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Chennai » Coimbatore » Bengaluru » Hyderabad » Madurai » Noida » Visakhapatnam » Thiruvananthapuram » Kochi » Vijayawada » Mangaluru » Tiruchirappalli » Kolkata » Hubballi » Mohali » Malappuram » Mumbai » Tirupati » Lucknow » Cuttack » Patna



**HINTS AT POLITICAL ENTRY**  
**Calcutta HC judge announces resignation**  
NEWS » PAGE 4



**SECOND STINT**  
**Shehbaz Sharif becomes Pakistan PM**  
WORLD » PAGE 12



**STEPPING UP PROTEST**  
**Farmer leaders call for march to Delhi**  
NEWS » PAGE 6

**NEED OF THE HOUR**  
**A women's urban employment guarantee act**  
*It can be an engine for economic growth*  
OPINION » PAGE 9



**PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION**  
**Trump wins party vote in 3 U.S. States**  
WORLD » PAGE 12

## INSIDE



### Non-lapsable defence fund plans on hold

**NEW DELHI**  
The idea of setting up a non-lapsable defence modernisation fund is off the table for now, officials told *The Hindu*, stressing that all defence funding needs are being met. » PAGE 4

### BJP's Asansol candidate opts out of LS polls

**KOLKATA**  
A day after the BJP announced Pawan Singh as its candidate from Asansol in West Bengal, the Bhopuri actor and singer on Sunday withdrew from contesting the Lok Sabha elections. » PAGE 5

### At least 150 bank accounts under ED watchlist

**NEW DELHI**  
The Enforcement Directorate has examined nearly 150 bank accounts linked to an international syndicate, which allegedly supplied opioid drugs to its contacts overseas. ED is probing the money laundering case based on a FIR registered by Mumbai Police. » PAGE 6

### Hamas, Qatari, U.S. envoys push for Gaza ceasefire

**GAZA STRIP**  
Mediators in Cairo made a renewed push for a Gaza ceasefire, but differences remained as fighting raged on in the Palestinian territory gripped by desperate food shortages. » PAGE 12

# Ministers discuss 100-day agenda for new govt.

Ministers, at their last meeting, brainstorm the vision document for 'Viksit Bharat 2047'

The Prime Minister began an outreach to seek input from youth on '2047' in December 2023

The goals for 2047 include growth, sustainable development, and ease of doing business

**Devesh K. Pandey**  
NEW DELHI

Seeking to send a message of confidence that once again come to power, the Union Council of Ministers, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at its last meeting, on Sunday, deliberated on a 100-day agenda for quick implementation after the formation of the new government in May. At the meeting, the Prime Minister reportedly told his colleagues: "Go and win. We will meet again soon."

According to sources in the government, the Council also brainstormed the vision document for "Viksit Bharat 2047" (Developed India 2047), and a detailed action plan for the next five years. "The road map for Viksit Bharat is a result of more than two years of intensive preparation. It takes a 'whole of government' approach involving all Ministries, and wide-ranging consultations with State governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations, and the mobilisation of the youth for seeking their ideas, suggestions and inputs. More than 2,700 meetings, workshops, and seminars were held at various levels. Suggestions of more than 20



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

lakh youth were received," a source said. The source said the roadmap for 'Viksit Bharat'

has a comprehensive blueprint with clearly articulated national vision, aspirations, goals, and action points. "Its goals include the areas of economic growth, sustainable development goals, ease of living, ease of doing business, infrastructure, social welfare," the source added. Modi had earlier asked his ministerial colleagues to hold extensive consultations and, based on the inputs, prepare a plan of action for the first 100 days of the new government, to be taken up at the last Union Council of Ministers' meeting. The NITI Aayog was also involved in giving final touches to the draft plan of action. As part of the exercise, on December 11, 2023, the Prime Minister launched an outreach programme to

seek inputs from youth on their vision for India in 2047. During the programme, Mr. Modi said that in the life of any nation, history provided a period when the nation could make exponential strides in its development journey. For India, the 'Amrit Kaal' was ongoing and it was the period in the history of India when the country was going to take a quantum leap. "One aim" Today, every institution and every individual should move with a resolution that every effort and act will be for Viksit Bharat. The aim of your goals and your resolutions should be only one - de-

veloped India. We have 25 years of 'Amrit Kaal' in front of us. We have to work 24 hours a day for the goal of Viksit Bharat. This is the environment we have to create as a family," the Prime Minister had said, pointing out that India was going to be the leader in terms of the working-age population for the next 25 to 30 years and that the world recognised this. From the ramparts of the Red Fort on August 15, 2022, which marked 75 years of the country's Independence, Mr. Modi spelled out "Panch Pran (five resolves)" for citizens, which included the pledge to make India a developed nation by 2047.

## Fire control



Controlled burning of dry leaves began in the hill areas in the outskirts of Guwahati on Sunday and will continue till the end of April. A forest fire management practice, controlled burning is carried out in fire-prone forest areas across the country. BITU RAJ KONWAR

# Four terror suspects under scanner for Bengaluru cafe blast

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



Under surveillance: The Rameshwaram Cafe at Kundalahalli in Bengaluru where the blast took place.

rested now. However, the State police named Abdul Mateen Taha and Musabir Hussain, also hailing from Shivamogga district, as suspects in the Mangaluru cooker blast case. Both Taha and Hussain are also accused in an IS-inspired Al Hind module case busted in Suddaguntepalya, Bengaluru in 2020 and have been at large since then. This IS module was put together by Mehboob Pasia of Bengaluru and Khaja Moideen of Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu and the NIA charge sheet alleges that they wanted to set up camps in the forests of south India and launch insurgency. The National Investigation Agency has declared prize money of ₹5 Lakh for information on Taha. Police suspect that the duo, who escaped arrest in the Al Hind module case, and are now suspected to be based in the Gulf or Middle East, groomed the four youths from their home district, helped and funded them, pushing them to carry out terror acts. Investigation into the Mangaluru case also re-

vealed that the accused were also in touch with a man code-named "Colonel", whose identity is yet to be established. He is said to be the "handler" of the module. **Claims responsibility** Following the Mangaluru cooker blast case, police found a photo of Mohammed Shariq dressed like an IS fighter holding the cooker rigged with explosives and days after the accidental blast, an unknown group that called itself "Islamic Resistance Council" claimed responsibility and warned of more to come. Now given the similarity to the improvised explosive device in Mangaluru and Bengaluru, police are now probing the networks of these absconding accused, to see whether they were involved in the recent blast as well. **Accused in the Mangaluru cooker blast case, including Mohammed Shariq, who are presently lodged in the Parappana Agrahara Central Prison, are likely to be questioned in the Rameshwaram Cafe case.**

# Seizure of cargo by India is unjustified, says Pakistan

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Pakistan has condemned India's "high-handedness" over the seizure of dual-use items bound for Karachi from China, saying that the "specifications of the equipment clearly indicate its purely commercial use". *The Hindu* reported on Saturday that two advanced computer numerical control machines manufactured by GKD, Italy and bound for Karachi Port from Shekou Port in China were seized by Customs authorities at Mumbai Port on January 23. The spokesperson for Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a statement late on Saturday, said this "disruption of free



A container of dual-use items that was seized by the Customs authorities in Mumbai. PTI

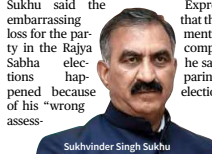
Pakistan... The transaction was being conducted through transparent banking channels with all the relevant documentation," the spokesperson said, adding that relevant private entities were pursuing the matter against "this unjustified seizure". **'Growing impunity'** Terming reports on this as reflective of Indian media's "habitual misrepresentation of facts", the spokesperson added, "Such acts highlight the growing impunity of certain states in violating international norms and taking arbitrary measures in violation of international law". The consignments was shipped on January 9 on a merchant vessel CMA CGM Attila.

# MLAs were upset over action against mining mafia: Sukhu

**Sandeep Phukan**  
**Vikas Vasudeva**  
NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

Some MLAs were upset with the government over the crackdown on "mining and stone crushing" mafia in the State, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhinder Sukhu said on Sunday. In an exclusive interview with *The Hindu*, Mr. Sukhu said the embarrassing loss for the party in the Rajya Sabha elections happened because of his "wrong assess-

ment". He alleged that there was a conspiracy by the BJP and within the Congress party. Mr. Sukhu asserted that now no one will leave the party and everyone is committed to the Congress ideology. "Some people, who have vested interest may be troubled with the crackdown on corruption by my government but I will continue my work," he said. Expressing confidence that the Congress government in the State will complete its full tenure, he said the party is preparing for the Lok Sabha elections. **FULL INTERVIEW** » PAGE 5



Sukhinder Singh Sukhu

## IN BRIEF



## Gang-rape of Spanish tourist: three produced before court

Three persons who were arrested in connection with the gang rape of a Spanish tourist in Jharkhand's Dumka district were produced before a court on Sunday. The woman from Spain was allegedly gang-raped at Kurumhadi in Hansidha police station area, around 300 km from the State capital Ranchi, on Friday night when she was spending the night in a tent along with her husband, police said. The woman, aged around 28, and her 54-year-old husband reached Dumka from Bangladesh on two motorcycles, and were en route to Nepal via Bihar. ■

## Delhi HC to hear wrestlers' plea against WFI polls today

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

## Rameshwaram Cafe blast triggers political slugfest between BJP, Congress

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

The Hindu Bureau  
BENGALURU/SHIVAMOGGA

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

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



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

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

government for political reasons is not ready to accept that it was a blast though the police have acknowledged that it was an act of terror. "The government looks dead. It is better for them to resign and go," Mr. Ashok said.

Taking exception to comments by the BJP, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah wondered if the incident was not the failure of the Central agencies like the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Intelligence Bureau (IB), and Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). He said the government has taken the incident seriously and the probe has been handed over to the Special Crime Branch.

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

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

## RSS-linked Muslim organisation in Assam favours UCC

The Hindu Bureau  
GUWAHATI

The Assam unit of a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-affiliated Muslim organisation has backed the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led government's decision to repeal the Assam Muslim Marriages and Divorces Registration Act of 1935.

The Muslim Rashtriya Manch said doing away with the Act would help end the issue of child marriage in the State.

"By repealing the legislation, the government can rescue Muslim boys and girls from a dangerous situation," Alkas Hussain, the convenor of the organisation's Assam unit told presspersons on Sunday.

Lauding the Chief Minister's recent statement that the government will "shut the shop" where marriages of girls aged 5-6 years in Assam, he slammed a section of Muslim MLAs for their brand of politics that leaves little scope for caring for Muslim children. The minority-based All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in Assam and the All India Majlis-e-Majlis-e-Itehadul Muslimin have been critical of the BJP government's decision on the Act.

Muslim Rashtriya Manch has taken a contrary stand to the AIUDF and All India Majlis-e-Itehadul Muslimin

The AIUDF has threatened to go to court after claiming that the government move is against the Kazis Act of 1880 as well as the Kazis. It also claimed that the State cabinet has no power to abolish the Kazis Act which is a Central Act.

"We also support the State government's plan to implement the Uniform Civil Code as there should be one law for one country," Mr. Hussain said, thanking the Narendra Modi government for banning triple talaq.

The Manch also advised the people of Assam not to protest against the Citizen-Split (Amendment) Act following Union Home Minister Amit Shah's statement in January that it will be notified and implemented before the Lok Sabha elections. "Since the matter is in the Supreme Court, we should wait for the court judgement and honour it," he said.

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

The Hindu Bureau  
LUCKNOW

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



Mohan Yadav

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

He said many are bothered by his visits to U.P., once again hinting at Akhilesh Yadav.

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

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

Press Trust of India  
BALLIA

Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party (SBSP) chief Om Prakash Rajbhar on Sunday expressed the hope of becoming a Minister in the Uttar Pradesh government this week, and also claimed victory of Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidates on all the 80 seats of Uttar Pradesh in the coming Lok Sabha poll.

'Purvanchal State soon' Addressing the Vanchit Shoshit Haq Adhikar rally in Sikandarpur of the district, he said, "Purvanchal State will be formed after the 2024 Lok Sabha election. After that you will all

be the Chief Minister and your government will be formed". The SBSP is a constituent of the NDA.

Since Mr. Rajbhar, who was part of the Samajwadi Party (SP) alliance in the 2022 Assembly election in U.P., returned to the NDA a few months ago, there is constant speculation about his becoming a Minister in the State government led by Yogi Adityanath. There are indications of Cabinet expansion before the Lok Sabha elections in the State.

## SP questions BJP's vikas model after Lucknow road caves in

The Hindu Bureau  
LUCKNOW

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

SPOTLIGHT

Ishita Mishra  
KOTA

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

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

teachers of religious conversion and propagating "love jihad", a term coined by right-wing outfits for interfaith couples, at the school.

When the students finally arrived at his office, SDM Krishna Kumar Rajawat met them, accepted their memorandum, and asked his driver to drop them back to school.

"They are young children. They don't understand the harsh realities of the world," the SDM said. At Khajuri Vidya, residents said the allegations against the teachers surfaced after a girl from the village, Muskan Gaur, 19, fled with a boy, also from Khajuri, named Lucky Ali, 22, on February 5. "Some anti-social elements, who are always on the lookout to create social unrest, were trying to find a way to give this case a communal colour. Muskan's admission form served the purpose," said a teacher of the school, who, in her statement to the



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

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

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

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

cation Minister vowed to take "strict action".

Akileema Parveen, 38, who teaches Social Science at a government school in Kishanganj block of Baram district, was relieved of her duties on February 23 and attached to the Education Department's office 550 km away in Bikaner without being given any reason.

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



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

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

ing religion into the school.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LINK TO FULL STORY  
» <https://t.me/gju11>

**IN BRIEF**



**Rally marks three-year protest against Vizag steel plant sale**

Political leaders and members of the Visakha Utku Parirakshana Porata Committee (VUPPC) took out a 'Maha Padayatra' on Sunday in Vishakhapatnam to mark the completion of 1,116 days of protest against the Union government's decision for strategic sale of the RINL-Visakhapatnam Steel Plant. The activists took out a 20-km-long walk from Kurmanapalem to the Gandhi statue near the Greater Vishakhapatnam Municipal Corporation (GVMC).

**Mahasivaratri celebrations begin at Srikalahasti temple**

The annual 'Mahasivaratri Brahmotsavam' began at the Srikalahasteeswara Swamy Devasthanams in Srikalahasti town, Andhra Pradesh, on Sunday, with the hoisting of festival flag on the Bhakta Kannappa hillock. The temple launches its fate with the *dhwajarohanam* at the Kannappa Konda, in obeisance to Bhakta Kannappa, the tribal devotee who is said to have plucked out one of his eyes for Lord Shiva. Mahasivaratri festival will be celebrated on March 8.

