of the global total, although it is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world to the effects of such cyclones.

The Saffir-Simpson (SS) hurricane wind scale, introduced in the early 1970s, is the most widely used metric for warning the public about the dangers of tropical cyclones. The SS hurricane wind scales are categorised by the maximum sustained wind speed at a height of 10 metres. Although most tropical cyclone-related deaths are caused by storm surge and heavy rainfall, wind hazard remains an important metric for communicating risk to the public and a critical metric

## Global warming intensifies tropical cyclones

Tropical cyclones form mainly in the North Atlantic, East Pacific, West Pacific, South Pacific and the Indian Ocean

- Saffir-Simpson (SS) hurricane wind scale introduced in the early 1970s has five categories. Wind speed exceeding 252 km/hour fall under category 5

- Long-term data indicate that the frequency of intense tropical cyclones is

**Increasing occurrence:** Five tropical storms with wind speeds over 309 km/hour occurred in the last nine years.

- increasing in the large ocean basins

- For every degree of warming, an increase in wind speed of 12% is observed in the strongest cyclones

- Tropical cyclones with wind speed far exceeding category 5 are becoming common. A new category 6 scale for wind speed over 309 km/hour may be required

- The Western Pacific

basin is the most active region for tropical cyclones, and accounts for about a third of all tropical cyclones. The north Indian basin accounts for about 4%

- At present, the north Indian Ocean is not very vulnerable to category 6 storms. As global warming continues, category 6 storms may occur here in near future

- There is a need to revisit India's disaster management strategy for tropical cyclones and the early warning systems

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



for measuring the impact of these cyclones. There are five categories on the SS hurricane wind scale – category 1 to category 5 – with category 5 wind speed exceeding 252 km/hour. The combined effects of wind, storm surge, and rainfall in a category 5 impact would completely raze any structure.

The sharp rise in man-made greenhouse gas emissions has led to global warming of the order of 1.10 degree C since pre-industrial times. The warming can be observed not only at the sea surface, but also in the depths of the ocean, which increases the heat content of the ocean and thus favours the intensification of tropical cy-

clones. Long-term data indicate that the frequency of intense tropical cyclones is increasing in the large ocean basins. For every degree of warming, an increase in wind speed of 12% is observed in the strongest cyclones, which corresponds to a 40% increase in destructive potential. As warm waters extend further poleward, cyclones are shifting poleward, with more storms forming at higher latitudes than in the past. A warmer atmosphere can hold more moisture, leading to heavier rainfall when tropical cyclones make landfall. As the oceans warm, cyclones also strengthen faster and spend more lifetime over the oceans. In 2023, tropi-

cal cyclone Freddy spent 37 days over the oceans, making it the longest-lived cyclones ever recorded.

## Category 5

In a recent research paper published in the *Proceedings of National Academy of Sciences*, the authors document that storms are occurring at intensities well above Category 5 and that record wind speeds are likely to continue as the planet continues to warm. At the time of its introduction, the SS wind scale did not foresee the need for a tropical cyclone-beyond category 5. However, due to global warming, there is now a need to define a category 6 cyclone. The authors therefore proposed to

introduce a hypothetical modification of the SS wind scale to tie category 5 to peak wind speeds between 252-309 km/hour and to include an additional category 6 above 309 km/hour.

Observations indicate that of the 197 tropical cyclones categorised as category 5 in the 42-year period from 1980 to 2021, half occurred in the last 17 years of the period. Five of these storms which exceeded the hypothetical category 6 (with wind speeds of over 309 km/hour). Simulations of future climate change suggest that the annual exceedance of the category 6 threshold will increase even more in the regions where intense tropical cyclones currently occur. It is expected that the proposed 6th category of the SS wind scale could raise awareness of the dangers of the increased risk of large cyclones due to global warming.

At present, the North Indian Ocean is not as vulnerable to category 6 storms. However, as global warming continues unabated, there is a good chance that a category 6 storm with maximum wind speeds of over 309 km/hour may occur over the North Indian Ocean in the near future. Therefore, there is a need to revisit India's disaster management strategy for tropical cyclones and the early warning systems. (Madhavan Nair Rajeevan was former secretary to the Government of India and presently the Vice Chancellor, Atria University, Bengaluru)

# Sprouting a sandalwood sapling



**SPEAKING OF SCIENCE**

D. Balasubramanian

Sandalwood hardly needs an introduction to the readers of *The Hindu*. It has been valued for many centuries, for its fragrant oil, its prized wood, and the many medicinal uses it has been put to. The tree that all this comes from, however, is not all that familiar. Growing in deciduous forests, it is a partial, or hemiparasite that needs four or five other trees growing around it. Under the ground, sandalwood roots form a haustorium that forms an octopus-like hold on the host tree's roots, from where water

and nutrients are taken.

The sandalwood fruit is probably even more unfamiliar. About 1.5 cm in diameter, the fleshy fruit is a shiny purplish black when ripe. The one seed inside is a hard, dry kernel, not the usual tough seed coat protecting a fleshy interior. This makes it difficult for the seed to survive beyond one season.

Both the above properties – the need for other trees in the early growth phase, and the seeds, which are short-lived and cannot be stored, have added to the overexploited tree's difficulties. This has led to a drastic fall in the number of sandalwood trees in the forests of South India. The IUCN has classified sandalwood as a vulnerable species. It is not surprising that Australia is



**Ideal way:** Passage through the digestive system of birds is good for the seeds as they have better chances of maturing into trees.

now the world's largest supplier of sandalwood and its oil.

## Dispersal by birds

The fruit is bitter, and not to human tastes. But it is loved by birds. About 10 species, such as the Asian Koel, and the Gray Hornbill

swallow the fruit whole, and over time drop the seeds at great distances from the tree they feasted on. These birds are among India's larger frugivores, or eaters of fruit. The sandalwood tree's fruit is just right for the koels and hornbills. It has been esta-

blished that sandalwood trees that produce larger seeds usually end up with the seeds close by. Although the large seeds are better equipped for germination, birds cannot swallow those large seeds, and drop them off after pecking away at the flesh.

The passage through the digestive system is good for the seeds. The seeds now germinate very quickly and have better chances of maturing into trees. This is the reason why forests, and not plantations, are where we get to see a few mature sandalwood trees. Sadly, the thinning of forests has reduced bird populations, and therefore the chances of proper seed dispersal.

Can humans try to emulate birds? Researchers at the Kerala Agricultural University in Thrissur, work-

ing with European colleagues have tried various ways of priming sandalwood seeds for germination (*Forests*, 14:1076, 2023). Best results were obtained when they soaked freshly collected sandalwood tree seeds in a 5% solution of polyethylene glycol-6000 for two days. This interesting synthetic substance induces osmotic pressure on the cells of the seed and pushes the germination process forward. This is called osmopriming, and when done correctly is more effective than soaking in just water. The sprouting rate was 79% compared to 45% when just planting the seed.

(The article was written in collaboration with Sushil Chandani, who works in molecular modelling)



## Question Corner

### Tooth decay

#### When did an uptick in dental cavities in humans begin?

Researchers have recovered remarkably preserved microbiomes from two teeth dating back 4,000 years, found in an Irish limestone cave. Genetic analyses of these microbiomes reveal major changes in the oral microenvironment from the Bronze Age to today. The authors identified several bacteria linked to gum disease and provided the first high-quality ancient genome of *Streptococcus mutans*, the major culprit behind tooth decay. While *S. mutans* is very common in modern

mouths, it is exceptionally rare in the ancient genomic record. One reason for this may be the acid-producing nature of the species. This acid decays the tooth, but also destroys DNA and stops plaque from fossilising. While most ancient oral microbiomes are retrieved from fossilised plaque, this study targeted the tooth directly. Another reason for the scarcity of *S. mutans* in ancient mouths may be the lack of favourable habitats for this sugar-loving species.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



## What happened to the bridge in Baltimore?

Could the Baltimore bridge disaster have been prevented? What happens when a ship's generators fail?

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

**O**n March 26, a container vessel ran into the pillar of a bridge on the Patapsco River in Baltimore, bringing a part of the structure crashing down together with some people and cars on the bridge. By late March 27, the U.S. Coast Guard had concluded its search in the river for the bodies of the six people who fell. The vessel had an all-Indian crew.

What is the timeline of events?

After departing from the port of Baltimore at 12.28 a.m. local time, the 300-metre-long vessel *Dali* was headed for Colombo, Sri Lanka, with several containers of oil and some hazardous material. Less than an hour after its departure, people nearby reported the *Dali's* lights flickering. Two minutes later, the ship's course also started to angle towards two of the bridge's pillars in the river. At 1.27 a.m. local time, the *Dali* mowed into the pillar and brought down a segment of the bridge.

A U.S. Coast Guard report said, the *Dali's* crew had broadcast a mayday signal seeking help to control the vessel. This signal alerted the Coast Guard as well as prompted local authorities to close the bridge for further traffic. A part of the bridge's superstructure also fell on the vessel, smashing some containers and leaving them balanced precariously on the vessel.

The Coast Guard suggested the vessel's engine failed. In this scenario, it would have lost its lights and other facilities and, sans mechanical power, deprived its pilots of the ability to steer the vessel.

Maryland governor Wes Moore later declared a state of emergency. With inputs from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, federal officials had by March 28 also virtually ruled out deliberate intent to cause the collision.

The *Dali* belongs to the Danish shipping giant Maersk and flies a Singapore flag. It is managed by the Synergy Marine Group, headed by Rajesh Unni.

What were the casualties?

The Synergy Marine Group said in statements that all crew members were safe.

The bridge's collapse dropped eight people through 50 feet into the Patapsco River. While two people were fished out soon after, the Coast Guard postponed the search for the other six because of the river's depth, temperature, lack of light, the presence of sharp objects in the water, and the risk of more parts of the bridge and/or the containers falling in.

Rear Admiral Shannon Gilreath told reporters on March 28 that the team no longer expected to find the six people alive.

What happened to the ship?

