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Nayab Saini-led BJP govt. wins trust vote

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Trump wins nomination, set to face Biden again

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Have cut ties with my brother, says Mamata

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INSIDE



Gadkari, Thakur in BJP second list for LS election

NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD
The BJP released its second list of candidates for the Lok Sabha, which included Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari, Anurag Thakur, Pralhad Joshi, and Piyush Goyal. » PAGE 5

SC stops Assam's move to de-notify rhino habitat

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Wednesday froze the Assam government's move to withdraw a notification constituting the Pobitora wildlife sanctuary, housing a number of rhinos. » PAGE 6

Panel suggests ban on 'ferocious dogs' as pets

NEW DELHI
An expert committee constituted by the Department of Animal Welfare and Husbandry has recommended certain breeds of "ferocious dogs" be banned from being kept as pets. » PAGE 6

Prachanda wins confidence vote as PM in Nepal

KATHMANDU
Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda won a vote of confidence in parliament on Wednesday with the support of parties in the newly formed Left alliance. » PAGE 12

SC to hear plea to include CJI on EC selection panel

NGO tells Supreme Court that Centre can take 'unfair advantage' while filling two vacancies

Organisation asks the top court to stay the new law on appointment of Election Commissioners

Says the law was enacted to countermand an order which sought to end 'exclusive control'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to urgently hear on Friday a plea which said the Centre could take "unfair advantage" while filling the two vacancies of Election Commissioners (ECs) in the Election Commission of India (ECI) following the unexpected resignation of Arun Goel ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

A Bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna agreed to list for hearing the plea by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, which said the new law on the appointments of ECs should

be put on hold. The NGO said the Chief Justice of India (CJI) should be brought back on board the high-profile selection committee headed by the Prime Minister for appointments of ECs to the top poll body as directed by a landmark Supreme Court judgment in the *Anoop Baranwal* case of March 2, 2023.

'Free and fair elections'
"Now, the Executive has the ability to appoint two Election Commissioners which can give an unfair advantage to the Executive. The role of the Election Commission is critical in ensuring free and fair elections and therefore, the appointments must al-

so be seen to be fair and free from any bias or latches to the government of that time," the organisation, represented by advocate Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl D'Souza, submitted.

In *Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India* in March last year, a Constitution Bench headed by Justice K.M. Joseph (now retired) ordered the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two ECs to be appointed by the President on the advice tendered by a committee of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the leader of the single largest party in Opposition and the CJI.

The court had reasoned

Matter of concern

The NGO's plea before the Supreme Court has asked for these specific interventions



- Direct the Union of India to appoint the vacant positions of Election Commissioners, till the pendency of the case in the Supreme Court, in accordance with the Selection Committee laid down by the *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* judgment of March 2023
- Bring the CJI back on board the high-profile selection committee headed by the Prime Minister for appointment of ECs

that "fierce independence, neutrality and honesty" envisaged in the institution

of the EC required an end to government monopoly and "exclusive control" ov-

er appointments to the highest poll body. However, the government had enacted a new law – The Chief Election Commission and other Election Commissions (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023 – to countermand the judgment. The law had replaced the CJI with a Cabinet Minister on the selection committee, giving the Centre a dominant role in the appointment process.

'Political interference'
"... Democracy is a facet of the basic structure of the Constitution and in order to ensure free and fair elections and to maintain

healthy democracy in our country, the Election Commission should be insulated from political and/or executive interference," the NGO argued.

The application filed by the NGO also pointed out that the ECI at present was under the sole charge of CEC Rajiv Kumar.

"In light of the eminent elections, it would not be prudent to leave the post of the Election Commissioners vacant as the role of the Election Commission is critical in assuring free and fair elections, in adjudicating disputes between political parties and in ensuring accurate voter lists and voter turnout," the application said.

Every drop counts



Garden City goes dry: Amid a severe water crisis, people line up to collect free drinking water from a tanker in Bengaluru on Wednesday. The Karnataka government has prohibited the use of potable water for non-essential purposes. PTI (REPORT ON PAGE 3)

T.N. Governor stalls move to re-induct Ponmudy

S. Vijay Kumar
Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI

In yet another stand-off with the Tamil Nadu government, Governor R.N. Ravi has put on hold the proposed swearing-in of DMK leader and former Minister K. Ponmudy to re-induct him into the Cabinet.

He was disqualified as MLA after his conviction in a disproportionate assets case in December. The move to re-induct him began after the Supreme Court stayed his conviction and sentencing.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 4

Will publish poll bond data 'in time', says CEC



Rajiv Kumar addresses a press conference on poll preparedness for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, in Jammu. PTI

The Hindu Bureau
JAMMU

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Wednesday said that the Commission would share details of electoral bonds "in time" and asserted that it believed in complete transparency.

The State Bank of India was directed by the Supreme Court to submit the data by March 12. "They have given us the details in time. I will go back and

look at the data, and would definitely disclose it in time," he said, speaking in Jammu where he was ending his nationwide visits before announcing the Lok Sabha election schedule.

He said the commission believed only "in disclosure, disclosure and disclosure" to ensure high standards of transparency.

The SBI has issued electoral bonds worth ₹16,518 crore in 30 tranches since the inception of the scheme in 2018.

HC dismisses Cong. plea in tax dues case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday rejected the plea by the Congress challenging an order of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) declining to stay an Income Tax department notice to the party for recovery of outstanding tax of over ₹100 crore.

"The problems that beset the petitioner [Congress] today are thus, and to a large extent, of its own making," the High Court said noting that the party has been "remiss in taking peremptory steps in respect of a demand that had remained outstanding right from 2021".

'Accounts frozen'

Senior advocate Vivek Tankha, representing the Congress, had said that the notification for the Lok Sabha election is expected in the next few days and the party is under tremendous pressure as its bank

The court, however, said Congress can approach ITAT by way of a fresh stay application

accounts have been frozen.

The court said though the I-T department issued notice as far back as in July 2021, and the first application by the party for complete stay was rejected in October that year, "no concrete steps appear to have been taken by the petitioner to either consider securitising the outstanding demand or to seek interim protection. This would clearly appear to suggest that the petitioner has been clearly lax in pursuing the legal remedies that were otherwise available."

The court, however, said the Congress can approach ITAT by way of a fresh stay application bringing to its attention the fact that ₹65.94 crore has already been recovered.

Kerala rejects Centre's one-time offer of ₹5,000 cr. to tide over fund crunch

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The bugle has sounded for a legal battle between the Centre and Kerala in the Supreme Court, after the Union government said on Wednesday that it could only spare ₹5,000 crore as a one-time measure to avert an immediate financial crisis in the State.

The amount offered by the Union government will not be enough to fulfil Kerala's most basic financial commitments, including pensions and salaries, senior advocate Kapil Sibal and C.K. Sasi, representing the State, told a Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan.

The Union government also said it would deduct ₹5,000 crore from the State's net borrowing ceiling in the first nine months of the financial year 2024-2025, and stipulated that the State would not be allowed any "ad hoc" borrowing in 2024-2025 if it



We want an absolute minimum of at least ₹10,000 crore. This ₹5,000 crore does not take us anywhere. I will not be able to pay my people

KAPIL SIBAL
Counsel for Kerala

takes the ₹5,000 crore being proffered now.

Rejecting the offer, Mr. Sibal said: "We want an absolute minimum of at least ₹10,000 crore. This ₹5,000 crore does not take us anywhere. I will not be able to pay my people."

The court was hearing an original suit filed by Kerala accusing the Centre of interfering with its financial affairs in violation of the principle of federalism.

Hearing next week

In an earlier hearing, Justice Kant said the suit was probably the first of its kind in the Supreme Court.

sition clear. Your note is self-explanatory," Justice Kant said after the reading.

Mr. Sibal said that it seemed as if the Union government's note was prepared under the assumption that the State was not entitled to the amounts required to pay its people. "The note assumes that our suit should be dismissed," he said.

The note said Kerala's projected Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for 2024-2025 is estimated at ₹11,19,906 crore. The net borrowing ceiling for Kerala is three per cent of its GSDP, which would amount to ₹33,597 crore.

Out of ₹33,597 crore, ₹4,711 crore has to be deducted for off-budget borrowing done by Kerala in 2021-2022. If Kerala, according to its demand, wants an advance of ₹15,000 crore before the end of March 2024, its borrowing space for the next financial year would be reduced to ₹6,664 crore, the note said.

Details hand-delivered to poll body, says SBI

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday informed the Supreme Court that details of electoral bonds anonymously purchased by contributors and encashed by political parties from April 2019 to February 15, 2024 were hand-delivered to the Election Commission of India (ECI). The SBI said a total of 22,217 electoral bonds were purchased and 22,030 were redeemed by political parties between April 1, 2019, and February 15, 2024.

From April 1, 2019, to April 11 the same month, 3,346 bonds were purchased and 1,609 were redeemed by parties. Between April 12, 2019, and February 15, 2024, donors

bought 18,871 bonds and 20,421 were redeemed by parties, the SBI affidavit said. Though the Supreme Court had sought information only from April 12, 2019, the bank said the selling and redeeming of electoral bonds had started from April 1. The ECI has time till March 15 to publish the information from the bank on its official website.

The bank said it has shared information with the ECI about the dates of purchase of electoral bonds, the names of purchasers and the denomination of the bonds. Similarly, the dates of encashment of the bonds, names of political parties which received the contributions and denomination of the bonds encashed were also provided.

IN BRIEF



Mukhtar Ansari sentenced to life in fake arms licence case

An MP/MLA special court in Varanasi sentenced gangster-turned-politician Mukhtar Ansari to life imprisonment on Wednesday in a more than three-decades-old fake arms licence case. On March 12, the court convicted Ansari under Sections 120 B (criminal conspiracy), 428 (mischief), 467 (forgery of valuable security), 468 (forgery for purpose of cheating) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Section 30 of the Arms Act. This is the seventh case in the last 18 months in which Ansari, 61, has been convicted by the courts. He is facing more than five dozen cases and has been in jail since 2005.

Naresh Goyal seeks court nod for family visit at hospital

Jet Airways founder Naresh Goyal on Wednesday sought a special court's permission to allow his family members to visit him at the private hospital in Mumbai where he is undergoing treatment for cancer. In his application moved before special judge M.G. Deshpande, Mr. Goyal also sought the court's nod to avail personal attendant service. The court has directed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to file its response to Mr. Goyal's plea and adjourned the matter to March 15. He was arrested in a money laundering case in September 2023 for allegedly siphoning off money meant for the now-defunct airline. PTI

AIMIM expands its base in Bihar, to field 11 candidates for Lok Sabha election

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

For the first time in Bihar, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimin (AIMIM) is trying to expand its base beyond the Seemanchal region and on Wednesday announced that it would field candidates from 11 seats in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election. Apart from Purne, Katihar, Kishanganj, and Araria, which fall under Seemanchal, the party will field candidates from Buxar, Gaya, Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur, Ujjaypur, Darbhanga, and Karakat Lok Sabha seats.

In February, AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi had launched his election campaign from Seemanchal during a three-day visit to Bihar. In the 2019 Lok

The move will pose a challenge to the INDIA bloc as it may lead to a division in minority votes in the State with 17% Muslim population

Sabha election, the AIMIM had contested just one seat from Kishanganj but in 2020, the party won five Assembly seats. But four of the five legislators later quit the party and joined the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

"On the instruction of our national president, we have decided to contest 11 Lok Sabha seats out of 40 [from Bihar]," AIMIM State president and party MLA Akhtarul Iman told *The Hindu*.

When asked if fielding AIMIM candidates would result in a division of minority votes, which will ultimately benefit the BJP, Mr. Iman said the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc did not allow his party to join them.

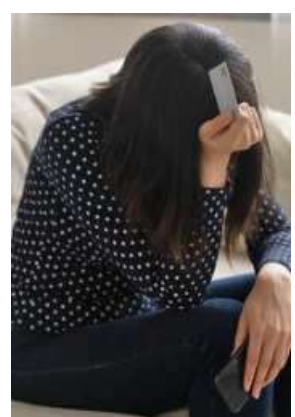
'Never want BJP to win'
"We never want the BJP to win the election neither do we want a division of secular votes. However, it is very unfortunate that INDIA bloc leaders want to grab power but they do not want to give due share to minorities and Dalits. If they are so concerned about the division of votes, the INDIA bloc should not field their candidates. It's not like only they can stop [the BJP], we can also stop

the BJP from coming to power," Mr. Iman added.

The Seemanchal region in north Bihar comprises four districts - Purne, Katihar, Kishanganj and Araria. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) won three seats and the Congress won one seat (Kishanganj).

The four districts represent 24 Assembly constituencies. Seemanchal is therefore important for next year's Assembly election too.

Apart from Seemanchal, of the seven Lok Sabha seats for which the AIMIM is fielding its candidates, three are held by the JD(U), and four are with the BJP. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the NDA had won 39 out of the 40 seats in Bihar.



A journalist lost around ₹1.2 crore to scammers who called her via WhatsApp. ISTOCK

₹1.2 crore to scammers who called her via WhatsApp.
"So far, in the investigations, we have found that there are many layers of 'interrogations' involved, just to ensure the victim ends up believing the process. Their body language is also convincing," the senior officer said.
He said the victims usually get their first call from a 'constable', then from a sub-inspector-level officer, followed by a DCP-

level officer, to give the entire scam the veneer of authenticity.

When asked how such connen get hold of one's personal details, such as Aadhaar data, a police source said, "We haven't been able to locate the source of data yet. But we know that bulk data is sold to these people, sometimes through the Dark Web."

'Contact the police'
In January, four persons, including a woman and her son, were arrested by the Delhi police from parts of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh for a 'digital arrest' operation, in which they posed as officers and threatened people through video calls.
One of their victims was a 65-year-old retired senior manager from Air India.
The victim was told about a parcel being allegedly seized at Mumbai airport by the Customs Department. She was duped of ₹35 lakh.
"When she insisted on knowing whether they

AIADMK, BJP are in a secret alliance; we will win any election, says T.N. CM Stalin

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

Lashing out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the BJP and AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday categorically stated that the ruling coalition in the State would emerge victorious in any election, including the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"What good has the AIADMK, which boasts about the Kongu region being its fort, done for the region," he asked, referring to the Pollachi sexual assault case and the intimidation of those who had filed complaints. Describing the former AIADMK regime led by Mr. Palaniswami as the most irresponsible go-



M.K. Stalin

vernment, he said that it was the DMK government that disclosed the identity of the sexual assault victim.

The Kodanad dacoity-murder, the assault on protesters who sought to revoke the ban on jallikattu, and the Thoothukudi police firing that claimed 13 lives had all taken place when the AIADMK was in power, he said. The names of an AIADMK Minister and a Director-General of Pol-

BJP puts faith in most sitting MPs in Maharashtra

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Even as the ruling *Mahayuti* alliance in Maharashtra firms up the final contours of its seat-sharing arrangement for the general election, its biggest constituent, the BJP, announced a list of 20 candidates as part of its 72-strong second list across States. The party has repeated 14 of its 19 candidates from the 2019 polls; Girish Bapat passed away last year while still the incumbent MP from Pune.

Stalwarts retained
Among those retained as candidates are stalwarts Nitin Gadkari and Raosaheb Danve from Nagpur and Jalna, four-term MP Sanjay Dhotre from Akola and two-term MP Ramdas Tadas from Wardha.