**Naidu to announce plans for uplift of BCs tomorrow**

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) will organise a 'Jai Ho BC Mahasabha' in Andhra Pradesh's Guntur district on March 5 to highlight what it plans to do for the uplift of the Backward Classes (BCs) if the TDP-Jana Sena Party (JSP) alliance comes to power in the State. Party national president N. Chandrababu Naidu will release the BC Declaration, which will focus on BC caste census as well as special legislation and reservation to protect the communities.

**Uddhav mocks BJP's first list, calls out absence of stalwarts**

Uddhav Thackeray expresses shock at inclusion of former Congress leader accused of graft in ruling party's list of candidates for LS poll; Modi's guarantee is giving clean chit to corrupt: Raut

**Shoumojit Banerjee**  
PUNE



Uddhav Thackeray

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

Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray expressed astonishment at the exclusion of BJP stalwarts like Union Minister for Road

Transport Nitin Gadkari from the first list, while those like Mr. Singh, previously accused of money laundering, made the cut. Alluding to the list, Mr. Thackeray recalled his past collaboration with Mr. Gadkari, who had expedited the completion of the Mumbai-Pune Expressway — the brainchild of Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray.

Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sanjay UBT questioned whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi's touted "guarantees" only amounted to either absorbing into the BJP, or giving tickets to, leaders accused of corruption from the Congress and other parties.

Today, Kripashankar Singh has been given a ticket from Jaunpur, near Varanasi. Earlier, Ashok Chavan, facing allegations in the Adarsh scam, was made a Rajya Sabha MP by the BJP as soon as he

joined the party. The case against [Deputy Chief Minister] Ajit Pawar pertaining to the Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank (MSCB) scam, allegedly totalling ₹40,000 crore, has now been closed. So, is this Modi's guarantee? That Kripashankar gets a ticket, Ajit Pawar gets a clean chit, and Ashok Chavan is given a Rajya Sabha berth?" Mr. Raut said, speaking in Nashik.

Stating that the BJP hardly had any leaders of its own, Mr. Raut said that of the 195 candidates, more than 70 were like Kripashankar Singh, and were accused in one scam or the other.



**Gearing up:** Rajiv Kumar addressing mediapersons in Chennai, after the two-day meeting recently. R. RAVINDRAN

**T.N. police heed to ECI warning about cash-for-vote in polls**

**S. Vijay Kumar**  
CHENNAI

With the Election Commission of India (ECI) cracking the whip on distribution of cash for votes and warning bureaucrats to take or face action, the Tamil Nadu police are chalking out elaborate strategies to effectively curb distribution of money or freebies to voters by political parties.

After holding a two-day meeting chaired by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) of India Rajiv Kumar and Election Commissioner of India Anurag Goel with IAS/IPS officers here last week, the ECI had made it clear that any incident involving distribution of freebies or money to voters would result in "severe" action against the Commissioner/Superintendent of Police concerned, sources said on Sunday.

Though there was an option to place the Flying Squad Teams (FST) and Static Surveillance Teams (SST) at the disposal of Poll Observers, the ECI said that the teams would re-

main under the command of the Returning Officers (Collectors) or Commissioners or SPs. However, the commission would not hesitate to change its mind if the desired results were not achieved, the sources added.

Besides IAS/IPS officers, the CEC and Election Commissioner of India held discussions with enforcement agencies such as the Narcotics Control Bureau, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, Directorate of Enforcement, and Central Industrial Security Force. "The ECI has said that detection of money or free distribution should result in registration of case against the party functionaries involved and the candidate. This may not only result in arrest of the accused persons, but also debarment of the candidate. They have reiterated that the responsibility to ensure free and fair elections starts and ends with the Collectors/Commissioners or SPs, as the case may be," a senior police officer told *The Hindu*.

**National dam panel to examine Kaleshwaram project on March 6**

**B. Chandrashekar**  
HYDERABAD

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

The Minister said the State government, alarmed at the sinking of piers of the Medigadda barrage of the KLIP, had written to the NDSA to conduct a thor-

ough probe into the other barrages, including Sundilla and Annaram.

The Congress government had alleged irregularities in the KLIP, which was inaugurated by the former BRS regime. The Medigadda barrage was shut after some of its piers sank and seepage was noticed.

In a press release issued here on Sunday, Mr. Reddy said the NDSA had constituted a five-member committee under the chairmanship of J. Chandrasekhra Iyer, former

chairman of the Central Water Commission (CWC).

"We welcome the visit of the expert committee, and we will cooperate with the committee," he said.

The NDSA team had already inspected the damaged Medigadda barrage as part of preliminary investigation and advised releasing water. It also suggested emptying Sundilla and Annaram barrages as well.

The committee has been asked to submit its report to the NDSA within four months.

**Let CBI probe student's death: Cong.**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V.D. Satheesan has written to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan demanding a CBI investigation into the death of Sidharthan J.S., a student of the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences in Wayanad district.

Sidharthan's parents had alleged he was killed by activists of the SFI — the student wing of the ruling CPI(M) — on the campus.

**George's spat with BJDs, SNDP Yogam catches BJP off balance**

**Hiran Unnikrishnan**  
PATHANAMTHITTA

Veteran politician P.G. George, a high-profile newcomer to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), appears to have thrown the party's State unit off balance by accusing the Bharath Dharma Jana Sena (BDJS), a key backward class ally, of scuttling his chances of contesting from the Pathanamthitta Lok Sabha constituency.

Known for his combative approach to politics, Mr. George alleged that BDJS leader Thushar Vellappally and Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam leader Vellappally Natesan had plotted with Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to prejudice the BJP leadership against him. The BDJS has taken strong exception to his statement, accusing Mr. George of being a conspirator and harbouring a bigoted view of the Ezhava community, a crucial electoral bloc, and arguably, the numerically largest Hindu caste group in the State.

**Delhi visit**

The BJP is reportedly worried about the feud within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) impacting the party's attempt to sway backward class and Christian votes in its favour, chiefly in central and south Kerala. Mr. Vellappally has rushed to New Delhi to meet BJP president J.P. Nadda to complain about Mr. George, who has accused of "insulting the SNDP Yogam, BDJS, and the Ezhava community as a whole".

**Sweet victory**



**Carnival ends:** Actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu presenting the overall cultural champions trophy to winners at the valedictory of Riviera 2024, an international sports and cultural fest at VIT Vellore, on Sunday. VIT vice-president G.V. Selvam is also in the picture. *The Hindu* was the media partner for the event. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

**Govt. staff in Kerala to stage hunger strike over salary delay**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

A section of government employees of Kerala will go on an indefinite hunger strike from Monday protesting against the delay in the payment of salaries.

The protest is being held under the aegis of Opposition-backed Secretariat Action Council. The hunger strike will begin outside the Secretariat gates here next to the sub-treasury at 11 a.m., Irshad M.S., convener of the action council, said. The payment of salaries for February through the employees-Treasury Savings Bank (eTSB) was hit on March 1 and March 2,

prompting the council to announce its protest.

While the Finance department attributed the problem to a "technical glitch", the Secretariat Action Council has not bought this excuse. It attributed the non-payment to financial mismanagement of the CPI(M)-led LDF government.

**Schedule of disbursement**  
The salaries of the Secretariat employees and those of government departments, including Revenue, Police, Taxes, Prisons, Excise and Public Works, are customarily disbursed on the first day of the month. On the second day of the month, the salaries for

educational institutions and hospitals are disbursed. The staff in the remaining departments get salaries on the third day.

Finance department sources said the issue is expected to be sorted out by Monday. Towards the end of the fiscal, the State government, already reeling under financial crunch, is also faced with huge expenses.

In a March 1 order, the Finance department directed public sector institutions, grant-in-aid and autonomous institutions as well as State-sponsored agencies to "deposit maximum amount of the institution's profits/own funds in the treasury promptly".

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

The proposed Anti-Drug Committees to be formed in every school in Telangana will strictly implement steps to check drug abuse, said Burra Venkatesham, Principal Secretary, State Education Department.

The committees will comprise teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, counsellors, and students, who would be encouraged to be peer police among themselves. Modalities of the programme and several concerns around it are being examined.

"We will come up with a different and positive name for the committee,

**Modi to inaugurate railway projects in Telangana today**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

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

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

The 58 route km (71 track km) of the Ambari-Adilabad-Pimpalkhuti section has been electrified at a cost of approximately ₹70 crore, said an official release on Sunday.

This railway line section falls in the backward district of Adilabad (46.6 route km) in northern Telangana region, and parts

**PM will commission an electrified stretch, and MMTS service**

of Nanded and Yavatmal districts in Maharashtra (11.5 route km). It serves as the connecting route towards Nagpur and other parts of Maharashtra.

This critical section falls in the railway line connecting Hyderabad/Secunderabad towards Nagpur (via Nizamabad) and beyond. Hence, the project facilitates seamless connectivity from Adilabad towards Hyderabad/Secunderabad, Bengaluru in the south as well as Nagpur and beyond. It will also avoid detention of trains on account of traction change thereby improving the av-

erage speed of both passenger and freight trains. Mr. Modi will also inaugurate the doubling and electrification of 22-km Sanathnagar-Moula Ali rail line, along with six new station buildings as part of the MMTS (Multi Modal Transport Service) Phase-II during his visit to the capital the next day. The new stations are at Ferroguda, Suchitra Centre, Bhudev Nagar, Ammuaguda, Neredmet and Moula Ali Housing Board stations.

He will also flag off the inaugural MMTS train service from Ghatkesar-Lingampalli via Moula Ali-Sanathnagar, connecting the new areas in the eastern part of the city like Cherlapalli, Moula Ali with the western part of the twin city region, the release said.

**Committees to be formed in schools across Telangana to check drug abuse**



The initiative for a drug-free Hyderabad being inaugurated at the Integrated Police Command and Control Centre. G. RAMAKRISHNA

which doesn't contain the word 'drug'. Only the committee's name would be different, the intended actions and results will remain unchanged," Mr. Venkatesham said.

Speaking at the launch of the initiative for a drug-free Hyderabad at the Integrated Command & Control Centre here on Sunday, Mr. Venkatesham said stringent action would be

taken against schools that do not form such committees or do not take the initiative seriously. "It will surely impact your school's recognition and the renewal processes," he said.

Commissioner and Director of School Education A. Sridevaseena said many schools were apprehensive about an initiative such as anti-drug committees in schools. "Some are concerned about their reputation or the trauma the child would undergo if reported, but we assure you that neither the school's name nor the child's name will be revealed when we get to the root of the issue," she said.

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

The Hindu Bureau  
CHENNAI

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

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

The reactor core consists of control sub-assemblies, blanket sub-assemblies and fuel sub-assemblies. The core loading activity would include the loading of the reactor control sub-assemblies, blanket sub-assemblies and fuel sub-assemblies that would generate power, it said.

PFBR marks the second stage of the three-stage nuclear power programme of the country with a "closed

**This is a crucial step for India towards thorium utilisation of the nuclear power programme**

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

With "minimised nuclear waste" generated from the reactor and advanced safety features, the FBRs would provide a safe, efficient and clean source of energy and contribute to the goal of net zero, it said. "This is an important step for India towards thorium utilisation in the third stage of the nuclear power programme. Once commissioned, India will be the second country after Russia to have a commercial operating Fast Reactor," it added.

## Plans for non-lapsable defence modernisation fund put on hold

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

Vikas Dhoot  
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



**Critical funding:** The 15th Finance Commission recommended the constitution of a non-lapsable defence modernisation fund. P11

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Dovetailing the Services' capex budgets together under one head is aimed at creating a more unified approach to procurements. It is a push towards jointness so the three Services can sit together and optimise their capital expenditure and if one is not able to spend, another can take more money," the official explained.

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

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

## Chargesheet against seven in Manipur arms loot case

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar  
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



Kripashankar Singh

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

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

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

## Haj Suvidha app launched, Haj guide for 2024 released

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Union Ministry Affairs Minister Smriti Irani on Sunday launched the Haj Suvidha App that would provide necessary information and direct access to important services like training modules, flight details, and accommodation to those embarking on the annual pilgrimage.

Ms. Irani inaugurated a two-day Training of Trainers Programme as part of preparations for Haj 2024 at the Vigyan Bhavan here in the presence of Minister of State for Minority Affairs John Barla. More than 550 trainers from various States and Union Territories attended the programme, according to an official statement.

The Programme is intended to sensitise and

educate the trainers who impart further training to the Haj pilgrims to ensure that the pilgrims have a fulfilling experience and are aware of the various aspects of the pilgrimage, it said. As part of the government's efforts to make Haj a more comfortable experience, Ms. Irani launched the Haj Suvidha App for the benefit of all Haj pilgrims.

The app has been developed by BISAG-N and will be a "game changer," the statement said.

Irani also released the Haj Guide-2024 which has been prepared to make pilgrims aware of various aspects of the pilgrimage with special emphasis on the use of the Haj Suvidha App for the pilgrims, it said.

The guide is published in 10 languages.

## Calcutta HC judge to resign, hints at taking poll plunge

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Calcutta High Court Judge Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay, who has given several orders in the West Bengal recruitment scam, announced his decision to resign as judge and hinted at taking the plunge into politics ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Opposition parties, including the BJP, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the Congress sought to welcome him into their ranks.

Speaking to Bengali TV news channel ABP Ananda, Justice Gangopadhyay said he would resign on Tuesday. Justice Gangopadhyay became a permanent judge in 2019 and on 14 instances, had directed a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into allegations of corruption in the West Bengal



Abhijit Gangopadhyay

school and municipal recruitment scams.

Justice Gangopadhyay thanked the Trinamool Congress and said the State's ruling party had challenged him to face them politically. His announcement triggered strong reactions in political circles. Opposition leaders said that a person with the integrity and stature of Justice Gangopadhyay would make positive contributions to the State and the country.

Justice Gangopadhyay

has become a household name in Bengal because of his orders in the recruitment scam.

Job aspirants who have been protesting against the government have hailed his intervention. The Trinamool leadership had often targeted the judge and described his interventions as "politically motivated". Many leaders of the ruling party, including party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, have been at the receiving end of his directions.

"It is better if such people come to politics. But the question is, whichever group you join, your views and judgment, neutrality of dialogue will be questioned. Whichever party you go to, there will be allegations of corruption. Can you accept them?" Trinamool leader Kunal Ghosh asked.