The *Dali* is propelled by a nine-cylinder two-stroke diesel engine. In the two-stroke cycle, fuel is pumped into the combustion chamber, where a spark plug causes the fuel-air mixture to explode. The energy release pushes a piston up, rotating the crankshaft. The explosion's residue (exhaust) is then pumped out of the engine to bring the piston down in the second stroke. Once the engine transfers mechanical power to the crankshaft, it can be further transferred to the propeller directly, via a gearbox or electric motors. It is also coupled with an alternator that converts the mechanical power to electric to supply appliances on the vessel, including lighting. The Coast Guard recorded a statement that at least one of *Dali's* engines "coughed" and that "the smell of burned fuel was everywhere in the engine room", suggesting the vessel's engine failed. In this scenario, the vessel would have lost its lights and other facilities and, sans mechanical power, deprived its pilots of the ability to steer the vessel. Onlookers reported the vessel's lights flickering on later which experts have attributed to a backup generator.

The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board said it would be checking whether the fuel used in the *Dali's* engine was contaminated.

In 2023, Chilean authorities reported issues with *Dali's* propulsion, although Singaporean ones said it had cleared two inspections at foreign ports the same year.

Could the collision have been prevented?

The Francis Scott Key Bridge – the structure in question – was built in the mid-1970s. Colin Caprani, a civil engineer at Monash University, Melbourne, wrote that the protective shielding around the pillars into which the ship moved wasn't designed to withstand the impact of such a large vessel. Together with the vessel's speed at the time of the collision, around 15 km/hr, he estimated the impact force to be equivalent to 20,000 tonnes. In 2016, Panama Canal authorities upgraded its locks to allow larger ships to pass through. The *Dali's* design was subsequently modified to increase its container capacity by 10%. Before this, *Financial Times* reported, vessels of this size seldom made port along the U.S. east coast – nor did bridges over waterways here have to contend with them.

## Why is unemployment high among the youth?

What has the India Employment Report 2024, prepared by the Institute for Human Development and the International Labour Organization, found? Why are educated youth also not getting jobs? Why is women participation in the labour force low? What are some of the correctives suggested?

A. M. Jigeesh

The story so far:

**T**he India Employment Report 2024, prepared jointly by the Institute of Human Development (IHD) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), and released on March 26, revolves around "youth employment, education and skills." It has analysed trends and patterns of the Indian labour market for two decades, including the COVID-19 years, and listed the "emerging characteristics of the employment challenges now confronting the economy as well as the impact of growth on employment."

What are the key findings?

The report's authors note that the proportion of India's working-age population (aged 15-59) increased from 61% in 2011 to 64% in 2021 and is projected to reach 65% in 2036. About 7-8 million young people are added each year to the labour force. Though the proportion of youth getting an education increased from 18% in 2000 to 35% in 2022, the percentage of youth involved in economic activities decreased from 52% to 37% during the same period.

The authors warn that unemployment in the country is "predominantly a problem among youth", especially those with a secondary level of education or higher, and that it has intensified over time.

"In 2022, the share of unemployed youth in the total unemployed population was 82.9%," they noted, adding that the share of educated youth among all unemployed people also increased, from 54.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2022. Also, among the educated (secondary level or higher) unemployed youth, women accounted

The report pointed out that most jobs in 2023 were in the informal sector; and that about half the jobs in the formal sector were also of an informal nature

for a larger share (76.7%) than men (62.2%).

Is the crisis the result of a lack of jobs?

Santosh Mehrotra whose studies have been cited in several chapters in the report, told *The Hindu* that it's a question of both lack of opportunities and unemployability of educated youth due to poor quality of education. He urged the government to ensure that the development of skills was separated from formal education. The ILO and IHD said the share of technically qualified youth was low in India: 15.62% youth had vocational training in 2022, but out of them only 4.09% had formal vocational training. According to Mr. Mehrotra, the fact that employment in the agriculture sector has increased after 2019 is because of the lack of quality education among the youth, making it difficult for them to get jobs in other sectors. The report's authors pointed out that most jobs in 2023 (90.4%) were in the informal sector; and that around half the jobs in the formal sector (45.2%) were also of an informal nature. Mr. Mehrotra stressed the importance of creating more jobs in the formal sector, pointing out that the unemployment rate among youth had tripled between 2012 and 2018.

What is the quality of employment?

The ILO and IHD stated that the jobs remained low-productive and low-earning. Real wages and earnings showed a decline or had stagnated. A large proportion of regular workers (40.8%) and casual workers (51.9%) did not receive the average daily minimum wage prescribed for unskilled workers. The government-prescribed rate is ₹480 per day.

Central trade unions and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha are concerned about the report's findings. According to senior trade union leader Amarjeet Kaur, the ILO report flags the "wage depression" prevalent in the country, especially when food inflation is not under control. She adds that formal employment is merely 9% of total employment and that most of the workforce is kept out of any social security net. "This itself adds to unemployment and underemployment as workers without formal employment may not be able to build a base of education and skill enhancement for the next generation," she observes.

The report's authors said as individuals attain higher levels of education, they are more likely to have access to more secure and formal employment options, leading to higher average returns. Youth residing in the southern, western and north-eastern regions had greater probabilities of being in formal employment, they noted, also flagging the larger presence of

socially marginalised youth in informal jobs.

Why are jobs scarce in the formal sector?

Trade unions contend that thousands of posts have not been filled for years and the policy of letting one-third of the vacancies lapse after retirements have resulted in the decrease of formal employment. The trend of contractual appointments and clamour for consultancies are also blamed for the dip in formal jobs.

What about the gender gap?

There is a significant gender gap in the labour market, with low rates of female labour force participation. The gender gap in the LFPR has remained almost consistent over the past two decades, the report's authors observed.

In 2022, the LFPR of young men (at 61.2%) was almost three times higher than that of young women (at 21.7%), and the gender gap was similar in both rural and urban areas. The report's authors have noted that there is a large proportion of young persons, particularly women, who are not in education, employment or training. Between 2012 and 2019, there was an alarming increase in unemployment because of the decrease in women participation in the workforce, a trend which has been slightly reversed post 2019. "Young women are more likely to engage in agriculture than young men," they said.

What has the report recommended?

India was expected to have a sustained economic growth of 5-6% in the next 15 years or so, the report's authors noted. "Rapid technological changes and high growth have increased the gap between skill supply and demand," they said, urging policymakers to take adequate steps to ensure rapid integration of youth into the labour market through well-targeted supply and demand measures.

The report's authors have recommended "five missions" to address the challenges: Make production and growth more employment-intensive; improve the quality of jobs; overcome labour market inequalities; make systems for skills training and active labour market policies more effective; bridge the deficits in knowledge on labour market patterns and youth employment. They have recommended measures such as integrating employment creation with macro and other economic policies to boost productive non-farm employment. They also said micro, small and medium-sized enterprises must be supported and decentralised.

The report's authors have urged the government to take steps to increase agriculture productivity, create more non-farm jobs and promote entrepreneurship. Calling for a focus on policies that boost women's participation in the labour force, they also sought a minimum quality of employment and basic rights of workers across all sectors.



**Crisis time:** The trend of contractual appointments and clamour for consultancies are also blamed for the dip in formal jobs. AFP

## Will global forest expansion hit tribals?

What are the concerns about the Global Biodiversity Framework which aims to increase areas under forest cover, inland water, coastal and marine areas to at least 30% of the world's terrestrial area? What is the situation in India?

Rahul Karmakar

The story so far:

**A** symposium on the rights of indigenous people organised by the University of Arizona on March 21-22 put the spotlight on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and how, in conjunction with the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act of 2023, it will hit India's tribes the hardest. Many at the symposium foresaw doom for the country's indigenous communities already affected by the establishment of national parks.

What is the Kunming-Montreal GBF?

This framework was adopted during the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022 following a four-year consultation and negotiation process. It claims to support the achievement of sustainable development goals and build on previous strategic plans, paving "an ambitious pathway to reach the global vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050." Accordingly, four goals were set for 2050 and 23 targets for 2030 toward planning, monitoring, reporting and reviewing implementation, organising finance, and drawing up strategies for capacity development, technical and scientific cooperation, and an agreement on digital

Activists say meeting the GBF targets will threaten the existence of indigenous populations

sequence information on genetic resources. In adopting the GBF, all parties have committees to set national targets to implement it. Participating at the event, New Delhi-based rights activist Suhass Chakma drew the attention of environmentalists and leaders of indigenous communities to Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal GBF, which aims to "increase terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services" to at least 30% of the world's terrestrial area. At present, protected areas (PAs) cover about 16%.

What are its implications?

Participants at the 'Symposium on Conservation, Racism, and Indigenous Peoples Human Rights' felt that the seemingly benign goals of the GBF tilt the scale in favour of corporate houses eyeing forest resources at the expense of the indigenous communities living with nature. Indigenous peoples have been denied the right to housing, health, education, electricity, and security in Indonesia's Ujungkulon National Park while Heng Saphen, an indigenous leader living inside the Beng Per Wildlife Sanctuary of Cambodia was convicted by a kangaroo court for cultivating on her own land. About 18% of Cambodia's Botum Sakor National Park stands protected after much of its land was sold off to private firms, the participants said. Involving the private sector in forest conservation is a bad idea and India has taken a step in that direction with the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act to 2023 to include zoos, safaris, ecotourism facilities, etc., as forest activities, Mr. Chakma pointed out. The UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, José Francisco Calí Tzay, said the PAs were initially created "as recreational opportunities, hunting grounds for western colonial elites". The concept, the participants pointed out, has not changed much with ecotourism or sustainable ecotourism projects reducing the indigenous peoples to animals in a zoo, made to sit in "model replicas" of traditional houses wearing traditional dresses and ornaments, and playing traditional musical instruments.

What would GBF mean for India?