The party also retained sitting MPs Sujay Vikhe-Patil (Ahmednagar), Ranjitsingh Naik-Nimbalkar (Madha in Solapur), Sanjaykaka Patil (Sangli), Prataprao Chikhlikar (Nanded) and Raksha Khadse (Raver in Jalgaon), who is the daughter-in-law of former BJP leader Eknath Khadse, now in Sharad Pawar's

NCP camp.

Former Minister Pankaja Munde, whose relations with the BJP top brass have been frosty for a while, was announced as the candidate for the Beed Lok Sabha seat in lieu of her sister, sitting MP Pritam Munde.

Chance for Pankaja

The candidature is an opportunity for Ms. Pankaja, the daughter of late BJP stalwart Gopinath Munde, to end her political drift besides allowing the Munde family to close ranks and back her, given that her cousin and one-time rival Dhananjay Munde (of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP) is now a BJP ally in government.

In a sign that the *Mahayuti* seat-sharing talks are still a work in progress, former Maharashtra Minister Vijay Shivtare - a senior leader in the ruling Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena - on Wednesday said he remained firm on contesting as an Independent from Baramati Lok Sabha seat. Mr. Ajit Pawar is widely expected to field his wife, Sunetra, as the *Mahayuti*'s potential candidate to take on incumbent MP Supriya Sule of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP.

'Digital arrest': duping people by posing as officers

Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

In November 2023, 50-year-old Rohini, a resident of Noida's Sector 34, received a phone call from "TRAI officials". Ms. Rohini was told that a SIM card purchased using her Aadhaar credentials had been used to launder money. At no point did she suspect that she was being led into a rabbit hole of deception that would culminate in her getting defrauded through a modus operandi known as 'digital arrest'.

Ms. Rohini received more follow-up calls from "senior IPS officers" who asked her to download Skype, a videoconferencing app. She was "interrogated" on Skype calls and told that an arrest warrant had been issued in her name. Only after she transferred some money into an account and an "auditor" approved the transaction would she avoid getting arrested. She was asked not to talk about it as it was a "national security issue".

Ms. Rohini ended up transferring all her savings - ₹11,12,295 - into the account as instructed.

For the next three days, she tried to contact the "IPS officers" through Skype, but nobody picked up. On the fourth day, she understood that she had been scammed and called the police. Her case is still under investigation.

'Several interrogations'
DCP Kuldeep Kumar R. Jain, a senior Bengaluru Traffic Police officer, who has the additional charge of cybercrime, told *The Hindu*: "We can say that the victims of such fraud are put in a virtual house arrest by the imposters."
Mr. Jain is investigating two cases of similar fraud in Karnataka.
In the first case, a retired IAS officer was duped of ₹11.5 lakh by scammers who introduced themselves as Mumbai Police Crime Branch officers.
A similar case from Bengaluru involved a senior journalist losing around

NCB arrests drug lord Jaffer Sadiq's close associate from Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) officers on Wednesday arrested Sada, alias Sadanand, 55, a close associate of Jaffer Sadiq, the alleged kingpin of an international drug syndicate that smuggled pseudoephedrine into Australia, New Zealand and other countries in the guise of food products.

The NCB arrested Sadiq in New Delhi last Saturday, and he is being interrogated in custody.

The multi-crore racket came to light following information from Australian and New Zealand officials about a consignment of drugs sent to their countries from New Delhi in the guise of food products such as health mix and desiccated coconut.

In February, a team of the NCB and the Delhi pol-

The drug syndicate smuggled pseudoephedrine into Australia, New Zealand in the guise of food products

ice raided a godown of a company named Aventa at Basai Darapur in West Delhi and arrested three persons packaging pseudoephedrine as a multi-grain food mix. The team also recovered 50.070 kg of pseudoephedrine.

Subsequently, the NCB declared Sadiq the kingpin of the network, which is suspected to have sent 3,500 kg of pseudoephedrine in 45 consignments over the past three years to various countries. Sadiq was arrested after a two-week search. Sada is native of Tiruchi. He used to package the drugs as food products for Sadiq.

TIDCO gives Parandur airport report to T.N. govt.

Sunitha Sekar
CHENNAI

The hydrogeological report prepared to address the concerns about the second airport at Parandur has been submitted to the Tamil Nadu government.

The report was compiled by the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO).

The airport, planned at a cost of ₹32,704.92 crore, will have three terminals and two runways.

When the project was announced, farmers and environmental activists opposed it as the area has about 26.54% waterbodies. Hence, the government formed a panel that engaged a consultant to prepare the hydrogeological report. Though the Centre is yet to grant site clearance, the State government has initiated land acquisition process.

Crop cover

A look at paddy coverage in Tamil Nadu*



Region	Normal area	Target	Coverage on March 11, 2024	Coverage on March 13, 2023
Samba/Thaladi/Pishanam				
Delta	8.914	13.263	11.927	13.528
Non-delta	21.716	21.902	21.055	22.984
TOTAL	30.63	35.165	32.982	36.512

* In lakh acres | Source: Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Tamil Nadu government

Cauvery panel to meet in Puducherry after four-year gap

T. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

The Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) will meet in Puducherry on March 21. This is the second time the committee will hold its deliberations in the Union Territory, where it last met in January 2020. The committee's previous meeting was held a month ago.

Though the meetings took place in Bengaluru before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, over the past four years, it has become a norm for the members to take part in the proceedings through video-conference.

Assessing pattern

The March 21 meeting will assess the pattern of water realisation, as recorded at

Biligundlu on the inter-State border, during the current water year, starting from June 2023. As of now, the total realisation is around 77.5 thousand million cubic feet (tmcft), whereas in a normal year, it would have been 170.6 tmcft till March 11.

Though the Cauvery Water Management Authority directed Karnataka to ensure environmental flows in the lean months of the year, the upper riparian State has not been able to comply with the order as its capital, Bengaluru, is in the grip of a severe water crisis.

Meanwhile, the negotiation committee on the Pennaiyar water dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, which met last month, has sought data from the States.

Kerala to explore legal options to challenge notification of CAA rules

The notification has brought new legal urgency to the case, says Cabinet; State Assembly had in 2019 adopted a resolution demanding that Centre repeal the Act that sets religion as a criterion for Indian citizenship; it had also filed a suit in the SC

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala Cabinet has asked the Advocate-General to explore legal options to challenge the Centre's framing of rules to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019.

The State government is against enforcing the "patently anti-Muslim and deeply schismatic" Act in Kerala. The Assembly had in 2019 adopted a resolution demanding that the Centre repeal the Act that sets religion as a criterion for Indian citizenship.

The State government had filed an original suit before the Supreme Court



Strong opposition: Police removing DYFI activists who blocked a train in Alappuzha to protest against the CAA. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

under Article 131 of the Constitution which gives the top court sole jurisdiction over Centre-State disputes.

The Cabinet on Wednesday said the Union government's notification of the

CAA Rules had brought a new legal urgency to the case.

Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala, the Democratic Youth Federation of India, and the Indian Union Muslim League have

moved the Supreme Court against the CAA.

Protests continue

Meanwhile, anti-CAA protests rocked the State for the third day on Wednesday. DYFI activists blocked trains in Alappuzha and hundreds of Congress workers marched to the Raj Bhavan.

Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan called Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's steady refrain that State would not implement the Central law a "Constitutional improbability aimed at deluding voters in Kerala." The States, he said, had little role in implementing the CAA.

Only a Congress-led IN-

DIA bloc government at the Centre could annul the law. The government should show justice to the country's common cause by withdrawing the cases registered during the agitation in 2019, he said.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor said that by setting religion as a criterion for citizenship, the Centre had struck at the foundation of the secular Constitution.

Industries Minister P. Rajeev said secular forces should unite to resist the schismatic legislation. However, he accused the United Democratic Front (UDF) of diverting public attention from the pressing matter by raising the spectre of non-withdrawal of cases.

Political background not 'sufficient reason' to reject a candidate as judge, says SC Collegium

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court Collegium has brushed aside an "input" from the Department of Justice that a lawyer being considered for appointment as a Kerala High Court judge is "considered a CPI(M) sympathiser".

Recommending advocate Manoj Pulamby Madhavan for appointment as High Court judge, the Col-

legium led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said having a political background is not always a "sufficient reason" to reject a person's candidature as a judge.

The Collegium resolution of Tuesday quoted from the Department of Justice's communication, which said "Manoj Pulamby Madhavan is considered to be a CPI(M) sympathiser. He was appointed as Government Pleader in 2010

It brushed aside 'input' that Kerala HC judgeship candidate is 'considered a CPI(M) sympathiser'

and 2016-2021 by the LDF government". The Collegium said the input was "extremely vague". "Even otherwise, the mere fact that the candidate has had a political background may not be a sufficient reason in all cases," it said.

"Similarly, that he was appointed as a Government Pleader in 2010 and 2016-2021 by the LDF government does not constitute a valid ground to reject his candidature. As a matter of fact, the appointment of the candidate as a Government Pleader would indicate that he would have acquired sufficient experience in handling cases where the State is a party in diverse branches of law," the Colle-

gium reasoned in favour of Mr. Madhavan, who is a Scheduled Caste community member.

The Collegium also reminded how recently an advocate was appointed a High Court judge despite being an office-bearer of a political party.

Justice L. Victoria Gowri was reportedly an office-bearer of the BJP Mahila Morcha before her appointment as a Madras High Court judge.

'60% Kannada signboards rule sees 98% compliance in Bengaluru'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

As the deadline for complying with the 60:40 rule for use of Kannada in signboards ended on Wednesday, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), body responsible for civic amenities of the Greater Bengaluru metropolitan area, claimed the rule has already seen a 98% implementation.

As per a survey conducted in December, the BBMP claimed to have identified 50,357 violations to the rule and of them, 49,241 establishments had already changed their signboards and only 1,116 now remain. A senior BBMP official said they were confident of ensuring 100% implementation within 15 days.

It may be recalled that when the BBMP started to shut shops for non-compliance after the previous deadline of February 28, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar orally announced the extension of the deadline by two weeks.

Gaps in implementation

B. Sannerappa, State general secretary, Karnataka Rakshana Vedike, which spearheaded the campaign in December 2023, said, "Many shops have covered the English name using plastic, cloth, and pasted a sticker bearing a Kannada name. This is just a temporary arrangement. The BBMP should ensure that the shops install new signboards".

Leopard hide seized in A.P., four taken into custody

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

Officials of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and the Forest department seized a leopard hide in Andhra Pradesh and took four persons into custody.

Based on a tip-off, the DRI sleuths raided a hotel on the Beach Road in Visakhapatnam on Tuesday and found the accused persons and the hide. Three of the accused persons are from Chennai.

Visakhapatnam District Forest Officer Anant Shankar said the gang of traffickers were poaching leopards and selling their skin for profit.

Time to rejoice



Happy faces: Students sharing a lighter moment after completing Class 10 CBSE Board exams, in Hyderabad on Wednesday. NAGARA GOPAL

Kerala CM launches Sabari K-Rice, flays Centre's scheme

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who launched the Kerala government's subsidised Sabari K-Rice here on Wednesday, slammed the Centre's Bharat Rice initiative saying that it was driven by considerations of "profit and political gain."

Rice available at ₹18.59 per kg was being sold as Bharat Rice for ₹29. The Centre has taken up rice distribution eyeing profit and political gain, he said.

The State government is providing a subsidy of almost ₹11 per kg on its Sabari K-Rice, which is purchased by the State at ₹40 a kg. Kerala's public distribution system is a model for the entire nation. It will be



New initiative: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inaugurating the distribution of Sabari K-Rice on Wednesday. S. MAHINSHA

strengthened further, he said.

Mr. Vijayan also slammed the Centre's decision to bar governments and State-run agencies from sourcing food grains through the Open Market Sale Scheme (OMSS).

Prior to the National Food Security Act, Kerala

was eligible for 16.25 lakh tonnes of food grains. After its enactment, the quota reduced to 14.25 lakh tonnes. The State government had been sourcing additional rice through the OMSS during times of higher demand such as festivals and natural calamities, the Chief Minister said.

Telangana to have TG as the new prefix for vehicle number plates

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Henceforth, vehicle registration number plates in Telangana will bear the State code TG replacing TS - the prefix in use now. The number plates that currently have the TS prefix, however, will continue while the change will apply to new vehicles.

The change came into effect on Tuesday. A gazette notification to this effect was published by the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways on Tuesday.

As per the notification, the registration mark on vehicles for States and Un-

ion Territories, under serial number 29-A, TS stands amended as TG. "This change aims to enhance regulatory clarity and effectiveness," a release from the office of the Special Representative to the government said.

The proposal to change the State code was initiated by the new Congress government, led by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, who reasoned that 'TG' was part of the rallying cry during the Telangana Statehood movement.

During the movement, people across the region voluntarily affixed TG stickers to erase the AP [Andhra Pradesh] code.

Despite price cap, water continues to cost over ₹2,000 per tanker load in Bengaluru

K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj
BENGALURU

Despite a cap on water tanker prices by the district administration in Bengaluru, water tanker loads of 12,000 litres continue to cost over ₹2,000. The cap has had little effect on water tanker prices on the ground and enforcement has been almost nil, complain residents.

Nayaz Khan, a resident of Varthur, said when asked about charging more than the price cap, water tanker dealers complained that what the government had fixed was unviable and they could supply water at only higher rates. "We are at the mercy of tanker dealers for water and have



A parched city: A woman and a child collecting water from a water tanker in Bengaluru. K. BHAGYA PRAKASH

to buy water at whatever rates they quote. The government has announced that they will provide water for free in our areas. It hasn't reached us," he said.

Another resident of Whitefield said that water

tanker suppliers are not only charging the price they want, but are also insisting that apartment communities enter into a contract of at least six months to get water now. "The price cap has been

on paper and there is no way to enforce that. If one wants water, one has to accept the terms put forth by tanker suppliers and that is the ground reality," he said.

Most of the water tanker dealers in the city have rejected the price cap, even as many argue it was dead on arrival and did not apply to them at all.

BWSSB chairman V. Ramprasad Manohar said that the board will soon paste stickers of the prices fixed by the district administration on water tankers to create awareness among the public. "It is a new system and will take some time for both the people and the tanker suppliers to get used to it," he said.

Tiger that caused panic in Wayanad caught after 10 days

The Hindu Bureau
KALPETTA

A tiger that caused panic among residents in Meenangadi gram panchayat, under the South Wayanad Forest Division of Kerala, was captured on Tuesday.

The big cat, aged about seven, had triggered panic among the people for the past 10 days after it strayed into the area and reportedly killed three domestic animals. The animal is identified as WYS-07, a resident of the South Wayanad Forest Division.

A forest team, led by Chethalayath range officer Abdul Samad, set up a trap at Pampunkolly, near My-

lambadi, and caught the animal. The officials had also installed eight surveillance cameras at two sites to monitor its movements.

The tiger's capture has come as a relief to the local residents.

Shifted to hospice

The predator was shifted to the animal hospice and palliative care unit for big cats at Sulthan Bathery.

The animal is not fit to be released into the wild as it has lost all of its canine teeth, Forest department sources said. The loss of its teeth might have forced the tiger to enter human habitation for easy prey, they said.

'Hacker gang planted emails on computers of Bhima Koregaon accused'

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The alleged evidence used to incarcerate 16 people in the Bhima Koregaon case was "likely to have been implanted remotely through a hacker-for-hire mercenary gang infrastructure that has clients all over the world, but whose epicentre is in India", according to claims made in a new book.