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

NEWS ANALYSIS

Sobhana K. Nair  
NEW DELHI

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

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

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



Lalu Prasad, Tejashwi Yadav, Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi and others join hands in Patna's Gandhi Maidan. A11

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

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

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

In 2020, despite the party's best efforts, it fell short thanks to a counter consolidation against the Yadav euphoria, and finished within striking distance of a victory. The 'A to Z' pitch is the RJD's promise to the voters that one will be

excluded, the senior RJD leader explained.

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

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

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

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

Amit Bhelari  
PATNA

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

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

An impressive crowd of over five lakh people gathered at the ground to be a part of the rally.

Workers of the Congress Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist-L-



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

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

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

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

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

"Whenever there is change in the country, a cyclone starts in Bihar because Bihar is the nerve centre of politics. There is a battle of ideology in the country between 'hatred and violence' and 'love and brotherhood'. Why is there hatred in the country? The only reason is injustice. The Prime Minister only works for two to three in-

terestists," said Mr. Gandhi. Mr. Kharge called Mr. Modi "sardar (leader) of liars".

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

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

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

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

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

# 'Rebel MLAs were angry for taking action against mining mafia'

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister slams 'conspiracy' by BJP against his government, says the dissident Congress MLAs were flown to Haryana by helicopter under the protection of the Central Reserve Police Force; he says the Congress government will complete its full tenure with cooperation and assistance from all quarters in the State and adds that everyone is committed to the party's ideology

**INTERVIEW**

**Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu**

Sandeep Phukan  
Vikas Vasudeva

As the Congress attempts to save its government in Himachal Pradesh, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu speaks on what lies ahead for the party. Experts:

The Congress had 40 members in the 68-member Assembly, yet you lost the recent Rajya Sabha elections. And your government

**now faces a crisis?**

As far as the six MLAs are concerned, some of them were angry with my government. At least, three of them were angry that the government had started taking action against the 'mining and stone-crushing mafia' after our State faced natural calamity and flash floods. Then, there were others who wanted to be made Ministers.

The three Independent MLAs who were supporting us were actually BJP rebels. So, there was a conspiracy by the BJP as well as internally within our party. Our MLAs were flown to BJP-ruled Haryana by helicopter under the protection of the Central

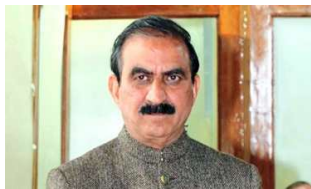
**Reserve Police Force.**

**But the rebel MLAs have questioned your style of functioning?**

I had spoken to some of the MLAs before the Rajya Sabha elections. They had breakfast with us even on the day of the elections. But I agree my assessment somewhat went wrong.

**Some say if the party had fielded a Himachali like Anand Sharma instead of Abhishek Singhvi, your party would have won the election.**

On the day of voting, only one MLA made this point to me. We had sufficient



numbers to win the Rajya Sabha seat.

**Is the crisis over now? The rebels have said they are in touch with nine or 10 Congress MLAs.**

I can say that now there is no one who will leave the party and everyone is com-

mitted to the Congress ideology. As far as I am concerned, people of Himachal Pradesh have elected us for five years and I am working towards fulfilling our commitment to the people of the State. Some people who have vested interest may be troubled with the crack-down on corruption by my

**Himachal Pradesh Congress chief Pratibha Singh has said that the BJP is better placed than the Congress in terms of contesting an election.**

What can I say about it? I think only Pratibha can explain what she would have meant by it.

**Pratibha Singh and former Chief Minister the late Virbhadra Singh's son, Vikramaditya Singh, first resigned as a Minister in your government and then took it back. He said the Congress had used his**

**father's name in seeking votes and now he feels humiliated.**

Well, Virbhadra Singhji is not just his [Vikramaditya's] father but was one of our most respected leaders. He has always been part of the Congress's ideology and legacy. I don't wish to drag him in this episode. As I said before, we have a mandate to serve the people and that should be our priority.

**How will the Congress fare in the bypolls if there is no stay on the disqualification of the six MLAs?**

We will win all the six seats. If there are Assembly elections today in Hima-

chal, we will win two-thirds of the majority.

**Is there any possibility of a rapprochement?**

In politics, there is always scope for rapprochement and doors are always open for everyone.

**What is the road ahead for you and the Congress?**

We will run the government in the State, and it will complete its full tenure with cooperation and assistance from all the quarters. We are all preparing for the Lok Sabha elections and along with the Pradesh Congress Committee chief, we will work together and win the elections.

## BJP's Asansol candidate opts out of Lok Sabha elections

The decision to field Pawan Singh had drawn criticism due to his song allegedly targeting women; Trinamool terms his withdrawal a result of 'indomitable spirit and power of the people of Bengal'

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

A day after the BJP announced Pawan Singh as its candidate from Asansol in West Bengal, the Bhojpur actor and singer on Sunday withdrew from contesting the Lok Sabha elections. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to the top leadership of the BJP. The party trusted me and declared me as the candidate from Asansol but due to some reason, I will not be able to contest the elections from Asansol," Mr. Singh posted on X.

**Questions raised**

There was outrage in political circles after Mr. Singh's name was announced, par-



BJP leaders Bajjant Panda and Vinod Tawde announcing the first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha elections on Saturday. PTI

ticularly because of his song allegedly targeting Bengali women. Leaders of the ruling Trinamool Congress, and political and social groups had also raised questions over his candidature. Photographs of Mr.

Singh's album covers and songs went viral on social media. Reacting to the development, Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said it was a result of "the indomitable spirit and

power of the people of West Bengal".

A section of the State BJP leadership was also not happy. Since the party is attempting to use the unrest at Sandeshkhali, where allegations of sexual assault have been made against the local Trinamool leadership, as a poll plank ahead of Lok Sabha elections, the candidature of Mr. Singh could have turned counter-productive for the party.

Actor Shatrughan Sinha is the Trinamool MP from Asansol. He won the bypoll to the seat in 2022 with a margin of over three lakh votes after Babul Supriyo resigned as the BJP MP and joined the Trinamool. The BJP had won the seat in 2014 and 2019.

## BJP leader Nitin Patel withdraws from LS race

The Hindu Bureau  
AHMEDABAD

Former Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Nitin Patel on Sunday said he had withdrawn his claim to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Mehsana.

Mr. Patel did not cite any reason for the decision. The BJP is yet to officially announce its candidate from the seat. "The selection process of Mehsana candidate is still under way. But before that, I withdraw my claim as a BJP candidate," he said.

Mehsana is the home district of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is one of the first two Lok Sabha seats that the BJP won in the 1984 elections and has remained with the party since then barring two exceptions.

## Doors still open for alliance with Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, says Jairam

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

On a day the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc parties presented a united front at the Jan Vishwas rally in Patna, the Congress said the doors were still open for an alliance with the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal and the final word had not been spoken on the issue.

Trinamool Congress chairperson and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who has already announced that her party will contest all 42 seats in the State, has also said that this does not mean that there is a final divorce from the INDIA bloc.

The Trinamool party was not represented at the



Jairam Ramesh

"We have not closed any doors. She has unilaterally announced that she will contest all 42 seats [in West Bengal]. Well, that is her announcement. As far as we are concerned, talks are still continuing, the doors are still open and the final word will not be said till the final word is said," the senior Congress leader added.

**Yet to announce list**

The Congress is banking on the fact that the Trinamool is yet to declare its list of candidates.

Trinamool sources, however, insist that not much should be read into this since the list for the 2019 Lok Sabha election too was declared only after the dates for the elections were notified.

## Denied ticket, BJP MP Harsh Vardhan quits active politics

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

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

The former Union Health Minister in a long post on X said he will return to his clinic after "over 30 years of a glorious electoral career". The leader is an ENT doctor.

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

**BJP's Delhi list**

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

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

**On the draw** MIKA AZIZ



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

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

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

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

The BJP nominee hit back at the ruling AAP in

the Capital, questioning its choice for the constituency. AAP has fielded Soomathi Bhatnagar, who Ms. Swaraj said was "beaten up by the AAP cadre" in Rajendra Nagar on Saturday.

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

Ms. Swaraj, a lawyer and the daughter of former Union Minister Sushma Swaraj, will be making her electoral debut this general election, replacing sitting

MP and Union Minister Meenakshi Lekhi. Ms. Swaraj, 40, is the youngest of the five candidates announced by the party.

**'Stood for Lait Modi'**

Attacking the BJP over her candidature, AAP said she defended in courts fugitive businessman Lait Modi, who fled the country after embezzling lakhs of crores of rupees.

"From 2012 to 2014, she consistently defended Modi from lower courts to the Supreme Court in a case linked to his passport. He fled with his passport be-

fore the court order came and has not returned since then. Not only that, he had also thanked Ms. Swaraj via a post on X for fighting his case," she said.

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

The Delhi Minister said Ms. Swaraj also defended the Central government when women were stripped and paraded naked in violence-hit Manipal last year.

## Police failed to monitor Jaffer Sadiq: BJP

The Hindu Bureau  
COIMBATORE

BJP Tamil Nadu president K. Annamalai on Sunday said here that the growth of expelled DMK functionary Jaffer Sadiq that enabled him to establish ties with an international drug cartel showed that there was a systemic problem in Tamil Nadu where the police department failed to monitor and take action against him.

According to him, the accused was arrested in 2013 in Chennai in a drug case. In 11 years, he had



K. Annamalai

grown to become an "international drug criminal". The police should have monitored him. Instead, he was moving freely, and had taken pictures with DMK leaders. Chief Minis-

ter M.K. Stalin, who has the Home portfolio, should have conducted review meetings. The State government should engage all stakeholders to control the drug problem in the State, he added.

Mr. Annamalai further said that the BJP had started working on a plan to address the drug menace. The start-up cell of the party would organise a challenge programme on March 7 and 8 in Tenkasi, seeking solutions to control this menace in the State. Asked if he would contest in the upcoming

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

The Hindu Bureau  
GURUGRAM

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

The decision to form the panel taken at the party's executive meeting in Karnal came in the wake of the BJP State poll committee's recommendation to the

Central leadership to go solo in the polls.

It also formed committees to decide on the names of the candidates and formulate the campaign strategy.

**Bharat Ratna demand**

Keeping an eye on the Jat and SC votes, the JJP reiterated its demand for Bharat Ratna for Deputy PM Chaudhary Devi Lal and Bahujan Samaj Party fourth also would continue to work for the public.

Dushyant Chautala, coming out of the executive meeting, told the press persons that the party would write to the Union government seeking Bharat Ratna for Chaudhary Devi Lal, and Mr. Kansu Ram.

Addressing the meeting, JJP's national president Ajay Singh Chautala said that guided by the ideology of Chaudhary Devi Lal the party was now stronger

**IN BRIEF**



**CBI arrests NHA official in ₹20-lakh bribery case**

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has arrested a general manager of the National Highways Authority of India (NHA) in an alleged bribery case of ₹20 lakh in Nagpur, Maharashtra, officials said on Sunday. Arvind Kale, who is also a project director, allegedly received the bribe from a private company, they said. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) recovered ₹45 lakh cash, including the bribe of ₹20 lakh, during a search operation following Mr. Kale's arrest, the officials said. A case has been registered against Mr. Kale and 11 others, including the private company, they said.

**CUET-UG dates may change based on LS polls schedule**

The schedule for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) UG is likely to be changed depending on the Lok Sabha election schedule, according to University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman Jagadish Kumar. The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Tuesday announced that the exam would be conducted from May 15 to 31 and the results declared on June 30. "The dates announced by the NTA are tentative. Once the election dates are announced, the NTA will finalise the CUET-UG dates. The tentative schedule is from May 15," the UGC chief said.

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

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

**The Hindu Bureau CHANDIGARH**

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

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

Farmers from Punjab and Haryana would, however, continue their protest at Shambhu-Ambala and Khanauri-Jind - the inter-State boundary between Haryana and Punjab, where they have been camping after being stopped from entering Haryana since February 13. The KMM and the SKM (Non-Political) had earlier given the call for the 'Delhi Chalo' march last month to press for fulfilment of their demands.

KMM coordinator Sar-



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

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

camp at the different locations on the inter-State boundary of both the States," he said.

**Rail roko protest**

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

Mr. Pander alleged that the Centre was treating the farmers and labourers demanding their rights like enemies. "This is unfortunate and an attempt is being made to establish dictatorship in the country, but the people of the country will not allow this to happen," he said. "The struggle will continue till the MSP and crop purchase guarantee act, implementation of the Swaminathan Report, complete loan waiver of farmers and the entire charter of demands are resolved," he added.

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

**Sangeetha Kandavel CHENNAI**

The famous Cuttack Rupa Tarakasi (silver filigree) has been given the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Geographical Indications Registry in Chennai. The application for this was filed by the Odisha State Cooperative Handicrafts Corporation Limited and was facilitated by the Department of Textile and Handicrafts, Government of Odisha. Filigree has been traditionally associated with fine craftsmanship and is practised even today as Telkari work.

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

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

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

Ratlam Riyawan Lahsun (Garlic), a variety named after Riyawan village in Ratlam district of Madhya Pradesh, also bagged the GI tag along with the Am-baji White Marble, which is formed when limestone is re-crystallised under the earth's crust due to intense pressure and heat. Tripura Risa Textile, Hyderabad Lac Bangles, Majuli Mask of Assam and the Assam Majuli Manuscript Painting are other products that got GI tag.

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

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

**Lavpreet Kaur HYDERABAD**

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

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

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



ILS used to provide accurate lateral and vertical guidance to aircraft for landing.

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

**Landing aid**

ILS is a standard precision landing aid established by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO). It is used to provide accurate lateral and vertical guidance to aircraft for landing on the runway under normal or adverse weather conditions.

Interestingly, the need for advanced ILS is now felt in airports which traditionally would not have fog problems, but report visi-

bility challenges due to increased pollution (or smog).

Currently, only six international airports in India, including Delhi, Jaipur, Amritsar, Kolkata, Lucknow and Bengaluru have CAT III B landing facilities, according to data revealed by the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA). Meanwhile, CAT I capability will be enabled in eight airports while facilities will be upgraded from CAT I to CAT II in four airports.

"Flights often get delayed due to challenges in landing at some of the airports which lack advanced ILS [CAT II or CAT III] systems. This trend is particularly pronounced in tier 2 and tier 3 cities of India, leading to a constant knock-out effect in flight delays even in major cities and hence passenger inconvenience," Rishi Jain, CEO at Jain Aviation Consultants, said.