About 84% of India's national parks (89 out of a total of 106) were established in areas inhabited by the indigenous peoples and meeting the GBF targets will threaten their existence, the activists said. For instance, the initiative to upgrade the Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan to a tiger reserve will affect 162 tribal villages located inside and outside the sanctuary while the expansion of the Nauradehi Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is set to affect 62 villages of mostly tribal people. In Assam, the June 19, 2022, notification for the Barak Bhuban Wildlife Sanctuary will affect the indigenous groups. The gazette notification states that the sanctuary "is free from encroachment as per record, there are no rights and concessions of any person in the area" but the Khasis possess documents showing they have been living in the area since 1914.

What can be done to protect the tribal lands?

Mr. Chakma said a multilateral agreement like the Kunming-Montreal GBF cannot be amended but the government of India needs to change its policy. First, it has to recognise the right to free, prior, and informed consent as guaranteed under the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and make further amendments to the laws to make the tribals custodians of the PAs as nature has largely been protected because of their special relations with the forests and their denizens. Secondly, the government of India should not only target the tribal areas simply because they do not matter electorally.

"That Uttar Pradesh and Bihar only have one national park each – Dudhwa inhabited by the indigenous Tharu people and Valmiki inhabited by the Tharus, Oraons, Mundas, etc. – speaks for itself. If tiger reserves can be created in areas where there are no tigers such as Sahyadri (Maharashtra), Satkosia (Odisha), Kamlang (Arunachal Pradesh), Kawal (Telangana), and Dampa (Mizoram), there is no reason why PAs cannot be created in non-tribal areas," he said. Finally, India ought to address human rights violations in the PAs seriously.

Human rights issues of these people such as access to education, healthcare, and housing cannot be left to the Wildlife or Forest Department. Thousands of indigenous people living within the PAs must be respected and recognised for preserving the biodiversity and the ecosystem and not punished, he said.



GETTY IMAGES



# PROFILES

## The dissident vocalist

**T.M. Krishna**

The Carnatic singer, whose musical genius and reformist activism won him both plaudits and condemnation, has kicked up a storm in the music world after he got this year's Sangita Kalanidhi award

**Ramya Kannan**

If two hypothetical roads diverged in the mature Carnatic woods, T.M. Krishna took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference. India is no stranger to controversies about awards that are given for meritorious achievement, and yet, seldom have we seen as much flap as was witnessed after the Music Academy in Chennai announced that, this year, it would confer its top honour – the Sangita Kalanidhi award – on the Carnatic vocalist.

The award has always been widely considered to be the 'highest accolade in Carnatic music'. Conferred by an institution that has been in existence for nearly a century, at the annual conference in Chennai's most salubrious season in Margazhi, artistes have accepted it with a Bhakti akin to what they might employ on a Thyagaraja *kriti*.

To understand the opposition to Krishna, comprehending the cultural and historical context is essential.

The idea of a Music Academy originally emerged as an offshoot of the All India Congress Session held in Madras in December 1927 as an institution that would set the standards for Carnatic music. It was inaugurated the next year. In 1929, it started hosting annual conferences on music, which in turn spawned the December music festival of Madras, known popularly as the *Kutchery* season. The format is a series of concerts across the city conducted in an intensive month-long festival that attracts both the cognoscenti and the common people, drinking in the performances, ticketed or free based on economic capacity, equally possessive of their own fest in their own backyard.

Was this feeling of possession truly universal? Or was this an esoteric stratosphere that, through deliberate plan and design, kept some out? It was here that Krishna, a prodigy who gave his first Carnatic concert at the age of 12 at a noon slot in the Music Academy, branched out on the path that has brought him both awards/plaudits and condemnation, in possibly equal measure.

Krishna himself was born in this crucible of culture, in Madras, 48 years ago, and was educated at The School, run by the Krishnamurti Foundation, with a liberal pedagogical outlook, that urges students to "learn and grow in mindful relatedness".

Initially, he got a hand up from his grand uncle T.T. Krishnamachari, industrialist and former Finance Minister, who was then a member at the Academy. A privilege that he acknowledged as his now famous awakening dawned, and one he sought to question, even counter, shaking at the roots of the system he was a symbiotic part of.

In retrospect, his grooming and education set him on this inevitable path of introspection. But some critics believe it was prep work on his books that set him askew. His first book *Voices Within* (2007), with singer Bombay Jayashri, was a coffee table book on Carnatic music maestros. It was his second book *A Southern Music: The Carnatic Story* (2013) that first hinted at the schisms in Carnatic music that Krishna was beginning to see.

It shows him standing dissatisfied at the edge of that yellow wood, peering at the divergent path. In this clearly polemical book, he strikes the first discordant note: "The environment that pervades Karnatik music makes it very difficult for an atheist to function within its world. There may be a few, but they will find it very difficult to come out in the open and articulate an atheistic narrative for Karnatik music." Later in an interview to *The Hindu*, he clarified: "The music – its form, history, integrity – is what I treasure. What we are stuck with is the *kutchery*. As far as the *kutchery* is concerned, I am willing to give it up. Because, after a point, I think the *kutchery* has not looked at the music but got stuck in its own success story."

**Thorny paths**

With *Sebastian and Sons*, Krishna was stridently in the other path, as he questioned what he called caste discrimination ingrained in, this time, percussion music.

Critics and colleagues, particularly the purists among them, were outraged. His questions went deeper,



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

beyond form and content, further rocking the foundation that all had found comfort in. No one was truly surprised by what he said, that Carnatic music was in the preserve of one community – the Brahmins. However, to express discomfort with that so openly and with judgement as Krishna did, was inexplicable. Was the innate performer in him at play even as he struck out, craving a different kind of attention? It could be said that reformers tread thorny paths; to shock and shake is the play of someone who wants to usher in change. His unvarnished opinion, nevertheless,

ruffled many feathers.

It is also what he did later that seems to have built up this bulwark of opposition. Refusing to participate in the Margazhi season in 2015, could well have been harakiri in that world. Krishna said: "I feel that the music season today has reached a point where music has almost disappeared from it. Perhaps I should say music has fled from it, because of the noise that pervades it." He also alleged corruption and hijacking of the sabhas by certain people. What a dissonance this might have seemed to them.

The Carnatic community perceived

his activism as arising from an intrinsic anti-Brahmanism, and was further scandalised by his growing, well-articulated fondness for the Dravidian ideologue Periyar, who was stridently against the Brahmin hegemony of his times. Krishna also performed non-ticketed concerts, besides going out to beaches and streets to take music to the people. In association with the progressive writer Perumal Murugan, he set Periyar's writing, and ancient Tamil texts to Carnatic music.

**The Periyar connection**

In the letter that was to muddy the waters, vocalist duo Ranjani and Gayathri (RaGa) invoked Krishna's Periyar connection, calling the latter a promoter of Brahmin "genocide", notably not questioning his ability as a musician. Others who pilloried Krishna subsequently too invoked 'dharma' and Hinduism. Even as they disagreed with the politics of Krishna, they allowed that to colour their perception of his musical genius, though Music Academy president N. Murali attested in a note that the choice was "based on his excellence in music over a long career".

In response, some sophistry followed: RaGa claimed they had not questioned the institution's prerogative to award someone, they had chosen not to perform at an event that the awardee would preside over. Inadvertently, his detractors advanced Krishna's own narrative. In their second letter, RaGa said, "It will be the happiest day for us and for millions of people to see star performers emerge from underprivileged communities and dominate the stage..." reserving their attack, for the Academy this time, calling for reform to start at the top.

In the 1981 Oscar winning movie *Mephisto*, the protagonist, an actor famed for playing the demon Mephistopheles, is shown signing a Faustian pact with the Nazi Party of Germany to advance his own career. He ignores the moral compromises his decision forces on him, but seeks to justify it: "I'm just an actor." Krishna is an artiste who has reached the opposite end of that spectrum, he long stopped being "just a singer".

**THE GIST**

▼ Krishna was born in Madras, 48 years ago, and was educated at The School, run by the Krishnamurti Foundation, with a liberal pedagogical outlook

▼ Initially, he got a hand up from his grand uncle T.T. Krishnamachari, industrialist and former Finance Minister, who was then a member at the Music Academy

▼ Krishna, who gave his first Carnatic concert at the age of 12 at a noon slot in the Music Academy, branched out on a different path that has brought him both awards/plaudits and condemnation, in possibly equal measure

## Israel's Minister of offence

**Yoav Gallant**

The Likud leader and member of Netanyahu's war Cabinet threatens to continue and expand the military operations despite a UNSC demand for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

**Priyali Prakash**

When the U.S. finally abstained from vetoing a UN Security Council resolution demanding for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza on March 25, it prompted a slew of angry remarks from Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled a delegation [which was eventually reinstated] to Washington to express his disappointment, which meant that his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant was left alone in the U.S. to deal with the immediate aftermath of the significant update.

Mr. Gallant, a member of Israel's three-member war Cabinet who famously likened Palestinians to "human animals" while ordering a complete siege of Gaza after the October 7 Hamas attack, has been instrumental in leading the war on the enclave. A former soldier himself, Mr. Gallant has not always had it easy with Israel's top brass. He was believed to be not particularly close to Mr. Netanyahu previously, who had cancelled his appointment as the Chief of General Staff of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in 2011 due to allegations related to seizure of public lands for personal use.

In 2023, Mr. Netanyahu fired him from the post of Defence Minister after he



warned the administration of a security threat due to a proposed judicial overhaul. Mr. Gallant was, however, reinstated following public outrage. A member of the Prime Minister's right-wing Likud Party, Mr. Gallant was among the first senior leaders who spoke against the judicial overhaul which proposed limiting the Supreme Court's powers.

Born to a Holocaust-survivor mother who arrived in Israel onboard the *SS Exodus* and a father with military roots, Mr. Gallant began his military career as a naval commando with the 13th Flotilla, also called Shayetet 13, which specialises in operating in the sea, on land, and in the air. He spent six years with the unit, before taking a break from the armed forces. Like many Israeli soldiers who travel overseas after their military service periods, Mr. Gallant went to Alaska and worked as a lumberjack for two years before returning to Israel.

He first rejoined the Navy before transferring to the IDF.