In her book, *The Incarcerations: Bhima Koregaon And The Search For Democracy In India*, London School of Economics Professor Alpa Shah draws from interviews with cybersecurity analysts and researchers to allege that the hacker gang was connected to a Pune police officer.

In the book, she elaborates on the role of the police in hacking into the computers of at least three of the accused at Bhima Koregaon and planting the emails and files that were used to implicate them.

Professor Shah says the 16 arrests were used to divert attention away from the Hindutva instigators of a communal riot targeting Dalits, which took place on January 1, 2018 at Bhima Koregaon in Maharashtra.

'Linked to police'

As reported by *The Hindu* in December 2022, U.S.-based digital forensics firm Arsenal Consulting had found that the computers belonging to the late Father Stan Swamy and his co-accused Rona Wilson and Surendra Gadling in the Bhima Koregaon caste violence case were compromised by the same attacker.



Pune police raided Surendra Gadling's residence in the Bhima Koregaon caste violence case on April 17, 2018. FILE PHOTO

On February 10, 2021, the same consultancy had found that a hacker had controlled Mr. Wilson's computer for a period of 22 months to plant documents, which led to an investigation that supposedly unravelled a Communist Party of India (Maoist) conspiracy to eliminate Prime Minister Narendra Modi "in another Rajiv Gandhi type incident".

Professor Shah writes that a security analyst working with an email provider enabled Andy Greenberg, a U.S.-based cybersecurity journalist, to

connect the hackers to an officer in Pune police. In June 2022, Mr. Greenberg had published new research by SentinelOne, a California-based cybersecurity company, on a long-running hacking campaign which targeted hundreds of activists, journalists, academics, and lawyers in India from as far back as 2012. Those associated with the Bhima Koregaon case were notable targets.

"Shockingly brazen" "These guys are not going after terrorists. They are going after human rights

defenders and journalists. And it's not right," the security analyst is quoted as saying.

The book also quotes Mr. Greenberg as saying, "I cover a ton of state-sponsored hacking stories and usually figuring out who did it is incredibly complex. The actual identity of a hacker, figuring out which government agency is tied to a hacking operation, is like a Holy Grail. It's a very difficult thing to prove. To see this person just put their name and contact information in the backup for these email accounts, it was so bizarre. It was such a shockingly brazen thing to do."

Professor Shah writes that 16 largely unconnected people from different parts of India found themselves thrown into jail between 2018 and 2020, accused of being Maoist terrorists and "urban Naxals". She notes that they are all custodians of democracy; people who had persistently supported grassroots social movements against rising inequality, land grabs, and State atrocities; and protectors of environmental, land, and forest rights.

In 2018, the Pune police arrested Sudha Bharadwaj, Shoma Sen, Surendra Gadling, Mahesh Raut, Arun Ferreira, Sudhir Dhawale, Rona Wilson, Vernon Gonsalves, and Varavara Rao, for their alleged involvement in the Bhima Koregaon riots, based on a complaint lodged by a local builder, Tushar Damgude. He alleged that members of the CPI (Maoist) and the Kabir Kala Manch spread

hated through provocative songs, plays, and speeches delivered at the Elgar Parishad held at Shanwar Wada in Pune on December 31, 2017. The police claimed that the event triggered violence the next day near the Koregaon Bhima war memorial located on the outskirts of Pune.

The case, initially investigated by the Pune police, was transferred to the National Investigation Agency on January 24, 2020. The NIA also arrested civil rights campaigner Gautam Navlakhia; Anand Telumbde, who taught at IIT Kharagpur; Hany Babu, an associate professor at Delhi University; and Jyoti Jagtap, Sagar Gorkhe, and Ramesh Gaichor, all members of the Kabir Kala Manch, a cultural organisation.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Delhi resident Ashish Kakkhar for allegedly running a cybercrime syndicate that cheated people across the country of ₹4,978 crore over the past four years. The funds were siphoned off and diverted overseas.

Mr. Kakkhar was picked up from a hotel in neighbouring Gurugram on March 2, the ED said. The agency secured his 10-day custody from a special court till March 12.

The ED alleged that the funds generated by the syndicate were accumulated in the bank accounts of the companies/firms controlled by the "kingpin" and his associates. They were transferred abroad through the *hawala* route via "circular trading".

It is alleged that Mr. Kakkhar imported a large number of consignments - declaring high-value items such as rose oil and solar panel machinery - from Dubai, Hong Kong, China, and other countries, to the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Mundra, Kandla and other places. These were then exported from the SEZs itself. He and his associates then sent outward remittances totalling about ₹4,978 crore, against the imports. However no remittances were realised against the exports, it said.

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T.N. Governor stalls move to re-induct ex-Minister Ponmudy

S. Vijay Kumar
Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI



R. N. Ravi

In yet another stand-off with the Tamil Nadu government, Governor R.N. Ravi has put on hold the proposed swearing-in of senior DMK leader and former Minister K. Ponmudy to re-induct him into the Cabinet.

The former Higher Education Minister was disqualified as MLA after the Madras High Court sentenced him to three years in jail in a disproportionate assets case in December last year.

After the Supreme Court stayed his conviction and sentence on March 11, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin had sought time from the Governor on Wednesday or Thursday for Mr. Ponmudy's swearing-in, official sources said.

While it appeared that he was all set to rejoin the Tamil Nadu Cabinet, the sources said the swearing-in seemed unlikely this week.

Delhi visit

Sources in the Raj Bhavan told *The Hindu* that Mr. Ravi would leave for Delhi on a three-day visit on Thursday. As regards the swearing-in of Mr. Ponmudy, Raj Bhavan has sought legal opinion from experts.

The Governor has sought clarification whether inducting Mr. Ponmudy

into the Council of Ministers would be legally correct when his conviction and sentence has only been stayed in the interim, and not set aside by the top court.

Parrying questions, a Raj Bhavan official said the "matter was under consideration of the Governor."

Following his conviction and sentencing in the assets case, the higher education portfolio held by Mr. Ponmudy was reallocated to his Cabinet colleague, R.S. Rajakannappan.

However, after the Supreme Court order, Assembly Speaker M. Appavu on Wednesday rescinded his earlier notification declaring the Thirukkoyilur Assembly seat (held earlier by Mr. Ponmudy) vacant.

Mr. Ponmudy, who is also the DMK deputy general secretary and hails from Villupuram district, is considered the party's strongman in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu.

Canadian probe into Nijjar case is not over: New Zealand Deputy PM

New Zealand is one of the 'Five Eyes' grouping countries that have urged New Delhi to cooperate in the investigation; it is too early to comment on the issue, says Winston Peters, who is on a four-day visit to India for talks on bilateral ties

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Evidence in the Nijjar killing in Canada can only be known once Canadian authorities complete their investigation and take the trial to the court, New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Winston Peters said, indicating it was too early to comment on the issue that has damaged India-Canada ties for the past few months. At the end of a four-day visit to India, the first by him as part of the recently formed coalition government in New Zealand, Mr. Peters also said that India and New Zealand shared common views about Indo-Pacific security challenges, and should work more closely together.

"Is the investigation complete?" he asked in response to a question from *The Hindu* on how New Zealand, a member of the 'Five Eyes' intelligence partnership with Canada, views Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in Parliament that Indian government agents were allegedly involved in the plot to assassinate a Khalistani separatist Canadian activist, who was killed in June 2023. Since



Shared visions: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with New Zealand Deputy PM Winston Peters on Wednesday, ANI

then the issue has snowballed, especially since U.S. authorities filed the indictment of an Indian national for ordering the assassination of another Khalistani separatist, Gurbaj Singh Pannun, at the behest of a senior Indian intelligence official. However, Canadian authorities, who made their charge publicly before the U.S., have yet to take their case to trial.

Mr. Peters' comments are significant as they come months after the previous New Zealand government had joined other 'Five Eyes' grouping coun-

tries in calling on New Delhi to cooperate in the Canadian investigation of the Nijjar killing, and subsequently expressed concerns over the Modi government's decision to ask half the Canadian High Commission's diplomats to leave India in the wake of the allegations.

"Indians are famous for understanding the law. When you go to court, that's when you find out all the evidence. If there is something suspicious, you wait for all the facts to come out," Mr. Peters said when asked about Canada's evidence in the case

while speaking to journalists at a reception held in his honour. During his visit to Delhi, Mr. Peters met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankar.

Mr. Peters visited the Swaminarayan Akshardham temple in Gandhinagar, and met with representatives of the Jama Masjid mosque in New Delhi.

"India, like New Zealand, is an extremely diverse country in which varied communities come together to forge a com-

mon future. It was my pleasure to learn more about India's faith communities and its rich spiritual heritage during this visit," Mr. Peters said, according to a press release by the New Zealand High Commission.

"It is clear that New Zealand and India share common strategic perspectives about the security challenges our Indo-Pacific region faces as well as a commitment to do more together to meet them," Mr. Peters was quoted as saying after talks with Dr. Jaishankar.

In a social media post, Dr. Jaishankar said he welcomed New Zealand's decision to join the International Solar Alliance and discussed cooperation in the Commonwealth, UN Security Council reform, Indo-Pacific, and global issues. "Warm and productive meeting with [Mr. Peters.] [We] agreed on enhancing our political, trade & economic, security, connectivity, mobility, education and people to people ties," the External Affairs Minister wrote on Tuesday.

India and New Zealand at present share a total bilateral trade of \$1.56 billion, and the Indian diaspora in New Zealand numbers about 240,000.

ED arrests Delhi resident in ₹4,978-cr. cheating case

Devesh K Pandey
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Delhi resident Ashish Kakkhar for allegedly running a cybercrime syndicate that cheated people across the country of ₹4,978 crore over the past four years. The funds were siphoned off and diverted overseas.

Mr. Kakkhar was picked up from a hotel in neighbouring Gurugram on March 2, the ED said. The agency secured his 10-day custody from a special court till March 12.

The ED alleged that the funds generated by the syndicate were accumulated in the bank accounts of the companies/firms controlled by the "kingpin" and his associates. They were transferred abroad through the *hawala* route via "circular trading".

It is alleged that Mr. Kakkhar imported a large number of consignments - declaring high-value items such as rose oil and solar panel machinery - from Dubai, Hong Kong, China, and other countries, to the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Mundra, Kandla and other places. These were then exported from the SEZs itself. He and his associates then sent outward remittances totalling about ₹4,978 crore, against the imports. However no remittances were realised against the exports, it said.

Mr. Kakkhar was picked up from a hotel in neighbouring Gurugram on March 2, the ED said. The agency secured his 10-day custody from a special court till March 12.

No stay on notification of fact-check unit, says HC

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

In a setback to the petitioners fighting against the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023, the Bombay High Court on Wednesday refused to accept applications seeking a stay on the notification for the formation of a fact-check unit (FCU).

The rules empower the Centre to establish an FCU to identify fake, false, and misleading information about the government on social media platforms. The social media companies will then be compelled to remove the content or information declared as fake, false, or misleading, and if not, they will have to defend their reasons in court.

High Court refuses to stay proceedings in Senthilbalaji case

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday refused to grant an interim stay restraining the Chennai Principal Sessions Court from proceeding with the trial in a money-laundering case against former Minister V. Senthilbalaji being investigated by the ED.

A Division Bench of Justices M.S. Ramesh and Sunder Mohan told Senior Counsel Mukul Rohatgi and S. Prabhakaran that the plea for an interim stay could be considered only after the ED filed its counter to a revision petition preferred by the accused against the Sessions Court's refusal to defer the trial.

The Bench asked Additional Solicitor-General A.R.L. Sundaresan to en-



V. Senthilbalaji

sure that the counter-affidavit was filed by April 25, and directed ED Special Public Prosecutor N. Ramesh to take notice on behalf of the investigating agency in the criminal revision petition.

During arguments, Mr. Rohatgi insisted that the trial in PMLA case against the accused should be deferred till the trial for cash-for-jobs case is completed.

Mamata snaps ties with brother for opposing Howrah candidate

Shiv Sahav Singh
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee said on Wednesday that she was snapping ties with her younger brother Swapan Banerjee, popularly known as Babun.

The remarks came a day after Mr. Babun said he would contest the Lok Sabha election as an Independent from Howrah against two-time Trinamool MP Prasun Banerjee.

"From now on, please do not link my name with him. Not only me, other members of my family will also disassociate themselves from him," Ms. Banerjee told presspersons.

Mr. Babun, a popular name in Kolkata's sporting circles, has aired his differences with Mr. Prasun, who is a former footballer. "I have a lot of allergy to-



Mamata Banerjee

wards Prasun Banerjee. I may contest as an Independent candidate against him," Mr. Babun had told a news channel.

Youngest of Ms. Mamata's six brothers, Mr. Babun is the president of the Bengal Olympic Association and the Bengal Hockey Association. He is the Secretary of the Bengal Boxing Association and is also in charge of the sports wing of the Trinamool. He was keen to contest from Howrah and had also registered as a voter there.

"Sometimes, people be-

come greedy as they grow older. In every election, he creates problems. I do not like greedy people," Ms. Banerjee said, adding that she was unhappy with his conduct.

There has been talk that Mr. Babun was trying to reach out to the BJP. However, after the Chief Minister issued a strong statement, he softened his stance and said that he would not do anything against the wishes of his *di-di* (elder sister).

In a post on X, the Trinamool said: "Mamata Banerjee reflected on her humble beginnings, recounting the days of toil and hardship at a milk depot to support her family and the betrayal she endured from those closest to her. But for her, 'family' transcends the confines of blood relations; it encompasses the people of Bengal as a collective..."

Uttarakhand Bill on Uniform Civil Code gets President's nod

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Uttarakhand has now become the first State in Independent India to have a Uniform Civil Code after President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday gave assent to the UCC Bill, 2024.

The Bill, which has kept tribal people out of its ambit, has banned practices like *halala*, *iddat*, and *talaaq* (customs related to marriage and divorce in Muslim Personal Law).

The Assembly passed the Bill on February 7. It ensures that women are given equal rights in matters related to property and inheritance rights.

"Under Article 201 of the 'Constitution of India', the President gave assent to the 'Uniform Civil Code Uttarakhand 2024' Bill passed by the Uttarakhand

Legislative Assembly, on March 11 and it is published as Act Number 3, the year 2024, of Uttarakhand for general information," read the gazette notification issued by the State on Wednesday.

The Bill was one of the poll promises of the BJP during the Assembly election in Uttarakhand in 2022.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said that with the implementation of the UCC law, the government was committed to providing equal rights to all citizens. The Bill, which has 392 Sections under seven Schedules, is based on a 750-page draft, spread over four volumes, prepared by an expert committee formed by the government in June 2022, to examine the way UCC can be introduced in the State.

Gadkari, Thakur in BJP second list

Party releases second list of 72 candidates for the Lok Sabha election, covering 10 States and one Union Territory; Mysuru's erstwhile royal replaces MP Pratap Simha; Union Minister Piyush Goyal to contest from Mumbai North; party drops 29 MPs

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

The BJP on Wednesday released its second list of candidates for the Lok Sabha election, fielding Union Ministers Nitin Gadkari from Nagpur, Anurag Thakur from Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh, Pralhad Joshi from Dharwad, and Piyush Goyal from Mumbai North.