ILS systems, however, are a costly affair. According to experts, the average

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

According to the Ministry, so far, 4,804 flight crew qualified for CAT II/III are available with various airlines, including 2,979 captains and 1,825 co-pilots. Besides this, CAT IIIB installation also demands an obstruction-free environment, to avoid potential interference in localiser signals for the ILS on the runway, creating a serious collision risk for low-flying aircraft.

**150 bank accounts linked to syndicate smuggling opioids under ED scanner**

**Devesh K. Pandey NEW DELHI**

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

**Cash deposits**

The ED also allegedly found many instances of cash deposits in the personal accounts and the accounts of logistics companies controlled by various individuals linked to Mr. Shirazi. An inquiry indicated that these entities did not have offices, employees or licences required for running logistics.

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

**Properties attached**

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

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

**THE CROSSWORD 14113** (set by Arden)

Crossword puzzle grid with numbers 1-25 indicating starting points for clues.

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

- 13 Real time changes in lawless state (7)
- 15 With friends lacking, it's a hit (4)
- 16 ...famous singer keen to make a comeback (4)
- 20 Fancy entranceway goes away, it's a mess (7)
- 23 Rule on charity (5)
- 24 The man heads off taking his newly married wife, an islander (9)
- 26 Fancy thing, sport for retirement (9)
- 27 Loves work, there's some delay (5)
- 28 Long for some money (3)
- 29 Top down, down in the dumps (11)

**SUDOKU**

9x9 Sudoku grid with some numbers filled in.

Solution to previous puzzle and solution to yesterday's Sudoku.

**FAITH**

**Essence of Bhajagovindham**

Adi Sankara's granthas are useful to many devotees and the biggest takeaway is that satsang is a big blessing, said Swami Ramacharana Tirtha (Nochur) in a discourse. Even if a devotee feels he is not well versed in scriptures, he would know Adi Sankara's Bhajagovindham. In Sivananda Lahiri, Adi Sankara prays to Sarveswara, saying, "I will pray and perform pujas; Oh, loka guru, kindly advise in a manner that will bring me inner santi." Listening to discourses in itself would bring one nirvriti or inner bliss. Satsang, the company of good people, and hearing their lectures would enhance one's intelligence quotient, while strengthening one's bhakti. Just as how a cow would approach one if one were to offer a few blades of grass, so too should one seek to improve oneself with bhakti and gnana in order to find that inner bliss, that Adi Sankara refers to as "Chidananda roopaya Shivoham Shivoham" in his work, Nirvana Shatakam.

SCIENCE

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

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

Vinod Scaria  
Sridhar Sivasubbu

**T**he sci-fi writer David Brin built his fictitious 'Uplift Universe' in a series of novels for two decades from 1980. In the series, a patron race uplifts species of a future universe to a higher order of life.

Something similar happened in the earth's distant past when many species went through bursts of evolutionary innovation, taking giant leaps and incorporating extraordinary diversity in their population, while others were left behind.

**Unexplained bursts of change**

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

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

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

**A tree of snakes and lizards**

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

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

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



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

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

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

**A clock in the body's molecules**

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

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

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



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

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

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

**Availability of prey**

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

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

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

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

**The Sonic hedgehog gene**

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

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

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

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

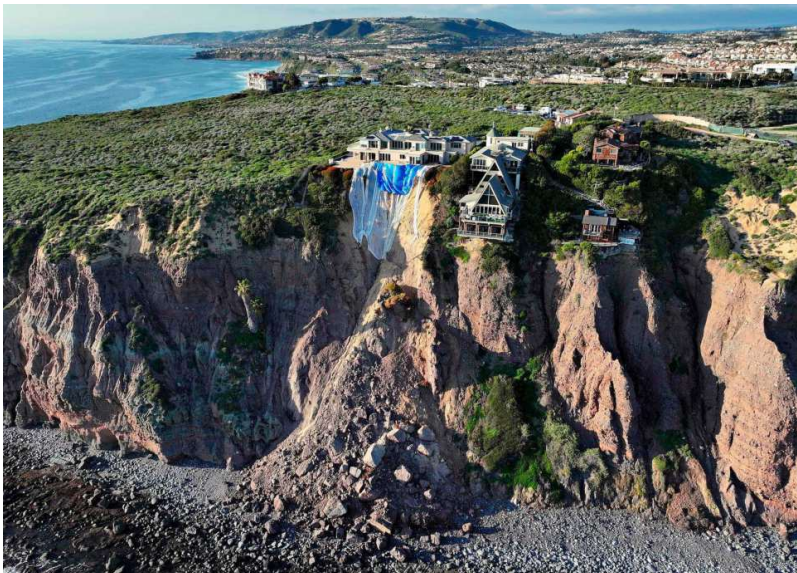
**THE GIST**

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

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

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**BIG SHOT**



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

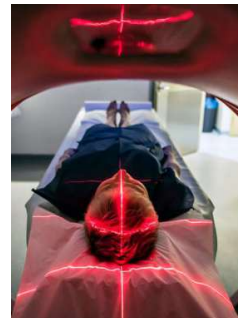
**WHAT IS IT?**

**Resonance: a tendency to move in step**

Vasudevan Mukunth

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

Resonance can be good or bad, depending on the context. It is good in applications like the quartz crystal in a quartz watch, when playing musical instruments or singing (with the vocal chords), when producing laser light, and in nuclear magnetic resonance (which MRI scanners use to look inside your body). You may have noticed the detrimental effects of resonance when you're sitting in a bus, the engine is idling, and you feel the vehicle's metal structure rattling. On April 12, 1833, British soldiers were marching on the Broughton Suspension Bridge in England. As they marched in step (all together going left, right, left, right), they



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

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

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## Facts and statistics

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

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

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

## Bloody Thursday

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

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

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

# Mountains of plastic are choking the Himalayan States

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

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation and changing production and consumption patterns are responsible for the plastic waste crisis in the Indian Himalayan Region. A quantum jump in tourist footfalls is another reason for exacerbation of the problem. A recent report by the Social Development for Communities (SDC) Foundation Dehradun highlighting the plight of towns in Uttarakhand drowning in plastic waste is no surprise — almost all the mountain States face a similar situation. Recently, the National Green Tribunal issued notices to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the Himachal Pradesh State Pollution Control Board, the Deputy Commissioner Lahaul and Spiti and the Panchayat of Koksir in Himachal Pradesh on waste dumping in eco-sensitive areas by tourists and commercial establishments. In Assam, at the Ramsar site of Deepor Beel, Greater adjutant storks have been feasting on the plastic waste in the landfill instead of fish from the wetland. In Manipur, growing pollution in rivers, that include the Nambul, has been widely reported. The Himalayan Clean up (2018-20) that was conducted by the Integrated Mountain Initiative with Zero Waste Himalayas and the National Productivity Council of India's waste and brand audit show increasing plastic waste, especially non-recyclables, in the Indian Himalayan Region. The Himalayan Clean up (2022) waste audit results showed that 92.7% of trash was plastic, with 72% of waste being non-recyclable plastic.

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



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which is shocking especially as the EPR portal of CPCB claims that there is a systemic ability to deal with plastic waste. India has one of the highest mismanaged waste index (MWI), at 68.5%, in the world (after Kenya, Nigeria and Mozambique) which is the gap in waste management capacity and plastic consumption. The Government of India claims that it recycles 60% of plastic waste. In statistical analysis done by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) using CPCB data, India is merely recycling (through mechanical recycling) 12% of its plastic waste. Close to 20% of this waste is channelled for end-of-life solutions such as co-incineration, plastic-to-fuel and road making, which means we are burning 20% of our plastic waste and still calling it 'recycling' and when 68% of plastic waste is unaccounted for.

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

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

Under the SWM, PWM and EPR, the task of

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

**Plugging data gaps is one step**

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

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

# The long road to reforming India's political party system

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

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

**Transgressions that pass muster**

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

**The issue of inner-party democracy**

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

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

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Overdrive?**

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

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

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

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

Hindutva (Page 1, "BJP's first list is out; PM keeps Varanasi", March 3).  
**G. David Milton**,  
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

**A shame**  
It was distressing to have read a report that a Spanish lady, who came to India on

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



# A women's urban employment guarantee act

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

# Not the right cure for urban maladies

The unification of urban local bodies may not help citizens

## STATE OF PLAY

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

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

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

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

The prosperity – or lack

thereof – of most civic bodies largely depends on property tax collections. This is unlike earlier times when civic bodies eagerly awaited grants from the government and Finance Commissions. In several municipalities and corporations outside the GHMC, the property tax reforms proposed by the Central government have been adopted. Accordingly, the basis for calculating the tax has been shifted from the Annual Rental Value (ARV) to the Market Capital Value of the property. Within the GHMC, however, the earlier formula based on ARV continues to be followed, with a few tweaks regarding the fixation of the rental values. With the changed calculation, residents in corporations and municipalities with higher property prices are paying a higher tax compared to those living within the GHMC. Taxpayers say that civic administration and amenities are not improving according to the higher tax collection.

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

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

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

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

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

# A majority of Indians support authoritarianism: Pew survey

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

## DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

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

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

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

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

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

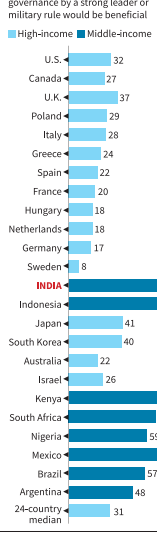
Since the last survey in 2017, in many countries, there has been a notable decrease in support for representative democracy. In 11 of the 22 countries with comparable data from 2017 (excluding Australia and the U.S.), there was a significant reduction in the share of the population that viewed representative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

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

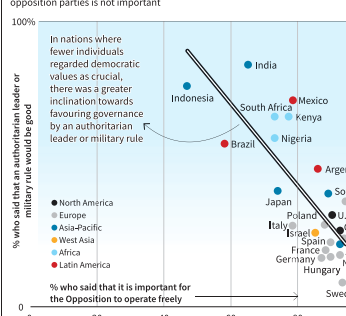


**Democracy in decline**  
The charts and text are sourced from the Pew Research Center's Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey

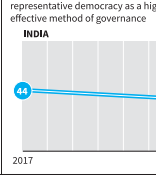
**Chart 1** | % who believed that governance by a strong leader or military rule would be beneficial



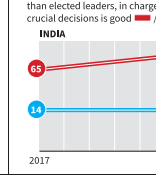
**Chart 2** | % who support authoritarian rule against % who said that freedom of opposition parties is not important



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



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



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 4, 1974

## Scope for more exports to Australia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 4, 1924

## The Caliphate abolished

Constantinople, March 2: The police have been instructed from Ankara to supervise the households of the Caliph and the Imperial Princes with a view of preventing the removal of valuables. It is reported that the Caliph's principal wife is prostrated with grief and the principal eunuch has refused to take food for three days.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The amount IPOs are expected to raise in the coming week**

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

**The votes secured by Shehbaz Sharif to become Pakistan PM**

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

**Amount injected by FPIs in Indian equities in February**

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

**Revenue generated by Sri Lankan tourism in January 2024**

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

**The number of years since MH370's disappearance**

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

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## On the relevance of university rankings

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

### EXPLAINER

Moumita Koley

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

### What do ranking systems do?

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

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

### Are ranking systems perfect?

In 2021, Elizabeth Gadd, a research officer at Loughborough University in the U.K., published a critique in which she reported that universities' quests for higher ranking mirrors the flawed pursuit of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the sole measure of a country's prosperity. For example, in their 2010 book *Mis-Measuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up*, eminent economists Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi contended that the use of a single indicator to capture the economic and social progress of a country will inevitably overlook the environmental impact of its growth and measures of its inequality, among other crucial issues. According to Dr. Gadd, university rankings, like GDP, distill complex roles that universities play in society into a single, unidimensional score.

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



ISTOCKPHOTO

### THE GIST

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

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

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

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

### What are the concerns over conflicts of interest?

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

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

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

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

### What about data security?

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

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

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

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

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

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

**CACHE**



REUTERS

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

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

**Nabeel Ahmed**

**The story so far:**

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

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

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

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

cryptographic keys between devices to ensure continued protection.

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

**Why is Apple shifting to PQ3 protocol?**

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

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

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

**What are PQ3's strengths and limitations?**

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

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

**Will the PQ3 protocol impact Apple users?**

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

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

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

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

**Are other messaging services also using methods like PQ3?**

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

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

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



**KNOW YOUR ENGLISH**

## His well-heeled boss threw a party for him

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

**S. Upendran**

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

"Some of the well-heeled in Delhi spend a month in Europe."  
"When the news of the scandal broke, many of his well-heeled clients left him."  
"That's a good example. I heard that your cousin is taking part in the college elections this year. How is she doing? Do you think she'll win?"

"Difficult to say. According to most people, the two candidates are running neck and neck."  
"Neck and neck? You mean 'neck to neck', don't you?"  
"No, it's always 'neck and neck', not 'neck to neck'. When you run neck and neck with someone..."

"I know what the expression 'neck and neck' means. When you say that two people are running neck and neck, what you're saying is that they're running side by side. That it's difficult to say who will win the race."  
"Very good. According to exit polls, the two parties are running neck and neck. At this moment, it's difficult to say who will form the Government."  
"For much of the race, Kumar was in the lead. But as he approached the finish line, he was running neck and neck with four others."  
"Do you know where the expression comes from?"

"From two people running a race?"  
"You're correct about the race part. But it's not a race between people, but horses."  
"I see. So, it's the horses that are running neck and neck. That makes sense, I guess. I understand your boss is in some kind of trouble."  
"Big trouble! Several people informed on him. The CEO is planning an inquiry."  
"Is it 'inform' or 'in-form on'?"

"When you inform on someone, what you're doing is going to an individual in authority, and telling them about some wrong that a person has done."  
"And I suppose this is done secretly."  
"Yes, that's right! For example, you might decide to go to the police and tell them about the illegal activities happening in your company."

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

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

**Ramya Kannan**

**QUESTION 1**

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

**QUESTION 2**

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

**QUESTION 3**

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

**QUESTION 4**

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

**QUESTION 5**

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



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

**Questions and Answers to the March 1 edition of the daily quiz:**

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

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

**Word of the day**

**Folderol:**  
nonsensical talk or writing

**Synonyms:** trash, rubbish, codswallop

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

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/folderolpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /fɒldəʊl/

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

KUALA LUMPUR

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



Relatives of passengers on a Malaysia Airlines plane that vanished 10 years ago pushed for a new search on Sunday as they spoke of grief and the struggle to find closure.