Mr. Gallant was appointed the military secretary of late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and was promoted to Major General – setting him up for his future roles within the IDF as well as Israeli politics.

During his tenure with the IDF, he moved up to serve with the Gaza Division. He commanded the 2009 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in which around 1,400 Palestinians were killed in 22 days. The operation put him in the 2011 race for the IDF Chief of Staff, even as a UN report accused Israel of committing war crimes during the offensive.

**Political entry**

In 2015, Mr. Gallant moved to politics after over 35 years with the armed forces. He joined the newly formed Kulanu Party, and was elected to the Knesset (Parliament) after the party won 10 seats. He was ap-

pointed the Minister of Construction.

By 2019, Mr. Gallant had crossed over to the Likud Party and was appointed the Minister of Education. As the Education Minister, he attempted to cancel the award of Israel Prize to Oded Goldreich, a scientist at the Weizmann Institute, who reportedly supported the "anti-Zionist" Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement.

Mr. Gallant became the Defence Minister in 2022.

In January 2024, he outlined his vision for the future of Gaza, which, according to him, would be an enclave run by a Palestinian body under overall Israeli control. Since the October 7 Hamas attack in which at least 1,200 Israelis were killed and around 240 taken as hostages, Israel has killed more than 32,000 Palestinians in its offensive in Gaza and forced most of the strip's population out of their homes amid continuous bombings. After the U.S. abstained from vetoing the UNSC resolution on March 25, Mr. Gallant has proactively met with leaders in Washington, sometimes referring to supporters as "true friends of Israel" in an apparent dig at U.S. President Joe Biden. And now, he is back in Israel, and is threatening to expand operations against Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon.

## The TikTok Taoiseach

**Simon Harris**

The Fine Gael leader is set to become the youngest Irish Premier at a time when the country is faced with an acute housing crisis and the ruling party is battling dwindling popularity

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

**Joan Sony Cherian**

"This is a moment for Fine Gael to reset," said Simon Harris after he was appointed the new leader of the Fine Gael, the centre-right party leading Ireland's ruling coalition, after the shock resignation of Prime Minister Leo Varadkar on March 20. At 37, Mr. Harris is set to become the youngest ever Taoiseach when the Dail (Irish parliament) reconvenes in April. He is determined to let the government run its full term until elections next year.

Mr. Harris was introduced to politics at the very young age of 16 when he, frustrated by the lack of information and guidance for people with autism like his brother, called for a public meeting in his neighbourhood on the issue which led to a lobby/support group for people and children with autism. Even though he calls himself an 'accidental politician', Mr. Harris seems to have paved his way in politics well in advance when one looks at how he rose through the ranks.

Dropping out of college to make his mark in politics, Mr. Harris, at the age of 22, was elected councillor of Wicklow in 2009. He then became a member of parliament at 24, a junior Minister at 27 and held his



first ever Cabinet position at 29 as Minister for Health in 2016. From 2020 onwards, he held the post of Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. His strong online presence has earned him the moniker, the 'TikTok Taoiseach'.

Mr. Harris oversaw the beginning of safety and quarantine precautions when COVID-19 first hit the country. He was applauded for his foresight in mandating necessary safeguards and ordering a total closure of schools and colleges almost a fortnight before the U.K. Another feather in his cap as Health Minister was bringing in the 36th amendment of the Constitution, which came out of the 2018 referendum that called for an upturn of Ireland's near-total ban on abortion.

However, it has not all been smooth-sailing for Mr. Harris. In February, 2019, he faced a no-confidence motion moved by

the Sinn Fein, the opposition political party, over the cost-oversruns at the new national children's hospital. The hospital, one of the government's biggest construction projects, which was to be built at an estimated cost of €800 million in 2014, rose to almost €1.43 billion by 2019. The opposition called the project a financial mismanagement. Mr. Harris survived the motion and went on to state that the government would build the hospital and "get to the bottom of what has gone wrong".

It was also under his tenure that the cervical cancer smear test scandal broke out. In April 2018, Vicky Phelan, a 43-year old woman, accused the Irish government's health authority of misdiagnosing a routine pap smear she underwent in 2011, which later turned out to be positive for cervical cancer. Many more women (over 200) then came forward sharing stories of how their state-run pap smear tests

were given as negative when it should have been flagged as positive, thus depriving these women of an early diagnosis and another chance at life.

**Challenges ahead**

Mr. Harris was quick to take a dig at the Opposition when he stated in his appointment speech that the "Sinn Féin cannot bear to look back over what Fine Gael has achieved since pulling our economy back from the brink...they cannot handle the truth." Mr. Harris said his party supports small businesses and education, and is committed to making "work pay".

However, the youngest ever Irish Premier has his work cut out for him. Ireland faces an extreme housing crisis, topped only by concerns over mass immigration and the record number of asylum seekers and refugees. Additionally, inheriting a three-party coalition leaves very little room for the incumbent Prime Minister to make any major policy changes.

After almost a decade of Fine Gael rule, Sinn Fein has the support of 28% voters, almost eight percentage points ahead of the ruling party.

Whether it be 'resetting' the party or forming a new Cabinet, it remains to be seen what impact Mr. Harris can have in his short tenure as Prime Minister.



## BEIJING

## As Sri Lanka PM concludes visit, China vows to help island nation



China has said it would continue to support Sri Lanka, as the crisis-hit island nation's Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardane on Saturday wrapped up a visit to Beijing to try to finalise a debt restructuring deal. Among other projects, the two sides agreed to "to promote the Port City Colombo and Hambantota Project". AFP

## AUSTRIA

## 17 injured as river cruise ship hits concrete passageway



17 passengers were hurt when a Bulgarian river cruise ship lost steering and hit the sides of a lock on the Danube in Austria. The ship with 142 aboard, most of them from Germany, temporarily lost power to its electronics system and became unsteerable as it passed through narrow locks at 9:45 p.m. on Friday. AP

## KATHMANDU

## On Tibet visit, Nepal official calls for opening China border points



Nepal has urged China to reopen the 14 traditional border points with the Tibetan Autonomous Region not just for bilateral trade and commerce but for the movement of people too. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Narayan Kaji Shrestha is on his first visit to China after taking over office earlier in the month. PTI

## CAIRO

## France, Jordan, Egypt Ministers call for 'permanent' Gaza ceasefire



The French, Egyptian and Jordanian foreign ministers called on Saturday for an "immediate and permanent ceasefire" in Gaza and the release of all hostages held by Palestinian militants. The three Ministers renewed their governments' support for the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA. AFP

## Asia should prevent world from becoming an arena for geopolitical fighting, says China

Countries in Asia should jointly oppose unilateralism and self-serving practices, oppose picking sides and bloc confrontation and prevent the region and the world from becoming an arena for geopolitical fighting, says Zhao Leji, Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee

Nikhil M. Babu  
HAINAN

China's top legislator Zhao Leji has said that Asia has endured both "hot and cold" wars and they should prevent the world from becoming an arena for "geopolitical fighting", and welcomed all countries to board China's "express train" of development.

Mr. Zhao, Chairman of the National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee, was speaking at the opening session of the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) Annual Conference 2024, an international organisation of 29 member states, including many leaders from Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries such as Sri Lanka.

Speaking at the same session, on March 28, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunewardane, said



**New vision:** Zhao Leji speaks at the opening ceremony of Boao Forum of Asia in southern China's Hainan province on Thursday. AP

that Sri Lanka's port development has taken a new turn of "advanced" development with the assistance of China and it will "change the present scenario".

A day earlier, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister had said had pledged to develop the island nation's strategic deep sea port and the capital's airport after talks

with his counterpart in Beijing, according to AFP.

"Colombo port will become a hub of a newly developed port with financial instruments that could cater to the new demands that are growing among ourselves, among our countries, for development and investment, which is essential. This will change the present scenario

from East Asia to East Africa, and the blue seas that we all could work together for the future that we face in a successful and a great joint programme are what we look forward to," Mr. Gunawardane said.

Sri Lanka's southern sea port of Hambantota was handed to a Chinese state-owned company in 2017 on a 99-year lease for \$1.12 billion. India and the U.S. are both concerned that a Chinese foothold at the port could boost China's naval advantage in the Indian Ocean.

In December 2023, amid repeated messages from New Delhi, Colombo announced a year-long moratorium on foreign research vessels visiting Sri Lankan waters.

## Walk together

Mr. Zhao said that Asian countries have the fine tradition of helping each other

out in trying times and they have overcome one difficulty after another on their paths to development.

"Now in a phase of clamours for division and confrontation, it is essential that we stay independent, seek strength through unity, and continue to walk side by side with each other. (We should) jointly oppose unilateralism and self-serving practices, oppose picking sides and bloc confrontation and prevent this region and the world from becoming an arena for geopolitical fighting," he said.

Mr. Zhao called on all countries to transcend the "old mentality" of bloc confrontation and zero-sum games and practice genuine multilateralism to jointly build an open world economy. "We must oppose trade protectionism and all forms of erecting

barriers, decoupling, or severing of supply chains," he said.

## Hot and cold wars

Mr. Zhao said people in Asia have endured both hot and cold wars, as well as hardships and tribulations, leading them to deeply cherish the value of peace. He added that China will make it more convenient for foreigners to work, study, and travel in China.

The BFA, which concluded on Friday, was held in Hainan – the southern most and the only tropical island province of China – in the South China Sea, not very far from the Philippines, amidst an ongoing tension between the two countries.

(This correspondent attended the Boao Forum for Asia at the invitation of the China Public Diplomacy Association)

## 5 killed, dozens hurt in Gaza amid chaos during aid delivery

Agence France-Presse  
GAZA STRIP

The Palestine Red Crescent said five persons were killed and dozens wounded by gunfire and a stampede during an aid delivery Saturday in northern Gaza, where famine looms.

Video footage showed a convoy of trucks moving past burning debris near the distribution point in pre-dawn darkness as people shout and gunfire echoes – some of which was warning shots, witnesses said.

