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Heady electoral rhetoric
As the NDA seeks another term there is a shift in its pitch
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Ashwin@100
Scan the QR code or use the link for a data-driven interactive story on spin lynchpin R. Ashwin - who recently claimed his 500th Test wicket - as he embarks upon his 100th Test
think.in/Ashwin

INSIDE



4 new Ministers are inducted into U.P. Cabinet

LUCKNOW
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday expanded his Cabinet for the first time in his second term inducting four new Ministers - two from the BJP and one each from allies, the SBSP and the RLD. >> PAGE 2

Karnataka CM, Deputy CM get threat emails

BENGALURU
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar received emails on March 2, warning them of "more bomb blasts" in the State. This comes after a low-intensity blast at a cafe here on March 1. >> PAGE 4

Govt. using SBI to hide dubious deals: Kharge

NEW DELHI
A day after the State Bank of India sought time from the Supreme Court to submit details of the electoral bond scheme, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the Centre of using the bank as a "shield". >> PAGE 5

Meta suffers global outage of its platforms

WASHINGTON
Meta faced a highly unusual outage of all its social media platforms on Tuesday with users of Facebook, Instagram and Threads locked out of their accounts. The sites seemed to be returning to normal, about two hours later. >> PAGE 12

HC acquits academic, 5 others in 'Maoist link' case

Relief for former DU professor G.N. Saibaba and 5 others in case under UAPA for alleged Maoist link

The Nagpur Bench of Bombay High Court sets aside the life sentence awarded to all accused

Hearing the case afresh, Bench holds sanction for prosecution under UAPA as 'null and void'

Purnima Sah
MUMBAI

The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court on Tuesday acquitted former Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba and five others in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for alleged Maoist links, saying the prosecution could not prove the case against them beyond reasonable doubt.

Within hours, the Maharashtra government approached the Supreme Court seeking an urgent hearing, after it failed to convince the High Court to stay the implementation of the judgment.

A Bench of Justice Vinay Joshi and Justice Valmiki

S.A. Menezes also set aside the life sentence awarded to Prof. Saibaba and the other accused - Mahesh Tirki, Hem Mishra, Pandu Narote, Vijay Tirki and Prashant Rahi - by a sessions court in 2017, and held the sanction for prosecution under UAPA as "null and void".

Earlier acquittal
A Bombay High Court Bench too had acquitted him and the other accused on October 14, 2022, only for the Supreme Court to stay the verdict and ask for the case to be heard afresh. Prof. Saibaba, who is wheelchair-bound, was arrested in 2014, by a joint team of the Maharashtra Police, Andhra Pradesh Police, and the Intelligence

Long wait

A timeline of events in the case against Delhi University former professor G.N. Saibaba and five others

May 9, 2014: Professor G.N. Saibaba arrested on charges of having Maoist links

April 6, 2015: Sanction to prosecute him under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act granted

March 3, 2017: Saibaba and five others convicted under various sections of the UAPA and the IPC by a Sessions

Court. Saibaba and others sentenced to life imprisonment

March 29, 2017: Appeal filed in the Bombay High Court against conviction and the sentence

October 14, 2022: All six acquitted in the case by the HC. The Maharashtra government approached the Supreme Court challenging the decision

October 15, 2022: Acquittal stayed by the SC

April 2023: The SC directed the HC to hear the appeal filed by Saibaba afresh

March 5, 2024: HC acquits Saibaba and five others



Bureau, in a case pertaining to ties with Maoist organisations. He has been lodged in the Nagpur Central Jail. In March 2017, a sessions court in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra, convicted Prof. Saibaba and five oth-

ers accused of indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country.

They were also held guilty of possessing Naxal literature that they planned to circulate

among underground Naxalites and the residents of Gadchiroli to provoke the people to resort to violence.

Advocate-General Birendra Saraf, on behalf of the State, requested the High

Maharashtra drags Saibaba to top court again

NEW DELHI

The Maharashtra government has dragged wheelchair-bound former Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba to the Supreme Court for the second time in as many years. The State filed an appeal in the top court on Tuesday against the High Court's acquittal. >> PAGE 4

rected their release forthwith if not required in any other case. We cannot stall the said order, which may affect the right to personal liberty," the court said.

"No legal seizures"
Noting that the prosecution had failed to "establish any legal seizure or any incriminating material against the accused", the court said, "The trial court judgment is not sustainable in the hands of law. We, therefore, allow the appeals and set aside the impugned judgment. All the accused stand acquitted."

The Maharashtra government subsequently filed an appeal in the Supreme Court on Tuesday. (With inputs from New Delhi Bureau and PTI)

Sea of red



Holy day: Devotees during the 'Shreenath Veer Mhaskoba' festival at Veer village, 50 km from Pune in Maharashtra on Tuesday. The festival is a celebration of an avatar of Lord Shiva and lasts for 10 days during the Magh Purnima (February full moon). PTI

'Foreign state actors stashed illicit funds in Paytm bank accounts'

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

"Extensive illegal activity" perpetrated by multiple businesses managed by "a syndicate of individuals connected to a foreign state" who cheated lakhs of Indians by offering "fraudulent services, including prohibited gambling activities and dating services" was the trigger for the ₹5.49 crore fine imposed on Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) last week.

The matter first came to light over two years ago with the Cyber Crime Station of Hyderabad lodging FIRs under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Telangana State Gambling Act.

The FIRs flagged certain business entities and their network of businesses engaging in a number of illegal acts such as organising and assisting online gambling, routing the proceeds of such criminal activities through bank accounts they maintained with the payments bank.

The agency also listed out payout-related charges against the bank, which included its failure to put an internal mechanism in place to detect and report suspicious transactions in the manner prescribed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and PML rules.

Based on the bank's responses to its show-cause notices, the FIU concluded that it had violated the law by failing to exercise due diligence with reference to the accounts of 34 beneficiaries and failed to file suspicious transaction reports regarding those accounts.

SC dismisses money laundering case against Shivakumar



D.K. Shivakumar had maintained that the case based on an IT complaint filed in 2018 was motivated by political reasons. ANI

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed the proceedings instituted by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) against Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister and Congress president D.K. Shivakumar under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) on the basis of an income tax department complaint filed in 2018.

The complaint was filed following searches on the premises of Mr. Shivakumar and his associates. The Income Tax department had alleged that Mr. Shivakumar, who ran business concerns, "hatched a criminal conspiracy" and engaged "different people for the purpose of concealing unaccounted and illegal money, and projecting it as untainted property" to evade income tax.

Mr. Shivakumar had maintained that the case was motivated by political reasons.

On Tuesday, a Supreme Court Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan quashed the ED case against Mr. Shivakumar on the basis of its recent *Pavana Dibbur judgment*, which had held that criminal conspiracy alone would not attract money laundering charges.

The Bench passed the order on the basis of special leave petitions filed by Mr. Shivakumar and two

others, variously represented by senior advocates A.M. Singhvi, Siddharth Luthra, S. Nagamuthu and advocate Parmatma Singh, challenging the jurisdiction of the Central agency. They had appealed to the top court against a Karnataka HC judgment in 2019 upholding the summons issued by the ED.

SC stricture

However, the Supreme Court issued notice on October 15, 2019, and directed the ED to not take any coercive action against Mr. Shivakumar, Anjaneya Hanumanthiah, and Sunil Kumar Sharma. Mr. Shivakumar had argued that the ED had commenced "illegal proceedings" by registering an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) against him under Section 3 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

Mr. Shivakumar had argued that with no scheduled offence alleged, there were no proceeds of crime. Evidence of crime proceeds was necessary to invoke money laundering charges. The Supreme Court referred to the *Pavana Dibbur judgment*, which had held that Section 120B would be deemed a scheduled offence under the PMLA only if the conspiracy had been directed towards the commission of an offence specified in the Act.

Kerala man killed in rocket attack on Israel; Indian Embassy issues advisory

Kalol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

An Indian national was killed and two were injured in a rocket attack by Hezbollah, the Shia militant organisation of Lebanon, in northern Israel on Monday.

In an announcement, the Embassy of Israel said on Tuesday that the incident took place in an orchard in Margalit, located along the Lebanese border. The *Times of Israel* said that seven people had been hit in Hezbollah's anti-tank rocket attack.

Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Pat Nibin Maxwell of Kerala was among those hit and killed in the attack. He hails from Kollam district.

This is the first reported death of an Indian near Israel's border with Lebanon



A damaged house after a rocket fired by Hezbollah militants hit the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona on Tuesday. AP

In several years. "Our prayers and thoughts naturally go to the families of the bereaved and those of the injured-Iraqi regards equally all nationals, Israeli or foreign, who are injured or killed due to terrorism. We will be there to support the families and offer them assistance," the Israeli Embassy in India said in a statement.

were injured in the attack hail from Idukki in Kerala, but their injuries are not as serious as earlier feared, the officials said.

Helpline number

The Indian Embassy in Tel Aviv, in an advisory, urged all Indians staying in the border areas of northern and southern Israel to move to more secure locations. The Indian mission also gave a helpline number +972-35226748 for those seeking emergency assistance.

The embassy blamed the incident on the "Shia terrorist organisation Hezbollah" that targeted "peaceful agriculture workers who were cultivating an orchard at the northern village of Margalit yesterday early afternoon." (With inputs from Thiruvananthapuram bureau)

More Indians held up in Russia seek help to return

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

A group of seven more Indians stuck on the Russia-Ukraine border released two videos this week seeking the government's help to return to India. While five workers are said to be from Punjab, the other two are from Haryana.

One of the men said that they arrived in Russia on tourist visas and were forced to join the Russian Army as "helpers" after police detained them for not possessing a "slip".

The men alleged that they were forced by the police to join the Russian Army or risk facing imprisonment.

FULL REPORT ON
>> PAGE 4

IN BRIEF



Day after quitting Congress, Gujarat leaders join BJP

Former Gujarat Congress chief and ex-MLA Arjun Modhwadia along with his former working president Ambarish Der joined the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday, a day after they quit the grand old party. The two leaders joined the BJP at its State headquarters in Ahmedabad along with several others. State BJP chief C.R. Paatil inducted them into the party by offering them saffron caps and scarves. Mr. Modhwadia and Mr. Der resigned on Monday, expressing anguish over the party's decision to "boycott" Ram temple consecration ceremony held in Ayodhya in January. **en**

Ambala-Chandigarh highway reopens after three weeks

Authorities have reopened the Ambala-Chandigarh national highway that was closed for the last three weeks to prevent the entry of protesting farmers from Punjab who wanted to march to Delhi, officials said on Tuesday. However, the Haryana-Punjab border in Shambhu near Ambala continues to remain barricaded. Ambala administration opened a single lane of the Ambala-Chandigarh highway near Sadopur late on Monday night, removing the barricades to enable traffic movement. The protesting farmers have been camping at the Shambhu border after their "Delhi Chalo" march was stopped by security personnel. **en**

Former MP Dhananjay Singh convicted in kidnapping case

A local court in U.P.'s Jaunpur on Tuesday held former MP Dhananjay Singh and one other guilty of kidnapping 'Namami Gange' project manager Abhinav Singhal, demanding extortion, abusing and threatening him. Additional Sessions Judge Sharad Kumar Tripathi, after hearing both the factions, held Singh and his associate Santosh Vikram guilty in the matter. The punishment will be decided on Wednesday. Both Singh and his associate have been sent to judicial custody. The former MP was arrested in the case and later got bail from the Allahabad High Court, District Government Counsel Satish Pandey said. **en**

14 trainee cops arrested in Rajasthan paper leak case

Fourteen trainee Rajasthan Police sub-inspectors were arrested on Tuesday over a 2021 paper leak case connected to the recruitment exam they cleared, officials said. They said sixteen probationary sub-inspectors were detained in connection with the case and an FIR was filed against 40 people in total. At the Special Operations Group headquarters in Jaipur to discuss the paper leak of the Sub-Inspector and Platoon Commander Recruitment Examination held in 2021, Cabinet Minister Kirodi Lal Meena said the number of fraudulently recruited candidates for the S-1 position could reach 300. "I will talk with the government to cancel the examination," he added. **en**

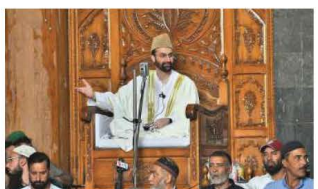
J&K HC to hear Mirwaiz Farooq's plea against 'illegal, unauthorised detention'

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The Jammu and Kashmir High Court is likely to pass directions on Wednesday in a petition filed by Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on alleged restrictions on his movement and "denial of permission" to attend Friday prayers at Srinagar's historic Jamia Masjid.

The court on February 21 granted the Lieutenant-Governor's administration "the last and final opportunity" to file its reply and elaborate on the reasons behind placing the 50-year-old cleric under "house arrest" in Srinagar.

In September last year, Mr. Farooq approached the court seeking an order



Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. NISSAR AHMAD

or direction to the J&K authorities to release him "from illegal and unauthorised detention". The petition claimed Mr. Farooq remains detained at his Ni-geh Palestine war broke out on October 7 last year, Mr. Farooq was again denied permission to visit the mosque.

Security agencies had

expressed fears about pro-Palestine protests from the mosque.

Contrary to the statements made by Mr. Farooq, Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha has denied the accusations and claimed the cleric "was free to visit wherever he wants".

L-G's statement

Mr. Farooq, in the petition, however, described the statements made by the L-G as "misinformation". The petition said the "house detention" has "adversely affected the entire family" and "needs immediate intervention of this court". "The Mirwaiz has also been directly affected by such unlawful incarceration in terms of his livelihood," it added.

Rajbhar finally gets look-in as four new Ministers get inducted into U.P. Cabinet

Two from BJP and one RLD MLA inducted in Council of Ministers; the expansion signals BJP's focus on getting right the social and regional balance ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday expanded his Cabinet for the first time in his second term inducting four new Ministers — two from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and one each from allies Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

SBSP president Om Prakash Rajbhar, RLD MLA Anil Kumar, and Dara Singh Chauhan and Sunil Sharma (both BJP) were sworn in by Governor Anandiben Patel.

With this, the strength of the State Council of Ministers has increased to 56. Uttar Pradesh can have a maximum of 60 Cabinet Ministers.

While Mr. Rajbhar represents the Zahoarabad Assembly segment of Ghazipur district in eastern U.P., Mr. Anil Kumar is an MLA from Purkazi reserved constituency in Mu-



Uttar Pradesh Governor Anandiben Patel administers the oath of office to Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party chief Om Prakash Rajbhar, Bharatiya Janata Party leaders Dara Singh Chauhan and Sunil Kumar Sharma and RLD MLA Anil Kumar as State Cabinet Ministers in Lucknow on Tuesday. ANI

zaffarnagar district, while Mr. Sharma is the MLA from Sahibabad in Ghaziabad district.

Of the four newly-inducted Ministers, only Mr. Chauhan is a Member of the Legislative Council.

Congratulating the new Ministers, Mr. Adityanath wrote on X, "I am fully con-

fidant that all of you will play an important role in realising the resolve of 'Developed Uttar Pradesh' by bringing 'Modi's Guarantee' to the ground."

Mr. Rajbhar, who joined the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in July last year, has continuously pushed for his induction in the U.P. Cabinet.

Tuesday's expansion comes a day after Mr. Rajbhar opposed the candidature of BJP's nominee from Salempur Lok Sabha constituency Ravindra Kushwaha.

The expansion clearly signals BJP's focus on getting right the social and regional balance with an eye on the upcoming general election.

While two new entrants, including Mr. Rajbhar, hail from the non-Yadav Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and are from eastern U.P., the other two — a Dalit and a Brahmin — are from western U.P.

The SBSP enjoys sizeable support among the Rajbhar community in eastern Uttar Pradesh, while Mr. Chauhan, who also joined the BJP in July and lost the Ghosi Assembly bypoll, is said to have considerable influence among non-Yadav OBC voters in some areas of the eastern U.P. region.

7 BJP MLAs got notices for House 'ruckus': Thakur

Press Trust of India
SHIMLA

Seven BJP MLAs have received notices for allegedly creating a ruckus in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly on February 28, Leader of the Opposition Jai Ram Thakur said on Tuesday.

Himachal Pradesh Assembly Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania also confirmed that notices have been sent to some BJP MLAs, and said the matter has been referred to the Privileges Committee.

The Speaker did not specify the number of legislators against whom proceedings have been initiated.

The notices have been issued to the BJP MLAs for creating a ruckus in the House and not leaving it when it was briefly adjourned after the suspension of 15 BJP legislators.

The BJP MLAs were suspended a day after the Opposition party won the elections for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Himachal Pradesh after some Congress MLAs cross-voted in favour of BJP party candidate Harsh Mahajan. "The indiscipline created by BJP legislators inside



Jai Ram Thakur

the House invites action for breach of privilege, rules and constitutional provisions and notices are being issued to them in this regard," Mr. Pathania said.

'Not permissible' MLAs can protest in a dignified manner and raise slogans but throwing papers on the chair of the Speaker is not permissible, Mr. Pathania said. The Privileges Committee would hold its proceedings on camera and submit a report, he said.

In a statement issued here, Mr. Thakur said the Congress is hatching a conspiracy to save the government by issuing notices to the BJP MLAs through Privileges Committee. The democratic rights of the legislators are being violated, he said.

Development not core issue of Kashmir, says PDP ahead of PM visit

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) on Tuesday said the core issue in Kashmir is not development and highlighted the approach adopted by BJP leader and ex-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his 2003 visit. The statement comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to the Valley on March 7.

"Whenever a PM visits Kashmir, it has a specific context. Kashmir's core issues are not developmental or 'sadak, bilji, pani'; though they are important. It's the locals' sentiments, which has a specific context. People of Kashmir have passed through tough times. They always wanted the ruling class to heal their wounds," PDP leader and spokesman Suhail Bukhari said.

Highlighting Vajpayee's Kashmir visit in 2003, Mr. Bukhari said, "When Vajpayee came to Srinagar, the situation was tense. The continent was going through a negative wave against the backdrop of the Kargil war between India and Pakistan. However, like a true statesman, Vajpayee extended the hand of friendship (to Pakistan) from here. He started initiatives for paving a peaceful atmosphere," Mr. Bukhari said.

The PDP leader said the present dispensation and the approach adopted by it towards Kashmir since 2019 "does not inspire confidence or hope among people of Kashmir". "Look at the status of rights of people. Pimp, show and blitz could be a marketing strategy but cannot be employed to heal the wounds of people," Mr. Bukhari said.

Shah lashes out at the 'dynasts of INDIA' at Sambhajinagar rally

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Accusing leaders of the opposition INDIA alliance of caring only about the political ambitions of their kin, Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that those who worked only for the welfare of their sons, daughters and nephews were incapable of working for the welfare of the country.

Addressing a massive rally in Sambhajinagar (formerly Aurangabad), Mr. Shah said that leaders in the INDIA bloc of parties did not "practise the politics of principles but of dynasty". The Sambhajinagar Lok Sabha seat is currently held by Imitiaz Jaleel of the AIMIM, led by Asaduddin Owaisi.

"There are two camps ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election. One, the NDA alliance under PM Modi's leadership; the other, an arrogant INDIA alliance under Rahul Gandhi which is a coalition of dynastic parties. Sonia Gandhi's aim is to make Rahul Gandhi the next PM. Sharad Pawar's aim is to make his daughter [Supriya Sule] the next CM of Maharashtra. Uddhav Thackeray's aim is to see his son [Aaditya] as CM. Mamata Banerjee's aim is to make his nephew [Abhishek Banerjee] the CM of West Bengal. Those who work for their sons, daughters and nephews cannot think of



Home Minister Amit Shah with Maharashtra Deputy CM Fadnis and BJP State chief Bawankule at a rally in Jaipur on Tuesday. ANI

their country," said Mr. Shah. Targuing the AIMIM, Mr. Shah exhorted the audience "to throw out the Majlis from Sambhajinagar" and "gift a lotus to PM Modi" in the upcoming election.

Seat-sharing turmoil

Mr. Shah is on a two-day visit to the State amid seat-sharing turmoil within the ruling 'Mahayuti' parties (Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, the BJP and Ait Pawar-led NCP). Prior to his rally,

he held pre-election meetings with local leaders in Akola while attending a youth conclave in Jalgaon. He is also expected to hold meetings with CM Shinde and Deputy CM Ait Pawar to iron out the seat-sharing arrangements.

Among those present on the dais on Tuesday were Pankaj Munde, who has had an uneasy relationship with the BJP's top brass, and ex-Congressman, former Maharashtra CM and current Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Chavan — an influential leader in the Marathwada region who recently joined the BJP.

"I want to assure Mr. Shah that the BJP and the NDA alliance will garner the maximum Lok Sabha seats in Maharashtra," Mr. Chavan said, adding that he has never criticised the development work being done by PM Modi even when he was in the Congress.

Voice of dissent in Rajasthan after BJP distributes tickets for Lok Sabha polls

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

A voice of dissent has emerged in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Rajasthan after the distribution of tickets for the 2024 Lok Sabha election. Two-time Churu MP Rahul Kaswan, who was denied the ticket, has registered his protest amid indications that the Opposition Congress is trying to entice him. Mr. Kaswan, 47, may contest the Lok Sabha election as an independent candidate.

The BJP sprang a surprise by fielding Devendra Jhaharia, the first Indian Paralympics player to win two gold medals, as its candidate from Churu after denying the ticket to Mr. Kaswan. The party announced 15 candidates for the State,



The BJP fielded Devendra Jhaharia (right) in the place of two-time Churu MP Rahul Kaswan (left), who has made known his protest.

which has 25 Lok Sabha seats, in its first list released on the candidates are sitting MPs who were renominated.

Mr. Jhaharia, 42, has earned distinction as a javelin thrower and is known as the country's most decorated Paralympics player, having won gold medals in 2004 in Athens and in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. Mr. Kaswan's candidature was ap-

parently rejected because of allegations over his role in the defeat of senior BJP leader Rajendra Rathore at Tarapur in the 2023 Assembly election.

In an emotional outburst, Mr. Kaswan asked in a long post on X on Monday about the reasons for not declaring him the Lok Sabha candidate for the third term. "Was I not loyal? Was I tainted? Did I leave any stone unturned in getting the works done in Churu?" he asked, adding that he had ensured implementation of all Central schemes in his constituency. "What else was needed? Whenever I asked this question, everyone remained speechless. Maybe my own people can tell me something," Mr. Kaswan said. The MP holds considerable influence among Jats in the Shekhawati region. Amid speculation over Mr. Kaswan's next political move, the Congress seems to be offering a place in the party to him. Bikaner District Congress Committee chief Bisharnam Siyag said that if Mr. Kaswan had opted to align with the Congress, his victory would be a "foregone conclusion".

Telangana is new ATM for Cong.: PM

The Hindu Bureau
PATANCHERU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accused the Congress Party of making Telangana its new ATM after coming to power. He also charged the party with having an alleged secret pact with Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS).

"You have given an opportunity for Congress Party after suffering years of corruption under the BRS government. They are both sides of the same coin and have an understanding among themselves to share the looted wealth," he said at a public meeting held in Patancheru in Sangareddy district.

"BJP ki vote veyyali (vote for BJP) and we should get 400 seats this time," he exhorted the gathering.

Mr. Modi, who began the speech with "Na Telangana Kutumba Subhyahu Andaraki Namaskaram" (Greetings to my Telangana family members), claimed that the Congress and its INDIA allies are "abusing



Narendra Modi

him and his "family" since he had raised his voice against "family parties".

He charged that governments run by family-based parties have "hidden their black money" in foreign banks and kept "expensive gifts" for themselves whereas he had put up every gift received for public auction, realising ₹140 crore and using the money to clean up River Ganga. He said his regular income in government was utilised for girls' education and took a swipe at the media claiming that they "will not report these kind of issues".

Man-animal conflict claims two more lives in Kerala

On Tuesday, Valsala, wife of tribal chief, was trampled to death by an elephant in Thrissur and a man was killed by wild gaur in Kozhikode; a day earlier, a woman was killed by elephant in Idukki

The Hindu Bureau
THRISSUR

For the second consecutive day in Kerala, a wild elephant trampled to death a woman on Tuesday. Valsala, a 64-year-old tribal woman, who went to the forest at Peringalkuthu in Thrissur for collecting forest resources was trampled to death by the animal around 3.30 p.m.

Valsala is the wife of Rajan, tribal chief of Vachimaram Colony. Mr. Rajan, who witnessed the incident, said the elephant that was behind a tree attacked Valsala. Rajan, who was terrified by the attack, has been hospitalised.

The elephant trampled Valsala when she tried to escape and fell down.

Mr. Rajan identified the elephant as 'Manjakomban', a frequent trouble-



Kerala Opposition leader V.D. Satheshan calls on tribal Chief of Vachimaram Colony, Rajan, on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

maker in the area.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheshan, who visited Mr. Rajan in the hospital, criticised the State government and the Centre for their apathy towards the plight of people living in the forest fringes.

Tense moments prevailed at Chalakyud Taluk Hospital as UDF workers protested against shifting

the body to the mortuary.

In another incident, a 70-year-old man, P.D. Abraham, was killed in a wild gaur attack at Kakkayam in Kozhikode district on Tuesday afternoon. The incident led to strong protests and both the Left Democratic Front and the United Democratic Front called for a hartal in Koorachund grama panchayat on Wednesday.