SEOUL

South Korean doctors rally as healthcare stand-off escalates



Thousands of South Korean doctors protested on Sunday in an escalating stand-off with the government over medical training reforms, which has seen junior doctors quit en masse.

GENEVA

Swiss voters approve proposal to increase pension payments



Swiss voters on Sunday backed a proposal to increase pension payments, a move hailed as "historic" at a time when the country's ageing population faces surging living expenses.

PORT-AU-PRINCE

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



An unknown number of inmates had escaped after armed gangs stormed the main prison in the Haitian capital Port-au-Prince on Saturday evening.

Many OPEC+ nations extend oil cuts to boost prices

Agence France-Presse VIENNA

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

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

Saudi Arabia's Energy Ministry said it would cut its production by one million barrels per day (bpd) from April to June (Q2), while Russia announced 471,000 bpd of cuts in Q2.

Shehbaz Sharif becomes the Pakistan PM for second time

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

Press Trust of India ISLAMABAD

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

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



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

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

Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) got only 92 votes in the election held at the newly-elected National Assembly. Amidst vociferous sloganeering by the members of Imran Khan's party members against alleged "mandate thieves," Mr. Shehbaz warned that Pakistan was

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

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

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

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

Agence France-Presse WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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



Donald Trump

two for the second time since 2020.

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

Complete sweep

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

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

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

The limited vote came in the wake of chaos within the State party, including allegations of overspending and mismanagement. Mr. Trump had grabbed 16 Michigan delegates earlier in the week in a limited primary vote.

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

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

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

Agence France-Presse OUAHADOUGOU

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

On that same day, February 25, separate attacks on a mosque in eastern Burkina and a Catholic church in the north left dozens more dead.

Aly Benjamin Coulibaly said he had received reports of the attacks on the villages of Komsilga, Nodin and Soroe in Yatenga pro-

On that same day, separate attacks on a mosque and a Catholic church left dozens more dead

vince on February 25, with a provisional toll of "around 170 people executed".

The attacks left others wounded and caused material damage, the prosecutor for the northern town of Ouahigouya added in a statement.

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

Navalny's memory



Floral tribute: A person throws flowers towards the grave of Russian Opposition politician Alexei Navalny in Moscow on Sunday.

U.S., Qatari, Hamas envoys push for Gaza ceasefire from Cairo

Agence France-Presse GAZA STRIP

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

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

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

And Israel, which has so far announced no plans to join the Egypt talks, has demanded Hamas provide it with a list of all 130 remaining captives, including more than 30 it fears are dead.

Despite the latest push to halt the fighting sparked by Hamas's 7 attack on Israel, Israeli bombing and urban combat again rocked Gaza,

home to 2.4 million people, most of whom have been displaced.

Another 90 Palestinians were killed within 24 hours, said Hamas-ruled Gaza's Health Ministry, which put the war's overall death toll at 30,410, mostly women and children.

Two babies buried

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

A relative, Shehda Abu Anza, said "only civilians" were in the house when it was bombed, killing 14 members of one family. "All of them were sleeping when suddenly a missile hit and destroyed the whole house," he said as residents searched the rubble with their bare hands, for bodies and also to salvage scarce food.

At least 16 children have died of malnutrition in recent days as "famine spreads" in Gaza's north, said Health Ministry spokesman Ashraf al-Qudra.



Picking together: A Palestinian man reads a book in front of a car damaged by Israeli bombardment in Gaza City on Sunday.

Iran conservatives secure bulk of seats in elections: media

Agence France-Presse TEHRAN

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

Authorities were still counting ballots two days after Friday's vote for members of parliament and for the Assembly of Experts, which selects the Islamic republic's supreme leader.

The vote was the first since protests broke out over the September 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, 22, an Iranian Kurd who had been arrested for allegedly violating the strict dress code for women.



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

The election, in which a vetting process barred many hopefuls from running, took place with Iran suffering a severe economic crisis deepened by international sanctions.

The official IRNA news agency put the turnout at around "41%" among 61 million eligible voters. No official figure had yet been announced. The reformist daily Shargh predicted the next parliament would be "in the hands of radical conservatives" who "took advantage of the opportunity created by the low

participation". Etemad, another reformist newspaper, reported that turnout was lower in Iran's bigger cities than its smaller ones, and that there was a significant number of "blank votes".

Fears of a low turnout had swirled ahead of the elections after a state TV poll found more than half of respondents were indifferent about the elections.

Wake-up call

Turnout in the capital Tehran was around 25%, according to IRNA media, which reported that ultra-conservative candidates secured 12 of the 30 parliament seats allotted to the capital.

Some seats have gone to a second round, which will

take place in either April or May, IRNA reported.

The pro-government Iran Daily said authorities should see the low turnout as a "wake-up call and redouble their efforts to fortify their support base".

Reformist daily Ham Mihan said that "the soul of the elections was lost" and that turnout was "far from victorious" which could have "political repercussions" for Iran's system.

Political analyst Mohammad Mohajeri said conservatives and ultra-conservatives will emerge as the main winner in the elections due to "sharp decline in the participation rate". A record figure of 15,200 hopefuls were competing for seats in the 290-member parliament.

Another 144 candidates sought a place in the 88-member Assembly of Experts, which is exclusively made up of male Islamic scholars.

By allowing a large pool of candidates, the government wanted "to create local competition and increase participation" to help attract voters, journalist Maziar Khomeini said. Iran's 2020 parliament was elected during the Covid pandemic with a turnout of 42.57% - at the time the lowest since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Former moderate president Hassan Rouhani cast his ballot on Friday despite his disqualification from running for the Assembly of Experts after 24 years of membership.



A group of men are seen near the artificial glacier in a mountain gorge near the village of Syn-Tash, AFP

## Artificial glaciers stave off drought in Kyrgyzstan

Agence France-Press  
KYRGYZSTAN

In the Tian-Shan mountains of Kyrgyzstan, villagers have made an artificial glacier to provide water for their drought-hit farms.

Standing on the ice hillock, farmer Erkinbek Kaldanov said he was optimistic about harnessing nature to counteract climate change. "We will not have any more problems with water," he said.

"When the glacier melts, there will be enough water for the livestock and to water the land in Syn-Tash," the surrounding district, he said.

The glacier currently measures five metres high and about 20 metres long. At the height of winter it was 12 metres tall. Local residents made it over a period of two weeks in autumn by re-directing water from the peaks of Tian-Shan, which tower more than 4,000 metres high in northern Kyrgyzstan.

Mr. Kaldanov and others are being forced to adapt since natural glaciers in Central Asia – the main water source for the region – are slowly disappearing due to global heating.

"There is less and less water every day," he said. The water tables are emptying out, said Aidos Yzmalnalyev, a spokesman for the Syn-Tash farmers.

Finding solutions is urgent, particularly as farming represents around 10% of the fragile Kyrgyz economy and two thirds of its inhabitants live in rural areas.

In the north of Kyrgyzstan, a country accustomed to revolutions and uprisings, the lack of water has already stoked social tensions in previous periods of drought.

# 60 years later, UN peacekeepers role vital for 'precarious' Cyprus divide

Cyprus has remained peaceful since the Turkish invasion, but it would be a mistake to think that the buffer zone is anything other than tense; it sees thousands of infringements each year. UN says the most common are unauthorised civilian crossings, while there is also plenty of criminality

Agence France-Press  
NICOSIA

In the heart of Nicosia's walled Old City, two UN peacekeepers unlock a padlocked door and step back five decades. They are entering the buffer zone that separates Greek Cypriots from Turkish Cypriots, and thousands of troops, on the divided island.

Like countless soldiers before them, the blue berets clambered over rooftops, past drying laundry lines, before walking along crumbling streets and through abandoned flats and businesses caked in thick layers of dust.

"When you first get here it's really quite surreal, obviously it's not something that most people will ever really experience," Sapper Michael Clasper, a British peacekeeper from 71 Engineer Regiment, said.

This year marks a triple anniversary for the Mediterranean island. It's 60 years since the arrival of the blue berets, 50 since an Athens-backed coup aimed at uniting Cyprus with Greece triggered a Turkish invasion that divided the island, and 20 since a referendum saw Greek Cypriots reject a UN reunification plan.

The appointment of a new UN envoy last month has sparked a flicker of hope for a new push for a



Under watch: Members of the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus patrol along the buffer zone in the divided capital Nicosia, AFP

settlement, but with six decades of failed negotiations behind it, the UN faces questions of how much longer it should stay.

"You have got a peacekeeping force on a holiday island... which is a really bizarre disconnect," said James Ker-Lindsay, a visiting professor at the London School of Economics and a Cyprus expert.

"But that also raises questions about UNFICYP and its long-term mandate," he said, using the acronym for the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus.

The UN is fully aware how long it has been here. "We always intend to come, fulfill the peacekeeping task at hand and leave,"

said UNFICYP spokesman Aleem Siddique. "The fact that we are still here, 60 years later, highlights the fact that we still need a solution to the Cyprus problem."

Cyprus, which has a large Greek Cypriot majority and a sizable Turkish Cypriot minority, gained an uneasy independence from Britain in 1960 under terms that forbade partition and union with Greece or Turkey.

Yet the new republic's delicately crafted constitution buckled under the strain of inter-communal tensions and in December 1963 the dispute exploded into deadly violence.

Turkish Cypriots withdrew into enclaves and Ni-

cosia, the capital, was divided along what was dubbed the Green Line.

British troops had deployed quickly from their bases on the island to try to restore peace, but London was uneasy about both the costs and the implications of making it a long-term mission.

"Peacekeeping was a really new thing at the time," said Mr. Ker-Lindsay. With the Cold War at its height, there were strong U.S. efforts to make it a NATO mission, but the Cypriot President appealed to the Soviet Union and the idea was dropped.

Eventually, in March 1964, the UNFICYP was created and has been in operation ever since, with

Britain an ever-present contributor.

The Turkish invasion of 1974 and its aftermath put an end to the enclaves and divided Cyprus in two, with the Turkish Cypriot north unilaterally declaring independence nine years later in a move recognised only by Ankara.

The buffer zone now stretches the full length of the island, 180 km from west to east.

Cyprus has, for the most part, remained peaceful since the Turkish invasion, but it would be a mistake to think that the buffer zone is anything other than tense.

The role of soldiers on patrol is to spot the slightest unauthorised alteration, even a new padlock, and report it up the chain, so that the UN can step in quickly and maintain the status quo.

"The attention to detail is something you really need to focus on when you're out here," Mr. Clasper said.

Frequent requests by former residents to retrieve their property are rejected because the UN cannot allow the status quo to change.

### Thousands of incidents

The buffer zone sees thousands of infringements each year. The UN says the most common are unauthorised civilian crossings,

while there is also plenty of criminality, including illegal hunting and the smuggling of everything from aspirin to people.

There can also be serious confrontations, like one in August over the construction of a road in the buffer zone to the mixed village of Pyla, which led to four peacekeepers being injured.

"It's easy for small incidents to explode into international incidents, and we saw that recently with the dispute in Pyla," Mr. Siddique said.

The longevity of the mission and the apparently slim hopes of a resolution – the last UN-backed talks collapsed in 2017 – have led to doubts about its continuing efficacy.

Under the Donald Trump administration, there was U.S. pressure to review the UN's peacekeeping missions and "Cyprus was definitely in the firing line", Mr. Ker-Lindsay said. He said it was saved in part because "if things really kick off in Cyprus, it will draw in two NATO allies", in the form of Greece and Turkey.

Since 1974, Sector 2 of the buffer zone, which covers Nicosia, has been headquartered in the Ledra Palace Hotel, once among the most glamorous in Cyprus and now a symbol of its division.

## + Gaza civilian deaths test Israel military's AI precision claims

Agence France-Press  
PARIS

The Israeli military has said AI helps it more accurately target militants in its five-month war against Hamas, but as Gaza deaths rise, experts are questioning how effective algorithms can really be.

The Health Ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip says the war has killed upwards of 30,000 people, the majority of them civilians.

"Either the AI is as good as claimed and the IDF (Israeli military) does not care about collateral damage, or the AI is not as good as claimed," Toby Walsh, chief scientist at the University of New South Wales AI Institute in Australia, said.

The Health Ministry does not specify how many militants are included in the Gaza toll.

Israel has said its forces



Israeli army vehicles rolling out of Gaza on Sunday, AFP

"eliminated 10,000 terrorists" since the war began in early October, triggered by a deadly Hamas attack on southern Israel.

Israel's claimed use of algorithms adds another layer of concern for activists already alarmed by artificial intelligence-powered hardware like drones and gunsights that are being deployed in Gaza.

The Israeli military said it had no comment on its

AI targeting systems.

But the Army has repeatedly claimed its forces target only militants and take measures to avoid harm to civilians.

### 'Precise attacks'

Israel began hyping AI-powered targeting after an 11-day conflict in Gaza during May 2021, which commanders branded the world's "first AI war".

The military chief during the 2021 war, Aviv Ko-

chavi, told Israeli news website Ynet last year that the force had used AI systems to identify "100 new targets every day".

"In the past, we would produce 50 targets in Gaza in a year," he said.

The current Gaza offensive began when Hamas launched an attack on October 7 that resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of official figures.

Weeks later, a blog entry on the Israeli military's website said its AI-enhanced "targeting directorate" had identified over 12,000 targets in 27 days.

An unnamed Israeli official was quoted as saying the AI system, called Gospel, produced targets "for precise attacks on infrastructure associated with Hamas, inflicting great damage on the enemy and minimal harm to those not involved".

## 'Connecting countries'



Republic of Korea Air Force's aerobatic unit 'Black Eagles' manoeuvre their F-150B aircraft as they perform an air show at Clark Air Base in Pampanga in Philippines to mark the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Philippines and South Korea. GETTY IMAGES

## Kenya's cash-strapped government splurges on parties, cars, and curtains

Agence France-Press  
NAIROBI

Expensive curtains, lavish garden parties and jet-setting lifestyles: Kenya's cash-strapped government has been on a spending spree even as austerity measures take their toll on weary citizens.

A report released by the country's auditor general last month said the office of the deputy president spent 10.2 million shillings on curtains while splashing out on furniture to the tune of some \$50,000.

"The purchases, which were "in breach of the law" for flouting procurement rules, according to the re-

port, have struck a nerve with an angry public.

"They have squeezed my finances to the limit as they drink and dine," Kenyan teacher Moses Bett said in the capital Nairobi.