BJP workers celebrate after the announcement of Union Minister Nitin Gadkari's name as the party's candidate from Nagpur. PTI

The list of 72 candidates covers 10 States and one Union Territory. With this, the party has declared candidates for all seats in Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Tripura, and Uttarakhand. Around 29 MPs have been replaced.

In Karnataka, the BJP declared candidates for 20 out of 28 seats. It has replaced nine MPs. Mysuru MP Pratap Simha has been replaced by the scion of the Mysuru royal family, Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar. The

party has also replaced former Chief Minister D.V. Sadananda Gowda, with his Bangalore North seat going to Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, who has shifted from Udipi-Chikmagalur. Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha president Tejaswi Surya has been repeated from Bangalore South.

An interesting contest is brewing in Bangalore Rural

with renowned cardiologist C.N. Manjunath – the son-in-law of JD(S) veteran and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda – getting BJP ticket to contest against sitting MP D.K. Suresh, brother of Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar.

In Maharashtra, the BJP's list of 20 candidates saw at least two notable changes: former Minister

Pankaja Munde, whose relations with the BJP top brass have been frigid for a while, was announced as the candidate from Beed in lieu of her sister, sitting MP Pritam Munde, while Union Minister Goyal was fielded from Mumbai North, in place of Gopal Shetty.

Delhi nominees

Replacing the sitting MPs in the East and North West Delhi, Gautam Gambhir and Hans Raj Hans respectively, the BJP in its second candidate list has announced Delhi BJP general secretary and former East MCD Mayor Harsh Malhotra from East Delhi, and BJP general secretary and former North MCD Mayor Yogendra Chandolia from North West.

In Gujarat, the party has dropped sitting MPs from Surat, Valsad, Sabarkantha, Bhavnagar and Chhota Udepur.

In Uttarakhand, the BJP fielded two new candidates – former Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat replaced another former Chief Minister and ex-Union Minister Ramesh Pokhriyal Nishank in Haridwar, while in Garhwal, BJP's media cell chief Anil Baluni replaced a former Chief Minister, Tirath Singh Rawat.

In Haryana, the party dropped two MPs. Former Chief Minister Manohar Lal has been declared the candidate from Karnal in place of Sanjay Bhatia.

In Telangana, the BJP continues to hedge its bets on newcomers, with turncoats, mostly those from the BRS, getting ticket in the second list. Former BRS MPs A. Seetaram Naik and G. Nagesh got the party nod for the seats of Mahabubabad and Adilabad respectively. Former BRS MLA S. Saide Reddy will contest from Nalgonda.

Saini govt. wins Haryana trust vote

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The new Bharatiya Janata Party government in Haryana, led by Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, won the motion of confidence by voice vote in the Assembly on Wednesday.

A Special Session of the Assembly had been convened to hold the vote of confidence after Mr. Saini was sworn in on Tuesday as the new Chief Minister, replacing Manohar Lal.

'Will work hard'

Mr. Saini, in his address, said the new government would work hard to serve the people of the State, just like how Haryana saw all-round development in the past nine-and-a-half years under the leadership of Mr. Lal.

In the 90-member Assembly, the BJP has 41 MLAs. It also enjoys the support of six Independents. The lone MLA of the Haryana Lokhit Party also



Nayab Singh Saini

extended his support to the BJP, ensuring that the government enjoys a comfortable majority.

The main Opposition Congress has 30 MLAs, while the Indian National Lok Dal has one.

The Jannayak Janata Party (JJP), a former ally of the BJP, had issued a whip asking its 10 MLAs to remain absent from the House during voting on the confidence motion. JJP MLAs Devender Singh Babli, Ram Kumar Gautam, Ishwar Singh, Ram Niwas, and Jogi Ram Sihag, who were in the House, left when the trust vote was taken up.

'One nation, one poll' panel may submit report today

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The committee on "one nation, one election", headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, may submit its report on Thursday.

The report is likely to recommend amending relevant articles of the Constitution and/or adding new sections to enable holding of simultaneous polls in the country.

Set up in September 2023, the committee was mandated to examine and make recommendations with regard to holding simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, municipalities, and panchayats.

The panel includes Home Minister Amit Shah, former Finance Commission Chairman N.K. Singh, former Lok Sabha Secretary-General Subhash Kashyap, and senior advocate Harish Salve.

BJP picks Chirag Paswan over his uncle

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The BJP has chosen Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti (Ram Vilas) Party over his uncle Pashupati Paras's Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party, ending days of speculation.



Chirag Paswan

According to sources, the BJP has agreed to concede five seats to Mr. Paswan, including the Hajipur Lok Sabha constituency that his father and Dalit leader Ram Vilas Paswan won eight times. It is currently held by Mr. Paras.

A jubilant Mr. Paswan posted pictures of his

meeting with BJP president J.P. Nadra on social media. "We have together finalised the seat sharing in Bihar for the ensuing Lok Sabha polls. The same will be announced in due course," he wrote on X. The breakthrough came

after Mr. Paswan's public posturing that he was ready to walk out of the alliance if the BJP did not give him a "respectable share".

Sources said for the past one week, senior BJP leader Mangal Pandey was told to settle the feud between the two LJP factions. But the talks bore no result as Mr. Paswan clearly laid down the condition that he would remain a part of the NDA only if his uncle's faction was not given any berth.

"We were clear from the beginning that the person who engineered a split in

the party founded by Ram Vilasji should not be accommodated in the NDA, either by giving them a Rajya Sabha berth or with seats in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls," a senior leader close to Mr. Paswan said.

Sources said the BJP acceded to this demand based on the condition that Mr. Paswan would not press for the 2019 Lok Sabha seat-sharing formula.

In 2019, the united LJP under the late Ram Vilas Paswan, was offered six Lok Sabha seats in Bihar and one Rajya Sabha seat. The party won all six seats.

Adhir seeks details on EC candidates

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Ahead of Thursday's meeting of the selection committee to fill two vacancies in the Election Commission, created by the sudden resignation of Arun Goel and superannuation of Anup Chandra Pandey, Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has written to the Law Ministry seeking details on the shortlisted candidates.

Mr. Chowdhury is a member of the selection committee, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, which will choose

the two new Election Commissioners (ECs). A Union Minister is the third member of the panel.

"I would request you to make available the 'dossier' containing biodatas of shortlisted candidates for the post of Election Commissioners before the meeting," Mr. Chowdhury is learnt to have said in his letter to Legislative Department Secretary Rajiv Mani.

The selection committee will peruse the names on the shortlist prepared by a search committee, which is headed by Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal. The search panel,

which also includes the Union Home Secretary and the Secretary of the Department of Personnel and Training, will shortlist five names for each vacancy.

With the dates for the Lok Sabha election to be announced soon, the Congress has been targeting the government for reducing the EC to a one-man body.

On Wednesday, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh alleged that the EC's independence had eroded since the Modi-led government came to power at the Centre. "The EC has refused to meet INDIA par-

ties on the issue of 100% VVPATs [Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails]. It is a Constitutional body but its independence has been severely eroded since 2014," Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X.

His comments came following reports that the police in Jammu had detained National Panthers Party (NPP) chairman and former minister Harsh Dev Singh along with his several supporters for trying to stage a protest outside Nirvachan Bhawan in Jammu against the "delay" in holding Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

Five guarantees for women announced by Rahul Gandhi

Abhinav Deshpande
DHULE

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday announced five *Nari Nyay* guarantees, including ₹1 lakh annually for poor women and 50% reservation in Central government jobs, if his party is voted to power in the Lok Sabha election.

Addressing a *Mahila Sammelan* (women's conference) in Maharashtra's Dhule district as part of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the Wayanad MP promised to double the income of ASHA workers, women in Anganwadis, and those in mid-day meal schemes under 'Shakti ka Samman' scheme. He also proposed plans to establish 'Savitribai Phule working women's hostels' in every district across the country.

Adhikar Maitri is the fifth guarantee under which a paralegal (nodal officer) will be appointed in every panchayat to educate women about their rights and help in the fight for their cases, he said. The party named the annual financial assistance as the 'Mahalaxmi Guarantee' and 'Aadhi Aabadi, Pura Hak' (half the population, full rights) to the 50% quota in the jobs scheme.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, through a video message, said the party's guarantees were "pathar ki lakeer (set in stone)" and not a "jumla". "Before this, we announced guarantees on

participatory justice, farmer justice, and youth justice. Our words are set in stone. This is our record from 1926 till now, when our opponents were not even born, we have been making manifestos and fulfilling those declarations," he said.

The term 'nyay'

The former Congress president reflected on his previous Bharat Jodo Yatra, spanning 4,000 km from Kanyakumari to Srinagar, where he interacted with lakhs of farmers, youth, and women. "The term 'nyay' has been added in the second yatra from Manipur to Mumbai after farmers, youth and women told me that violence and hatred is arising from injustice," he said.

Accusing the ruling BJP of deceiving women on reservation issues, Mr. Gandhi promised immediate implementation if his party comes to power.

"Women have been fooled by the Centre over reservation [in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies] as the Bill pertaining to it has been passed by Parliament, but its implementation will take place after 10 years. Our guarantee of 50% reservation will be implemented immediately, without any survey," he said.

The yatra entered Maharashtra on Tuesday in its last leg from neighbouring Gujarat and will culminate on March 16 at Mumbai's Chaityabhoomi.

In unison



Journey begins: Farmers raise slogans as they prepare to leave from the Amritsar Railway Station on Wednesday for the kisan mahapanchayat to be held on Thursday in New Delhi. ANI

Tata Motors to invest over ₹9,000 crore in Tamil Nadu

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tata Motors Group, which manufactures commercial and passenger vehicles, has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Tamil Nadu government for establishing a vehicle manufacturing facility at an investment of over ₹9,000 crore over five years.

The unit is expected to create 5,000 jobs, directly and indirectly. According to an official statement, the unit is expected to come up in Ranipet.

V. Vishnu, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Guidance Tamil Nadu, and P.B. Balaji, CFO, Tata Motors Group, signed

the MoU in the presence of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.

T.R.B. Rajaa, Minister for Industries; V. Arun Roy, Secretary, Industries, Investment Promotion and Commerce; and senior officials of Tata Motors Group were present on the occasion.

According to details that Tata Motors submitted to the Bombay Stock Exchange, following the signing of the MoU, teams from Guidance, the investment promotion agency of the State government, and Tata Motors Group will work together to take this opportunity forward.

As soon as the MoU was signed, Mr. Rajaa posted the following message on X: "Another billion dollar investment comes into



Huge deal: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin at the signing of the MoU on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

#TamilNadu! #TataMotors and the Government of Tamil Nadu are revving up for an epic journey!"

Two big investments

He also mentioned that for the first time, Tamil Nadu had attracted two big auto-

mobile manufacturing investments within two months. "Over the past couple of years, Tamil Nadu has hit the fast lane and become the ultimate hub for investments, showcasing our Chief Minister's dedication to fostering top-

tier employment for our vibrant youth and amplifying our industrial prowess. We're not just building factories; we're engineering dreams and accelerating towards a brighter, more prosperous future!" he said.

J&K simultaneous polls decision after security review: CEC

Peerzada Ashiq
JAMMU

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Wednesday remained non-committal on simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in J&K, saying "the final decision will be taken after thorough consultations with the security agencies and political parties".

"Majority of political parties we met in Srinagar and Jammu demanded that Assembly and Lok Sabha polls be held simultaneously. We will take a final

call after a thorough security review and consultations with the political parties. We want early Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in J&K," CEC Kumar, who held meetings in Srinagar and Jammu during a two-day visit to J&K, said.

Mr. Kumar said the Election Commission of India (EC) was "committed towards holding polls here and in the country peacefully and with maximum participation".

"We are fully prepared for the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls scheduled to be held this year," he said.

Later, at a press conference, Mr. Rajaa said, "At the Global Investors Meet 2024, we signed an MoU with VinFast. This happened in January, and in February, the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu laid the foundation for this project. No other State has come out with such continuous announcements." The Minister pointed out that the State had good infrastructure, ease of doing business, a safe environment for women, and a good happiness index.

On February 25, Mr. Stalin laid the foundation for VinFast Auto Limited's electric car manufacturing facility, which is coming up on 408 acres in the SIPCOT Industrial Complex at Silanatham in Thoothukudi.

IN BRIEF



Proposal to add 3 lakh NCC cadet vacancies approved

A proposal for expansion of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) with the addition of three lakh cadet vacancies has been approved by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. This expansion is expected to cater to the increasing demand for the NCC from educational institutions throughout the country, the Defence Ministry said. It will lead to the proportionate distribution of vacancies, and would reduce the waiting list of institutions aspiring for the NCC, the Ministry said. The expansion plan encompasses the establishment of four new group headquarters and the addition of two new NCC units.

Nagaland church body says LGBTQ+ lifestyle unacceptable

The LGBTQ+ lifestyle is unacceptable according to the biblical principles, an apex church organisation in Christian-majority Nagaland has said. LGBTQ+ expands to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and all other sexual orientations. A statement issued by the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) on Tuesday affirming its opposition to LGBTQ+ lifestyle came a week after an extremist group asked the "propagators of the community" to quit Naga-inhabited areas. "We are not against the people who struggle with an LGBTQ+ lifestyle. Love the person but hate the sin should always be our approach," the statement read.

Home Ministry to launch CAA helpline to assist applicants

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs said it would soon launch a helpline to assist applicants for Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), 2019. "Applicants can make free calls from anywhere in India and get information related to CAA-2019. Helpline to be available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.," the Ministry posted on X. Users are required to register on the portal (<https://indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in>). A mobile application, 'CAA-2019', has also been readied. All documents, along with photographs are to be uploaded online, and applications will be processed after a background check by security agencies and the payment of ₹50.

Maharashtra's Ahmednagar to be called Ahilyanagar

The Maharashtra Cabinet on Wednesday formally approved the renaming of Ahmednagar district to Ahilyanagar after the 18th Century Maratha queen Ahilyabai Holkar. The decision to rename the district had already been announced by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde in May last year on the 298th birth anniversary of Ahilyabai Holkar. The renaming of Ahmednagar follows the Mahayuti government's decision to rename Aurangabad district as Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar and Osmanabad as Dharashiv. The demand for renaming Ahmednagar was started by BJP leader and MLC Gopichand Padalkar, an influential leader of the Dhargar (shepherd) community.

SC stops Assam govt. move to de-notify rhino habitat

The Forest Department issued the notification in 1998 without consulting the Cabinet or Revenue Department, says State; court says it won't stand in the way of protecting rights of forest dwellers

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday froze the Assam government's move to withdraw an almost 26-year-old notification constituting the Pobitora wildlife sanctuary, which hosts one of the largest rhino populations in the country.

"The State government was not right in resolving to withdraw the notification dated March 17, 1998 notifying Pobitora wildlife sanctuary... We direct that no further steps be taken with respect to the withdrawal of the notification dated March 17, 1998 by the State," a Bench of Justices B.R. Gawai and Sandeep Mehta ordered.

The Assam Cabinet had on March 10 withdrawn the notification issued by the State Forest Department in 1998. The Cabinet decision of March 10 said the notification was issued unilaterally by the Forest department without consulting the Revenue Department or even the Chief Minister.

The government reasoned that declaration of



Protected land: An adult Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros walks with a calf inside the Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary. RITU RAJ KONWAR

the sanctuary was made without settling the rights of the people living in villages in the area, including Thengabhang, Murkata and Mayong. These villagers belonged to the marginalised communities and had been residing in the area even before Independence.