## Deadly roundabout

The Red Crescent said it happened after thousands of people gathered for the arrival of around 15 trucks of flour and other food, which was supposed to be handed out at Gaza City's Kuwait roundabout, in the territory's north.

The roundabout has been the scene of several chaotic and deadly aid distribution incidents, including

**Red Crescent said it happened after thousands were waiting for 15 trucks of food items**

ing one on March 23 in which the Hamas-run government said 21 people were killed by Israeli fire – a charge Israel denied.

The Red Crescent said three of the five killed early on Saturday had been shot.

Eyewitnesses said that Gazans overseeing the aid delivery shot in the air, but Israeli troops in the area also opened fire and some moving trucks hit people trying to get the food.

The Israeli military said it "has no record of the incident described."

A UN-backed report warned on March 19 that half of Gazans are experiencing "catastrophic" hunger, with famine projected to hit the north of the territory unless there is urgent intervention.

## Zardaris supersede Sharifs with most legislators from a family

Press Trust of India  
LAHORE

With six members, the Zardaris have overtaken the Sharifs to hold the record for having the most number of lawmakers from a family in Pakistani politics after President Asif Ali Zardari and slain former Premier Benazir Bhutto's youngest daughter Aseefa

was elected unopposed as a member of parliament.

Ms. Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, 31, who is set to become the First Lady, had filed a nomination for the National Assembly seat NA-207 from the Shaheed Benazirabad (formerly Nawabshah) area of Sindh province for the bye-election scheduled for next month.

Ms. Bhutto Zardari was elected unopposed after three candidates who had filed papers against her withdrew their names from the contest. It left her with no challenger and she was declared a winner in her maiden electoral contest on Friday. The seat was vacated by her father Asif Ali Zardari after he was elected President.

## Malaysia store attacked for offering 'Allah' socks

Agence France-Presse  
KUALA LUMPUR

A Molotov cocktail was thrown at a store belonging to a Malaysian chain that had offered socks bearing the word "Allah" for sale, the police said on Saturday.

The incident came days after the mini-market chain's executives were charged with hurting reli-

gious feelings over the sale of the socks at another of its stores.

The police chief in Kuantan city in Malaysia's east, said the KK Supermart branch had been hit just before dawn, causing a small fire at the entrance of the store.

Employees put out the fire with an extinguisher and no injuries were reported, he said.

## Russia unleashes new attacks as Ukraine sees another reshuffle

Associated Press  
KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy dismissed a long-time aide and several advisers on Saturday in a continuing reshuffle while Russia unleashed fresh attacks overnight.

Mr. Zelenskyy dismissed top aide Serhiy Shefir from his post of first assistant,

where he had served since 2019. The Ukrainian President also let go of three advisers, and two presidential representatives overseeing volunteer activities and soldiers' rights.

No explanation was given immediately for the latest changes in a wide-reaching personnel shake-up over recent months. It included the dismissal on

Tuesday of Oleksii Danilov, who served as secretary of the National Security and Defence Council.

Ukraine said on Saturday that Russia launched 12 Shahed drones overnight and fired four missiles.

Russia unleashed a barrage of 38 missiles, 75 airstrikes and 98 attacks from multiple rocket launchers over the last 24 hours

## Sport

## Nakajima enlarges lead to four strokes; Ahlawat stays six behind

INDIAN OPEN

Rakesh Rao  
GURUGRAM

A brilliant final-hole birdie enlarged overnight leader Keita Nakajima's lead to four shots at -18 over the duo of Romain Langasque and gate-crasher Gavin Green.

Though a yet-to-trail Nakajima goes into the final day of the \$2.25 million Hero Indian Open here with a comfortable lead, a dramatic twist on Sunday cannot be ruled out. At least four players kept alive their chances of lifting the coveted trophy.

Among the eight Indians making the 'cut' at

143, Veer Ahlawat remained the best. He stayed six strokes behind the leader after a three-under 69. Manu Gandas (70) spoilt a strong back-nine finish after two late bogeys, in succession.

Nakajima's two-stroke lead evaporated on the eighth-hole after he sent his tee-shot into the water for a bogey while nearest contender Langasque found his fourth birdie to catch up at 16-under.

To the credit of the Japanese, he regained focus to rebuild his two-stroke lead after birdies on the 11th and 12th.

Langasque, desperate for birdies, erred on the 13th to fall back by three strokes and slipped further

when he double-bogeyed the 16th.

Nakajima, too, failed to crack the 14th for the third day in succession and bogeyed. But he stayed ahead at -17 saving par on the 15th and consolidated his lead by adding a last-hole birdie. Langasque, too, finished with a birdie.

While all the attention was on the two front-runners, Gavin Green of Malaysia made a charge. He shot a stunning, flawless 64 to jump to the tied-second spot after three birdies on the last four holes. On the front-nine, Green found three birdies and an eagle-3 on the eighth hole to raise visions of a strong finish.

On Sunday, Green could

well be the man to watch.

## Leading scores:

**198:** Keita Nakajima (Jpn) (65, 65, 68); **202:** Romain Langasque (Fra) (66, 66, 70), Gavin Green (Mal) (72, 66, 64); **203:** Matteo Manassero (Ita) (65, 68, 70), Ko Jeong Weon (Fra) (67, 67, 69).

**Other Indians:** **208:** Manu Gandas (73, 65, 70); **210:** Aman Raj (68, 68, 74); **211:** Karandeep Kochhar (68, 70, 73); **212:** Shubhankar Sharma (70, 70, 72); **214:** Rashid Khan (71, 69, 74); **219:** Gaganjeet Bhullar (70, 69, 80); and **220:** Jairaj Singh Sandhu (74, 75); **150:** S. Chikkarangappa (78, 72).

**Prominent Indians who missed the 'cut':** **144:** Khalin Joshi (71, 73); **145:** Anirban Lahiri (77, 68); **146:** Shiv Kapur (74, 72); **148:** Udayan Mane (72, 76); **149:** Rahul Gangjee (71, 78), Ajeetesh Sandhu (74, 75); **150:** S. Chikkarangappa (78, 72).

## Leverkusen edges Hoffenheim

EURO LEAGUES

Reuters  
LEVERKUSEN

Bundesliga leader Bayer Leverkusen scored twice late in the game with Robert Andrich and Patrik Schick to earn a 2-1 comeback win over Hoffenheim on Saturday and edge closer to the league title.

Leverkusen, unbeaten in 39 matches across all competitions this season, is on 73 points with seven matches left.

**The results: Premier League:** Newcastle 4 (Isak 6-pen, 77-pen, Barnes 83, 90) bt West Ham 3 (Antonio 21, Kudus 45+10, Bowen 48); Bournemouth 2 (Solanke 64, Coleman 90+1-og) bt Everton 1 (Beto 87); Chelsea 2 (Palmer

44-pen, Palmer 78) drew with Burnley 2 (Cullen 47, O'Shea 81); Nottingham Forest 1 (Wood 61) drew with Crystal Palace 1 (Mateta 11); Tottenham 2 (Kabore 51-og, Son 86) bt Luton Town 1 (Chong 3); Sheffield United 3 (Brereton 58, 70, McBurnie 68) drew with Fulham 3 (Palhinha 62, De Cordova-Reid 86, Muniz 90+3).

**LaLiga:** Getafe 0 lost to Sevilla 1 (Ramos 5). **Bundesliga:** RB Leipzig 0 drew with Mainz 05 0; Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Andrich 88, Schick 90+1) bt Hoffenheim 1 (Beier 33); Eintracht Frankfurt 0 drew with Union Berlin 0; Borussia M'gladbach 0 lost to Freiburg 3 (Gregoritsch 7, Rohlf 47, Doan 57); Werder Bremen 0 lost to Wolfsburg 2 (Lacroix 45+4, Majer 84).

**On Friday: LaLiga:** Cadiz 1 (Navarro 51) bt Granada 0. **Serie A:** Napoli 0 lost to Atalanta 3 (Miranchuk 26, Scamacca 45, Koopmeiners 88).



**Rewarding day:** Nakajima emerged stronger after a topsy-turvy performance. GETTY IMAGES



**LIGHTNING**

**LSG's Mayank cranks up pace, catches the eye on IPL debut**



Mayank Yadav, the architect of LSG's win over PBKS on Saturday, represents Delhi in domestic cricket. In the 2023 Deodhar Trophy, he was the joint second-highest wicket-taker with 12 wickets in five innings while representing North Zone. The pacer registered 155.8 kph on the speed gun and clocked consistently in the high 140s.

**CROSSING THE LINE**

**Fan wars should never take ugly route: Ashwin on Hardik incident**



R. Ashwin came out in vehement support of the besieged Hardik Pandya after the MI captain was subjected to boos from the fans. Ashwin blamed this to the prevailing atmosphere of "fan wars" and "cinema culture". "Fan wars should never go this ugly. One should remember which country these players represent."

**FOND MEMORIES**

**Cummins and Travis head back to their place of conquest**



Australia's World Cup-winning captain Cummins, left, in pic, and Player-of-the-Final Head will return to the Narendra Modi Stadium, where they won the global title last November. "They had a smile. If you can associate a place with something that was good, it gives you a positive mindset," said SRH assistant coach Simon Helmot.

**MOVING ON...**

**Kohli, Gambhir hug each other during RCB's clash against KKR**



The IPL clash between RCB and KKR witnessed a heartfelt moment with Virat Kohli and Gautam Gambhir embracing each other. During RCB's encounter versus Lucknow in IPL 2023, Kohli and Gambhir got into a heated argument. In 2013, the two got into a heated fight, even pushing each other before being separated by teammates.

# Mayank Yadav breathes fire as LSG subdues PBKS

De Kock, Pooran and Krunal propel the Lucknow side to 199 with the West Indian leading the team in place of 'Impact Player' Rahul who opens the innings but fails to get going

**IPL-17**

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**  
LUCKNOW

He is quick. He is lightning quick, actually. Say hello to Mayank Yadav. He is that rare Indian cricketer: the genuine fast bowler. And he announced his arrival in stunning fashion.