The East African powerhouse – where corruption is a hot-button issue – raised taxes to shore up revenue for government debt repayments even as many citizens were already struggling with the high prices of basic commodities.

"I am living on negatives," Mr. Bett said.

"Every day is becoming more difficult to fend for my family with what is left of my salary," the 32-year-



Meagre existence: People shop at the second-hand clothes section of Gilkomba Market in Nairobi, Kenya. AFP

old father of two said.

President William Ruto, who served as the country's deputy leader from 2013 to 2022, had vowed to slash government spend-

ing, telling Kenyans in his inauguration speech that "we are living beyond our means".

But the businessman-turned-politician, who

campaigning on a platform to help the country's poor, is planning to spend more than 1.3 billion shillings (\$8.9 million) to spruce up his eight official residences.

His offices at Nairobi's State House, built a century ago, will be renovated at a cost of more than 700 million shillings.

The cost of the facility is equivalent to more than 800 houses under a tax-funded housing plan introduced by Mr. Ruto last year. More than \$5.5 million have also been earmarked for the purchase of cars for Mr. Ruto, his deputy and the prime cabinet secretary.

The government has not commented publicly on the auditor general's report.

"It appears they forgot us... as soon as they got into power," hawked Sharon Mwaruma said. In the first six months of his presidency, Mr. Ruto spent more than 1.49 billion shillings on receptions, parties and other hospitality supplies, according to treasury records.

The President's foreign trips have also come under fire.

According to *The Standard* newspaper, which nicknamed Mr. Ruto "the flying President", the 57-year-old has spent one in

every five days outside Kenya, visiting over 38 countries since taking office in September 2022.

Mr. Ruto has defended the trips as central to his duties. "I have been connecting Kenyans with employment and investment opportunities across the world," he said.

But Kenyans are not convinced. "The leaders do not care about us. Yet we voted them to power," chef Judith Kamau said.

### Country in 'grey list'

For decades, Kenya administrations have been accused of wanton embezzlement despite repeated promises of a crackdown

on graft and waste.

Kenya was added last month to a "grey list" of countries subject to increased monitoring by the global anti-money laundering watchdog the Financial Action Task Force.

Critics say Mr. Ruto's economic measures have done little to ease Kenyans' hardships.

Inflation has been running high, at 6.9% in January, and the International Monetary Fund has warned it would likely inch up in the first half of this year. The country is sitting on public debt of more than \$70 billion – equal to over 67% of gross domestic product.

## MONEYWISE



## Gold, silver remain range-bound

### PRECIOUS METALS

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

**B. Krishnakumar**

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

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

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

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, MCX gold closed 0.33% lower in February and closed at \$62,540 per 10-gram. MCX silver closed 3% lower at ₹71,265 per kilogram.

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

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

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

### Silver too range-bound

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

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

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

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

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

## How to choose a credit card that suits your pocket

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

### PLASTIC MONEY

**Rohit Chibbar**

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

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

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

### Check for eligibility

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

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

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

For salaried professionals who are looking for



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

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

**Understand your need**  
Identify if you need a card only for building credit or to enhance your savings on regular spends or a particular category of spends.  
For credit building, an entry-level low-fee credit card with basic features and minimal eligibility requirements could be the right choice. If you do not qualify for any such card, a secured credit card could also serve the purpose.

### Explore options

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

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



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

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

### Narrow down on choice

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

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

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

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

get value-back.

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

### How to apply

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

For most users, the first credit card is usually an entry-level card but it paves the way for you to establish credit and qualify for better cards in future.

A good credit score also makes it easier for you to avail loans to meet your life goals like buying a house. Hence, it is important to begin your credit journey as early as possible.

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

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

## Family matters

### THINKINVESTOR

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

**Venkatesh Bangaruswamy**

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

### Spousal involvement

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

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

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

### Conclusion

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

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

### Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
<b>Small Finance Banks</b>				
AU Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.75	7.50	7.25
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.00	8.00	7.25
ESMF Small Finance Bank	8.25	6.00	6.75	6.25
Finance Small Finance Bank	8.61	7.65	8.11	8.00
Jain Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.50	7.25	7.25
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	8.65	6.65	8.60	8.25
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	8.25	8.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.00	8.50	7.50
<b>Private Sector Banks</b>				
Axis Bank	7.20	6.70	7.10	7.00
Bandhan Bank	7.85	7.25	7.25	5.85
City Union Bank	7.00	6.75	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.75	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	7.50	7.00	6.50	6.50
DCB Bank	8.00	7.15	7.60	7.40
Federal Bank	7.50	6.80	7.00	6.60
HDFC Bank	7.25	6.60	7.00	7.00
ICI Bank	7.20	6.70	7.00	7.00
IDFC First Bank	7.75	6.50	7.25	7.00
IndusInd Bank	7.75	7.75	7.25	7.25
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.10	7.10	6.50	6.50

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Karur Vysya Bank	7.50	7.00	7.00	7.00
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.40	7.10	7.00	6.20
Nainital Bank	7.05	6.70	6.25	5.75
RBL Bank	8.10	7.50	7.50	7.10
SBI Bank India	8.25	7.05	7.30	7.75
South Indian Bank	7.40	6.70	6.70	6.00
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.75	7.00	6.50	6.50
<b>Public Sector Banks</b>				
Bank of Baroda	7.25	6.85	7.25	6.50
Bank of India	7.25	6.50	6.50	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	7.00	6.50	6.25	6.00
Canara Bank	7.25	6.85	6.80	6.70
Central Bank of India	7.25	6.75	6.50	6.25
Indian Bank	7.25	6.10	6.25	6.25
Indian Overseas Bank	7.30	6.90	6.50	6.50
Punjab National Bank	7.25	6.75	7.00	6.50
Punjab & Sind Bank	7.40	6.20	6.00	6.00
State Bank of India	7.10	6.80	6.75	6.50
Union Bank of India	7.25	6.75	6.50	6.50
<b>Foreign Banks</b>				
Deutsche Bank	8.00	7.00	8.00	7.50
HSBC Bank	7.25	4.00	7.00	6.00

### Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	Up to 10 lakh	Above 10 lakh & up to 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
<b>Public Sector Banks</b>			
State Bank of India	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.05	8.40-10.05
Bank of Baroda	8.40-10.05	8.40-10.05	8.40-10.00
Union Bank of India	8.35-10.75	8.35-10.90	8.35-10.90
Punjab National Bank	8.45-10.25	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.15
Bank of India	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75
Canara Bank	8.50-11.25	8.45-11.25	8.40-11.15
UCO Bank	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30
Bank of Maharashtra	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15
Punjab and Sind Bank	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00
Indian Overseas Bank	8.40-10.60	8.40-10.60	8.40-10.60
Central Bank of India	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80
<b>Private Sector Banks</b>			
Kotak Mahindra Bank	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*
ICI Bank	8.75*	8.75*	8.75*
Axis Bank	8.75-13.30	8.75-13.30	8.75-6.65
HSBC Bank	8.45*	8.45*	8.45*
South Indian Bank	9.84-11.24	9.84-11.04	9.84-11.09
Karur Vysya Bank	9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05	9.00-11.05

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	Up to 10 lakh	Above 10 lakh & up to 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
<b>Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)</b>			
Karnataka Bank	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60	8.60-10.60
Federal Bank	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*
Dhanu Bank	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50	9.35-10.50
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	9.45-9.95	9.45-9.95	9.45-9.95
Bandhan Bank	9.16-15.00	9.16-13.33	9.16-13.33
RBL Bank	8.90*	8.90*	8.90*
CSB Bank	10.69-12.54	10.69-12.54	10.69-12.54
HDFC Bank	8.55*	8.55*	8.55*
City Union Bank	12.35-14.10	12.85-14.60	13.35-14.85
<b>Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)</b>			
LIC Housing Finance	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.75
Bajaj Housing Finance	8.50*	8.50*	8.50*
Tata Capital	8.70*	8.70*	8.70*
PNB Housing Finance	8.50-14.50	8.50-14.50	8.50-14.45
GI Housing Finance	8.80*	8.80*	8.80*
SFMI Home Finance	10.00*	10.00*	10.00*
Aditya Birla Capital	8.80-14.75	8.80-14.75	8.80-14.75
ICI Home Finance	9.20*	9.20*	9.20*
Godrej Housing Finance	8.55*	8.55*	8.55*

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

## Alang makes more space for dying ships



**More on the deck:** The additional plots can double the ship-recycling capacity of Alang to 9 million LDT. THE HINDU

### Avinash Nair

Almost four decades after the Alang ship-breaking yard was set up on the Gulf of Khambhat coast in Gujarat, the State government is preparing a master plan to equip the country's biggest ship-recycling yard to take up more work.

"Currently there are 153 plots at Alang where ageing ships are beached to be broken down. We will be adding another 50 plots, as per the new master plan, which is being prepared for the entire Alang region in Bhavnagar district," an official of Gujarat Maritime Board (GMB) says.

The additional plots can double the ship recycling capacity of Alang from 4.5 million light displacement tonnage (LDT) to 9 million LDT.

Alang is currently equipped to recycle 400-450 ships a year. On an average, it has been producing 3.5 million tonne of steel annually from recycling about 200 ships.

"We will be expanding the capacity of Alang in two phases. In the first phase, we will make some changes in regulations to attract more ships to Alang. We will also try to operationalise the vacant plots at Alang. In the second phase, as per the new master plan for Alang region, we will be adding new ship-breaking plots," says the official, who declined to be named. There are 153 plots at Alang of which 131 are 'operational' and the rest vacant. However, workers point out business at Alang has been on a decline since 2011-12. From 415 ships with 3.8 million LDT for recycling, the work dwindled to 187 ships in 2020-21. The numbers improved a bit at 209 ships in 2021-22, before dipping again to 137 ships in 2022-23.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

## Mall makeover: driving footfalls via promotions, pop ups and fests

Consumer preferences are shifting from buying products to services and more experience-based shopping; so, retailers are turning more proactive in approaching and bringing in customers, to drive footfalls, mall developers and retailers are collaborating to come up with unique experiences

### Ianaki Krishnan

Recently, I was surprised when I got a call from my local supermarket that they were running a discount sale and as a valued customer to make sure not to miss it. In all the years I have been doing my weekly shopping here, never had they called me to announce their offers.

As consumer preferences are shifting from buying products to buying services and more experience-based shopping, retailers are becoming more proactive in approaching and bringing in customers. To drive footfalls, mall developers and retailers are collaborating to come up with unique experiences. Concerts, food fairs, free makeovers, book shows, events themed around cultural and religious festivals, artificial snow parks - it's all happening.

### Shifts in consumption

Consumption patterns have shifted over the past few years, especially after COVID-19. After lockdowns, the much publicised 'revenge' theme played out for a bit but people got tired of it. Now, there is another shift.

Sales data show consumption is back in malls but what customers are spending upon has changed. Earlier, it was apparel and fashion that



**New paradigm:** Food, dining out, entertainment and experiences are driving consumption. REUTERS

drove sales. Now, food, dining out, entertainment and experiences are driving consumption at shopping centres.

Malini, a communications professional, says when her family decides to go out, they identify the Starbucks outlet, or a pizza place they want to go to and then pick the mall where it is located.

"If you see the number of shopping bags in the hands of customers, apparel, fashion and accessories, they have gone down in terms of purchases," says Abhishek Sharma, Director, Retail Agency, Knight Frank India. He points out the share of food and beverage outlets had risen to 35-40% of this before.

This is not just anecdotal evidence. The numbers bear out this trend. In the last quarter of 2023, fashion sales of listed offline retailers dipped 5%, electronics fell 7% and so did grocery, according to a report by BCG India. Quick service restaurants saw a 12% dip in sales after decelerating growth over the last several quarters. Jewellery was the only category that showed growth.



Consumption growth lagged rental growth at malls; but entertainment and experiences have become a big part of the consumption basket

retail has outperformed the underlying category growth by a significant margin and this was the case till 2022. In 2023, there was a sudden change in trend and while the underlying category growth was more or less stable with a slight downward bias, listed retailers saw a steep dip in their sales.

### Mall movements

Consumption patterns at malls mirror this trend. At Phoenix Mills, one of the largest mall operators in the country, it was jewellery, gourmet dining and hypermarket that drove growth in the first nine months of FY24. The top-performing categories were family entertainment centres such as Time Zone and Game Luxe and multi-

plexes across its malls. Consumption growth has lagged rental growth at malls. But entertainment and experiences have become a big part of the consumption basket in malls.

With 65% of the population under 35 years of age and about half of the population under 25, "you will see there will be more consumption on the experience side," says Anand Ramanathan, Partner and Consumer, Products and Retail Sector Leader, Deloitte India. "Gen Z and millennials don't save as much, and they go in for experiences. They travel more. Their buying preferences are a lot less product-centric, and more services oriented. Even when buying a product, they look at what experience they can get out of it."

Abheek Singh, MD and Senior Partner, BCG India, points out that shopping at malls were always about the experience, but now that has escalated.

"The nature of the experience has changed, and it has moved to different elements." Mall owners and retailers are doing different things to target different customer segments.

At Infiniti Mall in Mumbai, experiences have become a key factor in drawing in customers. "Previously people were looking for options in terms of multiple products. Now, it has shifted to

getting not just the look and feel of the product, but also how it will give a different kind of experience to the person," says Gaurav Balani, DGM Marketing, Infiniti Mall. The Souled Store, for instance, that sells casual apparel has taken experiential clothing to a new level with prints featuring superheroes, cartoons and comics and characters from Netflix shows such as "Stranger Things".

Last year Infiniti Mall unveiled 'Lock the Box', a book fest where customers can take as many books as they like that can fit into a box and pay a flat rate. Customers also get to meet their favourite authors at the events. Encouraged by the overwhelming response, Season 2 of the event will take off in April.

Over 80% of brands are common to malls across the country, especially in the tier I cities.

To provide a novelty factor, malls are giving space to pop-up stores. These are niche, home-grown brands that lease space for six months to a year.

"It encourages local skills, local entrepreneurs but at the same time it allows them to bring in a new product or category into the mall," says Sushil S Dugarwal of beyond square feet, an advisory that specialises in mall development and management.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

## For a few dollars more



**Cuban legacy:** Workers roll cigars at cigar manufacturer El Laguito during the XXIV International Habano Festival in Havana. International sales of Cuban cigars, the island nation's most emblematic product, soared 31% last year as global demand rose for luxury items, the country's main tobacco exporter said. AFP

## Air cargo conundrum: The hungry elephant in the room

### B. Govindarajan

At a recent conclave of air cargo CEOs in Chennai, a pharma exporter said Indian freight forwarders were nothing more than booking agents since they couldn't offer guaranteed rates for a given period, unlike their counterparts in other export markets.