Panel set up

The government, having withdrawn the 1998 notification declaring the wildlife sanctuary, had also constituted a committee to look into both the rights and claims of the forest dwellers in the area as well as taking a considered decision, this time, to declare the Pobitora region as a

wildlife sanctuary.

"We will not permit any de-notification. Withdrawing a notification declaring a wildlife sanctuary is not your answer. Such withdrawals cannot be done without the permission of the National Board of Wildlife. Besides, the Supreme Court has also passed an order against de-reservation of national parks, sanctuaries and forests," Justice Gawai clarified to the Assam counsel, senior advocate Nalin Kohli.

Amicus curiae, advocate K. Parameswar, said the withdrawal was "ex facie illegal".

"The notification was done unilaterally by the Forest department in 1998.

The Revenue Department or the Cabinet was not involved," Mr. Kohli said.

But Justice Mehta said the declaration of the sanctuary in 1998 was an "act of government". "Then how can you now disown it?" Justice Mehta asked.

Mr. Kohli said the idea behind the withdrawal was not to close the Pobitora wildlife sanctuary, but to correct an error regarding the demarcation of lands.

"Fresh notification will be issued. It was not done properly in 1998. Our intention is to do the right thing. It only came to our attention now. Pobitora is our pride," Mr. Kohli submitted.

"The fact that the Forest Department did it without consultation came to light only 25 years later?" Justice Gawai asked Mr. Kohli.

The court, however, clarified that its order staying the withdrawal of the 1998 notification would not stand in the way of the State "doing something to protect the rights of the forest dwellers".

The court asked the State to file a detailed counter-affidavit by the next hearing.

Panel recommends ban on 'ferocious dogs'

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

An expert committee constituted by the Department of Animal Welfare and Husbandry, Ministry of Agriculture, has recommended that certain breeds of "ferocious dogs" be prohibited from being kept as pets.

An official letter has gone out from the department to all States listing out these dog breeds as well as instructions to no longer register licences that permit their sale.

The expert committee was constituted after citizen groups complained of attacks on people - sometimes fatal - by these dogs.

There is also a petition being deliberated upon in the Delhi High Court requesting it to ban certain breeds. The High Court, in De-

ceMBER 2023 had said it would decide on the issue "in three months."

The breeds include mixed and cross-breeds like pit bull terrier, tosa inu, American Staffordshire terrier, fila brasileiro, dogo argentino, American bulldog, boerboel, kangal, central Asian shepherd dog, caucasian shepherd dog, south mastiffs, rottweiler, terrier, rhodesian ridgeback, wolf dogs, canario, akbash dog, Moscow guard dog, Cane corso and dogs commonly classified as bandog.

These rules are expected to be implemented by local authorities. Dogs that have already been kept as pets must be sterilised to ensure that further breeding does not happen, said the letter signed by Joint Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture.



Prasar Bharati launches news sharing service

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Singh Thakur on Wednesday launched 'PB-SHABD' - Prasar Bharati's news sharing service and the revamped websites of DD News and Akashvani News.

Mr. Thakur said news organisations would be provided with clean feed and they would not have to carry the Doodardshan logo. He said the SHABD service was being provided free of cost for the first year as an introductory offer and would provide news stories in all major Indian languages across 50 categories.

The PB-SHABD has been designed to provide daily news feeds in video, audio, text, and other formats to subscribers.

Modi, British PM assess progress on free trade agreement negotiations

The Hindu Bureau
LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak spoke over the phone on Tuesday assessing the progress made on negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), as both countries face general elections.

New Delhi and London have been negotiating a deal since January 2022, but an agreement has thus far remained out of reach with British negotiators returning from India earlier after the 14th round of talks.

As the U.K. negotiating team left for India on March 4, a British official had said, it was a "last-gasp attempt to clinch an FTA before the Indian election campaign pauses talks",

PM launches portal for marginalised sections

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Launching the Pradhan Mantri Samajik Utthan evam Rozgar Adharit Jankalyan (PM-SURAJ) portal for credit support to entrepreneurs from disadvantaged sections of society virtually on Wednesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "This is a testament to our commitment to provide dignity and justice to the underprivileged. Modi gives you this guarantee - this campaign of development and respect for

the deprived class will intensify in the coming five years."

Mr. Modi also disbursed around ₹720 crore worth of credit to one lakh beneficiaries from the Scheduled Castes, Denotified, Nomadic Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Safai Karamcharis. The portal will be a one-stop point where people from disadvantaged sections of society can apply for and monitor the progress of all loan and credit schemes already available to them.

RSS to pass resolution on Ram Temple

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) will pass a resolution on the Ram Temple during its *Pratinidhi Sabha*, the meeting of the highest decision-making body of Sangh, scheduled to be held from March 15 to 17 in Nagpur,

said the organisation's all-India publicity head, Sunil Ambekar, on Wednesday.

The annual meeting, which aims at setting the course of action and programmes of the RSS for the

rest of the year, will also witness deliberation over various issues prevailing in the country, including Sandeshkhali and the farmers' protest.

He added that the plans prepared for this year will hold special importance as the RSS is completing 100 years of its formation in 2025.

BJP president J.P. Nadda, the heads and organising secretaries of 36 Sangh outfits, and other RSS-affiliated organisations will take part in the *Pratinidhi Sabha*.



Face to face: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his British counterpart, Rishi Sunak, in New Delhi, in this file photo.

according to a report in *The Guardian*.

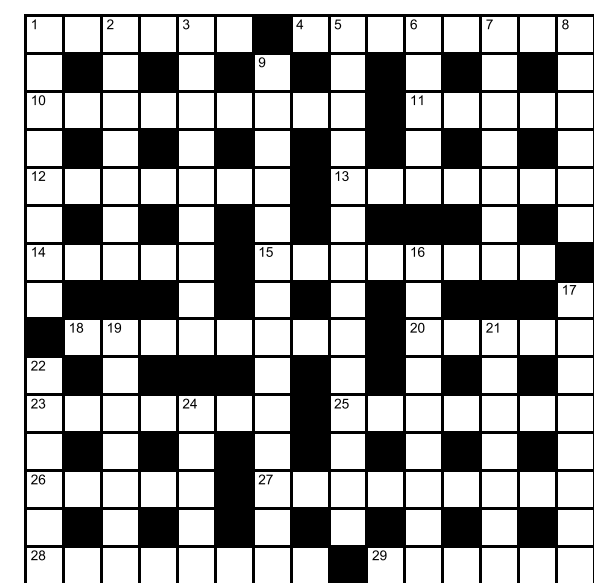
On Tuesday, Mr. Modi tweeted that he and Mr. Sunak had reaffirmed their commitment to the "early conclusion" of a "mutually beneficial" agreement.

"The Prime Minister [Mr. Sunak] reiterated the importance of reaching an ambitious outcome on goods and services,"

Downing Street said in a readout, adding that the two Prime Ministers agreed to remain in close contact.

The readouts also said the leaders discussed the overall partnership. Mr. Modi and Mr. Sunak discussed regional and global developments, according to the Indian government readout.

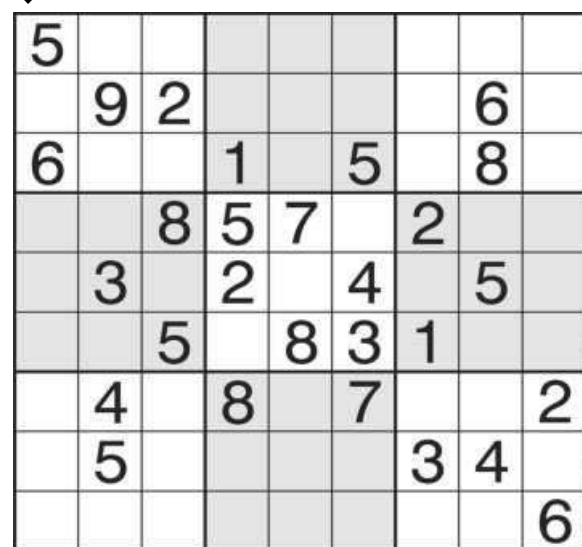
THE CROSSWORD 14122
(set by KrisKross)



- To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qr.go.page.link/jjpTn>
- 14 Journalists in opening of movie "Batman returns" (5)
15 Plane bearing royal crosses border (8)
18 Chronicle of tailless tigress running wild (8)
20 Dressing for dance (5)
23 Champion exhausted, nervous in track (7)
25 Unfriendly animal briefly controlled by force (7)
26 Shakespearean character lofty in speech (5)
27 Abruptly put out rage inside - could be harmful (9)
28 "Lived in camp" - entertaining article by journalist (8)
29 Supports chances (6)
- Down**
1 Temporary leave, followed by discharge? On the contrary (4-4)
2 Weak batting by pair regularly included in team - finally game lost (7)
3 Goddess of performing arts and studies, always in white basically (9)
5 DI eventually succeeded in arresting criminal for financial wrongdoing (7,7)
6 Encourage those having spirit (5)
7 Cover containing rupee became wrinkled (7)
8 Start a journey with extremely suave, well-dressed gentleman (3,3)
9 Run inside, kiss wife, winning good game (8,6)
16 Unyielding boss at last is splitting target (9)
17 Gives a name to pet bass swimming outside island (8)
19 Feeling sorry - no time to accept love (7)
21 Spooner cites items required to imprison humorist (7)
22 Squint-eyed like a German philosopher (6)
24 Treat tips of nails, oily locks and skin here? (5)

- Across**
1 Churchman in the olden days, ready to control Italy (6)
4 Beginner shot selfies that are dull (8)
10 Places to go excitedly? Some nude resorts (9)
11 Weakness of a boy overwhelmed by success (5)
12 Prepare to print form before game of tennis (7)
13 Women's work, mostly performed by men (7)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

E	X	P	L	I	C	I	T	I	S	L	A	N	D
N	E	B	N	O	N	A							
M	A	N	T	I	S	S	A	S	L	O	G	A	N
I	N	I	Z	U	J	I	E	D					
T	O	N	G	A	R	A	D	I	C	A	L	L	I
Y	O	A	S	E	L	I							
Q	U	A	S	A	R	I	S	T	H	M	U	S	
S	L	I											
C	H	A	N	N	E	L							
I	G	A	I										
E	A	R	M	A	R	K	E	D					
N	A	P	E	E									
C	A	N	Y	O	N	S	A	B	O	T	A	G	E
E	G	R											
S	K	E	W	E	R								

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

The power of women

Some may believe International Women's Day is a modern day construct; however, celebration of women power is an ancient one in our culture, dating back eons. Karadayyan Nonbu is one such, said Suchithra Balasubramanian in a discourse.

We are all asked to chant, *Lokah Samastah Sukhino Bhavantu* (May all beings everywhere be happy and free). One should always pray for the well-being of others, since God comes rushing to the aid of those one prays for. The observance of Karadayyan Nonbu is in line with this principle. Also known as Gauri puja, on this day, women pray to Goddess Devi for the longevity and health of their husband.

Falling in the cusp of the end of the Tamil month Maasi and start of Panguni, the nonbu celebrates Savitri's unwavering love and presence of mind, which helped her wrest her husband literally from the jaws of death. Born as the daughter of Ashtapati, Savitri wished to marry Satyavan, despite the prescient knowledge that he would die within a year of their marriage. Puranas say that although determined to enjoy the happiness from the union, she also steadfastly prayed to Devi to bless her with a long conjugal life. At the end of a year of the marriage, Yama, the God of Death, arrived to claim Satyavan's life. Known as someone who showed neither fear nor favour in his duty, he nevertheless moved by Savitri's love. He offered her a boon. The clever woman said she wanted to birth a few children. Yama quickly granted her wish, before realising that to do so, he would have to allow Satyavan live.

AlphaGeometry and the threat of AI's takeover of mathematics

Google's machine was able to solve 25 out of 30 Olympiad-level geometry problems and could also write human-readable proofs and draw diagrams to explain a proof. According to a U.S. Mathematical Olympiad coach, this performance exceeds that of an average silver medallist

Mohan R.

A few weeks ago, an animated discussion unfolded in a WhatsApp group whose members are mathematicians interested in the Indian Mathematical Olympiad. The spark was a *Nature* paper that announced a Google DeepMind artificial intelligence (AI) named AlphaGeometry had achieved a milestone: it could solve geometry problems at the level of the International Mathematical Olympiad, nearly matching the prowess of gold medallists.

The news evoked a mix of awe, fear, and wonder among us, especially in light of how AI tools like ChatGPT have started to reshape education. Some mathematicians wondered if the advent of AlphaGeometry signals the start of AI's ascendancy in mathematics.

Is this truly the beginning of an AI takeover in mathematics? To answer this question, let's take a look at the inner workings of AlphaGeometry.

How does mathematical logic work?

The *Nature* paper was coauthored by two computer scientists at New York University and two DeepMind researchers. AlphaGeometry is one of DeepMind's array of AI systems – perhaps the most popular of which is AlphaZero, a deep-learning algorithm that excels at playing chess. Programs like these are part of researchers' efforts to work up a ladder of complexity, building tools that can perform more complex tasks with better reliability.

The AlphaGeometry team has published supplementary information describing the proofs generated by AlphaGeometry for some geometry problems, showcasing its ability to create hundreds of logical steps in proof construction.

Let's start with a simple example from school mathematics. Suppose we only know that for any number a , $a + 0 = a$. From this, we will be able to prove that for any number $a \times 0 = 0$. How? If $a + 0 = a$ for any number a , then we should have $0 + 0 = 0$. Thus $a \times 0$ can be written as $a \times (0 + 0)$, which is the same as $a \times 0 + a \times 0$. So we have the equality $a \times 0 = (a \times 0) + (a \times 0)$. Cancelling $a \times 0$ on both sides of the equation, we can conclude that $a \times 0 = 0$.

Here, the entire proof is simply derived from the hypothesis using the rules of logic. Many computer programs can execute such a process but AlphaGeometry stands apart because of its 'Deductive Database' – a method that significantly reduces the number of steps in a proof.

What is 'Deductive Database'?

Suppose we are given a statement A , and we want to deduce the statement Z . The program can spit out all possible next steps – let's call them B – that can be deduced from A using the rules of logic. Then it will spit out all possible next steps C that can be deduced from B , and so on. If there are only finitely many steps possible, then it should reach the conclusion Z at some point. But once it reaches Z , it will perform a 'traceback' process to find the proof that takes the minimum number of steps.

So much for arithmetic and logic; geometry requires something more. In geometry, we use algebraic relations between different kinds of measures to find new relations. For example, we will have used simple techniques in school geometry called 'angle chasing', 'ratio chasing' and 'distance chasing'.

To illustrate the meaning of these ideas, let us take an example from school geometry. Let a , b , and c be three lines on a plane. If we know the angle between a and b and the angle between b and c , we can immediately determine the angle between a and c (see figure 1). This is an example of 'angle chasing'. Similarly, AlphaGeometry can quickly discover all possible algebraic relationships between some given quantities using its 'Algebraic Rules' program.

When it combines its 'Deductive Database' and 'Algebraic Rules' programs, AlphaGeometry can write complete proofs for most school-level geometry problems.

For example, let A , B , C , and D be any four points on a plane (see figure 2). Suppose by angle chasing we know that the angle between the lines AB and BD is equal to the angle between the lines AC and CD .