Not merely the 21-year-old bowled the fastest ball of the season, he also took the first three wickets of Punjab Kings to help Lucknow Super Giants register a 21-run win – its first in the 17th edition of the IPL – at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Stadium on Saturday night.

**Spectacular start**  
Chasing 200 – that would have beaten the record for the highest IPL total at this venue, bettering the one made in the first innings of this match – the visitors were off to a spectacular start.

Captain Shikhar Dhawan (70, 50b, 7x4, 3x6) and Jonny Bairstow (42, 29b, 3x4, 3x6) put on 102



Top shows: De Kock gave Super Giants an energetic start with a half-century while Mayank Yadav's fiery spell derailed Kings' chase. SANDEEP SAXENA

inside 12 overs.

The debutant Mayank had come on in the 10th over and his first ball clocked 147.1 kmph. The third ball was 150 kmph. And he became faster.

The first ball of his second over recorded 155.8

kmph – the fastest of the season. Off the fourth, he had Bairstow caught at deep mid-wicket.

In his next two overs, he had the Impact Player Prabhsimran Singh and then Jitesh Sharma also caught. He finished with

three for 27. No fast bowler since Umran Malik has excited Indian cricket as much.

**Losing its way**  
When Mohsin Khan removed Dhawan and Sam Curran off successive balls,

the Kings slumped to 141 for five in 16.3 overs. It was going to be a tough ask from then on.

Earlier, the opening scene of the match proved a bit of a surprise. Out came Nicholas Pooran for the toss and announced

that the regular captain K.L. Rahul would play as an Impact Player.

Rahul, whose straight six off Arshdeep Singh was one of the shots of this IPL so far, put on 35 for the first wicket with Quinton de Kock 54 (38b, 5x4, 2x6) in-

**SCOREBOARD**

**LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS**  
Quinton de Kock c Jitesh b Arshdeep 54 (38b, 5x4, 2x6), K.L. Rahul c Bairstow b Arshdeep 15 (9b, 1x4, 1x6), Devdutt Padikkal c Dhawan b Curran 9 (6b, 2x4), Marcus Stoinis b Rahul Chahar 19 (12b, 2x6), Nicholas Pooran b Rabada 42 (21b, 3x4, 3x6), Ayush Badoni c Bairstow b Curran 8 (10b), Krunal Pandya (not out) 43 (22b, 4x4, 2x6), Ravi Bishnoi c sub (Tanay) b Curran 0 (1b), Mohsin Khan run out 2 (1b), Naveen-ul-Haq (Impact Player in place of K.L. Rahul) (not out) 0 (0b); Extras (b-1, lb-1, w-5): 7; Total (for eight wks. in 20 overs): 199.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-35 (Rahul, 3.5 overs), 2-45 (Padikkal, 5.1), 3-78 (Stoinis, 8.4), 4-125 (de Kock, 13.1), 5-146 (Pooran, 15.1), 6-189 (Badoni, 18.4), 7-189 (Bishnoi, 18.5), 8-197 (Mohsin, 19.4).

**PUNJAB KINGS BOWLING**  
Curran 4-0-28-3, Arshdeep 3-0-30-2, Rabada 4-0-38-1, Rahul Chahar 3-0-42-1, Brar 2-0-14-0, Harshal 4-0-45-0.

**PUNJAB KINGS**  
Shikhar Dhawan c de Kock b Mohsin 70 (50b, 7x4, 3x6), Jonny

Bairstow c Stoinis b Mayank Yadav 42 (29b, 3x4, 3x6), Prabhsimran Singh (Impact Player in place of Arshdeep) c Naveen b Mayank Yadav 19 (7b, 1x4, 2x6), Jitesh Sharma c Naveen b Mayank Yadav 6 (9b, 1x4), Liam Livingstone (not out) 28 (17b, 2x4, 2x6), Sam Curran c Pooran b Mohsin 0 (1b), Shashank Singh (not out) 9 (7b, 1x4); Extras (lb-2, w-2): 4; Total (for five wks. in 20 overs): 178.

**FALL OF WICKETS**  
1-102 (Bairstow, 11.4), 2-128 (Prabhsimran, 13.3), 3-139 (Jitesh, 15.4), 4-141 (Dhawan, 16.2), 5-141 (Curran, 16.3).

**SUPER GIANTS BOWLING**  
M. Siddharth 2-0-21-0, Naveen 4-0-43-0, Mohsin 4-0-34-2, Krunal 3-0-26-0, Bishnoi 3-0-25-0, Mayank Yadav 4-0-27-3.  
**Toss:** LSG; **PoM:** Mayank Yadav. LSG won by 21 runs.

**Next assignment**

**LSG:** April 2 vs RCB Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.  
**PBKs:** April 4 vs GT Ahmedabad, 7.30 p.m.

**May consider Shaw if he impresses: Ponting**

**S. Dipak Ragav**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

As Delhi Capitals searches for its first win of the tournament following defeats in the opening two games, the decision to bench Prithvi Shaw has come under scrutiny. But with its batting line-up appearing thin, head coach Ricky Ponting said Shaw could be considered for selection for the match against Chennai Super Kings.

"Our team make-up in the first game without (Anrich) Nortje allowed us to play four overseas batsmen. By doing that we pushed Mitchell Marsh to the top of the order, which pushed Prithvi out. We will look at Prithvi at training today and see how well he plays. If he impresses everybody, we will consider him for tomorrow (Sunday)," said Ponting.

"We feel that a really good game is just around the corner for us. In fact, I am sure we will have a more positive intent going into this game," added the former Australian skipper.

Meanwhile, CSK's bowling consultant, Eric Simmons, praised Rituraj Gaikwad's captaincy in the first two matches. "He is a very calm individual and a great student of the game. "As a captain, you need to understand the game and why you need to make those changes," he said.

## In-form Super Kings has the edge over Capitals

**S. Dipak Ragav**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

After two defeats on the road, Delhi Capitals will look for comfort at its temporary home ground for two games at the ACA-VDCA Stadium as it gears up for a stern test against table-topper Chennai Super Kings on Sunday.

The hosts will be acutely aware of the perils of not getting early wins on the board.

In 2023, their campaign was derailed by five losses out of the gate, from which they could never recover, and finished a lowly ninth in the table.

**Over-reliant**

Even as skipper Rishabh Pant is slowly finding his feet, the Capitals' batting seems over-reliant on openers David Warner and Mitchell Marsh.

It will be interesting to see if the team plays destructive opener Prithvi Shaw to strengthen its batting line-up.

Capitals have a few headaches even on the bowling front, with the pacers leaking runs in the death overs in the first two matches.

**Well-rounded squad**

Meanwhile, Super Kings will look to continue their winning run and hold the edge, thanks to a well-rounded squad.

The depth in the batting



Zooming in: The way Dube has been hitting the ball, it seems he sees it as big as this one. K.R. DEEPAK

line-up has allowed its batters to be aggressive throughout the innings, putting the opposition bowlers under the pump.

Three left-handers in the top six, including the in-form Shivam Dube, also give the Chennai outfit a tactical advantage to neutralise Capitals' left-arm

spin duo of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel.

The Super Kings' new overseas picks have all performed admirably in the first two games and the only challenge is whether they would be able to adapt quickly to the conditions away from home.

## Titans, Sunrisers will look to surmount bowling woes

**N. Sudarshan**  
AHMEDABAD

With a win and a loss each, there is little separate Gujarat Titans and Sunrisers Hyderabad. Yet, it is the latter that will take the field with more confidence when they meet at the Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday.

GT, after opening with a nervous six-run win over Mumbai Indians, suffered a 63-run drubbing at Chennai Super Kings' hands that sent its net run-rate south. SRH, following the narrow four-run defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders, raked up IPL's highest-ever total (277) before going on to beat MI by 31 runs.

**Stark contrast**

The contrast is especially stark in the way the teams have batted.

GT has found middle-overs acceleration tough, with the likes of Sai Sudharsan, Vijay Shankar, Azmatullah Omarzai and David Miller unable to bat with freedom.

Australian wicketkeeper-batter Matthew Wade will be welcomed back into the squad, but to fit him in, the think-tank will have much tinkering to do.

For SRH, on the other hand, Abhishek Sharma, Heinrich Klaasen, Travis Head and Aiden Markram have been at their marauding best, helping their side breach the 200-run mark twice in succession.



Aiming high: Gill will look to pull his weight while Abhishek will be keen to rock again. VIJAY SONEJI

**Points Table**

	M	W	L	PTS	NRR
Chennai Super Kings	2	2	0	4	1.979
Kolkata Knight Riders	2	2	0	4	1.047
Rajasthan Royals	2	2	0	4	0.800
Sunrisers Hyderabad	2	1	1	2	0.675
Lucknow Super Giants	2	1	1	2	0.025
Punjab Kings	3	1	2	2	-0.337
Royal Challengers	3	1	2	2	-0.711
Gujarat Titans	2	1	1	2	-1.425
Delhi Capitals	2	0	2	0	-0.528
Mumbai Indians	2	0	2	0	-0.925

Bowling is an area where both GT and SRH have to improve. A better performance will be expected from the seasoned Umesh Yadav, whom GT is banking on in the absence of Mohammed Shami but has gone for more than 10-an-over. SRH, meanwhile,

will look to not concede in excess of 200 again.

This being an afternoon tie, dew will have negligible effect. But the sweltering summer heat will test endurance levels, with temperatures expected to hover around 40°C around start-time.

**You have to back the players, says Kirsten**

**N. Sudarshan**  
AHMEDABAD

Gujarat Titans batting coach and mentor Gary Kirsten was firm in his belief that his team's top-order will be back to its fiery best, ahead of the Sunday afternoon clash against Sunrisers Hyderabad here.

In two outings so far, GT has come up with middling totals – 168 against Mumbai Indians and 143 against Chennai Super Kings – and has been unable to switch gears after decent starts.

"Our top-order has done well for us [in the past]," insisted Kirsten. "Sai Sudharsan got 96 (47b) in the final last year. If you blow hot and cold and get into crisis-management because you haven't won a game, you can get into trouble very quickly."