In another incident, a herd of elephants entered the house of the welfare officer of the Athirappilly plantation corporation in Thrissur on Monday night and damaged furniture and other things inside the house. The family members were not in the house at the time of the attack.

Meanwhile, the Kothamangalam First Class Judicial Magistrate Court on Tuesday extended the interim bail of MLA Mathew Kuzhanadun, Ernakulam District Congress Committee president Mohammed Shiyas, and 30 other Congress leaders arrested in connection with a protest held at Kothamangalam town with the body of a woman trampled to death by elephant at Kanjiraveli in Idukki on Monday. (With inputs from Kozhikode)

99 kg hashish seized during attempt to smuggle to Sri Lanka



Swift action: The intercepted boat in which hashish was being smuggled to Sri Lanka. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Hindu Bureau
RAMANATHAPURAM

In a joint operation, Directorate of Revenue Intelligence sleuths, Chennai Zone, and Indian Coast Guard personnel intercepted a country boat in the Gulf of Mannar and seized 99 kg of hashish, a narcotic substance, that was being smuggled to Sri Lanka on Tuesday. Four persons were arrested for further interrogation.

Based on an intelligence input, the agencies mounted surveillance and intercepted the unregistered

boat, after a brief pursuit, a statement said.

After the officials found three persons sailing in it with five concealed sacks, the boat was brought to the Coast Guard Station at Mandapam. During the interrogation, they reportedly admitted that they had received the narcotic substance from a man on the Pamban coast and were on their way to hand it over to unidentified persons mid-sea.

Following the interrogation, the DRI officials arrested the man who had supplied the drug.

Jail radicalisation: NIA conducts searches

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Expanding the ambit of its investigation in the Bengaluru Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) prison radicalisation case, the National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday searched multiple locations in six States and seized a host of digital devices and incriminating doc-

uments, along with cash. NIA teams swooped down on the premises of suspects in various places across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Punjab, Gujarat and West Bengal on Tuesday, and recovered 25 mobile phones, six laptops and four storage devices, besides various incriminating documents, cash, apart from currency

notes of various countries. The NIA has been probing the case since October 25, 2023, and has filed a charge sheet against eight persons on January 12 this year. Two of them are absconding. Investigations had revealed that the absconders had established a network comprising individuals across India to promote the LeT's activities.

The case relating to radicalisation of inmates in Bengaluru's Parappana Agrahara Central Prison by alleged LeT operative T. Nazeer was originally registered by the Bengaluru City Police following the seizure of arms and ammunition. Nazeer was arrested in connection with the 2008 serial bomb blasts.

Kerala student's death: V-C suspends Dean

The Hindu Bureau
KALPETTA

Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University of Kollam Vice-Chancellor P.C. Saseendran on Tuesday suspended Dean and assistant hostel warden of the College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Pookode, in connection with the death of a second-year

veterinary student of the college. Sidharthan J.S., was found hanging in the hostel bathroom on varsity campus on February 18.

Dr. Saseendran served a show-cause notice on Monday on M.K. Narayanan, Dean, and R. Kanthanathan, tutor and assistant warden of the hostel, in connection with the incident.

In his explanation, Dr.

Narayanan said there were no lapses on the part of the administration, and that the intervention was made at the right time. He also said he was not the person residing on the campus and supervising things.

Dr. Saseendran, however, said in his order that the explanations received from Dr. Narayanan and Mr. Kanthanathan were

found unsatisfactory. "The undersigned is satisfied that the continuation of present incumbents in the position would seriously prejudice the inquiry and prevent a free and fair fact-finding. In such circumstances, it is felt that suspension of the officers from the service of the University is necessary," Dr. Saseendran said.

IN BRIEF



BRS, BSP to join hands for Lok Sabha polls in Telangana

The Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) have decided to enter into a formal alliance for the upcoming Parliamentary elections in Telangana. The decision came during a meeting between BRS president and former Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao and BSP State president R.S. Praveen Kumar in Hyderabad on Tuesday. The alliance would be respectable for both parties and the seat sharing would be finalised in consultation with BSP national president Mayawati soon, presidents of the two parties announced after their meeting.

ED issues new summons to Isaac in masala bonds case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has issued fresh summons to former Finance Minister T.M. Thomas Isaac asking him to appear before the investigators at its Kochi office on March 12 in connection with the issue of masala bonds by the Kerala Infrastructure Finance Fund Board (KIIFB). Dr. Isaac had not turned up despite earlier summons by the agency asking him to appear for interrogation. The ED suspects that funds were raised and utilised in violation of the Foreign Exchange Management Act.

Crown's worth was in tune with my capacity: Suresh Gopi

Responding to the controversy over the purity and quantity of gold in the crown offered by him to Lourdes Metropolitan Cathedral in Thrissur, BJP candidate for the Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency Suresh Gopi said he offered the crown according to his capacity. It was said that we had to explain what we offered to a church, he said in Thrissur on Tuesday. He said his wife had promised to offer gold to the tune of ₹10 lakh if he won from the Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency.

Festivities begin



Thousands of Shivalingams being stacked in the shape of a Mahashivlingam on R.K. Beach in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday ahead of the Mahashivratri celebrations on March 8. The Mahashivlingam, which is put up every year, draws devotees from far and wide. KR. DEEPAK

Nearly 100 taluks are facing drinking water crisis: Karnataka CM

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Close to 100 taluks in Karnataka have been facing severe drinking water crisis and tankers have been pressed into service to supply water to residents.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Tuesday took stock of the situation in the State by holding a video-conference with Deputy Commissioners and Chief Executive Officers of ZPs and said 98 out of 236 taluks have been facing

drinking water crisis owing to drought. The State had declared 223 taluks as drought-hit.

It is estimated that 7,408 villages and 115 wards in urban local bodies would face drinking water shortage. Agreements have been signed with owners of private borewells to supply water to drought-hit villages/towns, he said.

Noting the crop loss that has occurred extensively, the Chief Minister said ₹62 crore had been disbursed to 33.25 lakh farmers.

Mask names of those acquitted in criminal cases from digital records, HC tells media

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

"The Fourth Estate [the media] should consider masking, delisting and deleting the names of persons acquitted from criminal cases from their respective online digital records, and not drive such people to courts to seek directions for deletion of their names," the Karnataka High Court has said.

Justice M. Nagappaswami made these observations while directing the High Court's registry to mask



The evolving laws across the globe are moving towards the right to be forgotten, says HC.

national details of a 27-year-old petitioner, who was given a clean chit in a criminal case, from the court's digital records to mask his

I will take oath in Vizag and stay in city after elections: Jagan

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

Exuding confidence that he would win the upcoming Assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh with a handsome margin, Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy said on Tuesday that he would make Visakhapatnam his home and stay in the city, and conduct his swearing-in ceremony there.

Speaking at the investor meet, 'Vision Visakha', here, Mr. Reddy said that the city would become the Executive capital of the State. It would be the economic growth engine of the State, he added.

"The Opposition parties and a section of the media are claiming that I have vested interests in Visakhapatnam. If that is the case, I



Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy

would have vested interests in Kadapa, my home district, and not Visakhapatnam," he said.

"This city has the potential to become a global destination. But if the vision is 'negative', then growth cannot take place. I am the only person pitching to make it a mega city by converting it into the Executive capital," he said.

right to live with dignity.

In any crime, the court said, "once the accused gets acquitted honourably, or discharged by a competent court of law, or the High Court quashes criminal proceedings in exercise of its power under Section 482 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and such orders become final, the shadow of crime, if permitted to continue in place of shadow of dignity, on any citizen, would be travesty of the concept of life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The direction would be only to enable

the internet forget, like the humans forget. If it is allowed to stay on record, the internet will never permit the humans to forget," Justice Nagappaswami said. Pointing out that the Personal Data Protection Act, notified on August 11, 2023, which will come into force from the date of publication in the official gazette, also recognises the right of erasure of personal data, the court said that evolving laws across the globe are moving towards the right to be forgotten, and right of correction and erasure.

Karnataka CM, Deputy CM get bomb threat email

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar received emails on March 2, warning them of "more bomb blasts" in the State.

This comes after a the low-intensity blast at The Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru on March 1, which left nine injured. Home Minister G. Parameshwara and Bengaluru City Police Commissioner B. Dayananda too got similar emails on Saturday.

Following the threats, the cybercrime police stepped up investigations and registered a *suo motu* case. Efforts are on to track down the source of the mail. The emails warned of attacks at public places and transport, including the KSRTC's line of premier buses. The sender also demanded \$2.5 million for not carrying out the attacks.

The sender stated that they would raise their demands on social media and tweet the information about the next attack. "The police have stepped up vigil at public places even though the mail looks like a hoax," said an official.

Seven more Indians forced to fight in Russia seek govt. help

In video message, the men say this could be their last video and allege they were forced by police to join Russian Army or face imprisonment; they claim to have gone to Russia on tourist visas

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

A group of seven more Indians stuck on the Russia-Ukraine border released two videos this week seeking the government's help to return to India.

The seven Indians have been identified as Gagan-deep Singh (24), Lovepreet Singh (24), Narain Singh (22), Gurpreet Singh (21), Gurpreet Singh (23), Harsh Kumar (20) and Abhishek Kumar (21). While five workers are said to be from Punjab, the other two are from Haryana.

One of the men said that they arrived in Russia on tourist visas and were forced to join the Russian Army as "helpers" after police detained them for not possessing a "slip".

The men alleged that they were forced by the police to join the Russian Army or risk facing 10 years imprisonment. "We were told that we only have to work as helpers. But they enlisted us and they are providing us ammunition and are preparing to send us to Ukraine. They kept us hungry



The Indians stuck on the Russia border seen in a screenshot from a video. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and snatched our phones," one of the men, who is speaking Punjabi, said in a video on March 3.

He added that their fervent pleas for help with the Russians have not yielded any result. "The Russian Army tells us that we can leave only after a year. They are asking us to help them win the war. We don't know how to help them. If we don't, we may not survive," the man in his early 20s said in the video. The same group released another video on March 4.

One of the workers says in Hindi: "We had made you aware about our plight earlier also. There are many Indians stuck in either Ukraine or Russia. We request the Indian Embassy and the Indian government to help us. This could be our last video, they are sending us to the war zone in Ukraine."

The *Hindu* reported first on February 20 that at least three Indians who were hired as security helpers by Russia were forced to fight alongside the coun-

try's forces on the Russia-Ukraine border. The *Hindu* subsequently reported that there are around 100 Indians who are said to have been hired by the Russian Army in the past one year.

Russia and Ukraine have been at war since February 24, 2022. While a few Indians volunteered to join the International Legion created to fight Russian forces in Ukraine in 2022, the presence of Indians on the Russian side in combat roles has been reported for the first time.

Bengal police told to hand over ED attack case to CBI

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Tuesday directed the West Bengal Police to hand over the probe into an attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials in Sandeshkhali to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The officials were attacked on January 5. A Division Bench of Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam and Justice Hirannay Bhattacharya also directed the police to hand over the custody of suspended Trinamool Congress leader Sheikh Shahjahan to the CBI by 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday.

The police, however, did not hand over Mr. Shahjahan to the CBI. A team of CBI officials also visited Bhawan Bhawan, the headquarters of the West Bengal Police where the actual assault had been lodged, but they had to return empty-handed.

Appeal in SC

In an oral mention before Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, the State government requested for an early hearing of its appeal against the High Court order to hand over the case to the CBI. The Chief Justice asked the State government, represented by se-



Security personnel outside the police headquarters, where CBI officials arrived to take Sheikh Shahjahan, in Kolkata. PTI

nior advocate A.M. Singhvi, to approach the Supreme Court Registrar concerned with the listing of cases.

Mr. Shahjahan was arrested by the police on February 29 after villagers, particularly women in Sandeshkhali, held protests for days demanding his arrest. The allegations of sexual assault and land grab by Sheikh Mr. Shahjahan and his aides had triggered an outrage in the political circles.

The court also set aside the order of a single-judge Bench of the High Court for setting up an SIT to probe the attack on ED officials. On February 7, the Bench had stayed the single-judge Bench order. "The order passed by the learned Single Bench con-

stituting the Special Investigating Team is set aside, and the writ petition filed by the Enforcement Directorate is allowed, and cases in FIR No. 8 and 9 of 2024 on the file of the Nazaf Police Station and FIR 18 on the file of the Bongaon Police Station shall be transferred to CBI," the court said. The court said Mr. Shahjahan, who was arrested after being on the run for more than 50 days, is not an ordinary citizen, and it has become necessary for doing complete justice and enforcing the fundamental rights of the public that the cases be transferred to the CBI.

The ED, meanwhile, provisionally attached assets worth ₹2.78 crore under the PMLA of Mr. Shahjahan and others.

Law panel's report on simultaneous polls likely next week

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Law Commission may submit its report on simultaneous elections to the government next week in which it could recommend adding a new chapter to the Constitution on "one nation, one election" and holding the gigantic democratic exercise for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies and local bodies across the country by mid-2029. According to sources, the Commission, under Justice (retired) Ritu Raj Awasthi, would recommend an amendment to the Constitution.

The panel would also recommend synchronising the terms of Legislative As-

semblies in "three phases" in the next five years so that the first simultaneous elections could be held in May-June 2029, they said.

The new chapter in the Constitution would include issues related to "simultaneous election", "sustainability of simultaneous elections" and "common electoral roll" for Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, panchayats and municipalities so that the three-tier simultaneous polls could be held together "in one go", the sources explained.

The new chapter being recommended will have "power of non-extant" to override other provisions in the Constitution dealing with terms of Assemblies.

Forced landing



Residents gather near an aircraft of the Indian Army on a farm field in Gaya district of Bihar on Tuesday. At least two trainee pilots were injured in the incident, according to the officials. PTI

Maharashtra drags Saibaba to top court for the second time

Krishnasdas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Maharashtra government has dragged wheel-chair-bound former Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba to the Supreme Court for the second time in as many years.

The State's appeal against Tuesday's acquittal of Professor Saibaba, in jail since 2014 for offences under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, linking him with Maoist groups, is a sequel of sorts to a train of events, which began in October 2022.

Discharged in 2022

On October 14, 2022, the Bombay High Court discharged Mr. Saibaba in the case for lack of valid sanction under Section 45(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, or the UAPA. The State had not lost time. It rushed to the top court the same evening, a Friday.

In an uncharacteristic move, that too concerning a State's appeal against an order of discharge, the Supreme Court acquiesced to constitute a Special Bench of Justices M.R. Shah (now retired) and Bela M. Trivedi the very next day, a Saturday. The Bench went on to suspend the discharge order of the Bombay High Court Bench of Justices Rohit Doo and Anil Pantasari.

The Saturday Bench of the top court, in its October 15, 2022, order said the "offences are very serious against the sovereignty and integrity of the country". It surmised that the Division Bench of the High Court had "not at all dealt with and considered anything on the merits of the judgment" passed by the Sessions Court that sentenced Professor Saibaba to life imprisonment in 2017. The decision of the Supreme Court, which came within 24 hours of the High Court's discharge of the case against the 57-year-old paraplegic, had attracted criticism.

Months later, on April 19 last year, the Bench set aside the discharge order of the High Court. The Bench had reasoned that an appellate court (High Court) could not delve into the question of a valid sanction once an accused (Saibaba) was convicted by the Sessions Court. It had referred the case back to the Bombay HC for a fresh round of hearing. It also requested the Bombay Chief Justice to allocate the case to a different HC Bench for the sake of propriety.



Professor G.M. Saibaba

However, almost a year later on Tuesday, the judicial gavel again struck in favour of Mr. Saibaba.

"Null and void" A Division Bench of Justices Vinay Joshi and Valmiki S.A. Menezes agreed with the earlier High Court Bench on the invalidity of the sanction. They concluded that the sanction was both null and void.

During the October 2022 hearing, the State of Maharashtra had termed Mr. Saibaba the "brain" behind the alleged Maoist activities and his fellow accused were mere "foot soldiers". The Supreme Court Bench had responded orally that "as far as terrorist activities are concerned, the brain plays a very important role... A brain for such activities is very dangerous". Prof. Saibaba's lawyer, senior advocate R. Basant, had stressed that Prof. Saibaba was 90% physically disabled and had a respectable life as a professor in the Delhi University. A further request to transfer Mr. Saibaba into a house arrest on humanitarian grounds was also shot down by the court.

We will win at least 12 seats in M.P., says Kamal Nath

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

The Congress will win at least 12 to 13 seats (of the total 29) in Madhya Pradesh in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election, former Chief Minister and party veteran Kamal Nath said in Ujjain on Tuesday.

Mr. Nath was in the city to attend Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nvay Yatra. "Look, I believe the Congress should win at least 12 to 13 seats. The BJP is an expert in creating a fake atmosphere [of claiming to win all 29 seats]," Mr. Nath said.

He also refuted the rumours that were rife last month about him joining the BJP. "Did you ever hear anything from my mouth? You guys [the media] only ran news, and everybody started asking me questions. I had already said that the journalists should refute them first," he said.

Modi wants youth to be glued to phone, starve to death, says Rahul

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday offered prayers at Ujjain's Mahakaleswar Temple as his Bharat Jodo Nvay Yatra reached Madhya Pradesh's pilgrim city. Mr. Gandhi was accompanied by former Chief Minister and Congress veteran Kamal Nath among other party leaders.

As the former Congress president was entering the temple entrance, a crowd present at the temple present there started raising "Modi, Modi" slogans as he was entering the main entrance.

'Jai Shri Ram' slogans

Earlier in the day, a similar incident was witnessed in Shajapur when a group of BJP workers raised slogans in the name of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chanted "Jai Shri Ram" in front of the Congress leader.



Paying obeisance: Rahul Gandhi and Kamal Nath offering prayers at Mahakaleswar Temple in Ujjain on Tuesday. PTI

Mr. Gandhi, however, briefly stopped his vehicle, approached the BJP workers and shook hands with them.

Later in Ujjain, he said he shook their hands as it is easy to do away with hatred.

"Today, I met some BJP men. They were shouting and carrying their party flags. But when I got down the car and asked them how they were doing, they stopped shouting and started smiling. And then when I was leaving, they

were giving me flying kiss," he said, addressing the crowd. "So, it's not that difficult [dealing with such situations]," he said, adding that only those who get scared of life's hardships can't face them carry hatred.

'No loans'

In Shajapur, Mr. Gandhi hit out at the Prime Minister stating that Mr. Modi only wants the youth of the country to be "glued to their phones, chant Jai Shri Ram and starve to death".

He also said that the banks were not giving loans to the youth to start businesses whereas the government was waiving loans of thousands of crores of big industrialists.

"And those who can't pay off the loans flee the country. Be like [businessmen] Vijay Malya, Lalit Modi or Nirav Modi. Your life is all fun if you come from the 3% to 4% [well-to-do] population," he added.

State Chief Minister Mohan Yadav took a swipe at Mr. Gandhi's yatra saying that the party, which did *anyway* (injustice) throughout its tenure is taking out a *nvay* yatra (march for justice).

"The motive with which he is taking out the march will never be fulfilled. Because when the party which has done injustice throughout their time in power takes out a march for justice, people raise questions," the Chief Minister said while speaking to reporters.

NC discusses Congress's seat-sharing proposals

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The National Conference (NC), which held several rounds of talks with its ally Congress recently over seat sharing recently, on Tuesday held a meeting of its top leadership in Srinagar to discuss the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

An NC spokesman said party president Farooq Abdullah chaired the meeting and deliberated on the forthcoming polls. Sources said the NC also discussed the proposals put forth by the Congress on seat sharing. Several rounds of talks held between the NC and Congress remain inconclusive. Both parties are part of the INDIA bloc.

J&K has five Lok Sabha seats. The NC has been insisting that it will have a pre-poll alliance only in those seats where the BJP won in the 2019 elections.

BJP calls out INDIA bloc parties over remarks by DMK leader

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Tuesday came down heavily on the India National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) parties over alleged remarks by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP A. Raja that "India was not a nation". The BJP termed the remarks "Maotist ideology".

Former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, at a press conference at the BJP's national headquarters in New Delhi, demanded to know whether the other constituents of the INDIA bloc agreed with Mr. Raja's remarks on India's ethos.

Mr. Raja reportedly referred to the chants of "Jai Shri Ram" raised by supporters of the BJP in Benar as a conviction when they were released from prison and said, "if that is your 'Jai Shri Ram', if this is your 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', we will never accept that 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Bharat Mata'. Tamils don't accept it. You go and tell [that] we are enemies of Ram."

"This is Maotist ideology," Mr. Prasad said. Quoting Mr. Raja's remarks on Lord Ram, he said, "We (the BJP) vehemently condemn such remarks." "Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka (Gandhi Vadra), Mallikarjun Kharge, do you consider it (Raja's remarks) right?" he asked. He said it was "evident that insulting India's ethos publicly, humiliating Hindu gods, and questioning the very idea of India has become the hallmark of the political agenda of the INDIA *gambandhan*".

"Please do not insult Hindu sentiment in such a way. We respect all faiths. This is the Indian *sanskara* (tradition) from Rig Veda which says that truth is one, paths may be different," Mr. Prasad said.

Govt. is using SBI to hide dubious deals: Kharge

Congress chief says bank is trying to delay disclosure of poll bond donors till LS polls party asks if bank and ruling party are defying SC order; CPI calls it attempt to save BJP from embarrassment

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after the State Bank of India (SBI) parties over alleged remarks by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) MP A. Raja that "India was not a nation". The BJP termed the remarks "Maotist ideology".



The Congress leader alleged that the extension was being sought to ensure that the names of the donors were not exposed. PTI

Mr. Kharge claimed that experts were of the view that nearly 45,000 automated data entries of donors could be matched within 24 hours. "Why does the SBI then need 4 more months, to collate this information?" he said.

"Modi govt. is using the largest bank of our country as a shield to hide its dubious dealings through Electoral Bonds," he said. "The Congress chief added, "No less than the Supreme Court of India had

struck down Modi govt's "Black Money Conversion" scheme of Electoral Bonds, holding it 'Unconstitutional', 'Violative of RTI' and 'illegal' and asking SBI to furnish donor details by March 6."

'BJP is the beneficiary' Mr. Kharge alleged that the extension was being sought to ensure that the names of the donors were not exposed before the Lok Sabha elections. "The BJP is the main beneficiary of this fraudulent scheme. Isn't the Modi govt. conveniently hiding the BJP's shady dealings here: contracts of highways, ports, airports, power plants

were handed over to Modi-jit's cronies in lieu of these opaque electoral bonds?" he asked. "... The Electoral Bonds scheme was opaque, undemocratic and destroyed level playing field. But the Modi govt, PMO and FM bulldozed every institution - RBI, Election Commission, Parliament and Opposition to fill BJP's coffers. Now a desperate govt. is trying to use SBI to bulldoze the Supreme Court's judgement" he said.

'Black money sources' Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, where Congress, Supriya Shrinete, who heads the social me-

dia department, questioned why a bank that operated 48 crore accounts, 66,000 ATMs, and 23,000 branches, needed five months to provide information about electoral bonds.

"This should have been available at the click of a button," she said. "The question arises whether the country's largest government bank has now become a means of hiding the financial irregularities of the BJP and the means to conceal source of black money," she added.

"The question arises whether a political party and a government bank are together defying the decision of the Supreme Court of the country," Ms. Shrinete asked.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said the SBI was trying to save "the BJP from an embarrassment". "The claim that it will require more than four months to furnish the details of merely 22,217 EBs makes a joke out of Modi's claims of Digital India, BJP's extortions and Crony capitalist nexus must be exposed," he said.

'Nitish seeking simultaneous Assembly, LS polls in Bihar'

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The seat-sharing calculus of both the ruling alliance and the Opposition camp in Bihar is stuck due to different variables.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, still smarting from being pushed to the third rung in the Bihar Assembly after the 2020 Assembly election, is now insisting on holding the Assembly election simultaneously with the Lok Sabha election, said sources.

On the Opposition end, where the exit of Mr. Kumar's Janata Dal (U) has made the equation more or less straightforward, the negotiations are proceeding slowly, with several events delaying the process.

The JD(U), which currently holds 16 of the State's 40 Lok Sabha seats, has demanded 17 seats, which it had fought in the 2019 polls. The party had made the same demand when it was in the *maha-gabandhan* with the RJD. But with a greater number of claimants to the seat pie in the ruling NDA, including Upendra Kushwaha's Hindustan Awam Morcha (HAM), Jiten Ram Manjhi's Kachhrya Lok Janata Dal (RLJD), and two factions of



Another run: Nitish Kumar after filing his nomination papers for the MLG elections, in Patna on Tuesday. PTI

the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) - one led by Chirag Paswan and the other by his uncle Pashupati Paras, the equation is complicated.

Sources said that talks have been further delayed with the elections for the Bihar Legislative Council, for which Mr. Kumar filed his nomination on Tuesday for a fourth consecutive term. The voting will take place on March 21, if a vote is forced by either side.

"For us, the Lok Sabha seat division is not important. In fact, a large section of the party believes that Assembly elections should be called simultaneously so that we can correct our strength in the Assembly, which was distorted the last time around because of the LJP contesting against us," a senior JD(U) leader said. In the Opposition camp

where there are fewer claimants - the starting formula is that the RJD, being the senior colleague, will keep 30 of the State's 40 seats, and distribute the remaining 10 between the Left parties and the Congress.