Then 'Deductive Database' can immediately figure out all the four points lie on a circle while 'Algebraic Rules' can determine that the angle between the lines BC and CA is equal to the angle



AlphaGeometry stands apart because of its 'Deductive Database' – a method that significantly reduces the number of steps in a proof. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

between the lines BD and DA .

What are auxiliary constructions?

The combination of these two programs makes AlphaGeometry a very powerful tool. The AlphaGeometry team could solve 14 of the 30 geometry problems in the International Mathematical Olympiad in this way.

This achievement also reveals that a significant amount of difficulty in these problems was not in terms of the ingenuity required to solve them but in the ability to deduce the most number of relations – and computers are better at this than humans.

Fortunately, this ability is not sufficient to prove all problems in geometry, but AlphaGeometry seems to have summited this peak as well.

Mathematics is really a creative field because mathematicians often come up with clever constructions to solve a problem. Their name for such a construction is an auxiliary construction. Auxiliary constructions are not part of what is 'given' to us nor what we want to prove, and also illustrate what makes automatic theorem proving difficult. There are infinite ways to build constructions, and human



The success of this project will certainly lead to the development of AI programs that can efficiently do mathematics at least at the school level

intelligence is required to judge which one to choose for a given problem and how to use it.

There is a classic example: some 2,000 years ago, Euclid proved that there are infinitely many prime numbers. His proof goes as follows: suppose there are only finitely many primes numbers, say p_1, p_2, \dots, p_n . Take the product of all these primes and add 1 to the product. Let's call this new number p . That is, $p = p_1 p_2 \dots p_n + 1$. The question now is whether p is a prime.

If p is a prime, and since p is bigger than all the other primes, we have a new prime. However, this shouldn't be possible because we assumed originally that there is only a finite number of primes. If p is not a prime, we will be forced to conclude that one of the primes should divide 1, which is absurd. In sum,

assuming there is a number of primes leads us to absurdity, which means there have to be infinitely many primes.

The auxiliary construction in this proof is constructing the number p .

There are no particular restrictions for how we can come up with different constructions, and thus different ways to solve the problem. They simply require experience and deep insight.

What is the significance?

Invariably, most geometry proofs require auxiliary constructions. Large language models like GPT-4, which is behind ChatGPT, can be taught to come up with possible constructions. One can train them to use rule-sets from different fields to build auxiliary constructions and use them to write proofs. However, there is no guarantee that the new constructions they devise will be able to lead to new proofs. But when the AlphaGeometry team combined GPT-4 with 'Deductive Database' and 'Algebraic Rules', the program could produce auxiliary constructions for geometry problems, with no prior human demonstration. This is a new development in the field, and in this sense, AlphaGeometry seems like a big step towards AI's takeover of mathematics, which has thus far been a very human enterprise.

In all, AlphaGeometry could solve 11 more Olympiad geometry problems, bringing its tally to 25 out of 30 problems. It is also commendable that AlphaGeometry can write human-readable proofs and can draw diagrams to explain a proof. Once it did so, the team asked a coach of the U.S. Mathematical Olympiad to evaluate the proofs and grade them. The result: AlphaGeometry performed better than an average silver medallist.

The architecture developed for AlphaGeometry may not have been able to solve the other Olympiad problems, but the techniques it developed are directly useful to solve problems from other areas of mathematics. The success of this project will certainly lead to the development of AI programs that can efficiently do mathematics at least at the school level.

(Mohan R. is a mathematician at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.)

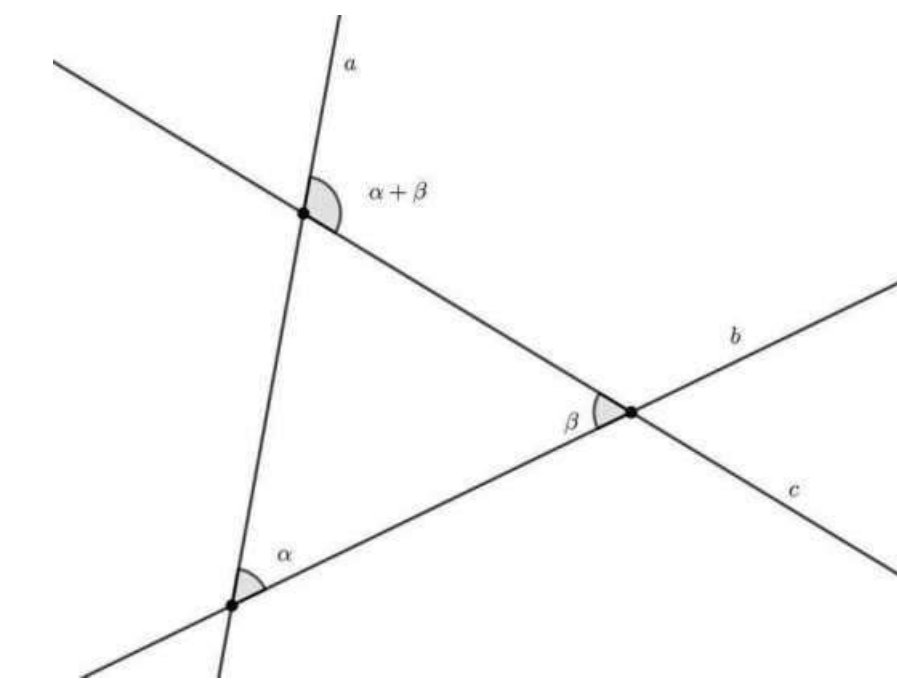


Figure 1. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

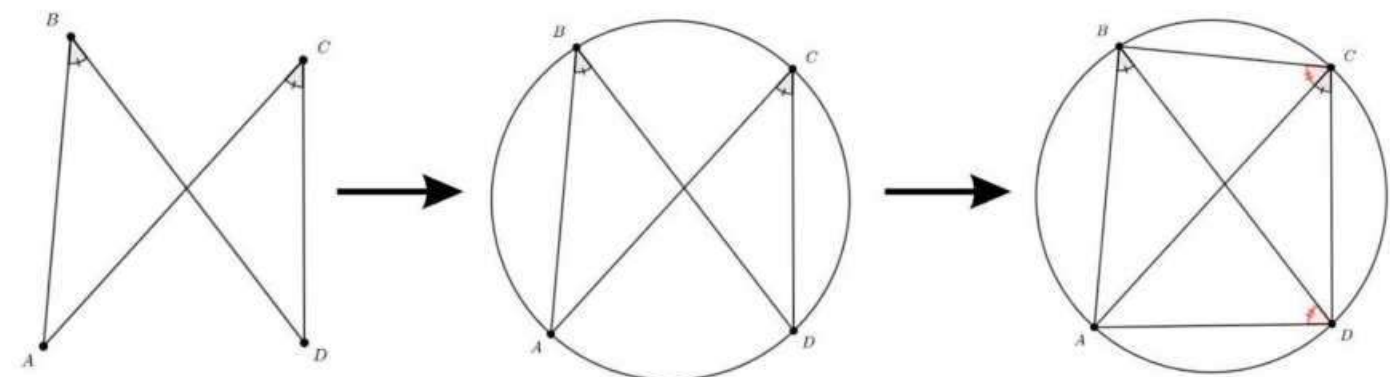


Figure 2. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Solar photo voltaics have inherent limitations which are the subject of research. FILE PHOTO

Overcoming theoretical limits on solar cell capacity

Priyali Prakash

In photovoltaics - i.e. the study of conversion of light energy into electrical energy – the Shockley-Queisser limit is a theoretical concept that defines the maximum capacity of a solar cell to produce electricity.

The Sun is the primary source of light and energy on the earth. Photovoltaic devices like solar cells allow us to harness this energy. Photovoltaic cells are made of semiconducting materials like (doped) silicon. When sunlight interacts with a semiconductor, it excites electrons from the lower-energy valence band to the higher-energy conduction band.

This transition leaves behind a vacancy in the valence band called a hole. (To be more precise, a hole is a vacant site where an electron is supposed to be. Since it denotes the absence of an electron, a hole is also a place with positive charge.)

The process of an electron moving to the conduction band and leaving a hole behind in the valence band creates an electron-hole pair. These pairs are the fundamental charge carriers in

Researchers have been trying to surpass the Shockley-Queisser limit and use more solar energy, and thus improve the cells' efficiency, but this has been easier said than done

semiconductors and play a crucial role in the operation of electronic devices.

In short, electron-hole pairs create the photocurrent – an electric current created as a result of radiation – in the semiconductor.

We know that the efficiency with which a solar cell can produce an electric current when sunlight is incident on it can't be 100% because some light particles (photons) pass through the material without interacting with it (i.e. transparency loss, around 25%) and some energy simply heats up the material without exciting the electrons (thermalisation, around 30%). As a result, the maximum efficiency of a conventional solar cell is confined, and this range is called the Shockley-Queisser limit. It is named after the physicists William Shockley (of the U.S.) and Hans-Joachim Queisser (Germany).

These days, a solar cell can convert only a third of the incident solar energy into electric energy. The semiconductor can't make use of photons with less energy than that required by electrons to jump across the band gap. Similarly, photons carrying significantly more energy than the size of the band gap only heat the device.

Researchers have been trying to find ways to surpass the Shockley-Queisser limit and use more solar energy, and thus improve the cells' efficiency, but this has been easier said than done.

South Korean physicist Young Hee Lee has said carrier multiplication and hot carrier extraction are two promising pathways. In the former, a cell allows a photon to create multiple electron-hole pairs. The latter aims to quickly capture photons with 'too much' energy before they dissipate as heat.

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



Wrong messaging

The underpinning of religion in the implementation of CAA is problematic

The government's decision to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, just days before the dates for the general election are expected to be announced seems to be a precursor to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) exploiting a polarising issue in the poll campaign. A law strongly opposed by many, especially by the Muslim community, for introducing a religion-based test for grant of citizenship to immigrants from three chosen countries, the CAA is under legal challenge before the Supreme Court of India. Enacted in 2019, it was not implemented until now as the government did not notify the rules to operationalise its provisions. The timing of the rules being notified raises a legitimate doubt if it is an attempt to divert attention away from the electoral bonds controversy. The rules were unveiled at a time when the nation was questioning the delay in the submission of details about the purchasers of anonymous electoral bonds and the parties that redeemed them. The circumstances make one question the urgent need to implement a law that has not been acted upon for five years. The new rules also appear carefully crafted, designed as they are to introduce processes that will leave no scope for States to impede its implementation. It is possible that the rules were ready for a long time, and the CAA issue is being revived for electoral gains.

The essence of the CAA, in reality, may not affect the interests of minority citizens: after all, it is only a fast-tracking mechanism for minorities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis and Christians – from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan to gain citizenship. Instead of the usual 11 years (out of the preceding 14 years), the waiting period for this class of immigrants will only be five years, provided they had arrived before December 31, 2014. Further, there is nothing in it that removes anyone's citizenship. The problem with the CAA is two-fold: first, in its discriminatory norm that specifies some religious communities as eligible for citizenship. All those from these six religions in these three countries are presumed to have fled persecution. Others who do not fall into this category, either due to their entering the country after the cut-off date, or because of their religion, will continue to be treated as illegal migrants. The second aspect is the unfortunate political propaganda that sought to link the CAA with the National Register of Citizens. This rhetoric accentuated the fears of Muslims that the CAA may lead to loss of citizenship without adequate documentary proof. More than its content, the CAA is causing harm through its use for the Narendra Modi regime's political messaging to the effect that all its policies will have an underpinning of religion.

A fresh stance

India's free trade pact with four EU nations matters even if gains are limited

On Sunday, India signed a Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with a bloc of four European countries – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, formally known as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA). The pact has been in the works since 2008 but slipped off India's to-do list after the UPA government's exit. In market access terms, the deal offers more room for Indian services firms, with easier visa rules, so that they can also tap other European markets using these countries as a base. Professionals (architects, accountants and nurses), can also expect more opportunities. Most goods exports already get duty-free treatment in Switzerland, India's largest EFTA trade partner, so the lynchpin in this deal is the in-built goal to nudge \$100 billion of fresh foreign direct investment into India and create a million jobs over 15 years. Indian consumers can expect cheaper wines and chocolates, while producers may access cheaper machinery. India's tariff cuts are linked to investment inflows, but a full assessment of those outcomes will only happen after 20 years, so persistent hard work is needed on both sides to realise these goals.

For India, the speed with which the EFTA deal has been dusted off and sealed within months of resuming negotiations is creditable. It constitutes the second major trade pact in recent years since the deal with the United Arab Emirates, and the first such arrangement with a western nations' grouping. An interim deal with Australia that kicked in late 2022, is yet to be followed through to a comprehensive agreement. Parleys for a deal with the Gulf Cooperation Council, mooted since 2004, are yet to take off. A deal with Canada has been waylaid by political frictions. Talks are on with the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom, with the latter likely in the last mile. The EFTA deal assumes greater symbolic significance than the size of trade flows involved. It signals that India's apparent aversion to such trade pacts since 2014, capped by its walkout from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2019, is likely a thing of the past. A country that has often been criticised for its high import tariffs and protectionist approach, now seems willing and able to walk the talk on free trade when many nations are turning protectionist. The EFTA pact, expected to be ratified by the end of 2024, also marks the first time that India has agreed to include non-trade issues such as labour, human rights, environment and gender in an economic agreement. Whether the inclusion of these issues in trade deals is necessary can be debated, but this is a positive augury for potential allies such as the EU that consider them critical.

The announcement in the interim Budget for 2024-25, of a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore to bolster the research and innovation ecosystem within the country, has sparked enthusiasm within the scientific and research communities. The decision to rebrand the slogan, 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' (by Lal Bahadur Shastri) to 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan' (A.B. Vajpayee) to now 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan, Jai Anusandhan' (by the Prime Minister) is intended to reinforce the foundation of research and innovation for development. The significance of research and innovation cannot be overstated in fuelling economic growth, technological advancement, and global competitiveness. However, to fully realise the impact, it is crucial to assess the current research and development (R&D) funding landscape in India and its resulting output. This entails examining India's comparatively lower R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP alongside its noteworthy output in terms of patent grants, PhDs awarded, and publication outputs. Analysing the quality of this output is equally imperative in understanding the true implications of these initiatives.

India's R&D is witnessing significant growth, with a notable increase in Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) from ₹6,01,968 million in 2010-11 to ₹12,73,810 million in 2020-21. However, with research and development investment as a percentage of GDP standing at 0.64%, India falls behind major developed and emerging economies such as China (2.4%), Germany (3.1%), South Korea (4.8%) and the United States (3.5%).

Research output, innovation

Despite the comparatively lower share of GDP dedicated to R&D, India has emerged as a powerhouse in producing academic talent. Annually, India generates an impressive 40,813 PhDs and is in third place after the United States and China. This achievement reflects India's



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India's technological and manufacturing aspirations hinge on a transformative shift in its R&D landscape

Comparison of research productivity and innovation metrics in selected countries (2021-22)

Country	Researchers per million inhabitants (2021) (FTE)	PhDs produced annually (2021) (Rank)	Publication output (2022) (Rank)	Top 1% most cited articles (% share)	Patents granted (2022) (Rank)
India	262	40,813 (3)	3,06,800 (3)	0.7	30,490 (6)
The U.S.	4,452	69,525 (1)	15,06,000 (1)	1.88	3,23,410 (2)
The U.K.	4,491	27,366 (5)	2,87,200 (4)	2.35	10,578 (15)
China	1,687	53,778 (2)	9,78,100 (2)	1.12	7,98,347 (1)
S. Korea	9,082	13,882 (11)	1,09,200 (16)	1.02	1,35,180 (4)
Japan	5,638	15,804 (10)	1,71,000 (9)	0.88	2,01,420 (3)

Source: Publications data has been extracted from OpenAlex on February 7, 2024.