He had a valid point since fluctuating air freight put Indian exporters at a disadvantage vis-a-vis competition.

The freight forwarders' said they had no option as the rates were quoted by foreign airlines that decided on available capacity.

A speaker, representing a foreign airline, confirmed they were forced to



**Air pocket:** Fluctuating air freight put Indian exporters at a disadvantage vis-a-vis competition. REUTERS

juggle capacity between countries in pursuit of the highest yield, leading to rate volatility. The geopolitical crisis that has hit maritime carriage via the Red Sea raised India's demand for air-cargo capacity, where almost 90% is con-

trolled by foreign airlines.

At yet another meet in Bengaluru, experts pitched for converting India's major gateways into transshipment cargo hubs.

While the aspirations of the industry are laudable, the reality is vastly different.

A country can host transshipment hubs only if it has at least one 'anchor' airline operating globally.

Foreign airlines such as Emirates and Cathay Pacific, operate in India do not have a sizeable home market but boast of a large fleet and capacity far exceeding their country's needs.

They effectively use the sixth freedom traffic right (commercial aviation right of an airline to carry load from one foreign country to another with a stopover in home country) and gain the most. India, however, does not have even one airline comparable with these foreign carriers in size.

(The writer is founder-CEO of Tirwin Management Services, Chennai)

## CSL builds on success with South Asia's largest ship repair unit

### V. Sajeew Kumar

Kochi's Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) was in the national limelight recently when PM Narendra Modi inaugurated 44,000-crore worth infrastructure projects and expressed confidence the port city in Kerala would soon become South Asia's largest ship-repair centre.

With the addition of a new dry dock and international ship repair facility costing ₹2,800 crore approximately, the public sector unit is raring to achieve new highs.

Madhu S. Nair, CMD, CSL, says opportunities abound in the shipbuilding market, given the growing demand globally. "We are inspired by the PM's speech during his recent visit, which is a major im-

petus for CSL and India's shipbuilding infrastructure. We are not expecting any immediate outcome after the PM's statement. But we believe it would help us pick up further orders."

The shipbuilding sector is set for greater growth primarily due to the challenges faced by ageing fleets the world over in meeting the new regulatory requirements, thus accelerating the demand for fleet replacements.

India commands less than 1% of the \$140-billion global shipbuilding market. "However, going by the order intake over the past 2-3 years at Alang and other yards in the country, we could be looking at much better numbers in the coming years," he says. In the area of ship re-



**Smooth sailing:** CSL is set to reach ₹3,200-₹3,400 cr. turnover for FY24, says Crisil. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

pair, an estimated \$20-billion global market, India's share is about 1%. CSL's share in the Indian ship repair market is about 50%. The yard's new international ship repair facility adds about 25% capacity.

The recent expansion at CSL is in line with the Central government's Maritime India Vision 2030 to position India among the world's top 10 shipbuilding and ship repair destinations by 2030. It also aligns

with the recently announced 'Amrit Kaal Maritime Vision 2047' initiatives, which include expansion of port infrastructure and maritime trade, and promotion of sustainable practices.

The new dry dock at CSL is 310 metre long; the international ship repair facility is equipped to host vessels weighing up to 6,000 tonne.

The large capacity will not only buttress Kochi's prowess in shipbuilding and repairs but also facilitate the development of a business ecosystem in the region encompassing micro, small and medium enterprises, as well as ancillary facilities. Larger vessels like aircraft carriers and LNG carriers can be accommodated, thereby cutting India's dependence on foreign nations for their construction and repair.

The yard had built and unveiled India's first hydrogen fuel cell ferry, which is in the final stages of trials and be commis-

sioned soon. The new, indigenous technology vessel has been developed by CSL in collaboration with Indian technology partners and would be propelled by an indigenous fuel cell. Globally, several countries are working on similar pilot vessels for technology demonstration, Mr. Nair explained.

Hydrogen is considered one of the cleanest fuels for achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions. CSL is hopeful of rolling out eco-friendly vessels in riverine and/or coastal cities as part of this initiative.

### Defence works

CSL's units in Mumbai, Kolkata, and Port Blair have helped spread ship repair services on both the east and west coast of India.

The units offer maintenance, repair and operations (MRO) services to domestic, foreign and defence navies generating more than ₹200 crore turnover until the third quarter of FY24. On the shipyard's work on new projects for the Indian Navy, Mr. Nair says eight anti-submarine warfare shallow watercraft, worth about ₹6,300 crore, are under construction. Also, six next-generation missile vessels, worth about ₹9,800 crore are in the design and equipment-ordering stage. Rating agency Crisil said CSL achieved sales of ₹1,488 crore during first half of FY24 and is set to reach ₹3,200-3,400 crore for the full year.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

## DOMINATION

### Lyon spins Australia to a thumping victory over New Zealand



Nathan Lyon took six for 65 as Australia dismissed New Zealand for 136 before lunch on the fourth day of the Test at the Basin Reserve on Sunday to win by 172 runs and go 1-0 up in the series. **The scores:** Australia 383 & 164 bt New Zealand 179 & 196 (Ravindra 59, Lyon 6/65). **PoM:** Green, Australia won by 172 runs.

## POLE POSITION

### India climbs to top spot in the latest WTC standings



India jumped to the top of the World Test Championship standings, replacing New Zealand in the latest rankings issued on Sunday. India has a point-percentage of 64.58 (62 points in eight matches: five wins, two losses and one draw). NZ has point-percentage of 60.00. (36 points in five matches: three wins, two losses).

## DETERMINATION

### RCB skipper Smriti praises Perry's fighting spirit



RCB captain Smriti Mandhana hailed Perry's resilience during the WPL match against Mumbai Indians. "Pezz (Elyse Perry) is a fighter. She wasn't hundred per cent but the way she was moving on the field, anyone would doubt that. She played a good knock to take us to that total," Smriti said.

## INCREDIBLE FEAT

### James becomes first NBA player to score 40,000 career points



LeBron James on Saturday became the first NBA player to reach 40,000 career regular-season points, when scoring nine against Denver Nuggets. James, who last year overtook Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the all-time scoring mark, is a four-time NBA champion, four-time NBA MVP as well as the oldest active player.

# Capitals move to top of the table with win over Giants

Meg Lanning kicks things off with a half-century; Ashleigh Gardner is lone star for Gujarat but Jess Jonassen and Radha Yadav neutralise her efforts as Beth Mooney's side ends Bengaluru leg winless

## WPL SEASON 2

**Meg Lanning**  
BENGALURU

Ashleigh Gardner (two for 37 and 40, 31b, 5x4, 1x6) shone for Gujarat Giants, but Jess Jonassen (4-0-22-3) and Radha Yadav (4-0-20-3) shone brighter to a 25-run win in the Women's Premier League match at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Sunday.

A spirited bowling effort helped DC pile on Giants' misery as the Beth Mooney side finished the Bengaluru leg winless after only managing 138 for eight chasing a target of 164. Titus Sadhu and Shikha Pandey started with maidens, the latter cleaning up Laura Wolvaardt for a duck as Meg Lanning got off to a dreadful start. Jonassen then picked up two in her first over. She



**Wreaking havoc:** Radha and Jonassen scalp three apiece to pile on Giants' misery after Lanning's breezy knock. K. MURALI KUMAR

trapped Mooney in front before removing Phoebe Litchfield. Wickets kept tumbling even as Gardner staged a fight. GG slid to 73 for five when Radha sent back Veda Krishna-murthy and Kathryn Bryce. Giants couldn't make much headway once Jonassen ended Gardner's resistance. Earlier, Meg Lanning's half-century took DC to 163 for eight despite a superb spell by Meghna Singh (4-0-37-4). Meghna removed Shafali Verma, who flicked strongly to Wolvaardt at square-leg.

The in-form Alice Capsey did not let the tempo slip as she took just four deliveries to hit her first boundary. The Englishwoman went to strike four more fours in her 17-ball cameo, adding a quick 38 for the second wicket with skipper Lanning before being

caught by Tanuja Kanwar of Meghna. Lanning switched gears and dealt in boundaries, pushing DC past 100 in the 13th over and reaching her fifty off 39 deliveries with a four. Just when Lanning looked on course to put the game beyond Giants'

reach, Meghna struck again. Jemimah Rodrigues was the next to go, losing her wicket to Mannat Kashyap. Meghna ended the innings with Radha's scalp, but the Giants dropped four catches and eventually slipped to their fourth straight loss.

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## SCOREBOARD

## DELHI CAPITALS

Meg Lanning c Hemalatha b Meghna 55 (11b, 6x4, 1x6), Shafali Verma c Wolvaardt b Meghna 13 (9b, 2x4, 1x6), Alice Capsey c Tanuja b Meghna 27 (7b, 5x4), Jemimah Rodrigues c Sarann b Mannat 7 (10b), Annabali Sutherland c Gardner b Tanuja 20 (12b, 2x4, 1x6), Jess Jonassen c Mooney b Gardner 11 (7b, 2x6), Arundhati Reddy c Meghna b Gardner 5 (9b), Radha Yadav lbw b Meghna 5 (7b), Shikha Pandey (not out) 14 (8b, 2x6), Extras (w-6); 6, Total (for eight wickets, in 20 overs): 163.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-20 (Shafali, 2.4 overs), 2-58 (Capsey, 6.6), 3-105 (Lanning, 12.4), 4-111 (Jemimah, 13.1), 5-138 (Jonassen, 15.3), 6-142 (Sutherland, 16.6), 7-146 (Arundhati, 17.6), 8-163 (Radha, 19.6).

## GIANTS BOWLING

Tanuja 4-0-31-1, Bryce 4-0-32-0, Meghna 4-0-37-4, Gardner 4-0-37-2, Mannat 3-0-16-1, Sarann 1-0-10-0.

## GUJARAT GIANTS

Beth Mooney lbw b Jonassen 12 (14b, 2x4), Laura Wolvaardt b

Shikha 0 (3b), Phoebe Litchfield c Sutherland b Jonassen 15 (10b, 2x4, 1x6), Veda Krishna-murthy c Shikha b Radha 12 (13b, 2x4), Ashleigh Gardner st. Tanuja b Jonassen 40 (31b, 5x4, 1x6), Kathryn Bryce lbw b Radha 3 (6b), Tanuja Kanwar c Shafali b Radha 13 (16b, 2x4), Sarann Pathan lbw b Arundhati 9 (11b, 1x4), Meghna Singh (not out) 10 (10b), Sayali Satghare (concussion substitute for Hemalatha) (not out) 7 (7b), Extras (lb-9, w-7, nb-1); Total (for eight wickets, in 20 overs): 138.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-0 (Wolvaardt, 1.3), 2-28 (Mooney, 4.2), 3-34 (Litchfield, 4.5), 4-53 (Veda, 7.6), 5-73 (Bryce, 10.3), 6-105 (Gardner, 14.2), 7-113 (Tanuja, 16.1), 8-123 (Sarann, 17.5).

## CAPITALS BOWLING

Titus 2-1-12-0, Shikha 4-1-28-1, Jonassen 4-0-22-3, Arundhati 3-0-27-1, Sutherland 3-0-20-0, Radha 4-0-20-3.

## TOSS: GUJARAT GIANTS.

Delhi Capitals won by 25 runs. **Monday's match:** UP Warriors vs. Royal Challengers, 7.30 p.m.

## Shardul swings it Mumbai's way, gives the host a big lead

## RANJI TROPHY

**Amol Karhadkar**  
MUMBAI

"I won the bet." Shardul Thakur told R. Sai Kishore while exchanging a 'high-five' minutes after the end of the second day's play of the Ranji Trophy semifinal on Sunday. While Sai Kishore reminded him that it was only for T20s, both had a hearty laugh over it. The bet, one was later informed, was that Shardul will "smash him when I face him in a match."

On a day that was highlighted by the individual brilliance of both the all-rounders, Shardul overshadowed Sai Kishore at the Sharad Pawar Cricket Academy ground, with Mumbai's lower order taking the game away from the opposition.

**Sai Kishore on song** Shardul Thakur's (109, 105b, 13x4, 4x6) maiden First-Class hundred and his partnerships with Hardik Tamore (105 for the eighth wicket) and Tanush Kotian (79 for the ninth) put Mumbai in command after R. Sai Kishore (six for 97) had Mumbai in trouble. Kotian (74) and Tushar Deshpande's unbroken 63-run stand rubbed salt into Tamil Nadu's wounds as Mumbai was 353 for nine at stumps, an advantage of 207 runs.

The star of the day was Shardul. He baited Mumbai out of trouble with a fearless yet masterful knock. When he took guard, with just 13 minutes remaining



**Reversing it:** Shardul pulled Mumbai out of the woods with a brilliant century. EMMAUJAL YOGINI

for lunch, Sai Kishore was on the rampage, having picked up four wickets in the morning to shatter another record. Mumbai, at that stage, was 106 for seven and in danger of conceding the lead. Shardul didn't waste time in showing his intent, hitting him for two fours. Even after lunch, he continued to go after the TN captain whose marathon spell was a treat to watch. While no other Mumbai batter was comfortable against him, Shardul scored 44 runs off the 37 balls he faced the lanky spinner.

He was dismissed after he reached his landmark with a one-bounced four as Jagadeesan — who had effected a brilliant stumping in the morning — took a lunging catch.

While the last two sessions belonged to Mumbai, Tamil Nadu dominated the morning session. Sai Kishore bowled unwell from the club house end. Despite an overcast morning, he used

the dampness to his advantage and broke the back of Mumbai's middle-order.

Barring Shreyas Iyer — who played on to Sandeep Warrier early on in his innings — Sai Kishore earned all of Mumbai's five wickets. **The scores:** Tamil Nadu — 1st innings: 146. Mumbai — 1st innings: Pritivi Shaw c Indrajith b Kuldeep Sen 5, Bhupen Lalwani lbw b Sai Kishore 15, Musheer Khan st Jagadeesan b Sai Kishore 55, Mohit Avasthi st Jagadeesan b Sai Kishore 2, Ajinkya Rahane c Indrajith b Sai Kishore 19, Shreyas Iyer b Warrier 3, Hardik Tamore c Washington b Sai Kishore 35, Shams Mulani b Sai Kishore 0, Sharudh Thakur c Jagadeesan b Kuldeep Sen 109, Tanush Kotian (batting) 74, Tushar Deshpande (batting) 17; Extras (lb-12, nb-2, pen-5); 15; Total (for nine wickets, in 100 overs): 353.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-5, 2-40, 3-48, 4-91, 5-96, 6-107, 7-106, 8-211, 9-290. **Tamil Nadu bowling:** Warrier 18-0-66-1, Kuldeep Sen 15-0-65-2, Mohammed 8-2-21-0, Sai Kishore 37-9-97-6, Ajith Ram 14-1-68-0, Washington 7-0-19-0, Pradosh 1-1-0-0.