"It is a high-risk game, and while players make an error or don't score, you have to back [them] believing what they can do."

SRH, meanwhile, has scored runs by the truckload, but has also conceded aplenty. "We would look at improving our defensive bowling," said assistant coach Simon Helmot. "When we won in 2016, good defensive economy was one of our best aspects. But with the Impact Player rule, it is difficult. A new batter comes to the crease and teams are still attacking."



## INBRIEF



## Sri Lanka's top-order makes merry on opening day

A top-order batting blitz brought Sri Lanka to 314 for four and left the tourists firmly in command on the first day of the second and final Test against Bangladesh in Chittagong on Saturday.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 314/4 in 90 overs (Kusal Mendis 93, Dimuth Karunaratne 86, Nishan Madushka 57, Dinesh Chandimal batting 34) vs Bangladesh. **Toss:** Sri Lanka.

## Clinical East Zone marches into the semifinals

East Zone romped to an innings and 120-run win over North East Zone and booked a spot in the semifinals of the Senior Women's Inter Zonal Multi-Day Trophy in Pune on Saturday. It bowled out North East for 108 and 157 in the two innings after putting up 385 for eight declared.

## Rithvik Bollipalli &amp; Niki Poonacha in Challenger final

Rithvik Bollipalli and Niki Poonacha defeated Ryan Seggerman and Patrik Trhac of USA 6-3, 6-4 in the doubles semifinals of the \$82,000 Challenger tennis at San Luis Potosi, Mexico. In the \$40,000 ITF women's in Kofu (Japan), Rutuja Bhosale and Ankita Raina lost 6-3, 7-5 in the doubles final to Erina Hayashi and Saki Imamura.

**The results: €148,625 Challenger, Naples: Doubles, quarterfinals:** Theo Arribage (Fra) & Victor Cornea (Rou) bt Arjun Kadhe & Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan 6-3, 6-2. **\$82,000 Challenger, San Luis Potosi (Mexico): Doubles, semifinals:** Rithvik Bollipalli & Niki Poonacha bt Ryan Seggerman & Patrik Trhac (USA) 6-3, 6-4. **\$40,000 ITF women, Kofu (Japan): Doubles, final:** Erina Hayashi & Saki Imamura (Jpn) bt Rutuja Bhosale & Ankita Raina 6-3, 7-5. **\$25,000 ITF women, Terrassa (Spain): Doubles, final:** Nika Radisic (Slo) & Anita Wagner (Bih) bt Yvonne Cavalle-Reimers (Esp) & Vasanti Shinde 7-5, 7-6(7).



## National champion Sitwala enters pre-quarterfinals

National champion Dhruv Sitwala defeated Arun Agrawal 979-399 and Dhvaj Haria beat Englishman Rob Hall 1055-425 in the pre-quarterfinals of the all-India CCI Billiards Classic in Mumbai on Saturday.

**The results (pre-quarterfinals):** David Causier (Eng) bt Kamal Chawla 1422-306; S. Shrikrishna bt Sourav Kothari 492-473; Raayan Razmi bt Siddharth Parikh 606-519; Dhvaj Haria bt Rob Hall (Eng) 1055-425; Dhruv Sitwala bt Arun Agrawal 979-399; Peter Gilchrist (Sin) bt Rohan Jambusaria 900-493; Peter Sheehan (Eng) bt Rupesh Shah 738-583; Pankaj Advani bt Aditya Agrawal 1236-428.

## Sinner to meet Dimitrov in Miami Open final

Italy's Jannik Sinner destroyed defending champion Daniil Medvedev 6-1, 6-2 in just 69 minutes on Friday to reach the final of the ATP Miami Open, where he will take on Grigor Dimitrov. Bulgarian Dimitrov made his third Masters 1000 series final beating fourth-seeded Alexander Zverev 6-4, 6-7(7), 6-4.

## Parth Aggarwal wins title in Gurugram AITA tennis

Parth Aggarwal defeated former National champion Dalwinder Singh 7-6(3), 7-6(2) in the final of the ₹100,000 AITA men's tennis tournament at Gurugram.

**Other results, semifinals:** Parth bt Rakshit Dhankar 6-3, 6-0; Dalwinder bt Arthav Neema 6-4, 6-4.

## LIVE TELECAST

**Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka:** 2nd Test, day 2, FanCode, 9.30 a.m.  
**Golf:** Indian Open, FanCode, 12 p.m.  
**IPL:** Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 3.30 & 7.30 p.m.  
**LaLiga:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 5.30, 7.45, 10 p.m. & 12.30 a.m. (Monday)  
**Premier League:** SS Select 1, 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 6.30 & 9 p.m.  
**Bundesliga:** Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LIV, 7, 9 & 11 p.m.  
**ISL:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.

## To play international cricket at a slightly late age a blessing: Mitchell

The all-rounder feels the time allowed him to know the type of player he wanted to be; he is happy to be a launchpad for batters coming after him

## IPL-17

S. Dipak Ragav  
VISAKHAPATNAM

By contemporary standards, Daryl Mitchell is a late bloomer, making his international debut only at 28. But since his first game in 2019, the big-hitting all-rounder quickly established himself as a regular for New Zealand across formats. Last year, he hit the jackpot when Chennai Super Kings shelled out ₹14 crore to secure his service in the player auction. Though he had to bide his time to make it to the big league, Mitchell saw the bright side of it.

"To play international cricket at a slightly late age is a blessing. It allowed me to learn my game at the

domestic level over some time and work out not only the cricketer that I want to be and how I want to play but also the person I want to be off the field," said Mitchell during a conversation with select media recently.

## Spin-hitter

A striking aspect of his game is his ability to play spinners well despite growing up in conditions where spin doesn't play a significant role. It was evident last year during the ODI World Cup when he scored 552 runs, often hitting the spinners down the ground.

"It's again a blessing that it allowed me to take a while to get to these stages where I could work out how I wanted to go about things. I'm 6'3" and 100 kg, so it's about making

sure I use my size and base

and finding ways to put pressure back on the spinners in my way," explained Mitchell on how he developed his game against spin.

The 32-year-old will have a crucial role for Super Kings in the middle-order and has already made an impact with both bat and ball in the first two games.

"The cool thing about batting in the middle order is it's never the same. I can adapt to different situations, work out ways to keep extending partnerships, and put pressure back on the bowlers.

"It is something I pride myself on. Here at CSK, it's doing that sort of 4-5 role, managing the middle and getting us positioned to allow the big boys at the end to try and launch it," he added.



Comfort zone: Mitchell feels playing in the middle-order brings out the best in him. K.R. DEEPAK

## AIFF executive committee member arrested for alleged physical assault on women players

## FOOTBALL

Neeladri Bhattacharjee  
CHENNAI

Indian football was rocked by further controversy when Deepak Sharma, a member of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) Executive Committee was arrested on Saturday evening for allegedly assaulting two women players of Khad FC physically in a drunken state.

The incident took place on Thursday night (March 28) in Mapusa, Goa. The players had filed a complaint on Friday with the AIFF and later an FIR with the police.

Himachal Pradesh's Khad FC is currently playing in the inaugural edition of Indian Women's League 2.

After the Goa Football Federation (GFA) filed a complaint on Friday, the local police started investigating the case against Deepak, who is also the general secretary of the Himachal Pradesh Football Association.

"Acting on this complaint, an FIR was registered at the Mapusa Police Station under sections 354A, 323 and 341 of the Indian Penal Code. Also, in this case, the main accused, who has been identified as Deepak Sharma, has been arrested," Akshat Kaushal, the Superintendent of Police of North Goa, said.

The AIFF, after an urgent meeting under president Kalyan Chaubey on Saturday, formed a three-member committee to submit a report on the issue in seven days.

Taking cognizance of the matter, Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur tweeted, "The Ministry of Sports has taken a serious note of an alleged physical assault upon women footballers by an official during the ongoing Indian Women's League in Goa."

The incident became public on the morning of March 29 and the match commissioner, Sujesh Rajan, reached out to the GFA for quick action.

"In the morning, I got a call from the Match Commissioner saying that there was a complaint," Jonathan D'Sousa, the vice president of GFA, told *The Hindu*.

"So, the General Secretary and the Match Commissioner went to the place where the girls were staying and they did a preliminary investigation. They forwarded their re-

port to the AIFF."

Deepak was the only male in the contingent, as confirmed by GFA's secretary Adlear D'Cruz, who was one of the people to conduct the preliminary investigation.

"He (had) started drinking right from the time they (started travelling) in the tempo traveller in Himachal Pradesh.

"He was drinking openly and was the only male in the vehicle and was fully drunk right from that day," he told *The Hindu*.

"He assaulted both of them and three girls were witnesses.

"He just barged into the room and started assaulting them."

The girls had also accused the team manager, Nandita Sharma – who is the accused's wife – of 'defending' Deepak.

## Sikki-Sumeeth pair bows out in semifinals

## SPAIN MASTERS

Press Trust of India  
MADRID

India's challenge in the Madrid Spain Masters Super 300 tournament ended here on Saturday after the mixed doubles pair of N. Sikki Reddy and B. Sumeeth Reddy crashed out in the semifinals.

The Indonesian pair of Rinov Rivaldy and Pitha Haningtyas Mentari did not have to work too hard as they prevailed 21-17, 21-12 over the Indian duo in a contest lasting only 29 minutes.

This was the first meeting between the two mixed doubles pairs.

N. Sikki Reddy and B. Sumeeth Reddy had earlier beaten Indonesia's Rehan Naufal Kusharjanto and Li-

sa Ayu Kusumawati in the quarterfinal on Friday, beating the fourth seeded pair 14-21, 21-11, 21-17.

On Friday, Supanida Katethong defeated P.V. Sindhu 24-26, 21-17, 22-20.

**The results: (Indians unless specified):**

**Mixed doubles: (semifinals):** Rinov Rivaldy & Pitha Mentari (Ina) beat N. Sikki Reddy & B. Sumeeth Reddy 21-17, 21-12.