The Karnataka civil engineers Bill, its pathway

The goal of the Karnataka Professional Civil Engineers Bill, that was passed recently, to improve professionalisation and construction standards, is laudable. However, the route it recommends, which mandates only certified civil engineers to offer engineering designs, is bound to create confusion, become unnecessarily restrictive, turn impractical and remain out of sync with best practices.

The brick and mortar

The Bill establishes four key things. First, it defines a civil engineer, lists engineering designs, imposes restrictions on those who can offer engineering design services, and, finally, instructs how to ensure this.

Anyone with a diploma or a degree in a civil engineering discipline in India or abroad can qualify as a civil engineer. However, they must register with the Karnataka Council of Professional Civil Engineers within one year from the date of commencement of the Act. In addition, they should obtain a certificate to become a 'professional civil engineer' in Karnataka. For this, those with degrees need one year of experience, while those with diplomas require two years of experience. Only professional civil engineers can offer engineering designs, which includes 'civil, structural, geotechnical, and environmental engineering designs and drawings'. It also includes 'conceptual plans, master plans, layout plans, and other designs and drawings for buildings and infrastructure'.

The Bill insists that any building that is more than 50 square metres in plinth area or taller than the ground floor or that is not built with load-bearing masonry structure (meaning, buildings with columns and beams, and others) or a group housing project with more than three buildings must be supervised or executed or certified only by professional civil engineers. Strict gatekeeping is imposed by instructing government authorities not to permit construction unless registered professional civil engineers certify designs and drawings.

These provisions must be rethought for three



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The Karnataka Professional Civil Engineers Bill pushes a bright-line rule and flounders

reasons. First, despite the overlaps between professional services in the building industry, the Bill, unthinkingly and restrictively, defines engineering designs. This is baffling since the Supreme Court of India, pointing out difficulties in a comparable situation involving architects, has refused to exclude related professionals from offering overlapping services.

In 2020, while settling architects' claim that their professional Act prohibits non-architects from offering architectural services, the Court pointed out that services, including site design, structural design, structural integration of services, incorporation of mechanical systems and inspection of construction, are carried out concertedly by a host of related professionals. Hence, to favour one group by imposing 'absolute prohibition' on others would lead to 'considerable confusion'. It wisely observed that 'varied professions form essential cogs in the overall machinery of construction' and one cannot take a hard and exclusionary regulatory view.

It is probably for these reasons that the Gujarat Professional Civil Engineers Act, 2006, which is similar, is restrained in its scope. It limits registered professional civil engineers only to certify engineering designs, which it does not define. Even this limited version may not withstand a legal challenge. Also, on the ground, anecdotally, the regulations are more honoured in the breach.

Global practices

Second, many countries are cautious about regulations restricting competition, reinforcing monopoly tendencies, raising prices, and working against user interest. Hence, they support the self-regulation of professions. Recalling a study on engineering licensing and professional practice across several countries would also be worthwhile. It pointed out that "there is no hard evidence that tight engineering licensure provides economic gains to societies". Also, large firms that employ many engineers and architects could easily countervail these provisions, making them difficult to implement.

HEIs. India's R&D ecosystem has its advantages in terms of efficiency, but could benefit more from strong private enterprises involvement and stronger industry-academia collaboration, facilitating knowledge transfer and fostering innovation.

HEIs play a comparatively minor role in the overall R&D investment, contributing 8.8% (\$1.5 billion). It is important to recognise that increasing industry contribution to R&D is a complex issue with no single solution. A multi-pronged approach involving diverse stakeholders is necessary to address the challenges and unlock the potential of R&D for India's economic growth and competitiveness. Learning from the R&D ecosystem in other developed countries while maintaining India's strengths in streamlined decision-making and strategic alignment could be a powerful force to optimise its R&D landscape. India must implement policies that incentivise private companies to invest in R&D.

Impact of initiatives

India's technological and manufacturing aspirations hinge on a transformative shift in its R&D landscape. Closing the existing gap demands a dual strategy: encouraging private sector involvement and fortifying academia's research infrastructure. Initiatives such as the National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP) signal a strong commitment to technological progress and innovation. This policy holds the potential to incentivise private sector engagement in India's R&D ecosystem. Despite the substantial time and technical uncertainties involved in Deep Tech's creation, allocating resources to safeguard intellectual property and tackle technical obstacles can unlock untapped markets. The recent enactment of the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Act, underscores the government's dedication to catalysing research and innovation as the cornerstone of development.

This legislative move will bolster scientific research nationwide. The Act aims to bridge India's persistent R&D investment gap while nurturing a robust research culture within HEIs. Although promising, this initiative must surmount challenges such as ensuring equitable fund distribution, fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, and upholding global standards. These efforts are poised to elevate R&D spending in India, providing strategic guidance for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship while encouraging greater private sector involvement. The interim Budget, combined with the NDTSP and ANRF Act, sends positive signals regarding India's commitment to incentivising private sector-led research and innovation, particularly in burgeoning industries.

Third, many professional councils across the world, aware of these complexities, have not tried to ring fence their services. Instead, they take the alternative and effective route of protecting titles such as 'chartered engineer or architect' by establishing a rigorous process that demands high academic standards and experience.

The councils also mandate additional peer interviews or examinations as non-negotiable requirements. Through this, they let users know that professional titles are not offered lightly, and only the competent ones earn them. Users, convinced by the credibility of the collective, voluntarily seek certified professionals.

For example, the Engineering Council in the United Kingdom clarifies that there are no restrictions on practising as an engineer. However, it protects titles offered to the qualified and those who pass professional reviews. Only a limited number of high-risk constructions, such as reservoir design and road tunnel safety regulations, are reserved for licensed persons. The same goes for the Architects Registration Board in the U.K. In comparison, the Karnataka Bill seeks an absolute protection of services and falls short of licensing requirements. There are no examinations and fewer experience requirements in the Bill. It would serve better to tighten the process leading to certification.

The question of which professional is more competent to offer a particular service will continue to arise regularly. As was decided in one of the cases involving the architect-engineer dispute in the signing of drawings for permits in Washington State, U.S., there cannot be a bright-line rule, and divisions are impossible in a 'general sense'. It must be decided on an event-to-event basis, locally and based on education, experience, and special knowledge. What would be even better is to resist the demand for professional turfs to control supply. An effective solution would be to influence the demand side by continuously demonstrating the usefulness of professionals and certification.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Acquittal
In recent times, the Supreme Court of India has come onto its own in speaking eloquently for people's freedom and democracy. Justice B.R. Gavai's statement that there was no urgency in staying Professor Sai Baba's

acquittal is part of this trend. Prof. Sai Baba's wife standing next to him cheerfully while the Court declined to stay his acquittal is noteworthy. Almost 80% of prisoners in India are undertrials. Their cases need to be disposed of expeditiously. Appeals

against acquittals being heard by the Court on a Saturday should also become a thing of the past. It is comforting that freedom is finally reaching a man who is on a wheelchair. **N.G.R. Prasad,** Chennai

Reservation and judgment
My father, M.R. Veerabadrhan, was the petitioner (W.P. no. 8142 of 87 and WA 1692 of 1987) seeking separate reservation for Scheduled Tribes in Tamil Nadu. The judgment was delivered on January 8, 1990 by

Justice Sathidev and Justice (Mrs) Padmini Jesudurai, as V. Vijayamalu (minor), represented by her father and natural guardian, M.R. Veerabadrhan (Appellant) vs The Director of Medical Education (Respondent). Senior counsel M.R.M. Abdul

Kareem had argued that SCs and STs are unequal, which was affirmed by the judgment. The N.M. Thomas judgment was used by the judges in the separate reservation for ST judgment. **V. Karunakaran,** Tiruchi, Tamil Nadu

Higher engagement, better learning

The Annual Status of Education Report 2023 states that more than 86.8% individuals in the age group of 14-18 are enrolled in educational institutions, but one-fourth of them cannot read a Class 2-level text fluently in their regional languages.



Urmila Chowdhury
has 35 years of experience as an educationist and currently serves as the Education Director at Peepul, an education non-profit

A learning deficit
India has been struggling with a learning deficit for years now. And though there is more awareness about this thanks to Pratham's annual surveys, little seems to have changed on the ground. Attendance in public schools tends to be low, so despite children being enrolled in school, many of them don't learn much. This is largely because schools are unable to engage children. Therefore, children and parents see little value in school. Across classrooms, government school teachers attribute poor student learning outcomes to poor student attendance. When students don't show up, teachers lose their motivation and do little to increase the level of engagement with learners, which could in turn motivate students to show up. It's a chicken and egg situation. Students learn when there is motivation to do so and that happens when classrooms are meaningful and psychologically safe spaces. However, in classrooms across India, the teacher focuses only on the few students who sit in the front rows. The teacher writes questions and often even the answers on the blackboard. The students spend most of their learning hours copying off the board while the teacher leaves the room to do "more important" work. The teacher asks questions, but only a few children generally answer. Otherwise, the class answers in a chorus. The children repeat after the teacher in unison. The teacher asks if everyone has understood and receives an enthusiastic "yes" in response. But this does not give a sense of how much the students have really learned. This looks and

Student engagement is the key to driving better learning, but this is missing from many classrooms in India

sounds like active learning, but is not, because the children are not cognitively or emotionally engaged. India has a long tradition of rote learning. Many have progressed in life learning this way, but this kind of learning does not serve all students. In any case, with the world changing so fast, children need different skills.

A two-way communication
Now imagine a classroom where the teacher calls upon every child randomly. Every child is alert, curious, and attentive. The students are allowed to discuss and solve problems with their peers and learn from one another. Every child gets to touch, feel, and use the learning material – whether a maths manipulative, a book, or a science kit. The teacher stays in the classroom while the children work and gives them feedback in real time. The children cognitively engage with the topic. There is a happy buzz of students taking ownership for their own learning. This is student engagement and this is what makes the classroom a meaningful space for every learner.

Unless the teacher participates, student engagement cannot happen. Classroom learning opportunities must be made available to everyone, irrespective of gender, caste, religion, special needs, or disability. When teachers actively engage students in a lesson, learning outcomes improve. This seems like a simple premise. Why then is it so difficult to implement in the classroom? The many problems that plague the education system, including inadequate teacher allocation, poor systemic governance, outdated teaching practices, lack of teacher support and coaching, all contribute to making this hard to implement at scale.

There are many teachers who teach with passion and dedication, despite the challenges. However, even when we have dedicated teachers teaching and good student attendance, children still do not always learn. A part of the

problem is that many of these teachers were themselves not taught in an engaging way. So, very few of them worry about whether they are engaging the learner as they don't see it as their responsibility. Teaching is largely seen as a one-way communication with the teacher getting no feedback from the student during the lesson. The teacher does not know what is going on in the learner's mind and therefore cannot customise their teaching to suit the learner's needs.

Teaching the teacher
Teachers have not seen how practices such as questioning are practiced. This is because teacher education and training in India tends to be theoretical. It is conducted in seminar-style and tends to be a one-way communication. There is little opportunity for practice provided to the participants. We must see teachers as learners too and provide them with an engaging learning environment with 70% practice and 30% theory so that training serves a two-fold purpose: teachers get trained, but also experience learner engagement for themselves.

Additionally, there is no one in school to support teachers. All of us need coaching and hand-holding to support us in adopting new behaviour. Even though teaching is a vital job, teachers do not get help.

Student engagement is the key to driving better learning, but this is missing from many classrooms. Structured lessons, high quality teacher-student relationships, and student autonomy, i.e. allowing students choices in the classroom result in higher engagement and better learning outcomes. Simple changes in classroom techniques can positively impact the learning environment. In India, we have spent a few years discussing the Right to Education but this is a good time to shift the focus to the Right to Learning. Else, reading every ASER report will only lead to more disappointment.

Too many trekkers spoil the mountains

The Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board has forgotten its role

STATE OF PLAY

Janaki Murali



After 4,000 trekkers climbed the Kumara Parvatha peak in the ecologically fragile Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary on the Republic Day weekend, an alarmed Karnataka government temporarily banned trekking in the State. Until a standard operating procedure is put in place, routes without an online booking system would remain closed, it said.

Although temporary in nature, the ban will effectively extend until September, as trekking is not allowed in the forest from March to September due to the risks associated with the monsoon months and probable forest fires.

Videos of a traffic jam of climbers en route to the peak went viral on social media. The government took this decision after ecologists and conservationists raised concerns about the damage that this could cause to the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats. While welcoming prompt action from the government, activists have called for more stringent measures and access to be limited to only serious trekkers studying forests and the environment.

Nowadays, many young trekkers with disposable incomes book weekend getaways that are challenging. They often flood social media with their personal vlogs, capturing their unique experience of negotiating a tough terrain. At a height of 5,600 feet, the Kumara Parvatha in Dakshina Kannada is considered one of the toughest treks in south India. The trek extends 25 km both ways, starting from the Kukke Subramanya temple, about 280 km

from Bengaluru. Several private tourism agents and trekking clubs offer trekking packages to large groups, which include food packets, tents, and forest entry fees. So much so that forest department officials face challenges in handling the crowds at entry points. This is where baggage is checked for banned items and passes are then issued. Some serious trekkers have likened the weekend crowds to that of the Everest base camp during peak season and prefer to trek during the weekdays.

It is puzzling that the forest department has not fixed restrictions on the number of trekkers who can enter the forest per day, especially since the Karnataka Tourism Policy 2020-26 (revised) states that "ecotourism activities shall focus on increasing awareness towards conservation and sustainability of biodiversity and natural environments." It adds, "The development and promotion of ecotourism shall be done after careful consideration of the destination's carrying capacity..."

The Pushpagiri wildlife sanctuary, proposed as a World Heritage Site, is one of 21 sanctuaries in Karnataka. It is situated in the Western Ghats, which has been recognised by UNESCO as one of the eight "hottest hotspots" in the world. The UNESCO says, "Forests of the site include some of the best representa-

tives of non-equatorial tropical evergreen forests anywhere and are home to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile and fish species."

When the Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board (KEDB) was set up in 2013, its aim was to "help the government immensely in protecting the wildlife, creating awareness about it, encouraging eco-tourism, forest safaris and also prevent damage to the eco-system in the name of tourism." Under its objectives, the KEDB states that "the Forest Department shall encourage and permit wilderness tourism in specified areas of the National Parks/Sanctuaries/Forests, as a conservation tool. It is necessary that tourists desirous of entering wilderness areas should have interest in the flora and fauna. Casual tourists shall be discouraged." It adds, "The wilderness areas are sacrosanct, and should continue to sustain themselves in pristine state... the entry of the number of tourists permissible shall be kept within limits."

So, what went wrong? How did a body set up expressly to protect the sensitive ecological regions while promoting ecotourism forget its role? How did the board remain a silent bystander to the indiscriminate entry of tourists into this eco-sensitive region?

Overcrowding damages the delicate biodiversity of the region and also poses dangers to the tourists themselves. Forests are not just a source of livelihood, food, and fuel, but also act as carbon sinks. They purify our air and water and help fight climate change. Both the state and civil society have a role to play in conserving our rich biodiversity.