As per sources, Mukesh Sahani of the Vikasshed Insaan Party has also approached the Opposition coalition.

In a bid to take the battle to the voters, the Opposition is planning to organise citizen conventions against the defections that took place during the confidence vote in the Bihar Assembly on March 9 and 10. Meetings are being planned at the Sasaram Lok Sabha constituency, where three Opposition legislators switched sides, and the Patna constituency where one Opposition MLA defected.

Congress condemns remarks by DMK MP

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday condemned the reported controversial remarks of DMK MP A. Raja and asserted that one should exercise restraint while speaking.

Supriya Shrinete, a Congress spokesperson, when asked about Mr. Raja's remarks, said, "100% disinterested," Mr. Prasad said.

From this platform, I condemn such a statement. I believe Ram belongs to everyone and is all encompassing."

"I believe that Ram, who was called Imam-e-Hind, is above communities, religions and castes. Ram is an ideal of living life. Ram is dignity, Ram is ethics, Ram is love. I completely condemn this statement, I do not support it."

Congress manifesto to focus on livelihood issues

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A foolproof system to prevent leak of question papers of professional recruitment exams, providing an allowance to unemployed youth, offering cooking gas cylinders for ₹450, cash assistance to women, and a low interest rate on education loans are some of the proposals that the Congress party may promise in its manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Former party chief Ra-

hul Gandhi on Tuesday said there would be a foolproof system to prevent paper leaks that endanger the future of the youth. "In the past seven years alone, more than 70 paper leak cases have broken the dreams of more than 2 crore students. This is not only wasting their precious years to build their future but also putting a financial strain and mental burden on their families," he said in a post on X.

He said there was a need to ensure accountability at

There is a need to ensure accountability at every level by ending the criminal nexus, says Rahul

every level by ending the criminal nexus of a callous government, corrupt officials, and mafia involved in cheating and private printing presses.

"Congress is preparing a foolproof plan to make the recruitment process of youth transparent. We will

not let the future of students be played with" he added.

Draft complete For the second day on Tuesday, the manifesto committee met to finalise the draft manifesto with a clear focus on employment and livelihood issues. While the party has already said it would fill up nearly 10 lakh existing government jobs that are lying vacant, it also wants to lay emphasis on vocational training and apprentice-

ship to make the workforce more in sync with the demands of the global job market.

The party will also reiterate its commitment to scrap the Agnipath scheme and revert to the old system of recruitment for the armed forces. "We have completed the draft manifesto and it will now go to the Congress Working Committee. The CWC will finalise it," P. Chidambaram, chairman of the manifesto committee, told presspersons.

Synergy among armed forces must, says Rajnath

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

In a projection of India's growing maritime power, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday addressed the top naval commanders onboard aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya* in the Arabian Sea and witnessed a mega war game amid China's increasing military assertiveness in the Indian Ocean region.

Mr. Singh also witnessed the combat prowess of aircraft carriers *INS Vikrant* and *INS Vikramaditya* in a "twin-carrier" operation that the Navy said was a demonstration of a "powerful testament" to the crucial role of sea-based air power in maintaining maritime superiority.

In his address to the commanders, the Defence Minister said jointness and synergy among the armed forces is crucial in today's ever-changing geopolitical scenario even as he lauded the Navy for continuously emerging in a leadership role in the Indian Ocean region with its increasing multi-dimensional capabilities.

Mr. Singh highlighted the Navy's important role in maritime security and maintaining India's sovereignty and urged the commanders to remain prepared to deal with all kinds of challenges while assur-



Power play: Rajnath Singh aboard *INS Vikramaditya* at the first Naval Commanders' Conference 2024 on Tuesday. ANI

ing the government's all-possible support. The war game in the Arabian Sea also came against the backdrop of increasing global concerns over Houthis' targeting various cargo ships in the Red Sea and adjoining areas in the last few months.

In March last year, Mr. Singh attended the inaugural session of the naval commanders conference onboard *INS Vikrant*. "If India's reputation has increased in the Indian Ocean Region and wider Indo-Pacific, it is due to the bravery and promptness of our Navy," he said.

"It has become synonymous with credibility in the Indo-Pacific region. The Navy is a reflection of India's growing stature on the global canvas," he said.

The defence minister underscored the importance of jointness and synergy of the three services amidst the constantly evolving geopolitical scenario including increasing use of drones in modern-day warfare.

Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said the "twin-carrier" demonstration served as a "powerful testament" to the crucial role of sea-based air power in maintaining maritime superiority.

In remarks at the commanders' conference, the defence minister commended the Navy for increasing its multi-dimensional capabilities in the Indian Ocean region and continuously emerging in a leadership role.

Calcutta HC judge resigns, says he will be joining BJP soon

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that drug distribution was rampant in Tamil Nadu, the State's Law Minister S. Regupathy on Tuesday said that Gujarat, Mr. Modi's home State, had become a haven for smuggling of narcotic substances.

Addressing journalists here, Mr. Regupathy said: "Mr. Modi's Gujarat coast and the 'Divine Dwarka' have become haven for smuggling of drugs worth thousands of crores of rupees into the country. While allowing it to happen in Gujarat by privatising airports and the harbours, Mr. Modi is accusing Tamil Nadu, which is a 'peaceful land' with a stable government. The Union government's Narcotics Control Bureau, which should weed out drug smuggling, is unable to do it. However, for political mileage and with an eye on election, Mr. Modi is accusing Tamil Nadu unnecessarily. Is it the Modi formula? The Tamils will never tolerate it."

Asked about the reasons for not joining CPI(M), he said "he was a proud Hindu" and not an atheist. He had announced his decision to resign and join politics on February 3, and leaders across all major Opposition parties welcomed him in their party.

Quoting the former judge's remarks that he approached the BJP, Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said, "You have to read between the lines. He confessed that he was in touch with the BJP when he delivered his judgements on various cases. I will leave the rest to the people."

Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee dared Mr. Gangopadhyay to contest from any seat in the State. "No matter from which seat he contests, we will defeat him."



Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay

'Gujarat has become a haven for smuggling of drugs'

The Hindu Bureau
NAGERCOIL

For political mileage and with an eye on election, the Prime Minister is accusing Tamil Nadu unnecessarily. Is it the Modi formula?



S. REGUPATHY
Law Minister

the issue of uncontrolled supply of ganja from Andhra Pradesh was raised in the DGMS meet, cannabis grown on over 6,000 acres in the neighbouring State was destroyed.

Sustained and intensive drive against ganja-peddlers and smugglers in the Tamil Nadu had led to the seizure of 1,416 kg of ganja in 2019, 15,144 kg in 2020, 20,431 kg in 2021, 28,381 kg in 2022 and 23,364 kg in 2023, he said, adding that the State government was keen on ensuring conviction of drug smugglers by ensuring proper and speedy trial of the cases. Of the 2,416 cases registered under NDPS Act that came up for hearing in 2022, the accused were convicted in 1,916.

As part of preventive measure, the government was organising awareness programmes against drug abuse, he said. "After getting due permission from the Governor, a case has been filed against a Minister in the previous AIADMK regime

under NDPS Act. we are taking steps to make Tamil Nadu drug free and protect the future generation," Mr. Regupathy said.

Taking a jibe at the BJP and its State president K. Annamalai, the Minister said that the national party had admitted 14 criminals having cases under NDPS Act into the party, and given some of them vital posts.

"Similarly, 18 persons facing charges of smuggling narcotic substances have been given posts in the BJP. Only after eradicating the drug cartel in Gujarat, and removing the NDPS case-accused from the party, should Mr. Annamalai point a finger at us," he said.

Asked why the DMK had given drug racket accused Jaffer Sadiq a post in the party, he said the background of everyone joining the party could not be verified.

"When their criminal background comes to light, there will be no space for them in the DMK," he said.

IN BRIEF



U.P. Police Recruitment Board chief made scapegoat: activists

Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment Board Chairperson Renuka Mishra has been made a scapegoat to hide the morass of the recent constable examination paper leak episode, activists said on Tuesday. "The decision to remove the Chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board was taken amid rising public pressure. The official question has been made a scapegoat to save higher-ups in the State administration. This is just an eye wash to hide the systemic corruption and organised syndicate responsible for paper leaks in Uttar Pradesh," Amitabh Thakur, an anti-corruption activist, alleged.

INS urges govt. to scrap 5% Customs duty on newsprint

The Indian Newspaper Society has urged the government to scrap the 5% Customs duty on newsprint to allow publishers to manage their operational costs more effectively. In a statement, the INS said a combination of factors affecting the price and availability of newsprint have created a formidable burden for publishers in the country. "This measure, if withdrawn, would provide much-needed relief to the print media industry, allowing publishers to manage their operational costs more effectively and ensure the continued dissemination of credible news and information to the public," INS president Rakesh Sharma said.

6 disqualified Himachal MLAs move Supreme Court for relief

Six Congress MLAs who were disqualified after they cross-voted in the recent Rajya Sabha polls in Himachal Pradesh moved the Supreme Court on Tuesday against their disqualification. The former MLAs have filed a plea against the February 29 decision of the State Legislative Assembly Speaker, Kuldeep Singh Pathania. These Congress rebels, who had voted in favour of BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha polls on February 27, later abstained from voting on the Budget, defying a party whip. Senior Congress leader Abhishek Singhvi lost the Rajya Sabha elections owing to cross-voting by the rebels.

Tejashwi Yadav calls for issue-based debate with PM

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader and former Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday hit back at the BJP's 'Modi Ka Parivar' (Modi's family) campaign, which came about as a response to his father Lalu Prasad's recent remarks on Prime Minister Narendra Modi having "no family". "Eighty per cent people are suffering from poverty, 100 crore people are unemployed, 120 crore people are helpless due to inflation, all the families are unhappy, yet he (Mr. Modi) calls them his family," Mr. Yadav told mediapersons in Patna. "There should be issue-based debate... He cannot run away from his responsibilities," the leader added.

Indian troops out, Maldives inks defence pact with China

The agreement says Beijing will provide free military assistance to Maldives to foster ties between the two nations; Muizzu says no Indian troops to remain on island, 'in uniform or in civil clothes'

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Days after a technical team from India arrived in the Maldives to replace troops that President Mohamed Muizzu wanted removed, the Maldivian Defence Ministry announced signing a military pact with China.

Maldives' Minister of Defence Mohamed Ghasan Maumoon and Major General Zhang Baoqun, Deputy Director at China's Office for International Military Cooperation, on Monday signed an agreement on "China's provision of military assistance gratis to the Republic of Maldives, fostering stronger bilateral ties", the Maldivian Defence Ministry said. The two sides also held bilateral talks on military cooperation.

The Ministry's post on social media platform X did not mention details of what the agreement entails. Further, China donated 12 green ambulances to the Maldives' Health Ministry on Monday. The development is in line with the two countries agreeing to "elevate" China-Maldives relations to a "comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership", during Mr. Muizzu's five-day state visit to China in January.



Mohamed Ghasan Maumoon and Zhang Baoqun at China's Office for International Military Cooperation. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Maldivian Foreign Minister Moosa Zameer posted on X, "Delighted to host the China EXIM Bank delegation, and the Chinese military delegation for lunch today. We had fruitful discussions on bolstering our economic and security partnerships between the two countries. Looking forward to continued collaboration."

It also coincides with New Delhi's apparent compromise with Male, agreeing to withdraw its troops stationed in the island nation, instead replacing them with a technical team to help operate India-gifted aircraft. The decision was made amid Mr. Muizzu's persistent calls for the removal of Indian troops, a campaign promise-turned-official pledge made by the leader.

bullies don't provide USD 4.5 billion in aid when the neighbours are in trouble", referring to Indian assistance to Sri Lanka during its crisis in 2022, have drawn wide attention in the Maldives.

Interpreting it as a "swipe at" Mr. Muizzu, several Maldivian media outlets reported the remarks, linking them to Mr. Muizzu's media comments soon after his return from China in January.

"Maldives may be small, but that doesn't give others the licence to bully the country," Mr. Muizzu had said. During his China visit, the Maldivian leader also urged Chinese travellers to reclaim their top spot in tourist arrivals to the island nation. India was the largest source market last year, but has since moved to the sixth spot, following the "boycott Maldives" campaign that went viral on Indian social media earlier this year.

According to the Maldivian Tourism Ministry's latest figures, China accounts for 12.8% of the total number of visitors - 4,31,002 as of March 3 - recorded in 2024, while India accounts for 6.4%. Earlier this year, Beijing said, "The relations between China and the Maldives now stand at a new historical starting point."

Bengal officials have been warned to curb poll violence: CEC

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA



Rajiv Kumar

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar said on Tuesday that the Election Commission has issued strict instructions to the West Bengal bureaucracy to contain violence and ensure a level-playing field during the Lok Sabha elections.

Mr. Kumar said adequate personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) would be deployed in the State. The CAPF personnel would be jointly deployed by the nodal officer of the State police, the Chief Electoral Officer, and the Central Observer for the State. Information on deployment of forces would be provided to all parties, he added.

Speaking to the media, Mr. Kumar said the bureaucracy in the State had been fully sensitised to make sure that the elections were "free and fair". On previous failures to curtail violence during polls, Mr. Kumar said, "Incidents will not be taken to widespread this time. If violence does happen to spread, then the district administration will take action. If they do not take action then we will make them take action."

Law enforcement agencies have been directed to monitor inter-State boundaries and international borders to curb flow of in-

ducements, especially drugs, gold, and counterfeit Indian currency, he added.

"All enforcement agencies will coordinate closely and not operate in silos and will ensure not only violence-free elections but also prevent any incident," he said.

The CEC said there were 7.58 crore voters - 3.85 crore men and 3.73 crore women - in the State. The number of first-time voters stood at 15.25 lakh.

The electoral gender ratio in the State stood at an impressive 968 women voters for 1,000 men voters, with 90 Assembly seats having a gender ratio of over 1,000. The full bench of the Election Commission has been in Kolkata for two days and held meetings with political parties and officials of the State government.

Mr. Kumar said the commission had taken steps to prevent spread of fake news. It has launched an integrated mechanism system and a toll-free number to register complaints.

INDIA bloc leaders not able to digest success of govt.: PM

Satyvasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday strongly criticised the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), asserting that its nepotistic leaders intensified their attacks on him due to their inability to counter his government's accomplishments.

Addressing a public meeting in Odisha's Jajpur district, he said, "Corrupt leaders of INDI alliance do not like the developments undertaken in the country. These dynasts do not have any answer to our commitments, achievements, policies, and dedication. INDI alliance has now stepped up its attack on Modi."

"We are implementing a

free-rider programme for the poorer section of society. This is the reason why we continue to get blessings of people. We have extended the scheme by another five years. We are also executing Har Ghar Jal Yojana to make provision for tap water supply to every rural household. I am also working on making three crore lakhpatri didis (women self-help group leaders)," he said.

"Now, corrupt INDI alliance leaders are saying Modi does not have any family and they want to oust Modi. INDI alliance leaders say this. It is an ideological fight against me. The ideology of INDI alliance leaders is family first while Modi's ideology is nation first. These leaders only live for their families while Modi toils hard for every family of the country," Mr. Modi said.

"These leaders have used power to get rid of their own poverty. But during administration of Modi, 25 crore families have elevated themselves from poverty. This is why I call me *raha meri parivar* (my country, my family). These statements are disturbing family-centric leaders. Since yesterday, every farmer, son and daughter have been resenting this, calling them part of Modi's family," he said

Google reinstates Indian apps 'in spirit of cooperation'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Google is reinstating dozens of apps that were delisted by the company on March 1 for resisting the firm's platform fees on in-app payments, the tech company said in a statement on Tuesday.

"In the spirit of cooperation, we are temporarily reinstating the apps of the developers with appeals pending in the Supreme Court," a Google spokesperson said, referring to apps by developers like Bharat Matrimony and Kuku FM.

"Google maintains its right to implement and enforce its business model, as established in various courts. We will invoice our full applicable services fees

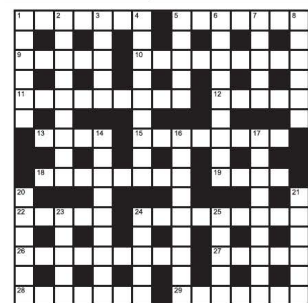
what they characterised as high fees that Google conditioned on their products being available on the company's Android application store. The tech firm collects 11%-30% per transaction in platform fees, which an emerging class of apps eager to charge for their services in India - such as in the dating, matrimonial or OTT streaming space - are trying to avoid.

"Google has been supporting our technology development journey and we believe that in the coming months, both start-up companies and Google will come to a long-term resolution," Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told ANI after meeting representatives from both camps.

in the interim and are extending payment timelines for these companies. We look forward to a collaborative effort to find solution that respect the needs of all parties."

The announcement remains a setback for the apps' developers, who had moved the court to avoid

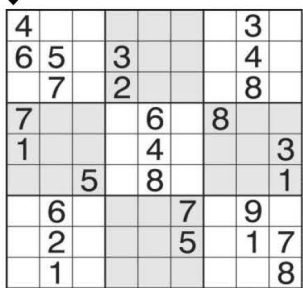
CROSSWORD + 14115



- 1 Controversy on European rodent, it's detailed (7)
- 5 Order rib chop and Highland music (7)
- 9 Questions young ones getting married (5)
- 11 Eats spread before horse as festive offering (6,3)
- 10 Corrosive stuff, for example in tanks (4,5)
- 12 "Live on rent" - backs up and leaves (5)

- 13 Crucial time lost, the medicine may be inside this (4)
- 15 Still it's missing in the dark night (8)
- 18 Attack the steed on animal (8)
- 19 Still not seen, still I follow (4)
- 22 Ban it, reportedly some of it can explode (5)
- 24 Madras refused to entertain regular singer for the carnival (5,4)
- 26 Cut, ball in turn does spin (9)
- 27 It doesn't make sense to restrict travel (5)
- 28 Study - even Israel follows another country (7)
- 29 Most simple in a different garment (7)
- Down
- 1 Well known, but not universal tree (6)
- 2 Some smaller version in lieu of fancy car (9)
- 3 Suffering, not something unknown for a skink (5)
- 4 Extremely careful with the work done, many cross at the minister (9)
- 5 Part of lunch, may be after one? (5)
- 6 Live with doubt - need guts to become a big corporation (4,5)
- 7 Open at the centre, volume goes up somewhat (5)
- 8 Old woman's happiness cut short in the bargain (6)
- 14 Free tips on how to tie them up and finish the job (5,4)
- 16 Gum used o'er insolent (9)
- 17 Function perhaps without a wind down (9)
- 20 Synchronised with a part inside pumps, say... (6)
- 21 ...like money growth? (6)
- 23 Terrible torture to be left out, when one is more faithful (5)
- 24 Honour to get a date for say, dinner outside (5)
- 25 Starts investigating nine different reserves involving these primates (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Gratitude to parents

The sacrifices that parents make for their children can never be wholly described. Aitareya Brahmhina points out why such a description is difficult, said Velukkudi Krishnan in a discourse.

Aitareya Brahmhina first talks of what the earth, fire and water do for us. The earth gives us the food we need to sustain ourselves.

Can we ever repay her for what she gives us? Fire is essential for cooking our food. Can we repay the fire for all this?

We need water to bathe, to quench our thirst, etc. Can we repay water for its many uses?

The answer to all the above questions is a 'no'. Now, place the benefits that these three elements give us, on one plate of a balance, and on the other, place all the things our parents do for us.

The plate that holds what our parents do for us will tip downwards, showing the magnitude of what they do for us.

The Vedas say that a man's lifespan is 100 years. Even if we take 100 births, and live for 100 years in each birth, we cannot repay our parents for their affection.

The least we can do is to look after them when they are alive, and then do the prescribed rituals for them after they have departed from this world.

In fact, rituals such as *tarpana*, *shraadh* and *mahayajna paksha* are observed keeping in mind all our ancestors.

This is the only way we can show our gratitude to our ancestors.

AI has a big and growing carbon footprint, but algorithms can help

Training GPT-3, the precursor AI system to the current ChatGPT, generated 502 metric tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to driving 112 petrol cars for a year. GPT-3 further emits 8.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually due to inference. The requirements of large language models which are behind ChatGPT have gone up by a factor of 300,000

Shirin Dora

Given the huge problem-solving potential of artificial intelligence (AI), it wouldn't be far-fetched to think that AI could also help us in tackling the climate crisis. However, when we consider the energy needs of AI models, it becomes clear that the technology is as much a part of the climate problem as a solution.

The emissions come from the infrastructure associated with AI, such as building and running the data centres that handle the large amounts of information required to sustain these systems.

But different technological approaches to how we build AI systems could help reduce its carbon footprint. Two technologies in particular hold promise for doing this: spiking neural networks and lifelong learning.

The lifetime of an AI system can be split into two phases: training and inference. During training, a relevant dataset is used to build and tune - improve - the system. In inference, the trained system generates predictions on previously unseen data.

For example, training an AI that's to be used in self-driving cars would require a dataset of many different driving scenarios and decisions taken by human drivers.

After the training phase, the AI system will predict effective manoeuvres for a self-driving car. Artificial neural networks (ANN), are an underlying technology used in most current AI systems.

They have many different elements to them, called parameters, whose values are adjusted during the training phase of the AI system. These parameters can run to more than 100 billion in total.

While large numbers of parameters improve the capabilities of ANNs, they also make training and inference resource-intensive processes. To put things in perspective, training GPT-3 (the precursor AI system to the current ChatGPT) generated 502 metric tonnes of carbon, which is equivalent to driving 112 petrol powered cars for a year.

GPT-3 further emits 8.4 tonnes of CO₂ annually due to inference. Since the AI boom started in the early 2010s, the energy requirements of AI systems known as large language models - the type of technology that's behind ChatGPT - have gone up by a factor of 300,000.

With the increasing ubiquity and complexity of AI models, this trend is going to continue, potentially making AI a significant contributor of CO₂ emissions. In fact, our current estimates could be



AI systems make huge demands on energy resources. NAT/UNSPLASH

lower than AI's actual carbon footprint due to a lack of standard and accurate techniques for measuring AI-related emissions.

Spiking neural networks

The previously mentioned new technologies, spiking neural networks (SNNs) and lifelong learning (L2), have the potential to lower AI's ever-increasing carbon footprint, with SNNs acting as an energy-efficient alternative to ANNs.

ANNs work by processing and learning patterns from data, enabling them to make predictions. They work with decimal numbers. To make accurate calculations, especially when multiplying numbers with decimal points together, the computer needs to be very precise. It is because of these decimal numbers that ANNs require lots of computing power, memory and time.

This means ANNs become more energy-intensive as the networks get larger and more complex. Both ANNs and SNNs are inspired by the brain, which contains billions of neurons (nerve cells) connected to each other via synapses.

Like the brain, ANNs and SNNs also have components which researchers call neurons, although these are artificial, not biological ones. The key difference between the two types of neural networks is in the way individual neurons transmit information to each other.

Neurons in the human brain communicate with each other by transmitting intermittent electrical signals called spikes. The spikes themselves do not contain information. Instead, the information lies in the timing of these spikes. This binary, all-or-none characteristic of spikes (usually represented as 0 or 1) implies that



AI could also help us in tackling the climate crisis. However, when we consider energy needs it becomes clear that the technology is as much a part of the problem as a solution

neurons are active when they spike and inactive otherwise.

This is one of the reasons for energy efficient processing in the brain.

Just as Morse code uses specific sequences of dots and dashes to convey messages, SNNs use patterns or timings of spikes to process and transmit information. So, while the artificial neurons in ANNs are always active, SNNs consume energy only when a spike occurs.

Otherwise, they have closer to zero energy requirements. SNNs can be up to 280-times more energy efficient than ANNs.

My colleagues and I are developing learning algorithms for SNNs that may bring them even closer to the energy efficiency exhibited by the brain. The lower computational requirements also imply that SNNs might be able to make decisions more quickly.

These properties render SNNs useful for a broad range of applications, including space exploration, defence and self-driving cars because of the limited energy sources available in these scenarios.

Lifelong learning

L2 is another strategy for reducing the

overall energy requirements of ANNs over the course of their lifetime that we are also working on.

Training ANNs sequentially (where the systems learn from sequences of data) on new problems causes them to forget their previous knowledge while learning new tasks.

ANNs require retraining from scratch when their operating environment changes, further increasing AI-related emissions.

L2 is a collection of algorithms that enable AI models to be trained sequentially on multiple tasks with little or no forgetting.

L2 enables models to learn throughout their lifetime by building on their existing knowledge without having to retrain them from scratch.

The field of AI is growing fast and other potential advancements are emerging that can mitigate the energy demands of this technology. For instance, building smaller AI models that exhibit the same predictive capabilities as that of a larger model.

Advances in quantum computing - a different approach to building computers that harnesses phenomena from the world of quantum physics - would also enable faster training and inference using ANNs and SNNs.

The superior computing capabilities offered by quantum computing could allow us to find energy-efficient solutions for AI at a much larger scale.

The climate change challenge requires that we try to find solutions for rapidly advancing areas such as AI before their carbon footprint becomes too large. (Shirin Dora is lecturer, computer science, Loughborough University. This article is republished from The Conversation.)