## Shardul revels in a dream knock

**S. Dipak Ragar**  
MUMBAI

Every aspiring cricketer, at some point, dreams of single-handedly saving the team from precarious situations with their individual brilliance. Shardul Thakur made it a reality with his scintillating counter-attacking century in the first Ranji Trophy semifinal against Tamil Nadu here on Sunday. "I like these kinds of situations. When you play with passion, you wait for these moments," said Thakur, reveling at the fact that his knock took the game away from the opposition. "When the team is down, you want to lift them up with your performance; you want to do something in the middle that changes the game."

The 32-year-old did not hold himself back from going for his shots and felt his side's top order was a bit defensive in the morning. "At times, in big games, if you are scared, you tend to lose wickets. So, we might as well play with freedom. That was the idea when I started batting."

The all-rounder also hoped this knock would be the start of many more centuries to come in the future. "When I started, Bombay used to send me at number 10 and 11. So, I had to work my way up," said Thakur on his long wait for his maiden First-Class century. "Probably more hundreds will come, and it's a big opening that you should promote all-rounders in Mumbai cricket," he added.

## MP rides on Mantri's ton to surge ahead against Vidarbha

**Abhishek Saini**  
NAGPUR

Himanshu Mantri's century (126, 265b, 12x4, 1x6) served as the archetype of the steady resolve often associated with the longest format and laid the platform for Madhya Pradesh to pull ahead against Vidarbha on the second day of the first Ranji Trophy semifinal at the VCA Stadium (Civil Lines) here on Sunday.

The southpaw was handed a reprieve on 39 made the most of it, forging innings-steering partnerships with Sagar Solanki and Saransh Jain.

Vidarbha, chasing a deficit of 82 runs, lost Atharva Taide, who was given lef before while shouldering arms to a delivery that seemed back in Dhruv Saransh and Akshay Wakhare took the home side to 13 for one at stumps.

The day started with the defiance of Mantri and Harsh Gawali but turned on its head after Vidarbha pacers exploited the two-paced nature of the wicket. Umesh Yadav lured Mantri into fishing outside off, only for Karun Nair to spill the chance at first slip.

If it had the worst end of the weather on the first day, the aid from the surface on the second was reparation of sorts for Vidarbha. Umesh and Yash Thakur combined in the final hour of the morning session to send MP from 81 for one to 93 for four.



**Leading from the front:** Mantri's century gave MP a decisive edge against Vidarbha. B. JOTH RAMALINGAM

ham Sharma before Thakur drew Venkatesh Iyer plumb in front to pull Vidarbha back into the fray. Solanki and Mantri added 52 runs for the fifth wicket before a mix up led to the former's run out. Mantri took matters into his own hands, dancing down to hoist Wakhare for four and six off consecutive deliveries before getting to his third First-Class century of the season in 210 balls.

Saransh stepped out against Wakhare to loft the off-spinner down the ground. But the tweaker had the last laugh when his length delivery held off the surface, causing Saransh to chip to covers and thus ending their stand for 73 runs.

Mantri perished when wicketkeeper Akshay Wadkar promedicated him with his sweep and pounced him down the leg side.

## Shardul and Sai Kishore call for better scheduling

**S. Dipak Ragar**  
MUMBAI

At a time when the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) wants to ensure players do not skip domestic cricket, especially the Ranji Trophy, India all-rounder Shardul Thakur has called for better scheduling and gaps between games for the well-being of the players.

"It's difficult because we are playing First-Class matches with three-day gaps," said Shardul when asked about how he is managing workloads. "When I started playing Ranji Trophy, the first three games used to have a three-day break and then four days. "Now we have seen all matches played with a three-day gap. So it is extremely tough to expect domestic players to play 10 games in a row with a three-day gap if a team reaches the final."

The 32-year-old felt the short gap is tough on fast bowlers and cited the example of his Mumbai teammate Mohit Avasthi picking up an injury. "I think they will have to relook at it next year and give more breaks," he added. TN skipper Sai Kishore echoed similar views. "A few players feel the same thing. We travel for one day and because of this I don't train much. The overs I am bowling are in the matches, and I manage myself that way, but it should be more challenging for the faster bowlers," said Sai Kishore.



**IN BRIEF**



**Aditi finishes 21st: Green wins title in Singapore**

India's Aditi Ashok finished 21st at the Women's World Championship golf with a final card of 2-under 70 in Singapore on Sunday after being in top-10 in the first two days. Australia's Hannah Green, shot her third straight 67 to total 132 under and win the title one shot clear of Frenchwoman Celine Boutier (67).

**de Minaur claims Mexican Open title again**

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

**Ishaque-Adil duo finishes runner-up in Iran tournament**

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

**Triple jumper Chitravel finishes 11th at World indoors**

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

**Foden double fires City to a comeback win over United**

Rashford had given the visitors an early lead with a thundering strike; Vinicius Jr. scores twice to help Real Madrid fight back to earn a 2-2 draw at Valencia on Saturday

**EURO LEAGUES**

Reuters  
MANCHESTER

Phil Foden kept Manchester City's Premier League title challenge on track with a superb second-half double as his side hit back to clinch a 3-1 home victory over Manchester United on Sunday.

Marcus Rashford's eighth-minute thunderbolt gave United the lead against the run of play and it looked like the visitors might put a dent in City's hopes of a fourth successive crown.

But Pep Guardiola's side remained patient, dominated possession and were eventually rewarded with Foden again proving how indispensable he is for City.

Sublime Foden arrowed a sublime effort into the top corner in the 56th minute and the England forward then produced a clinical finish with 10 minutes of normal time remaining.

Erling Haaland, who missed a golden first-half chance, secured the points with a late strike.

Reigning champion City, whose unbeaten run in all competitions now stands at 19, moved to 62 points, one behind leader Liverpool who it visits next weekend. United remains in



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

sixth place with 44 points.

Rashford's bolt from the blue might have floored lesser sides but Erik Ten Hag's United could have few complaints at the way City turned things around.

City had 74% possession and 27 efforts on goal compared to United's three but it was Foden who found the key to the lock. He was given a standing ovation as he walked off after taking a knock in stoppage time - City's fans in buoyant mood at keeping the pressure right on Liverpool and Arsenal.

Meanwhile in the LaLiga, Vinicius Jr scored a brace to help Real Madrid fight back from two goals down to earn a 2-2 draw at Valencia in an ill-tempered

match on Saturday.

Hugy Duro gave the host the lead with a header in the 27th minute and Roman Yaremchuk made the most of a bad mistake from Real defender Dani Carvajal to extend Valencia's lead three minutes later.

Vinicius reduced the deficit with a close-range finish in first-half stoppage time and scored the equaliser with a towering header in the 76th minute.

**The results:** Premier League: Burnley 0 lost to Bournemouth 2; (Ruhvert 13, Semeryo 88); Manchester City 3 (Foden 56, 80, Haaland 90+1) bt Manchester United 1 (Rashford 8). **Saturday:** Luton 2 (Chong 66, Morris 72) lost to Aston Villa 3 (Watkins 24, 38, Digne 89). **LaLiga:** Villarreal 5 (Sorloth 7, 19,

**ISL-10**

**Chennaiyin wins a thriller against Odisha**

Aashin Prasad  
CHENNAI

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

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

The three points lifts CFC to 10th in the table

while Odisha, remains level with second-placed Mohun Bagan Super Giant, having played a game more.

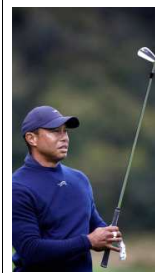
Chennaiyin's pressure from the start resulted in the opening goal when Rafael Crivellaro's inswinging corner was turned in by defender Ankit Mukherjee.

In the second period, out of nothing, Krishna, who was kept quiet for much of the game, looped in a header from a corner to bring Odisha back into the game.

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

**The result:** Chennaiyin 2 (Ankit 6, Murray 90+4) bt Odisha 1 (Krishna 78).

**Woods wins USGA Bob Jones Award**



Woods, AFP

GOLF  
WASHINGTON

**Agence France-Presse**

Tiger Woods, the 15-time Major champion who redefined the sport and inspired a generation of talent, was awarded the US Golf Association (USGA)'s highest honor, the Bob Jones Award, on Saturday. Woods received the Bob Jones Award, the Masters co-founder who was a 1920s star who captured 13 titles in what were then considered the four Major events.

**Toofans beat Thunderbolts in the PVL**

Sports Bureau  
CHENNAI

Delhi Toofans secured a dominant 15-9, 16-14, 17-15 win over Kolkata Thunderbolts in the third season of the Rugby Premier Volleyball League at the Jawaharlal Nehru indoor stadium here on Sunday. Santhosh was named the Player-of-the-Match.

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



Suarez, AFP

**Two goals each for Suarez, Messi as Miami beats Orlando**

Agencies  
FORT LAUDERDALE

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

**Disappointing start for Indians at Olympic boxing qualifier**

Sports Bureau

India began its campaign on a disappointing note with World championships bronze medalist Deepak Bhoria (51kg) and Asian

Games bronze medalist Narender Bernal (+92kg) losing their respective round-of-64 bouts in the first World Olympic boxing qualifier at Busto Arsizio, Italy, on Sunday.

Bhoria exited after 2-3 defeat to two-time European u-22 champion Nijat Huseynov of Azerbaijan. Bernal lost 0-5 to 2022 European champion Neltve Tiafack of Germany.

**Pragg outwits Vidit Gujrathi; Shock loss for Gukesh**

Press Trust of India  
PRAGUE

Indian GM R. Praggnanandhaa crashed through the defences of compatriot Vidit Gujrathi, but D. Gukesh suffered a shock defeat from a position of strength against Czech Republic's David Navara in the fifth round of Prague Masters. Uzbekistan's No-dirbek Abdusattarov emerged as the sole leader.

**The results (fourth round):** R. Praggnanandhaa (2.5) bt Vidit Gujrathi (2.5); Parham Maghsoodloo (1.5, 3.5) drew with Richard Rapport (Rou, 3); D. Gukesh (2.5) lost to David Navara (Cze, 2.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Ger, 2); drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 2); Mateusz Bartel (Pol, 1) lost to No-dirbek Abdusattarov (Uzb, 4).

**Justina Mikulskyte outclasses Yeonwoo Ku in ITF women's final**

Kamesh Srinivasan  
GURUGRAM

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

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

The score was misleading as the quality of the rallies was top class and the Korean, a half-step slow, could not cope with the flawless far of the

Lithuanian. After beating top seeded Dalila Jakupovic in the third set tie-break of the semifinals, saving a match point, Mikulskyte had the confidence to play her best. It was the fifth singles title in the professional circuit for Mikulskyte, who has won 20 doubles titles.

**Blancaneaux overcomes Wong for the Delhi Open Challenger title**

Kamesh Srinivasan  
NEW DELHI

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



Blancaneaux, KAMESH SRINIVASAN

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

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

like Blancaneaux, who controlled the flow of the match with ease. The Frenchman served six aces that sailed beyond a diving Wong. Blancaneaux converted three of six break points to make it a crisp entertainment for

the appreciative fans who had turned up in good numbers. Blancaneaux rarely gave an opening for his opponent to find his way for a fight. The Frenchman saved the two break points he faced in the match and

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

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

**Mohammedan beats Gokulam**

HLEAGUE  
KOZHIKODE

**P.K. Ajith Kumar** produced a thrilling game on Sunday. The Kolkatans

won 3-2 to maintain their pole position in the I-League, with the winner coming in dying seconds. Mohammedan went ahead in the 16th minute. A deft pass from Alexis Gomez found Lalremsanga Fana, who brought off a deflection from goalkeeper

Padam Chhetri and an unmarked Eddie Hernandez put the ball firmly in. Gokulam remains third with 32 points, six behind Mohammedan.

**The result:** Gokulam 2 (Noufal 45+1, Nidhin 65) lost to Mohammedan 3 (Hernandez 16, Gomez 23, Lalremsanga 90+7).

**Kipruto and Kebede triumph with course record timings**

TOKYO MARATHON  
Reuters  
TOKYO



Kipruto and Kebede, AP

Kenyan Benson Kipruto won the men's Tokyo Marathon in two hours, two minutes and 16 seconds on Sunday, breaking former World record holder Eliud Kipchoge's course mark in perfect racing conditions on the streets of the Japanese capital.

Ethiopia's Sutmeh Asefa Kebede won the women's race ahead of Kenya's defending champion Rosemary Wanjiru in 2:15:55, also bettering the best previous women's time over the course from Shinjuku to the Imperial Palace.

Kipruto pulled clear of Timothy Kiplagat over the last few kilometres and finished 39s ahead of his compatriot to add the Tokyo title to those he won in Boston in 2021 and Chicago in 2022.

The 32-year-old's time was almost two minutes better than his previous personal best and made him the fifth-fastest marathon runner of all time in events approved by World Athletics.

"I am so happy to get the course record," Kipruto said. "I think I'm ready for the Paris Olympics, I

would be happy to represent my country in Paris but that relies on my country for selection. I'm still waiting on that, but I'm ready."

Kiplagat had to be convinced not to pull out of the race by his coach after the death of his training partner, marathon World record holder Kelvin Kiptum, in a road accident last month.

Vincent Kipkemai Ngetich finished third in 2:04:18 to give Kenya a podium sweep.

Kebede and Wanjiru had been in the leading group throughout the women's race, but at the 37km mark, the Ethiopian Athletics Federation will select me for the Paris Olympics."

clear of her rivals and claim her first major marathon title by 19s.

Her time bettered Brigid Kosgele's 2022 women's course record of 2:16:02 and took more than two minutes off her previous personal best time of 2:18:12.

"I'm truly happy," the 29-year-old said.

"It was a very tactical race. Everything went well and the result was better than I expected. I ran a good time in a major race and I hope the Ethiopian Athletics Federation will select me for the Paris Olympics."

Kebede's compatriot Amane Beriso was third in 2:16:58.

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

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



AFP

Vignesh P. Venkitesh

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### One-man orchestra

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE GIST

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

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



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