**On Friday:**

**Mixed doubles:** (Quarterfinals): N. Sikki Reddy & B. Sumeeth Reddy beat Rehan Kusharjanto & Lisa Kusumawati (Ina) 14-21, 21-11, 21-17.

**Women's singles:** (Quarterfinals): Supanida Katethong (Tha) beat P.V. Sindhu 24-26, 21-17, 22-20.

**Men's doubles:** Junaidi Arif & Roy Yap (Hkg) beat M.R. Arjun & Dhruv Kapila 21-19, 21-23, 21-17.

**Women's doubles:** Chia Hsin & Teng Hsun (Tai) beat Ashwini Ponnappa & Tanisha Crasto 21-23, 21-17.



Masterclass in defence: OFC's Ahmed Jahouh, right, and BFC's Siva Sakthi are up against each other in a game which saw neither side give an inch. K. MURALI KUMAR

## Goalkeepers hog limelight in BFC-OFC stalemate

## ISL

Ashwin Achal  
BENGALURU

Goal-line clearances and sharp goalkeeper saves were the order of the day, as Bengaluru FC (BFC) and Odisha FC kept clean sheets in their ISL match at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium here on Saturday.

BFC (22 points) is sixth on the points table, while OFC is third. The result handed a jolt to Odisha's hopes of clinching the League Winners Shield, as

the side is now five points behind leader Mumbai City FC (41 points).

The backline scrambles began early, when Odisha defender Mourtada Fall cleared Oliver Drost's shot off the line.

BFC goalkeeper Gurpreet Sandhu was then called into action, sticking his leg out to parry Jerry Lalrinzuala's firm strike.

Odisha's Roy Krishna had the best chance of the game, when he found himself in a one-on-one battle with Sandhu. Krishna, a former BFC player, got past

Sandhu, but Shankar Sampingiraj sprinted back to make a desperate last ditch block.

More defensive excellence was in store in the second-half, when Odisha's Amey Ranawade booted a dangerous chip from Javier Hernandez in front of goal. Odisha custodian Amrinder Singh also made a couple of strong saves, denying an invigorated BFC in the final few minutes.

**The results:** BFC 0 drew with Odisha FC 0. **At Jamshedpur:** Jamshedpur 1 (Javier 45) drew with Blasters 1 (Diamantakos 23).



Key figure: Bagan's Petratos at a training session. X@MOHUNBAGANSNG

## Bagan targets league top position

Amitabha Das Sharma  
KOLKATA

Mohun Bagan Super Giant will look to continue its pursuit for its maiden League Shield title when it takes on Chennaiyin FC in a matchweek 20 fixture of ISL-10 at the Salt Lake Stadium here on Sunday.

The Mariners have been unbeaten since Antonio Lopez Habas took over the reins early in January. It has won six out of its last eight matches and has risen to second with 39 points from 18 matches behind Mumbai City (41).

The former has also played a match less will look to assume the leadership by picking up full points against Chennaiyin FC, which has had a mixed bag in the second phase of the tournament.

Chennaiyin under head coach Owen Coyle has come up with some good performances but its success rate has been overshadowed by setbacks which keeps it 11th with 18 points from as many matches.

Chennaiyin, which has lost thrice in its previous five, will aim to reverse the trend as it returns after the international break.

Bagan, which beat Chennaiyin 3-1 in the first leg, will hope to maintain its superiority and complete a league double the way it has done so far against Hyderabad FC, Jamshedpur FC, and NorthEast United FC.

Bagan has maintained its supremacy in recent home outings winning the last four matches comfortably at the Salt Lake Stadium.

## NEROCA relegated from I-League first division

Press Trust of India  
SRINAGAR

Real Kashmir FC dished out a fine performance to outclass NEROCA FC 3-0 in the I-League here on Saturday, the result relegating the Manipur outfit to the second division following a poor season.

Goals from Real Kashmir's Gnohere Krizo (35th), Hyder Yousuf (45th) and Shafer Shaheen (67th) sealed NEROCA's fate.

**Other results:** At Naihati: Mohammadan SC 1 (Samndip Mandi 8-og) drew with Inter Kashi (Mario Barco 82).

## Japan puts it across India in title clash

## Sports Bureau

Japan defeated India 2-0 in the final of the WJT Asia-Oceania under-14 boys tennis tournament at Kuching (Malaysia) on Saturday.

**The results (final):** Japan bt India 2-0 (Shintaro Ogaki bt Tavish Pahwa 6-2, 6-3; Takahiro Kawaguchi bt Hruthik Katakam 1-6, 6-4, 6-4).





**Sacred flame:** A boy with a ceremonial lamp at the Kottankulangara Bhagavathy Temple in Kollam, Kerala, on March 24.



**Getting ready:** Family members help a boy get dressed before going to offer prayers at the temple.



**Gracious look:** Men attired in saris and decked in jewellery participate in the rituals and procession.

# Embracing the feminine

Chamayavilakku, a festival in Kollam district of Kerala, is a flamboyant display of sartorial creativity where men deck up in women's clothes, complete with jewellery and accessories



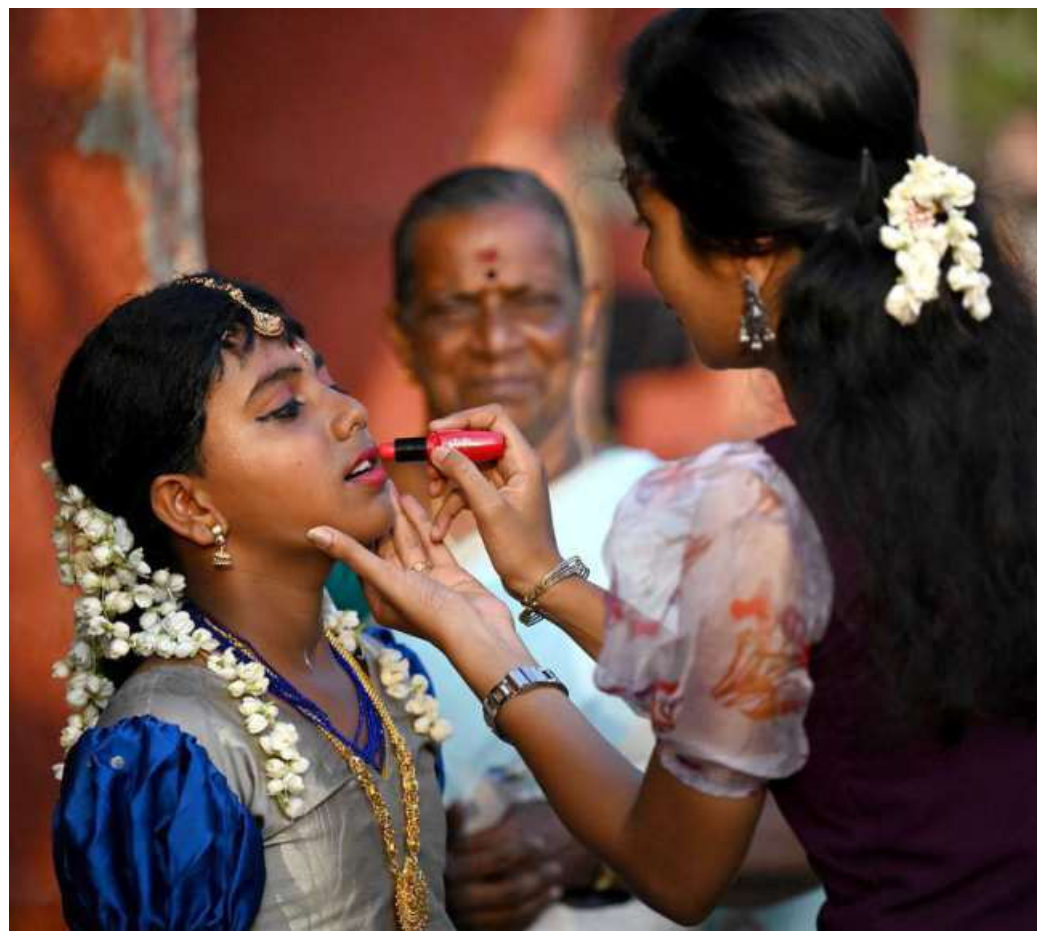
**Thulasi Kakkat**  
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**O**n the 10th and 11th of the Malayalam month of Meenam (mid-March to mid-April), thousands of men dressed as women through the Kottankulangara Sri Bhagavathy Temple in Kollam for its annual festival, Chamayavilakku. As per tradition, during the two-day celebration, men line up from the temple gate for the ceremonial *Ezhumallathu* (procession) around 2 a.m., holding lamps with five wicks to seek the blessings of the presiding deity, goddess Durga.

This gender-bending festival is a flamboyant display of sartorial creativity. Men deck up in women's clothes, complete with jewellery and accessories. Every year, several studios and green rooms mushroom near the temple to help male devotees transform into women.

On both days of the festival, the same rituals are followed. This tradition goes back to the temple's legend, according to which when some cowherds attempted to smash a coconut with a stone and it began to bleed. Astrologers discovered that the stone held Vanadurga's divine force, and they instructed the local people to erect a shrine around it. At the time, girls performed pujas in the temple. The cowherds therefore dressed as girls to perform the temple's initial pujas. Boys below the age of 10 also dress up as girls for Kakkavilakku, a part of the Chamayavilakku festival, but held during the day.

Over the years, Chamayavilakku has acquired a special significance for the transgender community in Kerala, which attends the festival in large numbers.



**Final touches:** Boys get to wear lipstick and rouge for the ceremony.





**Devotional fervour:** The traditional five-wick lamp is an important part of the festival.



**Floral adornment:** Apart from jewellery, strands of flowers are also part of the finery worn by the male devotees.



**Peace and poise:** It is believed that the feminine touch propitiates the Goddess Bhagavathy and brings her blessings to all.



**Lighter moments:** The festival procession is older than any pride march.



**Patient prayer:** Many families come together to mark the sacred occasion.





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