THE GIST

An AI system's life can be split into two phases: training and inference. During training, a relevant dataset is used to build and tune the system. In inference, the trained system generates predictions on previously unseen data

Spiking neural networks (SNNs) and lifelong learning (L2) have the potential to lower AI's ever-increasing carbon footprint, with SNNs acting as an energy-efficient alternative to ANNs

Advances in quantum computing will also enable faster training and inference using ANNs and SNNs. This could allow us to find energy-efficient solutions for AI at a much larger scale

BIG SHOT



Toralf Mjoeen places an Arctic fox in a box for transport early this February. The fox will make a 500-km trip south, where it will be released into the wild in Oppland, Norway. As part of a state-sponsored programme to restore Arctic foxes, Norway has been feeding the population for nearly 20 years, and the programme has helped to boost the fox population from as few as 40 in Norway, Finland, and Sweden to around 550 across Scandinavia. REUTERS

QUESTION CORNER

Transparent yet impenetrable

Q: What constitutes bulletproof glass?

A: High-strength ceramics such as silicon nitride, dual hardness steel, and layers of heavy nylon fabric make up bulletproof glass. The hard ceramic stops the bullet abruptly, dissipating its energy as it destroys the first layers of the glass at the point of impact, and entangles it in a coarse mesh.

A textile bulletproof vest is fashioned of 16-24 layers of nylon cloth of heavy weave. The layers are stitched together like a quilt. Such vests, also known as full-torso protectors, can be worn undetected under regular clothing.

A vest of 16 layers will stop regular handgun and submachine-gun bullets, while those of 24 layers will stop the more powerful magnum bullets from the same weapons.



Bulletproof glass uses a variety of materials that make it difficult to breach. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

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



Deprivileging bribe

Voters should know that MPs do not act under monetary inducement

It was a judgment that has ranked for years. The artificial distinction that the Supreme Court of India made over 25 years ago between 'bribe-givers' and 'bribe-takers' in the infamous JMM bribery case left many aghast that those who paid crores of rupees to MPs for voting in favour of the P.V. Narasimha Rao government in a no-confidence motion were to be prosecuted for corruption, but those who took the money were immune from prosecution. The reason was that those who had voted for money enjoyed the constitutional privilege of not being subject to any legal consequence for "anything said or any vote given in Parliament". There was one exception among the alleged bribe-takers: Ajit Singh, who was accused of taking a payoff, was to be prosecuted because he was absent during the voting, and was thus stripped of the protection enjoyed by those who actually voted in terms of the bribery agreement. The Court has corrected this anomaly in the law related to parliamentary privileges by holding that there can be no immunity for a Member of Parliament or a State legislator against a bribery charge in connection with a vote or speech in the legislature. In overruling the majority verdict in *P.V. Narasimha Rao vs State (CBI/SPE)* (1998), a seven-member Constitution Bench has foregrounded probity as the main aspect of parliamentary functioning.

The Court has made it clear that parliamentary privilege, enshrined in Article 105 (for MPs) and Article 194 (for State Legislators) is aimed at protecting the freedom of speech and independence of the legislators in their functioning in the House and cannot extend to bribery, as it is not essential to the casting of the vote or in deciding how to cast it. A key rationale that weighed with the Constitution Bench in 1998 was that parliamentary privilege was essential to protecting members from persecution for anything said or any vote in the House. The majority feared that limiting this privilege might have serious consequences and felt that public indignation over the conduct of some MPs accepting a bribe should not lead to the court constraining the Constitution so narrowly that it removes the guarantee for effective parliamentary participation and debate. However, the seven-member Bench has concluded that the potential for such misuse is neither enhanced nor diminished by recognising the court's jurisdiction to prosecute a member for bribery. The Bench has also held that voting in a Rajya Sabha election, being part of a legislator's function, is protected under Article 194 of the Constitution as a privilege. It requires utmost protection for a member to vote freely and without fear of legal persecution. Overall, the verdict meets public expectation that the members they elect do not act under monetary inducement.

Law and disorder

The continued radicalisation of Manipuri state is a cause of concern

One of the cardinal principles of a functioning and open democracy is that only a state, led by a government that is elected by the people, has a legitimate right to use or to authorise the use of physical force. When civilian groups resort to violence against state actors without repercussions, one has to call into question the maintenance of law and order in the State of Manipur. In late February, cadres of the Meitei chauvinist group, the Aarambi Tengsol, allegedly abducted a police officer, assaulted him and vandalised his home. Police officers protested the attack, lamenting their inability to take action against the group. It is another matter that the group has managed to source its weapons from the looting of police stations in the valley following the ethnic conflagration last May. Many of the weapons are yet to be seized or returned despite the government's appeals. The police in the valley are heavily ethnised with barely any representation from the Kuki-Zo minority. Yet, the impunity with which the Aarambi Tengsol has acted against a police official, and even assaulted a leader of the opposition in the recent past besides administering oath to legislators from the valley to pledge for its majoritarian cause, suggest that such actions have either the nod of the leadership of the State government or have been deliberately ignored. The severe ethnisation in the valley and the hills has also granted a degree of popularity to groups such as the Aarambi Tengsol and counterparts in the hills, making law enforcement difficult to achieve.

It is now incumbent upon the Union government and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to take into account the severity of the ethnic polarisation and the dangers posed to law and order. Humanitarian concerns related to the displacement of people apart, the predominance of extra-legal forces in public life in the valley and the hills points to the delegitimation of the idea of the state alone having a monopoly over the use of physical force in establishing law and order. The rampant radicalisation provides an opportunity for the muzzled civic voices in Manipur, and in the valley in particular, to raise their concerns about the impunity enjoyed by such forces. Unless the Chief Minister, N. Biren Singh, cracks the whip on the Aarambi Tengsol, the radicalisation of Manipuri society will continue, making a return to a much-needed civic state of affairs all the more difficult. But with Mr. Singh acting less as a Chief Minister and more as a leader promoting majoritarianism, it is incumbent upon the BJP leadership to yet again rethink its strategy to let the status quo continue in the State.

Heady electoral rhetoric with a hegemonic ring to it

The run-up to the general election this year is a propitious moment to interrogate the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coalition's self-presentation of its rule to the electorate, in whose name it governs. As the ruling coalition seeks a third consecutive mandate at the Centre, one can trace a tangible shift in the coalition's campaign pitch to voters. At the surface, one finds a perceptible repositioning in the campaign's mainline narrative: economic progress and 'softer' cultural rejuvenation have morphed into welfare guarantees and blunter Hindu majoritarianism. At a deeper level, the defining characteristic of the sought mandate has turned away from promises of socio-economic transformation and moved closer towards a referendum on a hegemonic political order.

The latter shift can be gauged from the disproportionate political capital expended towards demonstrating the ineptitude or venality of the opposition parties. The government appears on less sure ground on its billboard 'Modi ki guarantee' theme: a motley of stated government achievements (identified in a personalistic manner with the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi) across social, economic and cultural fronts.

The rationale for the government's apparent hesitancy in clearly foregrounding a pro-incumbency campaign – similar to the NDA's 'India Shining' campaign in 2004 – is not particularly hard to fathom. While the term 'guarantee' signifies an expectation of certainty, the claims enclosed within the 'guarantees' appear to carry, on the whole, a much more limited popular credibility.

'Guarantees' versus survey
To illustrate the point, let us juxtapose the claimed guarantees being proffered in the Prime Minister's name, with the corresponding set of survey evidence (taken from last month's bi-annual *India Today* 'Mood of the Nation' (MOTN) survey).

The guarantee of 'A Promising Ecosystem for the Amrit Peedhi' portrays a rapid pace of job creation – "reducing the unemployment rate from 5.8% in 2018-19 to 3.2% in 2022-23". In contrast, the voter survey exhibits a marked dissatisfaction on job creation, with only about a third of respondents crediting success to the government on this front. The 'welfare guarantee' also appears to be on a shaky foundation as 62% express difficulty in managing daily expenses. What about the 'empowering *amudata* (farmers) guarantee' or the 'middle class emerges a winner' guarantees? The survey shows a plurality (45%) blaming government policies for widening the gap between rich and poor. What about the 'Indian Economy: A Story that Inspires' guarantee? A quarter believe their household income will improve in future, while



Asim Ali is a political researcher and columnist

three-quarters believe it will either remain stagnant or worsen. In fact, more respondents expect a reduction in future income (30%) than those who expect an improvement (25%).

The most damning indictment is expressed on the question probing which sections are seen to have benefited most from government policies – 52% say big businesses, compared to 9% for farmers, 8% for salaried classes and 6% for daily wage labourers.

Spite of a hegemonic strategy
In the basis of this awkward dissonance between incumbent claims and popular perceptions, the headline figure of the *India Today* survey depicts the NDA heading for a comfortable majority, skirting the scale of the 2019 mandate. The government itself projects the ringing figure of 400-plus. The inevitability and incontrovertibility of a third term is itself presented as the overarching guarantee of the campaign narrative.

This is what we mean when we say that the NDA seeks a mandate characteristic of an aspiring hegemonic tripod: the trust its actual incorporation of rival political elites through a mix of coercive measures and power-sharing incentives. The second is delegitimising the political opposition as corrupt or pernicious, focusing attention on their 'normless' self-seeking opportunism. The third is undermining the possibilities for emergence of a broad programmatic coalition, while inundating the media spaces, with depictions of the fragmented or helter-skelter of rival political formations.

The NDA's own political manoeuvres also betray the stubborn openness of the political contest. The portrayal of opposition alliances as woefully lacking in popular acceptability seems to be rebuffed by the regime's high-profile attempts at breaking away these very rival formations, including in the core heartland states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

In the book, *Neoliberal Hegemony and the Pink Tide in Latin America: Breaking Up with TINA*,

political scientist Tom Chodor examines the conditions undergirding hegemonic sustenance and breakdown. In the Latin America of the 1980s and 1990s, right-wing regimes took power by instituting neoliberal economic policies which were consistently blamed for increasing socio-economic inequality and even intensifying absolute poverty.

As Chodor explains, while their economic policies remained widely resented by the broad populace, these 'Cesarist' regimes survived by assembling a coalition of dominant social classes: industrial bourgeoisie, rural oligarchy and upper middle classes. A steady mix of coercion and incorporation of elite challengers, buffeted by an equal emphasis on the opposition's 'unfitness to govern', helped institute a 'common sense' understanding in Latin America that there was no alternative to their respective regimes of unconstrained neoliberalism.

The pink tide of social democratic forces taking power across the continent from the early 2000s (notably in Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela), according to Chodor, succeeded through a forging together of an evolving counter-hegemonic bloc. This convergence entailed fusing the old leftist 'working class consciousness' with newly politicised 'marginalized and excluded subjectivities': an 'anti-elite' coalition built on an enlarged political bloc including women, indigenous communities and growing sectors of informal labourers.

Chodor argued that this coalition strategy followed Gramsci's insistence that the construction of a radical collective will is 'an active and reciprocal' educative relationship, illuminating the intersecting dimensions of class, race, and gender exploitation.

A similar coalition of backward castes, labouring classes, and marginalised minorities and women was formulated more than half-a-century ago by Rammanohar Lohia. Interestingly, the choice of the newly incorporated parties in the NDA (the Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Lok Dal) suggests the BJP's discomfort at the possibility of an NDA coalition which can fuse together the constituencies of caste-based social justice and agrarian discontent within its ideological umbrella.

Notwithstanding the heady hegemonic rhetoric, the NDA remains acutely cognisant of its previous losses: from the 2015 defeat in Bihar to a social justice platform of a Karnataka alliance to the recent electoral losses in Gramatataka and Telangana.

The Hindutva coalition has indeed veiled away on quite a few occasions in the recent past, faced with a backlash emanating from the backward castes and rural sectors. The only guarantee inherent in the political process is of a fluid space where alternative imaginations and possibilities can be temporarily suppressed but never foreclosed.

As the National Democratic Alliance seeks a third consecutive mandate at the Centre, there is a tangible shift in the coalition's strident campaign pitch to the voter

Green jobs and the problem of gender disparity

The transition to low-carbon development has the potential to add about 35 million green jobs in India by 2047. The International Labour Organization defines green jobs as those that contribute to preservation or restoration of the environment". Many of these span across sectors, such as manufacturing, construction, renewable energy, energy efficiency and automobiles, which traditionally saw a lower representation of women.

Globally, men are likely to transition to green jobs faster than women. Even as India increased its renewable energy capacity by 250% between 2015 to 2021, women comprised merely 11% of workers in the solar rooftop sector. The Annual Survey of Industries 2019-20 shows that women workers are mostly concentrated in industries such as apparel, textile, leather, food, and tobacco. In contrast, a Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) 2019 report shows that men comprise 85% of the work force in sectors such as manufacturing, transport, construction, and infrastructure.

A study in 2023 by the Skill Council for Green Jobs indicated that 85% of the training for green jobs was imparted to men while over 90% of women believed that social norms limited their participation in training for green jobs. These restrictive social norms include factors such as the belief that women are unsuitable for certain technical roles, safety concerns, lower representation in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, and familial constraints.

As India embarks on a green transition, empowering women and advancing gender equity in climate actions will be one of the keys to unlock the co-benefits of a low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economy. Increasing women's representation in green jobs has several benefits.

In the short run, it can address the gender biases in the Indian labour market and improve women's labour force participation rates. In the

Ananya Chakraborty is with the World Resources Institute, India

Bhawana Ahuja is with the World Resources Institute, India

Aryudai Nambi Appadurai is with the World Resources Institute, India

long run, this can contribute to improving women's agency and their empowerment by creating economic, technical, and social opportunities.

Address the gaps in data
There is limited data to understand the landscape of women's work for green jobs in India. Mapping emerging areas for green growth and collecting sex-disaggregated data on green jobs could be the starting point to improve women's participation. There is need to build evidence on the present and future impact of low-carbon transitions on women workers and entrepreneurs while considering the hidden and invisible roles played by women across different sectors and geographies. This could be done by conducting gender analysis, collecting gender statistics on green jobs through periodic labour force surveys and mobilising additional resources to emphasise and encourage women's role in the green transition.

Globally, women are being left behind in the worldwide race to achieve climate targets and sustainability goals. This is particularly evident in the transition to a low-carbon economy, where new opportunities are created alongside job displacement and transformation. Recently in a critical stride towards justice and inclusivity in transition planning, COP 28's high-level dialogue launched 'Gender-Responsive Just Transitions and Climate Action Partnership' with a focus on improved data, targeted finance, and skill development.

Given the unequal landscape of women's work participation in green jobs, we need to ensure that women can access emerging opportunities from low-carbon transitions. There is a strong need to review the status quo, map the current roles of women, address structural barriers that hinder women's employment choices, and also create a conducive ecosystem to foster their participation in green jobs.

In India, despite 42.7% of the total number of STEM graduates being women, they represent

only 30.8% in engineering, manufacturing and construction programmes which are the key sectors for green transition. To bridge this gap early hands-on learning, mentorship, scholarships, financial assistance, and awareness generation are crucial to empower women in green jobs-related fields.

Supporting women entrepreneurs
Gender-focused financial policies and products catering to the requirements of women entrepreneurs can spur their ability to enter the green transition market. Collateral-free lending, financial literacy training and building supportive networks are crucial steps to unlock their potential. Suitable tools must be developed to assess creditworthiness, disburse loans, and reduce operational costs for women-owned businesses.

Finally, bringing in more women into leadership positions to incorporate gender-specific needs in low-carbon development strategies can promote women's integration in green jobs.

A gender-just transition demands a multi-pronged strategy that focuses on employment, social protection, reduces the burden of care work, and enables skill development. Partnerships across government, private sector and other stakeholders are necessary to leverage the benefits of innovation, technology and finance for women entrepreneurs and workers.

Businesses must recognise the centrality of gender justice and ensure equity throughout the process of green transition by mitigating barriers that exist due to stereotyping or gender bias and fostering equitable job opportunities for a just transition that benefits everyone. This is the time to build the capacity and support women in meeting the demands of the new world of work and co-design a future pathway that is socially equitable and inclusive for all.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Poll bonds, bank plea
That the nation's premier bank which prides itself on its digital initiatives is seeking more time to collate data on poll bonds, is shocking and surprising (inside page, March 5). It is amply evident that the

bank's nine-page application in the top court of the land is aimed at delaying the whole process beyond the general election, by which time any kind of disclosure will not affect the fortunes of the biggest game among the political parties.

J. Anantha Padmanabhan, Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

Name, name change
Long before women fought for equal rights, in Kerala, women and men used the surnames of their mothers'

families. My name has the initial 'A', for 'Allah'; the family name of my mother. Bravo Ms. Divya Modi Tongya (Editorial, March 5).

A. Balagangadharan, Pollachi, Tamil Nadu

In most of the southern

States, the practice of adding the father's name when a baby is born or admitted in school is not followed. The name has just the initials(s). Well-informed parents use a surname so that the name is uniform in government records. But the girl child is usually not given any surname. After marriage, some add the husband's name. Perhaps it is best to have the full name of the father in the child's name and just stick to it!

V. Lakshmanan, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

The dynamics of household consumption

The eagerly awaited fact sheet of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23 was released recently by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. The results of the survey are significant as the last results on household consumption expenditure were released in 2011-12.

What the survey does
The HCES offers a close look at how households across India incur expenditures on consumable items in a given period. It captures auxiliary information on household characteristics and demographic details. The information gleaned from the HCES is instrumental in constructing a weighing diagram for Consumer Price Indices, an index that tracks retail inflation. The weights obtained from the HCES represent the relative significance of goods and services, determined by their respective shares in the overall consumption patterns of households.

The HCES has played a pivotal role in India's growth story since its inception in 1950-51. Beyond merely detailing spending habits, this survey has been a crucial factor in estimating the head count ratio, which is the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line. Moreover, the HCES has been an invaluable resource for research in diverse fields, including economics and sociology, contributing to our understanding of the nation's socio-economic landscape.

The HCES was initially scheduled to be conducted in 2020-21 but this could not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey finally commenced in August 2022 and went on until July 2023, symbolising resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Another phase of HCES, ongoing in 2023-24, started after the completion of the first phase.



Subash Chandrabose
Malik

is an ISS officer, currently posted as Additional Director General, Field Operation Division, NSSO, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), malik.sc@nic.in



Harshvardhan Singh Garhwal

is an ISS officer, currently posted as Assistant Director at Regional Office-Jaipur, FOD, MoSPI, harshvardhan.singhgarhwal@gmail.com

The views are the authors' own

The Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23 is a testament to India's commitment to a resilient statistical system embracing both tradition and innovation

The two-phase approach not only underscores the perseverance displayed in navigating the challenges in the first phase but also emphasises the commitment to capturing a comprehensive and evolving snapshot of India's household consumption patterns.

A significant stride in HCES 2022-23 was the positive shift to the modern and efficient computer-assisted personal interview method from the traditional paper-aided personal interview method. Data this time were entered using tablets. This shift expedited data collection and processing, introducing a more streamlined scrutiny mechanism across divisions of the NSSO.

Engaging a significant sample size of 2,61,746 households, strategically selected through stratified random sampling design, the survey was designed to align with the consumption patterns of 'New India'. The questionnaire was enriched with contemporary items (such as paner, LED bulbs, headphones, and details on online purchases) and the removal of obsolete items. To ensure a more efficient and accurate data collection process, the survey employed a strategic approach. The questionnaire was divided into three parts, and households were surveyed in three separate monthly visits within a quarter. This not only expedited the canvassing process but also resulted in an improvement in response quality, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the consumption expenditure on all 407 items.

This holistic approach to data collection, combining both conventional and contemporary practices, highlights the commitment of the HCES to accurately capture the diverse consumption patterns of households. The robust sampling design, coupled with the incorporation of new items and innovative survey techniques, reflects a dedication to staying attuned to the dynamics of a rapidly changing official statistics

domain. The fact sheet provides key estimates within six months of the end of the survey, with low relative standard errors for monthly per capita expenditure at both national and State levels.

While embracing modernity, the survey also retained certain traditional practices. The age-old method of imputing the value of home-grown or produced stock, gifts, loans, and exchanges persisted. Additionally, the NSSO took a pioneering step by imputing the value of items received free of cost through various social welfare programmes for the first time.

Insights into changes, trends
The fact sheet provides intriguing and precise insights into India's economic landscape. The average per capita expenditure in rural India and 76,459 in urban India. Notably, when considering imputed values of free items, these figures increase to ₹3,860 and ₹6,521, respectively. The fact sheet covers various aspects, including the consumption share of item groups, average MPCI by household type, and figures at both the all-India level and across States and Union Territories.

It provides trends as well. Analysing the trend from 1999-2000 to 2022-23 reveals a significant transformation in MPCI composition in rural and urban areas. There is a noticeable decline in the percentage share of expenditure on food items (especially cereals), accompanied by an increase in the share of spending on fresh fruits and processed foods. There is a surge in non-food expenditures' share, particularly on durable goods, indicating an improved standard of living and a growing preference for lifestyle enhancements.

HCES, through the collective endeavor of the Indian Statistical Service officers, the subordinate Statistical Service officers and the entire staff, stands as a beacon of reliability, a valuable tool for shaping the trajectory of New India's economic policies.

The question of Rajya Sabha seats

The Congress has to tread cautiously with the IUML

STATE OF PLAY

Biju Govind
biju.govind@thehindu.co.in



The rival political coalitions in Kerala — the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) — have nearly hammered out the differences within their alliances to reach a consensus on seat allocation for the 20 Lok Sabha seats in the State.

Known for its adept handling of allies, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), which leads the LDF, has seen greater success in seat distribution compared to the Congress, which leads the UDF and which has encountered challenges due to its dominant partner, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), demanding an additional seat to contest the elections. Reportedly, both the main parties engaged in negotiations with the base constituents and offered them a Rajya Sabha seat in the near future. Kerala elects nine members to the Rajya Sabha for a six-year term.

The Rajya Sabha terms of CPI(M) member Elamaram Kareem, CPI State secretary Binoy Viswom, and Kerala Congress (Mani) chairman Jose K. Mani will end on July 1. These vacancies are likely to be a bone of contention within these coalitions soon after the Lok Sabha polls and could potentially trigger a realignment of forces in the complex political landscape of Kerala.

Currently, all these seats are held by the LDF. But the LDF will lose a seat to the UDF based on the strength of legislators from both fronts in the Assembly. The CPI(M), which has three more members in the Rajya Sabha, i.e., in addition to Mr. Kareem, will have

to persuade the CPI, which is contesting four Lok Sabha seats, to offer the second winnable Rajya Sabha seat to the KC(M).

With the KC(M) announcing its candidate, Thomas Chazhikadan, for the lone allocated seat in Kottayam, Mr. Mani at present holds no official position in the LDF. The KC(M) enjoys support in Central Travancore, while the CPI has built a presence in all the districts over the years, though its influence is waning now. After the KC(M) switched loyalties from the UDF to the LDF, the Left parties supported Mr. Mani for the continuation of his tenure in the Rajya Sabha.

Dilemma of the Congress
Meanwhile, the Congress party is coping with the dilemma of accommodating the IUMLS demand for a Rajya Sabha seat without having one of its own members elected to the Upper House. Incidentally, the Congress had to forgo the Rajya Sabha seat that it could have easily won in 2018, as the party handed it over to the KC(M) to facilitate its return to the UDF. In 2016, the KC(M) walked out of the UDF, ending a three decade-long association, saying the Congress had not supported K.M. Mani in the alleged bar bribery scam.

At that time, the Congress' Central leaders criticised its Kerala leaders for offering the Rajya Sabha seat to its junior partner. Six years later, the

prospect of the Rajya Sabha poll is again looming over the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The IUMLS demand for a third Lok Sabha seat or another Rajya Sabha seat resonates with the rank and file. The party seeks better representation for Muslims in elected bodies, commensurate with the community's population share (28%) in Kerala. The UDF already has two Rajya Sabha members — P.V. Abdul Wahab of the IUML and Jebi Mather Hisham of the Congress; both belong to the Muslim community.

Post-dilemma, when Malappuram district gained four seats and Kannur, Kozhikode, and Palakkad districts in Malabar each gained one seat, the IUML expanded its base. This contrasts with the southern districts, with Alappuzha and Pathanamthitta losing two seats each and Kollam and Kottayam losing one each. Interestingly, the LDF secured 39% of the Muslim votes in the 2021 Assembly polls, according to the Loknit-CSD post-poll survey.

Electoral-wise, the Congress needs the IUML, but IUML does not need the Congress, to win Lok Sabha seats in Malabar. The Congress high command is expected to make the final decision on the IUMLS demand for the Rajya Sabha seat. However, if it easily won in 2018, as the party handed it over to the KC(M) to facilitate its return to the UDF. Already facing accusations of appeasement, the Congress has to tread cautiously. It needs to balance electoral pragmatism and ideological integrity, while remaining mindful of the IUMLS option of aligning with the CPI (M), which has been aggressively wooing the party for some time.

Airlines damaged luggage of one in every two flyers: survey

While the number of lost and damaged luggage has increased over time, customer handling has become better

DATA POINT
The Hindu Data Team

In the last two years, every one in two flyers in India had experienced damaged baggage at least once, as per a survey by LocalCircles. In the same period, every two in five flyers in India had their baggage delayed or lost by an airline at least once. Moreover, one in four flyers whose baggage was lost/delayed/damaged by an airline said that when they reached out to complain, customer service and the responsiveness of the airline was poor or pathetic.

The survey, conducted through the LocalCircles platform in 2024, garnered responses from more than 41,000 airline passengers across 303 districts in India. Of them, 67% were male and 33% female. The geographical distribution of the participants included 41% from tier-1 areas, 30% from tier-2 areas, and 29% from tier-3, tier-4, and rural areas. To take part in the survey, participants were required to be verified citizens registered with LocalCircles.

Recently, after incessant complaints from passengers, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, which oversees regulations, issued instructions to seven leading Indian airlines to increase their staff. This directive aimed at optimising and improving the process of baggage handling at airports before the deadline of February 26. It warned that failure to comply may lead to more regulatory measures.

Chart 1 shows the times in the last two years (2022-2024) when travellers experienced delayed or lost baggage. Among respondents, 18% said that they had experienced this more than once, while 24% said that they had experienced it once. Together, 42% had experienced this at least once. Only 56% said that they had always got their baggage on time.

form in 2022, for the years 2020 to 2022. Chart 2 shows the comparison. In 2022, only 11% had said that they had experienced lost/delayed baggage more than once, while only 14% said that they had done so once; 75% of them always got it on time. So, the share of passengers whose luggage was lost or delayed by airlines has sharply increased. However, it is to be noted that the 2022 survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when airlines were not in operation for a while.

Chart 3 shows the times in the last two years (2022-2024) when travellers experienced damaged baggage. Among respondents, 26% said that they had experienced damaged baggage more than once, while 24% said that they had done so once. Together, 50% had experienced this at least once. Only 48% said that their luggage had never been damaged.

The same question was asked in a survey conducted by the platform in 2022. Chart 4 shows the comparison. In 2022, only 35% said that they had experienced damaged baggage at least once, while 65% said that their baggage had never been damaged. So, the share of passengers whose luggage was damaged by airlines has sharply increased.

Chart 5 shows the share of flyers among those whose baggage was delayed, lost or damaged who rated the responsiveness of the airlines as excellent, good, average, poor or pathetic in 2024. Only 10% rated it excellent; 27% rated it good, 31% average, 12% poor, and a similar share said it was pathetic.

The same question was asked in a survey conducted in 2022. Chart 6 shows the comparison. In 2022, 50% had rated the customer service as poor or pathetic. So, customer service has improved significantly in the last two years.

Handle with care

The data for the charts were sourced from a survey conducted by LocalCircles



Chart 1: The chart shows the times in the last two years (2022-2024) when travellers experienced delayed or lost baggage

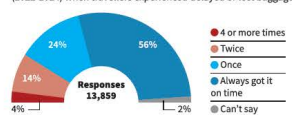


Chart 2: The chart plots the same data shown in chart 1 for 2022 & 2024

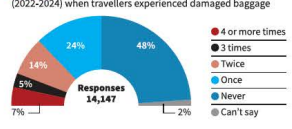


Chart 3: The chart shows the times in the last two years (2022-2024) when travellers experienced damaged baggage

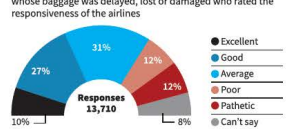


Chart 4: The chart plots the same data shown in chart 3 for 2022 & 2024

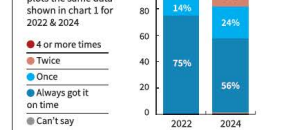


Chart 5: The chart shows the share of travellers among those whose baggage was delayed, lost or damaged who rated the responsiveness of the airlines

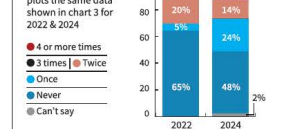
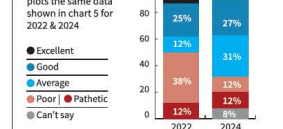


Chart 6: The chart plots the same data shown in chart 5 for 2022 & 2024



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1974

Wilson returns to power in UK

London, March 5: The Labour Party leader, Mr. Harold Wilson, returned to power as Britain's Prime Minister last night.

Mr. Wilson, 58, accepted Queen Elizabeth's commission to form a new Government soon after Mr. Heath turned in his resignation at Buckingham Palace.

With 301 of the 635 seats in the House of Commons, the new Labour Government will be a minority administration, the first since 1929.

Mr. Wilson's moment came when the 14 MPs of the Liberal Party — the party playing its biggest role in British politics for half a century — opted out of any action to keep Mr. Heath's Conservatives in power.

The Liberal MPs expressed themselves unanimously in favour of a national government made up of members of all the three main parties.

Mr. Heath's resignation came four days after the general election in which his Conservative Party lost its majority in Parliament and emerged five seats behind the Labour Party.

He publicly said last night that he would support the new Labour Government on every policy that he considered realistic and in the national interest.

Mr. Wilson named a cabinet of familiar faces with one surprise — left-winger Michael Foot in the key job of Employment Secretary, empowered to try and settle the coal miners' strike.

Otherwise key cabinet posts went to most of the same men who served in Mr. Wilson's last Labour Government defeated in 1970, although not always in the same posts.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 6, 1924

Jute boom in Scotland

London, March 4: Scottish jute cloth manufacturers have received orders beyond their brightest hopes. Contracts for many million yards of Hessian cloth have been booked, delivery being as far ahead as the end of this year. Prices have risen sharply. The explanation is that consumers are purchasing heavily in view of the great demand for floor cloth which will help the Government's housing schemes.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The decline in India's unemployment rate in 2023, as per the NSSO

3.1 in percentage. Unemployment rate for persons aged 15 years or above declined in 2023 and was the lowest in the last three years, as per a report of National Sample Survey Organisation. PH

India's coal output from April to February in FY24

880.7 in million tonne. India is now just 119.28 MT away from its one billion tonne coal production target for FY24. In 2022-23, India's total coal output was 893 MT. PH

Worth of order bagged by BHEL from NTPC for thermal project

9,500 in ₹ crore. Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL) said it was given the order from the NTPC to set up a 1,600 MW Singrauli thermal power project (Stage-II) in U.P. PH

Number of companies in the northeast to opt for the NPS

76 companies. There are over 17,000 registered companies in the northeastern region, of which only a few opted to enrol their employees under the National Pension System (NPS). PH

The decline in the borrowing cost of States in India

7.4 in percentage. Amid continuing lower supplies, the borrowing cost of States fell to a 32-week low, down by 4 bps from the previous week's auctions. PH
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Maharashtra's latest Maratha quota law

What have commissions said about the law? What is the legislative history of the Bill and will it pass judicial scrutiny, unlike its predecessors? What is the current reservation pool of the State? Why was the earlier Bill struck down by the Supreme Court?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

In February 20, the Maharashtra Assembly unanimously passed a Bill granting 10% reservation in education and government jobs to the Maratha community. However, activists have claimed that the new legislation is a "betrayal" of the community and instead seek a Maratha quota carved out from the existing reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) category.

What does the new Bill entail?

The Bill does not disturb the existing OBC quota and is distinct from the Maharashtra government's earlier notification on the issuance of Kumbi caste certificates to eligible Marathas for inclusion within the OBC category. Thus, non-Kumbi Marathas will continue to be covered under the new law, making the Maratha community eligible for reservations under two separate categories for the first time. However, those who fall within the "creamy layer" bracket will not be entitled to the benefit.

The law has been formulated based on a report by the Justice (retired) Sunil B Shukre-led Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission that claims to have surveyed 1,58,20,264 families across the State. It opined that "exceptional circumstances and extraordinary situations" justify granting reservation to the community beyond the Supreme Court-approved 50% limit. While concluding that the Marathas constitute 28% of the State's population, with 84% of them qualifying as not advanced, it pointed out that such a large backward class cannot be added to the existing reserved categories. The Commission also attributed extreme poverty, decline in agricultural income, and partitions in land holdings as reasons for the declining status of the Marathas.



Not over yet: People celebrate the passing of the Maratha reservation bill, in Mumbai on February 20, 2024.

Maharashtra already has 52% reservations, split into Scheduled Castes (13%), Scheduled Tribes (7%), OBC (19%), Vimukta Jati (3%), Nomadic Tribe B (2.5%), Nomadic Tribe C (3.5%), Nomadic Tribe D (2%), and Special Backward Classes (2%). The 10% Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) reservation is also applicable to the State — making the total reservation pool 72% with the inclusion of the new quota.

When was the demand first raised?

The first-ever bid for implementing a law to extend reservation to the Marathas was in 2014 when a non-statutory committee headed by veteran leader Narayan Rane submitted a report to the then Prithviraj Chavan-led Congress-NCP Democratic Front government, stipulating that the Marathas constitute 32% of the population in the State and needed economic

upliftment in the form of a special quota. Accordingly, the government passed an ordinance reserving 16% of government jobs and seats in educational institutions for Marathas and 5% for Muslims.

However, the Bombay High Court passed an interim order staying the ordinance, pointing out that findings of previous committees such as that of the National Commission for Backward Classes have shown that the Marathas cannot be regarded as a backward class. Referring to the apex court's landmark verdict in *Indira Sawhney versus Union of India* (1992), the Court underscored that the 50% cap for reservations cannot be breached except "in extraordinary situations and for extraordinary reasons."

What has the Supreme Court said?

Following its failed attempt, the government constituted an 11-member

statutory commission — the Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission headed by Justice (retired) N.G. Gaikwad to conduct a survey. In its report submitted on November 15, 2018, the Commission recommended granting Marathas 12% reservation in higher education and 13% reservation in public employment. Based on this, the government on November 30, 2018, implemented the Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act, 2018, which provided the Marathas 16% quota overall in education and government jobs.

However, in May 2021, a five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in *Jaisri Laxmanrao Patil versus Chief Minister, Maharashtra* struck it down and held that there were no "exceptional circumstances" that merit the government breaching the 50% ceiling limit to bestow quota benefits on the Maratha community. Declining to revisit its *Indira Sawhney* verdict, the Court said that the 50% cap is now constitutionally recognised. Dismissing the findings of the Gaikwad Commission, the Court observed that the Marathas are a "dominant forward class and are in the mainstream of national life."

Will it pass judicial muster?

According to Alok Prasanna Kumar, Co-Founder and Lead at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, the legislation is unlikely to pass judicial scrutiny. "The Court refused to recognise the Marathas as a socially and educationally backward class. The criteria for granting such a reservation should be based on data which shows that the community suffers from social backwardness. For instance, were they denied access to education and social facilities?" he highlights.

"To breach the SC-ordained 50% reservation cap, exceptional circumstances need to be shown, which is absent in this case. Marathas are politically dominant, and have land holdings — by no metric can they be said to be socially and educationally oppressed," Mr. Kumar adds.

THE GIST

On February 20, the Maharashtra Assembly unanimously passed a Bill granting 10% reservation in education and government jobs to the Maratha community.

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Why did Google delist some Indian apps from Play Store?

What is the platform fee issue that has brought Indian tech firms and the tech giant at crossroads?

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

In March 1, Google announced that it was pulling the apps of almost a dozen firms out of its marketplace for Android apps. While the announcement seemed sudden, it was preceded by years of wrangling between the search giant and Indian companies, with proceedings in the Madras High Court and the Supreme Court. After the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology intervened, the apps were restored on Monday, but the issue remains unresolved.

What is the problem?

At the heart of the issue is Google's platform fees. For all in-app purchases that involve a purely digital service — such as an ebook purchase or an OTT streaming subscription — Google collects a fee of anywhere between 11 to 30% per transaction. This fee, Google argues, helps the company pay for Google Play

and develop the Android ecosystem. The exact fee paid by each developer varies. If a developer is using Google's own billing product, and is offering a recurring subscription service, or if they make less than \$1 million a year in revenue from in-app payments, the company charges 15%. For app purchases for bigger firms, the amount is 30%. In India and South Korea, where regulatory scrutiny on these fees has been among the most intense, Google collects 18% or 26% in fees if developers choose to use a different payment method. However, Indian developers — like many global counterparts — see these fees as a high price to pay. Some, including Bharat Matrimony and Disney's Hotstar, approached the courts at different stages to avoid paying the fee altogether.

"While Google should definitely be able to charge a fee for creating and maintaining the app store ecosystem, the main contention is the size of the fee," Rohit Kumar, founder of the public policy firm The Quantum Hub explained.

What about other marketplaces?

Apple has not faced similar pushback in India, as relatively fewer Indians use its products. Android, however, dominates the smartphone market, and Google Play is widely seen as the best bet for developers who want to be discovered by consumers. However, both Apple and Google have faced serious international resistance to these fees, and both firms have pushed back strongly against developers' resistance. The music streaming firm Spotify filed a complaint with the European Commission, after Apple stopped Spotify from telling its users how to pay for its service using a browser to avoid the App Store's fees. Additionally, Spotify said this was anti-competitive because Apple Music was not subjected to the 30% barrier that was erected for Spotify. Following the complaint, Apple was hit with a €1.84 billion fine by the European Commission, which ruled that it had fined the company over unfair trading conditions. Similarly, in the U.S., Epic Games, the developer of

the popular Fortnite franchise, sued Apple as well as Google over the 30% fee.

Unlike Apple, Google allows third party app stores around the world, something that gives app developers a little more leeway in avoiding these fees. But Google Play comes installed by default on most Android phones.

How have regulators responded?

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) had in 2022 fined Google ₹36.44 crore for its Play Store policies. The company is in the process of appealing that fine, as well as orders by the CCI that it give developers comprehensive choices for in-app payments. An appeal by Google against this fine is pending at the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal. Meanwhile, the Indian apps that went to the Court are back on the platform for now. In-app payments are not yet a major part of the digital economy in India, as purely digital services for which Indians consumers have been willing to pay have been limited to content streaming, dating and matrimonial services — the very segment that is largely up in arms against Google's fees. "What we really need is regulation to increase competition in the app store market," Mr. Kumar said. "This should involve removing barriers to the adoption of other app stores (by placing restrictions on arrangements that Google makes with phone manufacturers to set defaults and give primacy to its own apps) and allowing sideloading (for apps to be downloaded via websites)."

THE GIST

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ABSTRACT

Have India's health centres really 'collapsed'?

In this paper, the authors counter and complicate the prevailing narrative of 'collapse'. They present a portrait of the healthcare centres in five north Indian States, documenting their strengths and struggles alike

Saumya Kalia

Jean Drèze, Reetika Khera, Rishabh Malhotra, 'The Changing State of Health Centres in North India', Economic & Political Weekly (2024)

There is a well-documented infamy around public health centres. Some have likened it to a Chasm, others to a systemic rot representing the "greatest failure of the Indian state". There is proven dilapidation and disrepute – there are no doctors, no diagnostics, no drugs. There are no buildings either sometimes, and people walk for miles to get substandard treatment. These centres, as reflections of the vast network of public healthcare, stoke the fear that India's health system has either collapsed or is disintegrating rapidly.

In this paper, the authors counter and complicate the prevailing narrative of 'collapse'. They present a portrait of the healthcare centres in five north Indian States, documenting their strengths and struggles alike. Their survey shows a pattern of "improving quality and utilisation [of services] over time", but the nature of progress is "largely cosmetic", and "the pace of improvement" remains far from adequate. Still, there is scope and strength in redeeming health centres' potential, they say. Against all odds, health centres "are mostly functional" and show "a demonstrated capacity to improve".

Why do health centres matter?

Health centres are the lowest rung of India's public health system, charged with offering accessible and affordable primary care. Almost two lakh in number, they are conceptualised as a three-tier system: sub-centres (later renamed as health and wellness centres), public health centres (PHCs) and community health centres (CHCs). 94% of these centres are located in rural areas, but reports show that less than 20% of them function effectively, pushing disadvantaged communities to rely on expensive, exploitative private health care. "Torn between the two, many patients end up risking their health or their wealth, if not both". Last year's Economic Survey showed that in the absence of proper insurance and affordable services, almost half of all health spending in India is still paid by patients themselves, pushing many households into poverty.

The answer to social and health inequity may lie in accelerating the expansion and improvement of health centres. Localised healthcare "is a much better way of dealing with most health problems than to let patients loose on larger public hospitals or the private sector".

'Unsurprising' improvements

The researchers studied the performance of 241 health centres – 26 CHCs, 65 PHCs and 150 sub-centres, spread across Bihar (23), Chhattisgarh (36), Himachal Pradesh (45), Jharkhand (37) and Rajasthan (100). They referred to data from two studies and one in three different decades, one in 2002 and one in 2013, conducted in Udaipur and parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, and Himachal Pradesh. Centres from the 2013



Still hope: People outside a flooded government health centre in Saran, Bihar in 2021. PTI

survey were revisited in 2022, with Chhattisgarh added to the mix.

Himachal Pradesh was always a "trailblazer" with functional centres serving 83% of its population, but States like Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan have introduced "valuable initiatives". "Health centres today have better facilities, dispense more medicines, serve more patients, and provide a wider range of services than they did 10 or 20 years ago", the researchers found. This perception of progress was shared by health workers too, who found that "the work environment and the work culture seem to improve hand in hand".

Two case studies stand out. Chhattisgarh was a pleasant surprise: by 2022, it illustrated a "radical expansion in public provision of healthcare". Local health workers reported running water, functional toilets, better facilities (for cold storage, vaccines, contraceptives, etc.), more medicines, a supportive role of ASHAs and open centres with staff

present most of the time. There also has been a surge in public healthcare utilisation. On the other hand, the "twin States" of Bihar and Jharkhand presented a contrasting narrative, with Bihar the apparent laggard. The quality of health centres was "dismal", some local sub-centres were dormant and others were non-existent.

On average, contrary to popular belief, there is "evidence of functionality" across PHCs: "The centres are generally open during working hours, patients are being treated, basic facilities (not more) are in place, and healthcare is more or less free except in Bihar".

What changed between 2002 and 2022? The share of health expenditure in the Union Budget increased drastically, coupled with the introduction of the National Rural Health Mission. India's flagship Ayushman Bharat programme, launched with the vision of achieving universal health coverage, in 2018 introduced a health insurance component

(PMJAY) and a public provision component through health and wellness centres (HWCs). State-specific schemes launched by Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh boosted their performance. The survey noted that COVID-19 contributed to a "sustained increase in patient utilisation", with people placing greater trust in public health facilities.

The flip side

Progress is rarely ever linear or logical. The study contextualises these signs of life as "modest improvements" only. The centres are still "grossly underutilised": there is high staff absenteeism, the number of patients per day is low, services are limited and "quite likely, of poor quality". Bihar's sub-centres "are still trapped in the old pattern where Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANMs) focus mainly on family planning targets and "motivating" people—mainly women—for sterilisation".

The health workers interviewed listed challenges that remain neglected: lack of staff; irregular flow of funds; lack of toilet facilities; no transport or residential facilities; and the growing burden of both online and on-field work. The study also documented social discrimination in health centres: some upper-caste doctors had "disparaging attitudes towards marginalised communities", and upper-caste families routinely disrespected Dalit ANMs. Care isn't offered in a vacuum devoid of social realities; identity markers like caste, class, gender, and religion have historically shaped Indians' access to health services.

Researchers also made a rare mention of the critical role women play in rural health settings. The study found female nurses and staff members run district hospitals and did "the bulk of the effort", while men in senior positions tended "to take advantage of their seniority". ANMs and ASHAs worked in grim environments with centres lacking running water and toilets. Still, they "tend to perform much better than the system in which they work". The researchers echoed demands made by frontline health workers: to enhance investment in this "veritable army of salaried health workers" so that women can reap the recognition or rewards of their work.

The pursuit of development

Investment in healthcare increased, but the "improvements are patchy" and allocations prioritise material development in tertiary healthcare. Take the composition of the healthcare budget: the allocation in 2021-23 (1.3%) was almost the same as a decade ago in 2013-14 (1.7%). The National Health Mission share shrank from 69% to 44%. In comparison, the government spent 10 times as much money on PMJAY and new regional AIIMS hospitals than on public welfare arms like the HWCs. The researchers poked holes in the claim that lakhs of HWCs were "created" – these were "minor upgrades" of existing centres. The HWCs "have a relatively attractive look" but were only "marginally better" than sub-centres, with improvements only "cosmetic" in nature.

The study sketches India's health centres as sites of hope, debunking cynicism surrounding its failures and dissects claims of progress. These struggles "cannot be regarded as successful, but nor is it hopeless", because "hope lies in the experiences of States that have shown how decent standards of healthcare can be achieved in the public sector". The researchers conclude by noting that "beyond the current tokenism of Ayushman Bharat", "major support from the poorer states to emulate these initiatives".



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Mr. A. Shankar, Kallai Road, Kozhikode, wants to know the contexts in which the following words are used: (a) excuse (b) forgive (c) pardon."

"Please excuse me for losing my temper. The sentence means that the person concerned is sorry for losing his temper and wants to apologise for it.

He always has a ready excuse for not doing his homework.

Here 'excuse' means 'some reason, whether true or untrue, given when asking to be forgiven for absence, bad behaviour, etc.' 'Excuse' also means 'reason, justification'.

She always has an excuse for entertaining people. It is either her birthday or her husband's salary day or her mother's recovery from a bad cold! Please make my excuses to her for not attending her party.

Here 'to make one's excuses' means 'to explain why someone is not doing something or for absence.' 'By way of excuse' or 'in excuse' is used when you want to justify your action.

I am sorry I did not attend the meeting. I can only say by way of excuse that I was unwell on that day.

'To excuse oneself for something' means 'to set someone free from a duty, requirement, punishment, etc.' In this sense, it is used in the passive.

He was excused from attending classes.

She may be excused from IT classes. 'Excuse me' is used 'as an apology when one interrupts, disagrees, disapproves or has to behave impolitely.'

Excuse me, can you tell me the way to the station?

'Excuse me,' he said, 'as he pushed his way through the crowd.'

Excuse my interruption.

He stepped on my foot and said, 'Excuse me.'

When you did not hear what someone had said and would like him to repeat it, you say, 'Excuse me?' This is used more in American English than in British English. In British English, in such contexts, you say 'Pardon?' or 'I beg your pardon.' You also say 'Sorry?' These are polite ways of asking another person to repeat what he had said. 'Pardon' also means 'an action of a court or ruler forgiving a person for an illegal act and giving freedom from punishment.' 'Pardon' in this sense is a formal word. 'Forgive' also means 'to pardon.' When you forgive someone, you do not want to punish him; also you have no resentment against him. In 'forgive' there is an element of compassion. 'Pardon,' 'excuse' and 'forgive' are also used to convey one's apologies for causing some inconvenience to another.

I beg your pardon.

Excuse my interruption.

Forgive my interruption.

"Ms. Meera Chatterjee, Calcutta, wants to know the meaning of 'She danced like crazy'."

"Like crazy", "like mad" are idioms which mean "to an extreme degree", "very intensely". "She danced like crazy" means that she danced with great enthusiasm.

She talks like crazy.

She spoke like mad.

These are used in informal contexts.

'She laughed like crazy' means she laughed and laughed and laughed as if she were mad!"

Published in *The Hindu* on April 30, 1991.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez was born on this day in 1927. Here is a quiz on one of the most significant authors of the 20th century

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

Let's start with a simple one: in which year did Márquez win the Nobel Prize in Literature?

QUESTION 2

Upon García Márquez's death in April 2014, Juan Manuel Santos, then president of Colombia, called him something. What is it?

QUESTION 3

This is a fictional town from one of his most celebrated novels of all time, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The town is often supposed to draw from Márquez's

childhood town, Aracataca. Name the town.

QUESTION 4

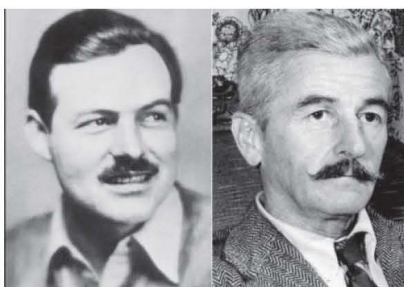
What was the name of the Colombian newscast that aired between 1992 and 1997? Márquez was one of the founders of this newscast.

QUESTION 5

This 1975 novel by Márquez is termed a 'dictator novel', having been based on a variety of real-life leaders. Name the novel.

QUESTION 6

What is the title of the speech given by Márquez upon being awarded the Nobel Prize? This theme also runs through much of Márquez's works.



Visual question: Name these two authors. How were they related to Márquez?

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

1. The reason Antonio Vivaldi was nicknamed 'Red Priest'. Ans: He had red hair and was trained as a priest.

2. The reason Vivaldi did not function as a priest was because of this ailment. Ans: Asthma

3. The composer spent 37 years of his life at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà asylum which housed these inmates. Ans: Orphaned girls

4. The most recognised of his compositions was this group of four concerti written for this instrument. Ans: 'The Four Seasons' ('Le quattro stagioni') for the violin

5. Vivaldi's compositions are identified by these two letters. Ans: RV (Ryom-Verzeichnis), a number created by Danish musicologist Peter Ryom

Visual: Name this famous composer. Ans: Johann Sebastian Bach
Early Birds: Prashant Nain| Md Sarfaraj Nawab| K.N. Viswanath| Arin Khatun| Lavanya Ranveer

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

Word of the day

Emote: give expression or emotion to, in a stage or movie role

Synonyms: play, represent, act

Usage: The ease with which he was able to emote this character deserves applause.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/emotepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /i:maʊt/

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

PARIS

Iran executed at least 834 people last year, the highest since 2015



Iran executed at least 834 people last year, the highest number since 2015, as capital punishment in the Islamic republic surged to a "staggering" level. The number of executions was up some 43% on 2022 Norway-based Iran Human Rights (IHR) and Paris-based Together Against the Death Penalty (ECPM) said on Tuesday. AFP

KYIV

Ukraine says it destroyed another Russian warship in the Black Sea



Ukraine said on Tuesday its forces had destroyed a Russian military patrol ship in the Black Sea near annexed Crimea, the latest naval attack on Moscow's fleet in the key waterway. Kyiv also said it was behind a drone strike on an oil depot in a Russian border region. Ukraine said it destroyed the Patrol ship Sergei Kotov. AFP

NEW YORK

Hamass committed rapes during its October 7 attacks on Israel: UN



There are "reasonable grounds to believe" rapes were committed during Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel and that hostages subsequently taken to Gaza have also been raped, a UN report said. UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, said she had "convincing information" on the matter. AFP

FAIZABAD

Blast shakes Taliban security base in northeastern Afghanistan



A blast shook a Taliban military base next to the airport in Faizabad, the capital of Afghanistan's northeastern Badkhash province, a government official said on Tuesday. The Taliban official confirmed on condition of anonymity that an explosion had occurred at the base but would not provide further details. AFP

China defence budget up by 7.2%, targets 5% GDP growth

Associated Press BEIJING

China on Tuesday announced a 7.2% increase in its defence budget, which is already the world's second-highest behind the United States at 1.6 trillion yuan (\$222 billion), roughly mirroring last year's rise.

The official budget figure announced on Tuesday at the opening of the legislature's annual meeting is considered only a fraction of spending by the People's Liberation Army, the military wing of the ruling Communist Party, once spending on research and development and foreign weapons purchases are considered.

Premier Li Qiang, in his address to the assembly of nearly 3,000 participants, put China's GDP growth target at 5% this year, while acknowledging it would be difficult to achieve.

China's economy is dealing with high youth unemployment and a cratering real estate market.

Philippine and Chinese vessels collide in disputed South China Sea

Four Filipino crew members were injured and Manila's vessel suffered minor structural damage in separate incidents; U.S., Australia and Japan condemn Beijing's actions which transpired ahead of an ASEAN summit taking place in Melbourne

Associated Press MANILA

Chinese and Philippine coast guard vessels collided in the disputed South China Sea and four Filipino crew members were injured on Tuesday in high-seas confrontations as Southeast Asian leaders gathered for an Asian summit where alarm over Beijing's aggression at sea was expected to be raised.

The Chinese Coast Guard ships and accompanying vessels blocked the Philippine Coast Guard and supply vessels off the disputed Second Thomas Shoal and executed dangerous manoeuvres that caused two minor collisions between the Chinese ships and two of the Philippine vessels, Philippine officials said.

The BRP Sindangan of the Philippine Coast Guard had minor structural damage from the collision that happened shortly after dawn.



Bone of contention: Chinese vessels deploy water cannons at a civilian boat operated by Philippine military in South China Sea. AFP

Over an hour later, another Chinese coast guard ship first blocked and then collided with a supply boat the Philippine coast guard was escorting, the Philippine officials said.

The supply boat, manned by Filipino Navy personnel, was later hit by water cannon blasts from two Chinese coast guard ships. Its windshield shattered, injuring at least four Filipino crew members, according to a statement from the Philippine government task force dealing with territorial disputes.

The task force said the actions by the Chinese was "another attempt to illegally impede or obstruct a routine resupply and rotation mission."

"China's latest unprovoked acts of coercion and 'maneuvers' against Philippine ships en route to deliver supplies and fresh troops to the Philippine-occupied shoal 'put the lives of our people at risk and caused actual injury to Filipinos,' it said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila summoned China's Deputy Ambassador to convey a protest against the Chinese coast guard's actions, which it said were unacceptable.

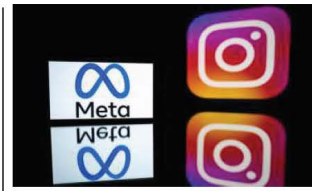
A small Philippine marine and Navy contingent has kept watch onboard a rusting warship, the BRP Sierra Madre, which has been marooned since the late 1990s in the shallows of the Second Thomas Shoal.

China also claims the shoal lying off the western Philippines and has surrounded the atoll with coast guard, Navy and other ships to press its claims and prevent Filipino forces from delivering construction materials to fortify the Sierra Madre in a decades-long standoff.

The shoal has been the site of several tense skirmishes between Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships last year.

Washington strongly condemned the Chinese coast guard's actions and its Ambassador in Manila, MaryKay Carlson, said the U.S. stands with the Philippines and proponents of international law. Australia and Japan separately expressed their concern over China's actions.

The long-smoldering territorial disputes in the South China Sea are expected to be discussed at a summit of leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and their Australian counterpart on Wednesday in Melbourne.



At its peak, close to 5,00,000 Facebook accounts and 70,000 Instagram accounts were reported as down. AFP

Meta suffers global outage of Facebook, Instagram, Threads

Agence France-Presse WASHINGTON

Meta suffered a highly unusual outage of all its social media platforms on Tuesday with users of Facebook, Instagram and Threads locked out of their accounts.

At about 12:00 U.S. east coast time (23:30 IST), the sites seemed to be returning to normal, about two hours after the outage reports first emerged.

some of our services," Meta spokesman Andy Stone said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

"Quickly resolved" "We resolved the issue as quickly as possible for everyone who was impacted, and we apologize for any inconvenience," he added. According to the DownDetector website, reports that Facebook was down peaked at around 5,00,000 at 21:00 IST. Instagram peaked at about 70,000 reports at the same time.

'Trump policy would not differ from the past on China, India'

Former Trump administration official says there will be fierce U.S.-China competition, and the continued building up of strategic alliances and partnerships with countries including India

INTERVIEW

Lisa Curtis

Suhasini Haldar



As the U.S. elections increasingly look like a Trump vs Biden rematch from 2020, U.S. foreign policy will differ on certain issues like Russia and support to the UN depending on who wins, but there will be continuity on issues like China and the Indo-Pacific, says former Trump administration official Lisa Curtis. Speaking to The Hindu on the sidelines of a "Quad-Plus" conference in Manila, Ms. Curtis, who was earlier a Deputy Assistant to the U.S. President at the National Security Council (2017-21) and is now the Director of the Indo-Pacific Security Program at the Center for a New American Security, said the presence of Indian-Americans in the fray is a "coming of age" for the Indian diaspora community in the US.

Do you think 2024 is going to see a 2020 election redux with a Biden versus Trump rematch?

I think that the way it's looking, even though I think the American electo-

work, which President Trump signed in 2018. And it drove the rest of the administration's policy toward China and toward the Indo-Pacific. There will be fierce U.S.-China competition, and the continued building up of strategic alliances and partnerships with countries like Japan, Australia, India, the Philippines, etc.

How much would change? If you're talking about a country like India, for example, I think that we would not see major changes. There's been bipartisan support over the last 20 years, whether it's Republican or Democrat, favouring building up the relationship with India, building up India's capability so that it can play a stronger role in the Indo-Pacific and help with that balancing with China.

However on Ukraine, President Trump has made some statements, which are worrisome for Europeans - calling on NATO partners to "pay their bills or step up on their own defence" and that the U.S. would give an open door to Russia.

How much could change in terms of foreign policy to the surprise of tweeting for

example? Well, people don't really change their personalities overnight. So I think it probably would be a similar style, a little bit of unpredictability and some surprises here and there.

To be sure many times there was a method to the madness, and many decisions [Mr. Trump took] had in fact been thought through even if they were announced suddenly and appeared from the outside to be totally off the cuff.

The election already has an Indian-American flavour. Vice President Kamala Harris, Vivek Ramaswamy, Nikki Haley have all been prominent. Does their presence affect ties with India? I think what they signify is that it is not unusual to have an Indian-American to vie for the top slot or to be the second any more, it's become quite common. That's a sign that the Indian American community has really come of age in the U.S. When it comes to the bilateral relationship, there may be a tangible added comfort especially in people-to-people ties. But when it comes to the policies of the Republicans or the Democrats, I don't think it matters as much.

'All the President's men'



A policeman rests during a demonstration demanding the impeachment of Indonesia's President Joko Widodo, the rejection of the general election results and the removal of members of the General Election Commission in Jakarta on Tuesday. AFP

Imran Khan's party to hold protests across Pakistan against 'poll rigging'

Press Trust of India ISLAMABAD

Jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on March 5 announced that it will launch nationwide protests on March 10 against the "stealing" of the mandate, nearly a month after an inconclusive general election marred by allegations of vote rigging.

"We will unite all political forces and will launch a movement within the law

and Constitution," senior PTI leader Asad Qaiser said while speaking to the media here.

He said that they are planning to take to the streets in all provinces so their demands are met. "Our movement will continue and will bring to-

gether all political forces," he said, adding that they will ally with like-minded parties.

The February 8 general election, marred by allegations of widespread rigging, in Pakistan, resulted in a hung parliament with independent candidates backed by Imran Khan's party winning more than 90 seats at the 266-member National Assembly. Former premier Nawaz Sharif's PML-N bagged 75 seats and former Federal Minister Bilawal Bhutto's

PPP got 54 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) won 17 seats.

Mr. Qaiser said that they would protest peacefully as they did not believe in the Shehbaz Sharif-led "fake government". "You have no respect for our mandate and the 30 million votes we got," he said, adding that "180 seats" have been stolen from the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC), the party joined by PTI-backed lawmakers.



A 2023 report by the WEF noted the proportion of women hired into leadership roles was 37% in 2022. GETTY IMAGES

Gender inequality persists in top jobs, researches show

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

More women are taking top management jobs but inequality persists, with men still dominating business leadership roles, research showed ahead of International Women's Day on March 8.

Despite some high-profile exceptions and laws helping to boost quotas for women board members and executives, it remains a slow march to the top. A survey published last week by Equileap, which researches data on diversity, found only 7% of CEOs and 17% of finance directors in big companies in developed countries were women. "The battle for gender equality remains ongoing," said Equileap's CEO Diana van Maasdiik.

A 2023 report by the World Economic Forum noted that "women's share of senior and leadership roles has seen a steady global increase over the past five years, with the proportion of women hired into leadership roles rising from just over 33% in 2016 to nearly 37% in 2022."

But the overall figures for women's representation at companies show they are still in a minority at the top level. "Work structures have been built up over the last 200 years to accommodate men's needs," said Tara Cemlyn-Jones, the CEO of 25x25, a non-profit organisation that aims to improve the gender balance in executive leadership roles.

"The only way that you can get around that is being consciously aware that you have to make sure the structures are equally fair to women," she said.

Deloitte survey of 10,500 companies in 51 countries with data from 2021 found that while about one in five board members were women, just one in 20 chief executives were.

Russia hacks unsecured German line discussing Ukraine arms aid

The fallout from the leaked audio tape, which features four high-ranking German officers hypothetically discussing how Taurus long-range missiles could be used by Kyiv against Russian forces, has increased tensions between the two countries

Associated Press
BERLIN

A German military officer used an unsecured phone line at a Singapore hotel to join a conference call that was hacked by Russians and leaked to the public, Germany's Defence Minister said on Tuesday.

The fallout from the leaked audio tape, which features four high-ranking German air force officers discussing hypothetically how Taurus long-range cruise missiles could be used by Kyiv against invading Russian forces, has embarrassed the German government and further increased tensions between the two countries.

"Not all participants adhered to the secure dialing procedure as intended," German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said as he briefed presspersons in Berlin on the initial results of an ongoing investigation.

The Minister said that the officer in question, whose name was withheld, had participated in the Singapore Air Show, which was attended by high-ranking military officers from across Europe, and then dialed into the WebEx call using either his mobile phone or the hotel's Wi-Fi but not a secured line as is considered mandatory for such calls. "For the Russian secret services, this was a real find. ... Targeted



Support call: A demonstrator holds a placard calling on the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz to supply Ukraine with Taurus air-to-surface cruise missiles, during a rally in Berlin on February 24. AFP

hacking took place in the hotels used across the board," Mr. Pistorius said. "It must therefore be assumed that the access to this (phone) conference was a chance hit as part of a broad, scattered approach."

"No severe action" Mr. Pistorius said the investigation was ongoing, overall security had been increased and preliminary disciplinary proceedings were being considered, but that several personal consequences were unlikely.

"I will not sacrifice any of my best officers to Putin's games, to put it very clearly," he said, referring to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The 38-minute audio leak was posted by Margarita Simonyan, chief editor of the Russian state-funded television channel RT, on social media on Friday, the same day that Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was laid to rest after his still-unexplained death two weeks ago in an Arctic penal colony. The recording also surfaced just weeks before Russia's presidential election.

While German authorities have not questioned the authenticity of the recording, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said last week that delivering those weapons to Ukraine was not an option — and that he does not want Germany to be drawn into the war directly.

However, Russia's Foreign Ministry on Monday threatened Germany with "dire consequences" in connection with the leak. It did not elaborate.

Relations between the two countries have steadily eroded since Russia invaded Ukraine two years ago.

In the leaked audio, four officers, including the head of Germany's air force, Ingo Gerhartz, can be heard discussing deployment scenarios for Taurus missiles in Ukraine before a meeting with Mr. Pistorius.

The officers said that early delivery and rapid deployment of Taurus missiles would only be possible with the participation of German soldiers. The officers said training Ukrai-

nian soldiers to deploy the Taurus on their own would be possible, but it would take months.

"More important tasks" The recording also shows the German government has not given its OK for the delivery of the cruise missiles sought by Ukraine. Mr. Pistorius said on Tuesday that while the damage caused by the leak was severe, "the mistake is still being worked through and we must now turn our attention back to more important tasks," such as how Germany and its allies can continue to help Ukraine fight Russia.

There had been a months-long debate in Germany about whether to supply the Taurus missiles to Ukraine as Kyiv faces battlefield setbacks until Mr. Scholz said last week that Germany would not deliver the missiles. With military aid from the United States held up in Congress, Germany is now the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the U.S., and it is further stepping up its support this year.

Mr. Pistorius pointed out that while the damage done by the actual content of the leaked audio was "manageable," Russia's real success was that with the leak it set the agenda for what is being discussed in Germany, and "that's exactly what Putin wants to achieve."

EU officials propose to boost bloc's defence

Associated Press
BRUSSELS

Top European Union officials on Tuesday outlined ambitious plans to boost its defence industry at an unprecedented pace as the bloc seeks to respond to the threat posed by Russia's war on Ukraine and a trans-Atlantic partner that could be wavering on its commitments to Europe.

For decades, EU nations have slumbered under the protective nuclear cover of the United States through the NATO alliance while their defence spending and crisis preparedness withered.

A first warning under former U.S. President Donald Trump highlighted a lack of coordination and supplies that would be needed if European nations would ever have to defend themselves without Washington's help. The realisation that Mr. Trump might return to the White House and undermine support for Ukraine has also focused minds in Europe.

Now, with an increasingly assertive Moscow, the need to beef up defence is becoming ever clearer.

"After decades of under-spending, we must invest more on defence, but we need to do it better and together," said EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. "A strong, resilient, and competitive European defence industry is a strategic imperative."

EU heavyweights France and Germany have warned that the bloc must do more to protect itself.

Taiwan deputy FM visits Tuvalu to firm up ties

Agence France-Presse
TAIPEI

Taiwan's deputy Foreign Minister has embarked on a visit to diplomatic ally Tuvalu, officials said on Tuesday, after the Pacific island nation's new government affirmed its "special" relationship with Taipei.

Tien Chung-kwang left for the visit on Monday as a special envoy for President Tsai Ing-wen to congratulate and show support for Tuvalu's new government, said Foreign Ministry official Eric Chen.

Mr. Tien will attend celebrations for the new government and meet top officials including new Prime Minister Feleli Teo to discuss bilateral cooperation before returning on Saturday, added Mr. Chen.

The visit "demonstrates the solid ties between the two countries... as this year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Tuvalu," the Foreign Ministry said in a separate statement.

"In the future, Taiwan and Tuvalu will continue to work together... to promote sustainability, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region."

The visit comes after Tuvalu's new government vowed last week to keep up its "special" relationship with Taiwan, ending speculation that the Pacific island nation was poised to switch diplomatic recognition to Beijing.

Whimsical approach



Canned protest: A man wearing a mask made out of a plastic can takes part in a protest, organised by Extinction Rebellion against South African gov't's commitment to use fossil fuels, outside the venue for the Africa Energy Indaba conference in Cape Town on Tuesday. AFP

North Korea threatens military response to U.S.-South Korean armed drills

Associated Press
SEOUL

North Korea called the ongoing South Korean-U.S. military drills a plot to invade the country, as it threatened on Tuesday to take unspecified "responsible" military steps in response.

The North's warning came a day after the South Korean and U.S. forces kicked off their annual computer-simulated command post training and a variety of field exercises for an 11-day run. This year's drills were to involve 48 field exercises, twice the number conducted last year.

In a statement carried by state media, the North's

Defence Ministry said it "strongly denounces the reckless military drills of the U.S. and (South Korea) for getting more undisciplined in their military threat to a sovereign state and attempt for invading it."

"Responsible activities" An unidentified Ministry spokesperson said North Korea's military will "continue to watch the adventurist acts of the enemies and conduct responsible military activities to strongly control the unstable security environment on the Korean Peninsula."

The spokesperson did not say what measures North Korea would take, but observers say North



Peace rally: Protesters at a rally demanding to stop the joint military exercises between the U.S. and South Korea, in Seoul on Monday. AFP

Korea will likely carry out missile tests or other steps to bolster its war capability.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said later on Tuesday that its drills with the U.S. is a regular, defensive training. A ministry statement said South Korea will

make an overwhelming response if North Korea launches direct provocations against it during the drills. North Korea views its rivals' major military drills as invasion rehearsals, though South Korean and U.S. officials have repeatedly said they have no

Australia proposes to grow trade ties at ASEAN forum

Agence France-Presse
MELBOURNE

Australia unveiled plans to ramp up investment in Southeast Asia on Tuesday, setting aside \$1.3 billion to bolster trade in a region of rising economic might.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced the funding as leaders from the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) forum met in Melbourne for a three-day summit.

"The government I lead has made it clear. More than any other region, Southeast Asia is where Australia's future lies," Mr. Albanese told a business forum on the summit's sidelines.

Following a series of bruising disputes, Australia has increasingly looked



Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, left, with leaders and representatives of ASEAN members in Melbourne on Tuesday. AFP

to build economic ties outside of major trading partner China.

Fuelled by years of swift and sustained population growth, the ASEAN bloc is widely seen as an emerging economic powerhouse.

With vast deposits of critical minerals and a booming appetite for electricity, Southeast Asia is also poised to play a major

role in the global push for clean energy.

Australia's new funding package will provide export financing and loans geared largely toward infrastructure and renewable energy projects.

Mr. Albanese said it was "the most significant upgrade of Australia's economic engagement with ASEAN for a generation".

IN BRIEF



BYD India unveils luxury EV sedan SEAL at ₹41 lakh

Chinese auto major BYD India, a subsidiary of New Energy Vehicles (NEV), has entered the luxury, electric- sedan segment by introducing BYD SEAL with prices starting at ₹41 lakh. BYD said bookings were open for the vehicle which would be available in three variants. With a range of up to 650km per charge, BYD SEAL can accelerate to 100 km/h in 3.8 seconds. "We are confident BYD SEAL will play a significant role in accelerating the new energy vehicle revolution in India," said Sanjay Gopalakrishnan, Senior VP, Passenger Vehicle Business, BYD India.

Venture Center, BFI sign pact on biomedical innovation

Venture Center has tied up with Blockchain For Impact (BFI) under the BFI-Biome Virtual Network Program to expand initiatives aimed at nurturing innovation and driving advancements in healthcare. Venture Center is the first incubator across India to partner BFI for the initiative, the Pune-based firm said. Under this programme, BFI will allocate more than \$2 lakh over three years and leverage Venture Center's expertise for healthcare start-up programmes.

Ex-LIC chief Kumar joins Bol as Non-Executive Chairman

Bank of India (BoI) named M. R. Kumar as the Non-Executive Chairman. He will be responsible for overseeing the overall growth trajectory of the public sector lender. He was the Chairman of LIC India from 2019 to March 2023. The bank named Rajiv Mishra as Executive Director. He will handle stressed-asset resolution and recovery, including policy matters.



Lubrizol names Bindra as MD of IMEA region

Specialty chemicals major Lubrizol has named Bhavna Bindra as MD for India, Middle East & Africa (IMEA) Region. She will be responsible for leading the company's IMEA team to deliver regional growth for Lubrizol and its customers based on a local-for-local approach.

Singapore gives nod for Vistara-AI merger

The Competition and Consumer Commission of Singapore (CCCS) has granted conditional approval for Vistara's merger with Air India along with Singapore International Airline's 25.1% stake in the latter. The approval was granted following commitments from all three airlines that the merged entity would "maintain" capacity, or passenger seats, at pre-COVID-19 level (calendar year 2019) for flights between Singapore and Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Thiruvananthapuram.

This followed competition concerns identified by CCCS as the three entities hold majority of the mar-

Settled 1-cr. claims in 18 years: Star Health

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Star Health and Allied Insurance Co. Ltd. (Star Health Insurance), claimed to be the first standalone health insurer to settle more than 1 crore claims since its inception in 2006. Star Health Insurance disbursed more than ₹44,000 crore in claim payments, covering cashless and reimbursement claims across India. Most claims were from Maharashtra, followed by Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Delhi, the insurer said in a statement.

As of January 2024, Star Health Insurance held 33% market share in the retail health insurance business in India, the company said.



diseases were the prominent reasons for claims, amounting to 20% of the total. General medicine, gastroenterology, and orthopaedics also accounted for sizeable claims. As of January 2024, Star Health Insurance held 33% market share in the retail health insurance business in India, the company said.

Approval subject to merged entity maintaining capacity at pre-COVID level on four key routes

ket shares among various airlines offering direct flights on the four routes. "Price coordination" "CCCS also found that the price and capacity coordination between the parties arising from the confluence of the transactions would significantly restrict competition on the affected routes," it said in a statement on Tuesday.

The merger is now expected to conclude in 2025 first half, according to Vistara CEO Vinod Kandan-

Reuters
DUBAI

Dubai's Al Khaleej Sugar aims to lift output at its sugar refinery this year, with competition from India curtailed by bad weather in the South Asian country, its MD said on Tuesday. Jamal Al Ghurair said on the sidelines of the annual Dubai sugar conference that his refinery at Jebel Ali in Dubai was operating at 40% capacity last year with output of about 6,00,000 metric tons, but was aiming if possible to produce up to 1.5 million tons this year. The refinery's normal capacity is 1.5 million tons although it can produce more refined sugar if demand is strong. In 2017 it produced a record 1.87 million tons. Mr. Al Ghurair said India had stopped exporting because of bad weather and this had created more demand, at least temporarily. The International Sugar Organization last month forecast that Indian sugar output would fall to 3.17 million tons in 2023/24.

MRF cuts price of 'Steel Muscle' truck tyres by ₹350

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

MRF Ltd. reduced the price of its mainline truck tyres by ₹350 apiece beginning March 4. MRF said this was to meet market requirements of its most popular truck tyre - Steel Muscle, which is currently sold at ₹25,250 apiece. After the price reduction, it is expected to sell at ₹24,900 apiece, the leading tyre manufacturer said in a statement. MRF said Steel Muscle tyres are ideal for heavy duty use. They have even tread wear, better abrasion, lower heat build-up and cut resistance.



mand is strong. In 2017 it produced a record 1.87 million tons. Mr. Al Ghurair said India had stopped exporting because of bad weather and this had created more demand, at least temporarily. The International Sugar Organization last month forecast that Indian sugar output would fall to 3.17 million tons in 2023/24.

RBI bars JMFPL from loans on IPO shares

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has directed regulated entity JM Financial Products Ltd. (JMFPL) to cease and desist, with immediate effect, from doing any form of financing against shares and debentures, including sanction and disbursement of loans against Initial Public Offering (IPO) of shares or against subscription to debentures as the entity has been found violating regulatory guidelines. "It was observed that the company repeatedly



helped a group of its customers to bid for various IPO and NCD offerings by using loaned funds. The credit underwriting was found to be perfunctory, and financing was done against meagre margins," the RBI said.

Bloomberg to add Indian bonds to EM indexes in Jan.

Reuters
MUMBAI

Bloomberg Index Services said on Tuesday it would include in its Emerging Market Local Currency Index from Jan. 31 next year 34 Indian government bonds eligible for investment via the country's fully accessible route (FAR). "The inclusion of these bonds will be phased in over a 10-month period starting on the rebalance date of January 31, 2025," it said in a statement. "The weight of India FAR bonds will be increased in increments of 10% of their full market value every month over the 10-month period ending in October 2025."

I-T dept. sets April 30 for AY21-22's unprocessed returns

Shishir Sinha
NEW DELHI

In an order dated March 1, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) noted that due to certain technical issues, several returns for AY 22 could not be processed. Consequently, intimations regarding the production of such returns could not be sent within the time frame as mentioned under section 143(1) of the Income Tax Act. "This has led to a situation where taxpayers are unable to get their legitimate refund... although the delay is not attributable to them," the department said in the order. Therefore, the Income Tax (IT) department has revised its the timeline for completing the assessment and inform the assesses by April 30. This will not cover cases under scrutiny.

Providing relief The order further said against relaxed norms will not be applicable. (The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

ments of 10% of their full market value every month over the 10-month period ending in October 2025." Discussions from 2013 The Indian government began discussing inclusion of its securities in global indexes as far back as 2013, but the move was held back by its curbs on foreign investments in domestic debt. In April 2020, the Reserve Bank of India introduced a clutch of securities free of foreign investment curbs under a "fully accessible route" (FAR), that made them eligible for inclusion in global indexes. JPMorgan was the first to announce India's inclusion in its widely tracked emerging market debt index in September, setting the stage for billions of dollars of inflows into India. Tuesday's inclusion by Bloomberg Index Services Ltd. was based on feedback invited in January on its plan to include eligible Indian bonds in the EM local currency indexes. By January 31, 34 Indian FAR bonds with a market value of \$448 billion were eligible for EM Local Currency Government Index.



Deleveraging fast: The net debt to EBITDA ratio is expected to be 2x at the end of March, down from the 3.3x last March. REUTERS

Adani Group's net debt has ballooned to \$26 billion in FY24

Janaki Krishnan
MUMBAI

The Adani Group's net debt has ballooned in FY24 and is expected to end the year at \$26 billion, up about a fourth from last year, even as the Group anticipates ending the year with an EBITDA in excess of \$9.5 billion, driven by its core infrastructure businesses. At the end of FY23, the Group's debt was around \$21 billion, after the frantic deleveraging in the wake of the Hindenburg Research allegations in early 2023.

Positive signals Despite the increase in debt, the net debt to EBITDA ratio is seen in the region of 2x at the end of March, down from the 3.3x last March and 3.8x prior to Hindenburg. EBITDA had already crossed \$9 billion by the end of February, sources said. The power business has exceeded guidance; airports, green energy and all other businesses are doing well, while green hydrogen is expected to grow 60-70%. Debt mix Of the total debt, around 34% are due to global bond

assurances, 36% vanilla debt and the remaining from domestic debt, and funds raised from private equity firms for group companies, sources said. The group has already raised \$15 billion in debt, of which \$6 billion was from PE funds and the remaining \$9 billion from global and domestic investors. Adani Green Energy's \$400 million bond issuance - the first overseas bond issuance by the Group since the allegations by Hindenburg last year - saw a strong response, being oversubscribed seven times, Bloomberg said. This testified to the return of investor confidence in the group, sources said. For the Group, about a fourth of its bondholders are from Europe, a little over a third from Asia and about 31% from North America. Bond-holders include Black Rock, AIA, Fidelity, Melville, Goldman Sachs and Natix. (The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

IIFL Finance to bring in external gold assayers

Hansini Karthik
MUMBAI

IIFL Finance's gold business is expected to undergo some major changes in the coming months. To start with, the company will replace its internal assayers with certified external experts to assess the value and quality of the underlying asset before extending loans. Compliance tightening The company also plans to revamp and strengthen its compliance team and the search is on for a new compliance officer. "Like most NBFCs, IIFL was also assessing the value of gold using internal resources because it reduced the turnaround time on loan disbursements and was cost effective. "That practice must be discontinued now, and the lender is in the process of appointing external assayers as done in most banks," said a person familiar with the development. IIFL Finance did not respond to an email seeking confirmation of these developments.

Gold loans account for 32% of IIFL Finance's total asset book and stood at ₹24,692 crore in the December quarter. On Monday, the Reserve Bank of India notified certain material supervisory concerns in the gold loan portfolio of IIFL Finance, including serious deviations in assaying and certifying purity and net weight of the gold at the time of sanction of loans and at the time of auction upon default and breaches in loan-to-value ratio. (The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH			
	TUESDAY		% CHANGE
Sensex	73,677		-0.26
US Dollar	83.90		—
Gold	69,000		1.25
Brent oil	83.05		-0.20

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3330.20	-6.95
Adani Ports	2338.50	-4.30
Apollo Hosp	2180.00	27.80
Asian Paints	2856.40	-11.35
Axis Bank	1100.50	-5.95
Bajaj Auto	244.45	144.46
Bajaj Finance	1550.50	-68.80
Bajaj Finserv	624.25	-27.20
Bharti Airtel	1348.90	39.40
BKSP	662.10	6.65
Britannia Ind	462.65	-13.25
Cipla	1473.65	1.95
Coal India	469.85	5.25
DNS Lab	3464.45	2.15
Dr Reddy's Lab	6933.30	-31.80
Eicher Motors	3670.00	46.40
Genesys	223.50	-0.60
HCL Tech	3619.35	-18.65
HDFC Bank	1490.85	8.15
HDFC Life	697.10	1.60
Hero MotoCorp	4590.00	-21.70
Hindalco	522.10	-2.85
Indian Oil	2399.85	-22.15
ICICI Bank	1088.00	-4.00
IndusInd Bank	1542.45	11.15
Infosys	3006.50	-30.70
ITC	462.15	-2.95
J&F Steel	813.30	-6.00
Kotak Bank	1735.70	-11.50
L&T	2632.80	-31.80
LTI Mindtree Ltd.	5133.50	-65.30
M&M	399.25	18.20
Maruti Suzuki	14670.00	76.45
Nestle India	2328.80	-55.65
NTPC	358.25	4.40
ONGC	238.75	4.55
PowerGrid Corp	228.00	0.35
Reliance Ind	3008.40	-14.40
SBI Life	1491.25	-26.70
State Bank	783.50	12.10
Sun Pharma	3374.20	32.10
Tata Consumer Pro-	2200.00	-2.65
dax	82.70	0.00
Tata Motors	3023.90	34.10
Tata Steel	151.85	-1.25
TCS	4032.10	-68.60
Tech Mahindra	2272.50	-7.50
TiE	31.49	0.10
Ultra Tech Cement	989.35	-140.05
UPL	474.25	0.00
Wipro	513.90	-7.20

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicates direct rates in rupees and except in \$ are p.m. on March 05

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT BILL
US Dollar	82.70	83.00
Euro	80.62	80.11
British Pound	104.49	105.30
Japanese Yen (100)	54.98	55.39
Chinese Yuan	13.49	13.58
Swiss Franc	95.34	98.73
Canadian Dollar	61.64	61.78
Canadian Dollar	60.99	61.12
Malaysian Ringgit	17.46	17.55
Australian Dollar	53.61	53.90
Sri Lankan Rupee	—	—

Bigbasket eyes IPO in 2025



Delivering profit: bigbasket hopes to become profitable in the next 6-8 months, says Menon. THE HINDU

Ianaki Krishnan
MUMBAI

Online grocer bigbasket is targeting an initial public offering (IPO) of its shares in 2025, CEO and Co-founder Hari Menon said.

"Probably 2025 is the date. We are leaving this to the Tatas, but I think we are gunning for 2025," Mr. Menon told *businessline* on the sidelines of an event to unveil a frozen food line in collaboration with celebrity chef Sanjeev Kapoor. Next year is set to be busy for the Tatas, with group holding firm Tata Sons and Tata Capital set to introduce IPOs having been classified as upper-tier NBFCs, as per Reserve Bank of India guidelines.

The grocery platform is expected to end FY24 with revenue in the region of \$1.5 billion and hopes to become profitable in the next 6-8 months, Mr. Menon said.

He said the capital requirements were much lower than what they had been earlier. "We don't need as much money as we needed five years ago... it has come down quite a bit," he said, adding the business still required capital. He indicated the IPO would comprise fresh and a secondary issuance. In 2021, Tata Digital acquired more than 64% of its stake with investors such as Alibaba and Actis exiting. There are PE firms such as U.K.'s CDC Group and Silicon Valley's Bessemer Venture Partners that hold minority stakes in it.

Profitability factor

Of bigbasket's three business lines — bb daily, the slotted business and bb now — the first two are already stable and profitable, while the third bb now, the quick commerce vertical, is expected to be profitable in the next six-eight months.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

Strong U.S. economy sends dollar bears into hibernation for now

Strategists are still broadly bearish on the dollar, though the dollar's persistent strength is testing their outlook; signs that the Federal Reserve is sticking with its 'higher for longer' messaging on rate cuts or that the U.S. economy continues to stay strong could further support the dollar's rally

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
NEW YORK

A stronger-than-expected United States economy is buoying the dollar, frustrating investors who had bet the currency would fall under a barrage of interest rate cuts that have yet to materialize.

The dollar index, which measures the buck against a basket of its peers, is up 2.4% year-to-date. Net bets on the dollar in futures markets swung positive last month for the first time since late November, Commodity Futures Trading Commission data showed.

Driving the U.S. currency's stubborn strength is a robust U.S. economy that has made the Federal Reserve hesitant to ease monetary policy too quickly and risk an inflationary rebound.

U.S. gross domestic product grew at a 3.2% annualized rate in the fourth quarter. By contrast, the eurozone's economy stagnated last year, China faces a deepening property crisis, and Japan unexpectedly slipped into recession at the end of 2023.

While the U.S. economy has remained resilient, "there is no significant evidence Europe and China are picking up," said Thierry Witzman, global FX and



Strong comeback: The dollar index, which measures the greenback against a basket of its peers, is up 2.4% year-to-date. AFP

rates strategist at Macquarie, who has become more neutral on the dollar after his bearish outlook last year. "That's the reason people have had this change of heart" on the dollar, he said.

The dollar's strength will be tested this week as investors brace for Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell to testify before lawmakers on Wednesday and Thursday and await U.S. employment data at the end of the week. Signs that the Federal Reserve is sticking with its "higher for longer" messaging on rate cuts or that the U.S. economy continues to stay strong could support the dollar's rally.

Investors are pricing in some 85 basis points of

While the median forecast among currency strategists is for the dollar to weaken over the rest of the year, some 80% believed there was a risk of the dollar exceeding their target

rate cuts for 2024, compared to more than 150 basis points they had factored in early January, futures tied to the Fed's policy rate showed.

Among the dollar bulls is Ugo Lanciaioni, head of currency at Neuberger Berenson, who is betting on the greenback to continue rising thanks to U.S. outper-

formance even though he believes it has grown expensive relative to other currencies.

"Our call right now is purely a relative growth type of call," he said.

Getting the dollar's trajectory right is important for investors, given the currency's central role in global finance.

A strong dollar could weigh on the outlook for U.S. multinationals as it makes it more expensive to convert their foreign profits into dollars, while also making exporters' products less competitive abroad. About a quarter of S&P 500 companies generate more than 50% of revenues outside the U.S., FactSet data showed.

Dollar strength could al-

so complicate other central banks' efforts to fight inflation as it makes their currencies cheaper. The European Central Bank, which concludes its monetary policy meeting on Thursday, has also pushed back against rate cut talk due to sticky inflation. Signs that the euro zone's policymakers might further delay easing could boost the euro at the dollar's expense.

Strategists are still broadly bearish on the dollar, though the dollar's persistent strength is testing their outlook. While the median forecast among currency strategists is for the dollar to weaken over the rest of the year, some 80% believed there was a risk of the dollar exceeding

their target, a Reuters poll showed in February.

Paul Mielczarski, head of macro strategy at Brandywine Global, sees the dollar's recent rebound as more of a "tactical rally as opposed to a change in the underlying trend overall."

Mr. Mielczarski is encouraged by nascent signs of improving growth outside the U.S., including strength in the global semiconductor cycle, which benefits currencies like the Korean won.

Others, however, see more reasons for dollar strength—especially if former U.S. President Donald Trump gains the upper hand in a presidential reelection race that has been deadlocked for months.

Analysts at Capital Economics wrote that Mr. Trump's proposed tariff increases could shift the Fed back to a tightening bias on monetary policy and set off a wider trade war that spurs safe haven demand for the U.S. currency. The dollar initially rallied after Mr. Trump won the 2016 election but fell 10.5% during his term.

While that may be far off, investors will still likely be hesitant to renew bearish bets against the greenback, Macquarie's Witzman said.

"I think it's a 'show me' story," he said. "The amount of skepticism on the part of traders is high."

Uber technology



Robotic touch: Members of the media and passersby walk next to an unmanned robot as it crosses the street during a demonstration of a robot delivery service by Uber Eats Japan, Mitsubishi Electric and robot developer Cartken in downtown Tokyo. AFP

U.N. warns of climate change impact on women run farms in poor nations

Associated Press
ROME

Women who run farms and rural households in poor countries suffer more from climate change and are discriminated against as they try to adapt to other sources of income in times of crises, the United Nations warned Tuesday.

A new report by the Food and Agriculture Organization, "The Unjust Climate," found female-headed rural households lose on average 8% more of the income during heat waves and 3% more during floods, compared with male-headed households.

That disparity translates into a per capita reduction of \$83 due to heat stress



Bearing the brunt: Female-headed rural households lose 8% more of income during heat waves and 3% more during floods. AP

and \$35 due to floods — coming up to an annual total of \$37 billion and \$16 billion respectively in poor countries, the U.N. agency said in the report.

"Considering the significant existing differences in

agricultural productivity and wages between women and men, the study suggests if not addressed, climate change will greatly widen these gaps in the years ahead," FAO said.

The Rome-based FAO

came up with the statistics by surveying 1,000,000 rural households across 24 poor and middle-income countries around the world. The agency then integrated that data with 70 years of precipitation and temperature data.

Few plans

Significantly, the report noted few government plans to address climate change and promote adaptation strategies take into account the specific vulnerabilities of rural women and youth.

Only 6% of the more than 4,000 proposals contained in the national climate-adaptation plans of the countries surveyed mentioned women.

India firms look to bet big on coal-fired power after long absence

Reuters
SINGAPORE/NEW DELHI

Private Indian firms have expressed interest in building at least 10 gigawatts (GW) of coal-fired power capacity over a decade, four sources familiar with the matter said, ending a six-year drought in significant private involvement in the sector.

Adani Power, JSW Group and Essar Power are among the companies that have told India's Power Ministry they would be keen to expand old plants or develop stalled projects facing financial stress, as per according to the sources and a government presentation seen by Reuters.

The potential investments, which have not been previously reported,

could cumulatively cost billions of dollars and demonstrate renewed appetite in an industry seen by many as financially unattractive. But they also threaten to undermine progress made by the world's No.3 greenhouse gas emitter in weaning its economy off carbon.

PM Narendra Modi's government, which has cited energy security concerns and low per-capita emissions to defend India's coal dependence, has been trying to attract private investment to boost coal-fired capacity by 80 GW by 2032.

Half the capacity
Coal-fired power plants currently account for half, or about 215 GW of India's total installed capacity of 430 GW, with renewables accounting for 135 GW and



Energy boost: APP wants the government to ensure local credit for investments. REUTERS

hydro making up 47 GW. A spokesperson for the Power Ministry said the private sector had agreed to invest in the coal-fired power sector "in line with the energy requirements of

the nation," adding India was ahead of international commitments to cut emissions.

"The private sector is now expressing interest because of financial viabil-

ity and assurance that payments will be made on time," he said. The companies did not respond to requests seeking comment.

The India's Association of Power Producers (APP),

which represents coal-fired power developers, told Power Minister R. K. Singh its members were eager to boost capacity, according to a December 4 letter reviewed by Reuters.

Among the new proposals, Adani Power plans to add 4.8 GW and JSW 1 GW, according to three sources and a government presentation dated November 21 reviewed by Reuters.

Essar Power plans 1.6 GW of new domestic coal-based power generation in Gujarat state by 2029, one of the sources said. Another source said Vedanta will add 1.9 GW of capacity.

The sources — two government officials and two industry executives — declined to be named as the discussions are not public. The presentation, made

by an arm of the Power Ministry in November, estimates the plants would be commissioned by 2032.

Funding drought

In the five years to March 2018, private investments drove 56 GW, or more than 60% of the new coal-fired power, government data shows. That dwindled to 1.5 GW, or 5% of additions, in the next five years as projects faced financial stress, shifting the investment burden on State and Union governments.

A total of 24 private sector projects totalling over 23 GW, or over 10% of current Indian coal-fired capacity, are on hold or unlikely to be commissioned due to financial stress, as per Power Ministry data. However, higher coal

dependence in the last three years on slower renewable installations, new power demand and heavy energy subsidies enabling higher tariffs have made coal-fired power attractive again, boosting profits and pushing shares of generators to record highs.

APP asked the government to provide more flexibility in coal and power-supply pacts and expansion of existing power plants, ease clearances, and ensure local credit availability to expedite investments. "It will be a big challenge for any private developer to raise funds," APP wrote in the December 4 letter, adding state lenders Power Finance Corp. and Rural Electrification Corp. must be asked to take the lead.

LION ALERT

Captain Dhoni lands in Chennai ahead of the IPL season



Chennai Super Kings skipper M.S. Dhoni landed in Chennai on Tuesday ahead of the IPL season. CSK posted a picture of Dhoni, who led the team to its fifth title last season, exiting a vehicle on social media, captioning it "#THATA DhariSnam!" Speculation is rife that this season will be Dhoni's final one as a player.

TOUCH OF HUMOUR

Not sure I've insurance: Perry jokes after breaking car window



Elyse Perry played an instrumental role during RCB's 23-run triumph over UP Warriorz at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium. In the 19th over, she smashed the window of the display car in Deepthi Sharma's over. After the game, she talked about her window breaking six and said, "Not sure I have insurance here to cover that."

TAKEAWAY

Domestic tourneys give chance to rediscover basics: Tendulkar



The legendary Sachin Tendulkar on Tuesday said, "When India players turn up for their domestic teams, it raises the quality of play for youngsters and sometimes new talent is identified. It also gives the national players a chance to sometimes rediscover the basics," Tendulkar posted on X.

I AM BACK!

Halep wins doping case on appeal, cleared to resume tennis at once



Two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep was cleared for an immediate return to tennis on Tuesday after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) said its judges partially upheld Halep's appeal and reduced her four-year ban to just nine months. It was applied retroactively and expired last July.

Ashwin and Bairstow all set for a century of Tests

The duo will share the rare milestone of playing the 100th match in the longest format of the game when India takes on England in the final game of the engrossing series

ENGLAND IN INDIA

Rakesh Rao
DHARAMSHALA

For R. Ashwin and Jonny Bairstow, this week at the foothills of the imposing Dhauadhar mountain ranges would coincide with their scaling 'Peak 100' in Tests.

When the fifth and final India-England Test opens here on Thursday, the duo would share the milestone of playing the 100th Test. No doubt, Ashwin's journey has been more glorious and comes days after he took the 500th Test wicket in a winning cause. In contrast, Bairstow still has not been in the best of forms with the bat in the series.

As Ashwin said, "A lot of things need to go your way when you have to get a breakthrough and also continue playing for so many years."

Long journey

Indeed. Since his debut against the West Indies in Delhi in 2011, the off-spinner has come a long way.

Looking back, Ashwin chose to mention the 2012



Reflecting: Ashwin mentioned how many things have to go one's way in a long career while Bairstow said it will be an emotional week. RI. MOORTHY & FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

England's tour to India during which he learnt lessons that were to stand him in good stead.

"One of the turning points of my life was the England series when (Alastair) Cook came here and made all those runs along with (Kevin) Pietersen, who had a great game in Mumbai. It has been spoken about a lot. Leading in

to the next series against Australia at home, there was a lot of noise about me being left out of the team.

"And that is a wonderful lesson I have still kept with me all these years. Whatever happens, we can hold a lot of complaints against somebody external or blame it on another individual. But for me, if you look internally, you can im-

prove at least by another five per cent.

"Until and unless there is something wrong with you, people aren't going to throw punches at you or point fingers at you..."

Ashwin graciously acknowledged the role played by S. Badrinath, Mithun Manhas, and Rajat Bhatia during the days before he made it big. "These are

some of the greatest batters of spin who I would have not wanted to encounter in international cricket." They were my finishing school before I went on to play international cricket."

On his part, Bairstow declared, "Playing 100 Tests means a hell of a lot. It will be an emotional week for me."

Bairstow, like Ashwin,

made his debut against the West Indies but in 2012.

"No matter what it is, I'll be going out there, chewing my gum, puffing my chest out and trying to have a good time with the other 10 bloopers out there. Whatever the situation is, we'll be going out there with smiles on our faces, like we have done in the whole series."

Series won, but Indians surprisingly caught in spin-web

Rakesh Rao
DHARAMSHALA

A dead rubber in a Test series is no longer an opportunity to experiment with the bench-strength. Thanks to the World Test Championship, no team risks the points earned. Teams in contention for a spot in the final do not get influenced by the outcome of an ongoing series.

When the fifth and final Test between India and England begins here at the picturesque HPCA Stadium on Thursday, there will be no let up in the intensity in both camps. The current 3-1 scoreline could have looked a lot different, but credit to India for seizing the big moments after squandering them in the first Test.

From India's point of view, it is a good time to reflect on what this series has thrown up instead of being

satisfied with the much-anticipated series-win. This series has exposed the vulnerability of the Indian batters even against debutant spinners in home conditions. In contrast, some English batters gave a much better account of facing quality spinners.

Barring the exception of the first Test, where England commendably fought back from a 190-run first-innings deficit to turn things around, Indian batters battled tough phases and the bowlers – and not just the spinners – struck when needed.

But the larger question remains. How could England, despite losing the services of its most-experienced spinner, left-arm Jack Leach (36 Tests) after the first Test, keep the Indian batters on tenterhooks for the next three Tests with their grossly inexperienced spin attack?

After Lanning and Jemimah pilot DC to big total, Jonassen takes over

WPL SEASON 2

LAVANYA L
NEW DELHI

Jemimah Rodrigues is an entertainer. She knows how to turn up on a big stage. Delhi Capitals' 29-run win over Mumbai Indians in its first ever home fixture in the Women's Premier League (WPL) saw the batter at her explosive best as she made a match-winning 33-ball 69 at the Arun Jaitley Stadium on Tuesday.

A 48-run opening stand set the tone for Capitals, put in to bat on a slow surface. After promising starts, Shafali and Alice Caspey fell in quick succession. Meg Lanning slowly sunk her teeth into the winning stock pile. Even a 123kmph ripper from Shabnim Islam couldn't stop the Australian from cruising to a half-century. When she fell soon after, courtesy a brilliant catch by Amelia Kerr at deep midwicket, the onus fell on Jemimah.

A rare off-day with the ball didn't help MI's case, with Jemimah finding enough time to walk across the stumps most times and send the ball to the ropes. The over in which she hit Nat Sciver-Brunnt for a four and two sixes was particularly delightful. It saw



Audacious: Jemimah did as she pleased, cashing in on the MI bowlers' off-day. SHV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

her fist-pumping her way up and down the field as her team's score inflated. With 192 on the board, Marizanne Kapp and Shikha Pandey cleaned up Yastika Bhatia and Sciver-Brunnt. Jess Jonassen did not allow Hayley Matthews to capitalise on a botched catch by Taniya Bhatia behind the stumps as Caspey snapped up another mis-timed hit at midwicket.

Pooja Vastrakar and Amanjot Kaur's 48-run partnership gave MI some hope before the latter fell to Jonassen. Capitals fielded four pacers but it was the wily left-arm spinner who sealed the game in the host's favour.

Pooja and S. Sajana's big hitting only reduced the margin of defeat for the defending champion.

SCOREBOARD

DELHI CAPITALS

Meg Lanning c Kerr b Pooja 53 (38), 64, 2x6; Shafali Verma c Yastika b Ismail 28 (12), 3x4, 2x6; Alice Caspey b Matthews 19 (20), 3x4; Jemimah Rodrigues (not out) 69 (33), 84, 3x6; Marizanne Kapp b Salka 11 (12), 1x4; Jess Jonassen (not out) 4 (6); Extras (lb-1, w-7); 8; Total (for four wickets, in 20 overs): 192.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-48 (Shafali, 4.3 overs), 2-79 (Caspey, 9.3), 3-114 (Lanning, 12.6), 4-151 (Kapp, 17.2).

MUMBAI INDIANS BOWLING

Ismail 4-0-46-1; Salka 4-0-29-1; Sciver-Brunnt 4-0-38-0; Pooja 4-0-20-1; Kerr 2-0-35-0; Matthews 2-0-23-1.

MUMBAI INDIANS

Hayley Matthews c Caspey b Jonassen 29 (17), 6x4; Yastika Bhatia b Kapp 6 (3), 1x4; Nat Sciver-Brunnt b Shikha 5 (3), 1x4; Harmanpreet Kaur c Radha b Kapp 6 (6), 1x4; Amelia Kerr c

Jemimah b Titus 17 (20), 1x4, 1x6; Pooja Vastrakar c Taniya b Radha 17 (22), 1x6; Amanjot Kaur b Jonassen 42 (27), 7x4; S. Sajana (not out) 24 (14), 3x4, 1x6; Humaira Kazi b Jonassen 6 (8); Extras (w-11); 11; Total (for eight wickets, in 20 overs): 163.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-77 (Yastika, 0.4), 2-12 (Sciver-Brunnt, 1.1), 3-29 (Harmanpreet, 2.6), 4-54 (Matthews, 5.5), 5-58 (Kerr, 8.5), 6-116 (Amanjot, 15.1), 7-137 (Pooja, 17.4), 8-163 (Humaira, 19.6).

CAPITALS BOWLING

Kapp 4-0-37-2; Shikha 3-0-27-1; Jonassen 4-0-23-3; Titus 3-0-23-1; Radha 3-0-23-1; Arundhati 3-0-32-0.

TOSS: Mumbai Indians.

Player-of-the-Match: Jemimah. Delhi Capitals won by 29 runs. Wednesday's matches: Gujarat Giants vs. Royal Challengers, 7.30 p.m.

Dubey's dismissal gives Vidarbha hopes of a late fightback

RANJI TROPHY

Abhishek Saini
NAGPUR

The promise of the second-wicket partnership between Yash Dubey (94, 212b, 10x4) and Harsh Gavali (67, 80b, 11x4) withered after a meek middle-order display, leaving Vidarbha within reach of a victory against Madhya Pradesh in the first Ranji Trophy semifinal at the VCA Stadium here on Tuesday.

MP was still in contention under Dubey's watch but his fall in the penultimate over of the fourth day left the side at 228 for six, still 93 runs away from a victory.

The 106-run alliance between Dubey and Gavali was a course correction after Himanshu Mantri holed out at mid-on off Aditya Sarvate in the sixth over. While Dubey was content with the slap through point and the flick with which he flagged off the chase in Umesh Yadav's first over, Gavali set the side's counter in motion with three boundaries in as many deliveries of Yash Thakur. Gavali drew from his share of luck too, when his poke outside off against Thakur came at a trickle but were steering the side closer.

However, an inside edge popped up for silly point



The rock: Dubey's knock arrested a batting collapse for MP in pursuit of a tricky target. B. JOTHIRAMLINGAM

an edge to the wicketkeeper. Akshay Wakhare was aided by purchase as he accounted for Sagar Solanki and captain Shubham Sharma before tea. Just when Venkatesh Iyer brought hope with an assault, Wakhare's delivery jumped from a length, took the shoulder of Venkatesh's bat, and went to first slip.

Dubey, who brought up a fifty in 84 balls, was desperate for support when Saransh Jain arrived. Their 32 runs for the sixth wicket came at a trickle but were steering the side closer.

Dubey's pad and turned the wicketkeeper. Earlier in the day, Yash Rathod's burst helped Vidarbha set a fighting target. He took two deliveries in the morning to breach the fence and register his maiden First-Class century off 167 deliveries.

Rathod then latched on when Kulwant Khejroliya offered width, picking two more boundaries through point. Rathod remained a thorn for MP even as his side slipped from 377 for six to 385 for nine.

swell his team's total past 400 runs. It was a slower one from Khejroliya that forced him on 141, taking his inside edge and ricocheting onto the stumps.

The scores: Vidarbha – 1st innings: 170. MP – 1st innings: 252.

Vidarbha – 2nd innings: Athava Taidle lbw b Avesh 2, Dhruv Shorey c Mantri b Kartikeya 40, Akshay Wakhare c Gavali b Anubhav 1, Aman Mohdade lbw b Kartikeya 59, Karun Nair b Khejroliya 38, Yash Rathod b Khejroliya 141, Akshay Wadkar c (sub) Kushwah b Anubhav 77, Aditya Sarvate c Venkatesh b Anubhav 21, Yash Thakur c Gavali b Anubhav 2, Umesh Yadav b Anubhav 0, Akshay Wakhare (not out); Extras (b-5, lb-14, nb-3); 20; Total (in 101.3 overs): 402.

Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-17, 3-90, 4-137, 5-161, 6-319, 7-377, 8-385, 9-385.

MP bowling: Avesh 19-37-3-1, Venkatesh 3-0-20-0, Anubhav 18-3-92-5, Khejroliya 15-3-1-64-2, Kartikeya 30-4-76-2, Saransh 7-1-28-0, Sagar 9-1-30-0.

MP – 2nd innings: Yash Dubey c Mohdade b Sarvate 94, Himanshu Mantri c Thakare b Sarvate 8, Harsh Gavali c Wadkar b Thakur 67, Sagar Solanki lbw b Wakhare 12, Shubham Sharma c (sub) Kale b Wakhare 6, Venkatesh Iyer c Karun b Wakhare 19, Saransh Jain (batting) 16, Kumar Kartikeya (batting) 0; Extras (b-4, lb-2); 6; Total (for six wickets, in 71.3 overs): 228.

Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-228, 3-157, 4-165, 5-195, 6-227.

Vidarbha bowling: Umesh 11-47-0, Sarvate 23-5-51-2, Thakur 11-38-0, Thakur 9-0-48-1, Wakhare 17-38-3.

IN BRIEF



Shahbaz Nadeem retires from international cricket

Jharkhand left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem, 34, who featured in two Tests for India, has announced his retirement from international cricket to try his luck in franchise-based leagues as he does not foresee opportunities in the national team. "I realise I can't feature for Team India anymore, as there is a pool of talented youngsters waiting for their chance," Nadeem said. "I would have continued playing if there were opportunities for me in Team India. I don't foresee any chances in near future."

Delhi Toofans rally to beat Kochi Blue Spikers

Delhi Toofans came from two sets down to register a 9-15, 15-10, 15-8, 15-8 win over Kochi Blue Spikers in the third RuPay Prime Volleyball League in Chennai on Monday. While Delhi secured its fifth win in seven outings Kochi remains winless after seven games.

People will criticise if I miss, I'll focus on scoring: Haaland

Erling Haaland admits he will "keep on missing chances" but insists he will shut out the critics as he targets perfection. "I will still score goals so I'll probably miss a big chance in the future and people are going to criticise me... I should focus on scoring more goals and helping the team."

Prajwal Dev crashes out in the first round in Kigali

S.D. Prajwal Dev lost to Thomas Fancutt in the first round of the Challenger in Kigali, Rwanda. The results: \$41,000 Challenger, Kigali, Rwanda: First round: Thomas Fancutt bt S.D. Prajwal Dev 6-2, 7-5. \$15,000 ITF men, Kish Island, Iran: First round: Ishaque Eqbal bt Savelly Ivanov 7-5, 6-3. \$15,000 ITF men, Sharm El Sheikh: Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals: Szymon Kielan & Volodymyr Uzhyrovskiy bt George Gregoriot & Aryan Lakshmanan 7-5, 6-3.

Chahar bows out in World Olympic boxing qualifier

Lakshya Chahar (80kg) was the fourth Indian to bow out of the first World Olympic boxing qualifier at Busto Arsizio (Italy) on Monday. Up against the Iranian Meysam Gheshlaghi, Chahar, who lost the first round 3-2 and won the second 3-2, was knocked out with 20 seconds to go in final period.

Pakistani judoka dies after suffering head injuries

A young female judoka died in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province after suffering head injuries during a competition bout. Fiza Sher Ali, 20, couldn't recover from the head injuries she sustained while competing in the 44kg fight at a Youth Talent Hunt program in Mardan.

Ruthless Arsenal shoots six past Sheffield United

Arteta's side is third with 61 points after 27 games, just one behind Manchester City, but with a much better goal difference than its title rival

EURO LEAGUES

Reuters
SHEFFIELD

Arsenal matched its biggest Premier League away win with the 6-0 pummeling of Sheffield United on Monday after scoring five times in the first half when it tore the home side apart. The win helped Arsenal stay within two points of leader Liverpool.

Mikel Arteta's team is third with 61 points after 27 games, a point behind Manchester City but with a much better goal difference than its title rival. The Blades remain rooted to the bottom on 13 points, 11 adrift of the safety zone.

Arteta was ruthless as it sliced through Sheffield's defence with ease from the start. Martin Odegaard opened the floodgates with his fifth-minute goal, firing home from the middle of the box after a cute cut-back from Declan Rice.

There was more misery to come for United goal-



Sublime form: Arsenal matched its record Premier League away victory set in the 6-0 rout of West Ham on February 11. AP

keeper Ivo Grbic on a night that saw six different names on the scoresheet. Jayden Bogle put through his own goal in the 13th before Gabriel Martinelli struck two minutes later, sending scores of weary United fans to the Bramall Lane exits, while Kai Havertz (25th minute),

Rice (39), and Ben White (58) also netted. The early fireworks from the Gunners had the 9-0 Premier League scoring record looking in jeopardy, but Blades fans were spared partly due to Arteta's substitutions including forward Bukayo Saka heading to the bench

after an excellent 45 minutes.

The results: Premier League: Sheffield United 0 lost to Arsenal 6 (Odegaard 5, Bogle 13-og, Martinelli 15, Havertz 25, Rice 39, White 58). LaLiga: Osasuna 1 (Budimir 76) bt Alaves 0. Serie A: Inter Milan 2 (Aslan 30, Alexis Sanchez 38-pen) bt Genoa 1 (Vasquez 54).

Pragg to face Firouzja; Gukesh meets Vidit

CANDIDATES CHESS

Sports Bureau

R. Praggnanandhaa will take on Alireza Firouzja of France, while D. Gukesh will meet Vidit Gujrathi in an all-India encounter in the opening round of the Candidates chess tournament, to be held in Toronto from April 4.

Humpy vs Vaishali

In the Women's Candidates tournament too, the two Indians - Koneru Humpy and R. Vaishali - will come face to face in the opening round. Both the open and wo-

men's events feature eight players each. They will play one another twice.

The winners will earn the right to challenge the reigning World champions - Ding Liren (open) and Ju Wenjun (women), both of China.

The field: Open: Fabiano Caruana (USA), Hikaru Nakamura (USA), Nijat Abasov (Aze), Ian Nepomniachtchi (Rus), Alireza Firouzja (Fra), R. Praggnanandhaa, D. Gukesh, and Vidit Gujrathi.

Women: Koneru Humpy, Aleksandra Goryashina (Rus), Katerina Lagno (Ukr), Anna Muzychuk (Ukr), Nurgul Salimova (Bul), Lei Tingjie (Chn), Tan Zhongyi (Chn), and R. Vaishali.

Sports Ministry revokes PCI's suspension

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry on Tuesday revoked the suspension on the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) after the body initiated the process for its long-pending elections in which multiple Paralympic medalist Devendra Jhajharia is set to be elected president.

On February 2, the ministry terminated PCI's recognition for "intentional delay to elect a new Executive Committee" as per the National Sports Code. The PCI had postponed the elections, which should have been held before January 31, to March 28 because of the impending Paris Shooting World Cup from March 6 to 15.

Mizoram outlasts Kerala in sudden-death in Santosh Trophy

Amitabha Das Sharma

YUPIA (ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

Mizoram outlasted Kerala 7-6 in sudden-death in the final quarterfinal action of the 77th National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy at the Golden Jubilee Stadium here on Tuesday.

Both the teams were locked goalless in regulation and extra-time. The deadlock continued even in the tie-breaker, where the teams were tied 5-5 before Sujith V.R. lost his nerve and sent his attempt wide to give Mizoram the ticket to the last-four stage.

For Mizoram M.C. Malsawmzuala, Malsawmfela, F.C. Lalhmunmawia, E. Lalremtuanga, L. Tochhawng, Lalremruata and Lalbiakthanga were successful in their attempts while for Kerala Sanju G, Arjun V. Mohammas Salim, Ritwanal Edakkavil, Sarath Prasanth K, Jithin Gopalakrishnan scored before Sujith's blunder.

The match saw box to box action, with both Kerala and Mizoram creating a lot of openings. But the goal-shyness of their attackers and some good goalkeeping at both ends kept the sides locked goalless.



Keen tussle: Manipur's Phijam and Assam's Tupu vie for possession. X@INDIANFOOTBALL

Earlier, former champion Manipur gave a nice display of attacking football to score a resounding 7-1 win over Assam in the third quarterfinal match.

Sadananda Singh scored a hat-trick to have the biggest contribution in Manipur's massive win. While Phijam Sanathoi Meetei,

Ngangbam Pacha Singh (penalty), Mabam Deny Singh and Imarson Meitei scored one apiece for the winner. Joydeep Gogoi produced the lone reply for Assam.

The results: Quarterfinals: Manipur 7 (Phijam Sanathoi Meetei 4, Wangkheimayum Sandananda Singh 11, 16, 70, Ngangbam Pacha Singh 19-pen, Mabam Deny Singh 52, Imarson Meitei 88) bt Assam 1 (Joydeep Gogoi 64).

Mizoram 0 drew with Kerala 0 (Mizoram won 7-6 via sudden-death).

Angad Vir Singh Bajwa tops skeet in National trials

SHOOTING

Sports Bureau

Angad Vir Singh Bajwa topped the men's skeet with 59 out of 60 after shooting 121 in qualification in the third National shotgun selection trials in Patiala.

With the event doubling up as the Olympic trials for Paris, Angad, who has the world record 60 out of 60 in the finals, enhanced his chances.

Olympic quota winner Anantjeet Singh Naruka was placed fourth behind Bhavtegh Singh Gill and Arjun Thakur.

Gurnihal fifth

Gurnihal Singh Garcha, who had pipped Mairaj Ahmad Khan 4-3 in the shoot-off after being tied on 117, finished in fifth place ahead of the other qualification topper Kuldeep Sanyashi (121).

Satwik-Chirag, Treesa-Gayatri win in their opening round

FRENCH OPEN

Press Trust of India
PARIS

Maheshwari Chauhan finished on top in the women's skeet beating Areeba Khan

Darshna Rathore shot 123 out of 125 in qualification but was placed sixth in the final.

Maheshwari Chauhan finished on top, beating Areeba Khan 55-52, Sanjana Sood was third, ahead of Parinaaz Dhaliwal and Raiza Dhilloon.

The results: Trap: Men: 1. Aryanavansh Tyagi 46(117); 2. Prithviji Tondaiman 44(119); 3. Udayvir Singh Jaijee 36(117).

Women: 1. Neeru 39(1) (107); 2. Rajeshwari Kumari 39(0) (112); 3. Shreyasi Singh 28(114).

Satwiksiraj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty advanced to the doubles second round of French Open Super 750 badminton tournament with a hard-fought 21-13, 24-22 win against Malaysia's Ong Yew Sin and Teo Ee Yi here on Tuesday.

Commonwealth Games bronze medalists Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand also progressed to the second round after claiming a 16-21, 21-19, 21-17 victory over Ashwini Ponappa and Tanisha Crasto in the opening match of women's doubles event.

The two pairs are fighting to qualify for the Paris Olympics.

While Tanisha-Ashwini are ranked 11th, Treesa-Gayatri are placed at the 14th spot in the Olympic Games qualification ranking.

Ashwin, a modern master with a positive mindset



BETWEEN WICKETS
Suresh Menon

There is something magical about the figure '100' in cricket. In Dharamshala this week, R. Ashwin and Jonny Bairstow play their one-hundredth Test match, while in Christchurch it is the turn of Kane Williamson and Tim Southee to do the same by the Edgbaston crowd, later played with an injury and with Ge-

off Boycott as his runner, remaining unbeaten on 95 at the end of the day's play. "Crowd, in spite of a hampering injury, played one of the most accomplished and felicitous innings of his career...," wrote John Arlott.

"It is not easy to play 100 Test matches," Rahul Dravid, who has played 164, once said. "Test cricket is not easy. To be able to play one is great, to be able to play 100 is a fantastic achievement."

A player with 100 Tests behind him has an impressive CV when it comes to being selected for an all-time team to represent his country. Would Ashwin find a place in an all-time India team?

Such selections cannot be based on figures alone, although Ashwin would walk in as India's most successful off-spinner. They

are not based on averages either (although Ashwin has the best among Indian spinners with over 100 wickets) or strike rates (ditto). There is also the conviction that contemporary bowlers have more tricks up their sleeve than those of an earlier vintage, thus giving them an advantage.

After all, contemporary engineers know more than those of the 19th century, and most undergraduates in philosophy are better trained than Plato was.

By definition, therefore, Ashwin brings to his craft a wider range, a greater understanding (thanks to analytics) and even the necessary experimentation than, for example, Billy Bates, the 19th century offie who was the first Englishman to take a Test hat-trick and to temporarily claim 14 wickets in a Test. Knowledge is one thing,

and modern bowlers are being constantly fed the data, but the skill to act on the knowledge is another matter. That requires both something inherent and cricket intelligence, both nature and nurture. Ashwin has this by the bucketful.

Joe Root put his finger on 'Ashwinness' recently in a podcast saying Ashwin always tries to take wickets, not merely wear down the batter. This positive approach is special in the age of the T20.

It does not, of course, follow that a later generation automatically has the better players. This is no case for asserting that Bairstow is superior to Len Hutton because he came later and can play the regular sweep! Each is capable of doing something the other cannot. But Bairstow has more access to infor-

mation, has played more formats and is likely to borrow from one to succeed in another.

Among the finest Indian off-spinners, from Ghulam Ahmed to Erapalli Prasanna and Srinivas Venkataraghavan to Harbhajan Singh, Prasanna had this combination of cricket intelligence and natural skill. Roughly half his 189 wickets were claimed abroad; Ashwin has played only 40 of his 99 Tests abroad as India often played only one spinner in those matches. Ravindra Jadeja bats left-handed and is a brilliant fielder and was thus preferred.

Ashwin, who has played all 59 home Tests, has missed 24 away Tests. In many ways, Ashwin stands alone. He is constantly experimenting, constantly pushing him-

self, and always fighting two battles every time he steps onto the field.

The first, to achieve victory for his team, and the second to push the limits of his craft. Others have bowled a version of his carrom ball flicked off the middle finger, but few have been as keen on surprising himself and discovering greater depths. Only Muthiah Muralitharan has claimed 500 wickets in fewer Test than Ashwin.

All this talk of statistics is a bit off-ky; it is as if Ashwin does not exist beyond his numbers, as if his achievements have to be constantly buttressed by figures, with his away record making everybody uncomfortable.

The fact is, Ashwin ought to be a certainty in an all-time India squad; we can applaud a modern master of the craft.

Antim given relief to compete in one final trial

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Tuesday decided to give the country's lone Olympic quota place winner Antim Panghal (women's 53kg) the relief of competing in only one final bout in the upcoming selection trials for Asian championships.

The trials will be held at the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Delhi on March 10 and 11.

As per a WFI circular, the winner of the 53kg weight category will fight with World champions and two-time World under-20 champion Antim, who is reportedly nursing an injury, in a final trial which will be held in March end.

In Olympic weight classes will represent the country in both the Asian championships (April 11-16) and the Asian Olympic Games qualifier (April 19-20) to be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

A case filed by the protesting wrestlers, including Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, Sakshi Malik, and Satyawart Kadian, challenging the trials is still pending in the Delhi High Court.

SGM on March 29
Meanwhile, the WFI, which is still 'suspended' by the Union Sports Ministry even though the United World Wrestling (UWW) has lifted the suspension, has decided to hold its special general meeting (SGM) in Noida on March 29.

From bylanes of Hyderabad to the Olympics in Paris — Sreeja's journey

The 25-year-old two-time National champion is part of the Indian women's team which made it to the Games and the first paddler from Telangana to achieve this feat



THE GIST

Sreeja wants her coach Somnath to be present during her individual event at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games

She says the focus will be on consistency and playing more international tournaments to improve her ranking

Y.V. Subrahmanyan
HYDERABAD

It has been an inspiring journey for Sreeja Akula as she made it to the Paris Olympic Games from the bylanes of Naveenagar in the city, where she once trained in the one-room Global Table Tennis Academy under the tutelage of Somnath Ghosh with just one table available!

The 25-year-old two-time National champion is part of the Indian women's

team which made it to the Games and is also the first paddler from Telangana to achieve this feat.

"It's a testament of the dedication and synergy between a coach and an athlete," said Sreeja, expressing gratitude to Somnath for his unwavering support.

Sreeja wants her coach Somnath to be present during her individual event at the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, underscoring the importance of his presence and guidance.

Both Sreeja and Somnath are ready to

make their mark on the world stage thanks to the support of Dream Sports Foundation, Ctrl+S, Raheja and the UTT.

"I am also lucky to have my parents, who went out of the way to support me and grateful to TTFI, Government of India and PWC.

"But for them, it would have been very difficult," said the Commonwealth Games mixed gold medalist (partnering A. Sharath Kamal). Special thanks to my coach Somnath who has been working with me for 13 years now. I will try to play

my best game and create a few upsets in the Olympics. "The focus will be on consistency and playing more international tournaments to improve my ranking and be ready for the biggest challenge of my career," Sreeja said.

"It has always been a dream, not just for me but for every athlete, to participate in the Olympics."

Reflecting on the journey so far, Somnath said: "We've poured our hearts and souls into this journey, overcoming obstacles and challenges along the way."

Art deco style posters prop up Paris as it gets ready for the Games

Associated Press
PARIS

Vibrant colours and striking landmarks illuminate posters for the Paris Olympic Games in an art deco style inspired by the city's flamboyant past.

The posters were unveiled on Monday at the Musée d'Orsay — a former railway station transformed into an imposing museum stretching along the Seine River — in the presence of Paris 2024 director of design Joachim Roncin and the artist behind them, Ugo Gattoni.

Telling a story

"I don't want it to be something dull like only a poster with only a logo and a date on it, which they usually are. I want to tell a story," Roncin said.

"I want it to be something very happy, because it's going to a huge party. I want it to be very joyful. Hopefully people will be inspired by these posters."

There are many eye-catching images to absorb.

Among the most striking is the Eiffel Tower piercing through the Stade de France. As if forming a giant cake mixing together two crucial ingredients: Paris' most famed landmark and its national stadium.

Spectators on the posters have expressions on their fresh faces that are perfectly captured. It's like they are frozen in time, enjoying a giant and timeless party somewhere. On a balcony admiring ballroom dancers, or guests at a grandiose fête thrown by the Great Gatsby himself.

"It's the art deco style," Roncin said. "I wanted something very flamboyant, very rich, very colourful. It's typical of Paris, when you look at various restaurant styles, you can see the art deco style. When



GETTY IMAGES

you look at the entrance on the subways, you can see the art nouveau style."

No coincidence
No coincidence that it has this feel, perhaps, since these Games mark the centenary of the 1924 Olympics in Paris.

Everywhere you look, even amid a blur of colours, the details are intricate and precise.

In the background you can see the Olympic flame arriving on a three-mast tall ship into the French port of Marseille, having sailed from Greece, and the high-rolling waves representing surfing events in Tahiti. Closer up, some of Paris' monuments which will be used during both Games.

Les Invalides, which holds former French emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's tomb; the imperious Grand Palais; the Arc de Triomphe; and the Château de Versailles, whose resplendent gardens will host

equestrian and pentathlon events.

The posters will also appear on billboards all over Paris from Tuesday.

It will be a relief to purists that no AI (artificial intelligence) was used to design the posters, which is part of the reason why Roncin selected Gattoni.

"It was very important to work with Ugo because he's a manual artist, he works with his hands. Nothing is digital assisted. Today we live in the world where there is a lot of AI," Roncin said.

It took six months to decide which colours to use and Gattoni has spent more than 2,000 hours working on the posters.

"It has this fresh feel... an atmosphere of good vibes," said Gattoni, whose work also included studying all the previous Olympic posters. Just like the 1924 poster, this poster has to work in 100 years' time. For me this is super important."

Smriti Mandhana hopes Delhi matches Bengaluru's 'crowd energy'

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper Smriti Mandhana on Tuesday said she is looking forward to seeing how the crowd in the national capital embraces the Women's Premier League, after playing in front of a packed stadium in Bengaluru during the tournament's first leg.

The second season of the WPL is being held at two venues. The Bengaluru leg, comprising of 11 matches, concluded with RCB defeating UP Warriorz by 23 runs at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Monday night. The caravan now rolls to New Delhi from Tuesday.

The fans in Bengaluru not only turned up in large numbers for RCB's matches but also for the other teams.

"We'll see if the Delhi crowd can

match the energy of the Bangalore crowd. We have seen men's cricket here, I had come in 2016 to watch a match and the crowd was similar and the atmosphere was like this.

The way people have supported me has been great to see," Mandhana told *Jo Cinema*.

Mandhana said looking at the reception in the first leg of WPL got and the massive turnouts at the Brabourne Stadium and D.Y. Patil Stadium in Mumbai which hosted the league last year, it seems that "women's cricket is winning."

"As a women's cricketer, at that moment, I think women's cricket has won. I am saying this not just about Smriti Mandhana or RCB, I feel like women's cricket is winning."

"Last year, Mumbai had a good turnout. Bangalore was the other, especially for our matches. It was great watching people come and

support not just the home team but also the others (teams).

"They call RCB the most loyal fanbase. We saw it this time. We couldn't even step out in Bangalore for the last 15 days — it's that good. It's a win for women's cricket and the entire fraternity," Mandhana added.

Mandhana also heaped praise on her opening partner Sabbhineni Meghana, whose 164 runs in five games at a strike rate of 120.58 places her second after the RCB skipper in the list of highest run-getters this season.

Mandhana said she cannot take the credit alone in Meghana's success. "I can't take any credit; the way she has come back is amazing. I discussed this with her after the auction and told her that I had full faith in her, after what she had done on the domestic circuit," she said.



K. MURALI KUMAR