Janaki Murali is a journalist and author

Russian dominance in India's arms imports declines

Russia's share in India's arms imports shrunk from 76% in 2009-13 to 36% in 2019-23

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

In the last 15 years, India has significantly reduced its dependence on its biggest arms supplier, Russia. According to new data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), a Swedish think tank, about 76% of arms imported by India during the 2009-13 period was from Russia. In contrast, in the 2019-23 period, Russia's share reduced to 36%.

While Russia still remains India's largest supplier, arms imports have increased substantially from France and the U.S. in recent years (Chart 1). France's share in India's arms imports was just 0.9% in the 2009-13 period. However, in the 2019-23 period, its share climbed to 33%, making it the second largest supplier. The U.S.'s share increased from 8% in 2009-13 to 13% in 2019-23. The chart shows the volume of arms transfers from the five major arms exporters to India in terms of trend-indicator value. This is calculated based on the known unit production cost of a core set of weapons and is intended to represent the transfer of military resources rather than the financial value of the transfer. India's arms imports increased by 4.7% during 2019-23 compared to the previous five-year period.

Between 2019 and 2023, India climbed one spot to become the world's biggest arms importer (Chart 2), displacing Saudi Arabia. India's share in global arms imports rose from 9.1% in 2014-18 to 9.8% in 2019-23. Saudi Arabia, which was the biggest importer in the previous five-year period, reduced from 11% to 8.4%.

Understandably, Ukraine, which had a negligible share in global arms imports in 2014-18, increased its share to 4.9% in the next five years, especially after the Russian invasion in February 2022. As far as India's neighbours are

concerned, Pakistan's share in global imports increased from 2.9% in 2014-18 to 4.3% in 2019-23. The share of China, on the other hand, declined from 4.9% to 2.9% in the same period.

According to SIPRI, countries in Asia, Oceania, and West Asia continued to import arms in much larger volumes than Europe. In 2019-23, nine of the 10 biggest arms importers were from Asia, Oceania, or West Asia. Chart 2 shows the share of top countries in global arms imports in two five-year periods.

Russia's role as an arms supplier diminished not just in the case of India but across the world. Russia accounted for 21% of all arms exports in 2014-18. In 2019-23, this share came down to 11% (Chart 3). In volume terms, Russia's exports fell by 52% during the two periods.

According to the think tank, until the year 2019, the volume of Russian arms exports remained more or less constant with minimal changes. However, export volumes started to rapidly decline in 2020, 2021, and 2022. In 2023, the volume exported was 74% lower than the levels recorded in 2019.

Russia was the major arms supplier to 31 nations in 2019. This figure decreased to 14 in 2022 and 12 by 2023. On the other hand, the U.S., the biggest exporter of arms, further cemented its position by increasing its share in global exports from 34% to 42%. Chart 3 shows the share of top countries in global arms exports in two five-year periods.

Table 4 lists the units of various types of weapons ordered by India in the last 15 years. Missiles formed the largest component in India's arms order and a majority of them were from Russia followed by the U.S., Israel, and France. Most ordered commodities also included engines, armoured vehicles, and aircraft. While engines and aircraft were mostly ordered from Russia, France and the U.S., armoured vehicles came from South Africa and Russia.



From Moscow to Paris

The data for the charts were sourced from the Arms Transfers Database maintained by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

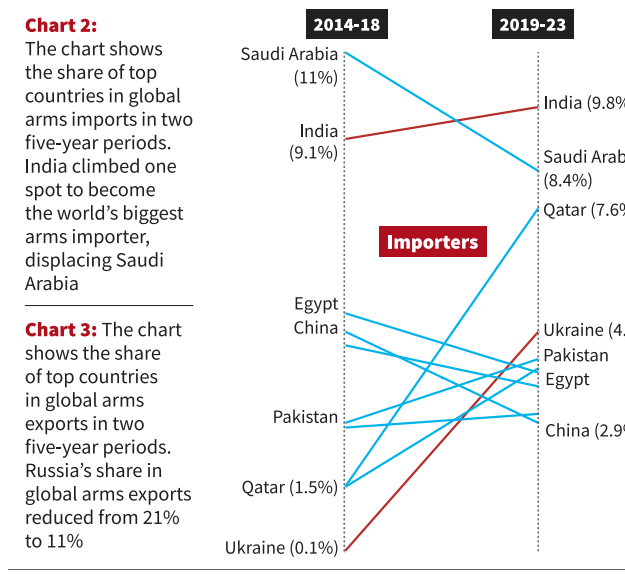
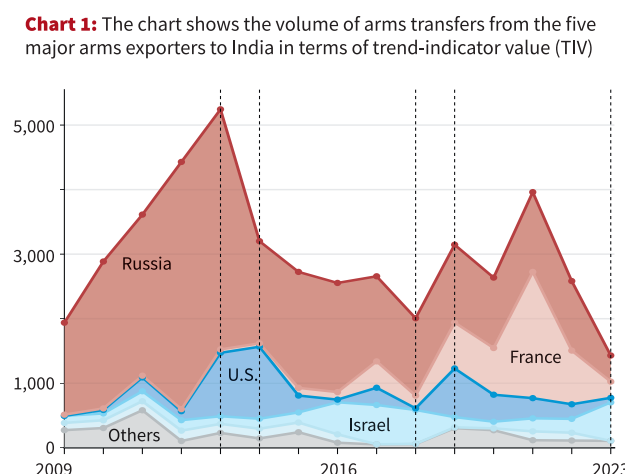
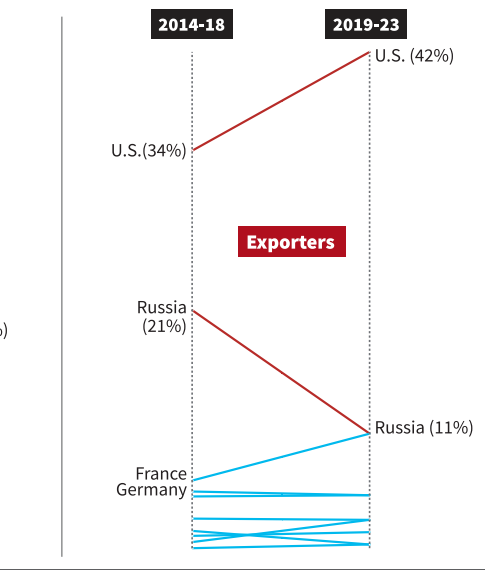


Table 4: The table lists the units of various types of weapons ordered by India in the last 15 years

Seller	Missiles	Engines	Armoured vehicles	Aircraft
Russia	59,821	593	1,005	356
U.S.	4,622	329		136
Israel	1,821			44
France	1,343	342	14	172
S. Africa			640	
Ukraine	360	240		
U.K.	200			57
Germany		240		46
Canada		215		2
S. Korea				



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 14, 1974

Why is the national motto missing on notes?

New Delhi, March 13: A question about the national emblem motto Satyameva Jayate was the subject of a 20-minute exchange, which included digs at the Government and philosophical observations, in the Lok Sabha today.

Mr. Madhu Dandavate, the alert and quick-witted Socialist member, had asked the Government to explain the absence of the motto from currency notes and postal stamps.

Mr. F.H. Mohsin, Deputy Minister for Home Affairs, replied that although the motto was an integral part of the national emblem, there were instructions that for technical reasons there could be a modification of the emblem for use on coins, currency notes and stamps.

To a supplementary from Mr. Dandavate, the Home Minister, Mr. Uma Shankar Dikshit, said the Government certainly did not regard the motto to be of marginal or secondary importance.

Mr. Dandavate asked whether one reason for dropping the motto from currency notes was because the rupee value had eroded and the Government realised that the inscription in the notes "I promise to pay the bearer a sum..." was a breach of truth.

Mr. Dikshit: It is a very poor joke. I refused to take note of it.

Mr. Mohsin said the question of printing the motto on coins and currency was referred by the Ministry to the then Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister (Mr. Morarji Desai). It was later considered in detail by the Finance Ministry. It was found that printing the motto was not possible as it would increase the lettering.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 14, 1924

Help from America

New York, Mar. 12: American bankers headed by the Morgans have established a credit of hundred million dollars in favour of the Banque of France.

London, Mar. 13: The French loan is fully secured by gold in the vaults of the Banque de France, which is acting for the French Government and will be used to stabilise French exchange and for other purposes. It is understood that the duration of the loan is for one year.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of electoral bonds purchased since its inception

22,217 SBI informed the Supreme Court that out of all the bonds purchased by parties between April 1, 2019, and February 15, 2024, 22,030 were redeemed. PTI

The fall in vegetable oil imports in the month of February

13 in percentage. India's vegetable oil (comprising edible oils and non-edible oils) imports fell year-on-year in February to nearly 9.75 lakh tonnes, according to data from the Solvent Extractors' Association of India. PTI

Worth of weapons to be sent to Ukraine by the U.S.

300 in \$ million. Pentagon will send weapons to Ukraine after finding some cost savings in its contracts, even though the military remains deeply overdrawn, the White House said. AP

The writers who won the Sahitya Akademi Award for 2023

24 The awards coincided with the 70th anniversary celebrations of the National Academy of Letters at the 'Sahityotsav'. Awards were given to authors including English author Neelum Saran Gaur. PTI

Number of Indians arrested for illegally working in Sri Lanka

21 Sri Lankan authorities arrested Indian nationals aged 24 to 25 for illegally operating an online marketing centre in the country, breaching relaxed tourist visa norms. PTI

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On judges and bureaucrats joining politics

What are the restrictions on judges and senior government officials with respect to their employment when it comes to other posts within the government or in the private sphere? Can a former judge join a political party and contest elections?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

Recently a Calcutta High Court judge and a senior IPS officer in West Bengal resigned from their posts and joined political parties. This has once again raised questions of propriety about independent constitutional authorities and other senior government officials joining political parties after demitting office.

What are constitutional restrictions?

The Constitution works on the principle of checks and balance between various organs. The executive is accountable to the legislature. An independent judiciary keeps a check on both these branches of the State. There are also other independent bodies like the Election Commission, Public Service Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) who are required to perform their constitutional duties without any interference from the government. The independence of these institutions is ensured through guaranteeing fixed tenure, financial independence, stringent removal procedure and restrictions after demitting office. A judge of a Supreme Court after ceasing to hold office cannot appear as a lawyer before any court or authority in India. A judge of a High Court has similar restrictions except for appearance before the Supreme Court or other High Courts. The CAG and the chairman/members of the Public Service Commission cannot take up any other employment with Central or State governments after demitting office. These restrictions are laid down to avoid favouritism, during the period of holding such positions, towards the government in power with an intent of securing any post-retirement benefit.

What about political posts?

There are no restrictions when it comes



Necessary safeguards: Former Calcutta High Court judge Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay joins the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Kolkata on March 7. ANI

to joining political parties, contesting elections or being nominated to certain posts. There are notable instances of persons who held independent constitutional posts and later went on to join politics or were nominated to various posts. There have been two Supreme Court judges in 1967 and 1983, who resigned from their posts to contest the presidential and parliamentary elections from Assam, respectively. Another Supreme Court judge joined a political party in Tamil Nadu and contested elections five years after his retirement in 1999. A former Chief Election Commissioner became a Rajya Sabha member and Minister in 2004, three years after his retirement. Recently, a retired Chief Justice of India was nominated to the Rajya Sabha in 2020 within four months of his retirement.

There have also been occasions where retired CAG and judges have been appointed as Governors of States. Numerous bureaucrats have also joined political parties and contested elections after resigning from service or soon after their retirement.

What are the recommendations?

The Election Commission had in 2012 recommended to the Union government to provide for a cooling-off period for top bureaucrats after their retirement before they could join political parties and contest elections. However, the Government had rejected this recommendation based on the opinion of the Attorney General that this may not be in line with constitutional provisions and democratic values. The Supreme Court had dismissed a writ petition in May 2022

that sought a direction from the top court to the legislature to frame a law imposing a cooling-off period for retired bureaucrats before joining politics. The court observed that it is for the legislature to determine whether a cooling-off period is required for bureaucrats before they join politics after retirement.

Is a cooling-off period desirable?

One of the essential features of a democracy is every citizen's right to contest elections. The Attorney General while providing his opinion against the 2012 recommendation of Election Commission had said that maintenance of independence and neutrality will be relevant during the period a person is in service. There are rules at present which restrict a senior bureaucrat from joining a private job for at least one year after he or she retires from government service. The Attorney General had opined that such restriction for commercial employment is based on intelligible differentia to avoid conflicts of interest. However, such a restriction against officials contesting polls may not be a valid classification and would not be in harmony with democratic principles in the Constitution.

While the opinion of Attorney General is based on sound legal principle, it is equally imperative to remember the famous judicial quote that 'justice should not only be done but should also be seen to be done'. This applies equally to judges, independent constitutional authorities and senior bureaucrats. It is an indispensable trait while discharging their official functions. Extending this principle even after they demit office will have a salutary effect. This may be achieved by prescribing a cooling-off period of say at least two years for joining political parties or being nominated to political posts by the government. This will instil confidence in the public at large and negate any allegation of quid pro quo.

Rangarajan. R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Polity Simplified'. He trains civil-service aspirants at 'Officers IAS Academy'. Views expressed are personal.

THE GIST

A judge of a Supreme Court after ceasing to hold office cannot appear as a lawyer before any court or authority in India. The CAG and the chairman/members of the Public Service Commission cannot take up any other employment with Central or State governments after demitting office.

There are no restrictions when it comes to joining political parties, contesting elections or being nominated to certain posts.

The Election Commission had in 2012 recommended to the Union government to provide for a cooling-off period for top bureaucrats after their retirement before they could join political parties and contest elections.

How did Indians end up in the Russia-Ukraine war?

What did the CBI uncover with respect to the illegal recruitment of Indian youth to the Russian military?

Sumeda

The story so far:

The deaths of two Indian nationals in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the recent raids by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which uncovered a human trafficking network recruiting Indians as "security helpers" and other personnel for the Russian military have sparked widespread concern. This has highlighted the plight of dozens of Indians stuck on the frontlines of the Russia-Ukraine war after they were deceived into working with the Russian military under false pretences.

What happened?

The presence of Indians in combat roles on the Russian side, first surfaced in February this year. In a series of reports, *The Hindu* brought attention to the situation, stating that some Indian nationals, initially hired as "army security helpers," were compelled to fight against

their will after their passports and documents were seized.

One of the men, a resident of Uttar Pradesh, told the daily that he went to Russia with the help of an agent in November last year after he was assured that there would be no deployment in the war zone. However, he was sent to the frontline in January after some basic training in handling weapons. "We were categorically told that we would not be sent to the battlefield and promised ₹1.95 lakh salary and ₹50,000 additional bonus per month. Except for the ₹50,000 bonus for two months, I have not received any money," he said. The U.P. resident claimed that he tried to contact the Indian Embassy in Moscow but all his pleas went in vain. In the subsequent days, more Indian citizens and their families came forward to seek the government's intervention. A group of seven Indians from Punjab and Haryana released a set of videos, claiming that they arrived in Russia on tourist visas but were forced to join the Russian Army as "helpers" after

being detained.

An Indian-origin Russian official associated with the Russian Ministry of Defence told *The Hindu* that approximately 100 Indians were recruited at the Moscow recruitment centre in the past year. However, the actual number of Indians hired could be higher, since there are several recruitment centres across Russia. The official said all recruits had to sign a contract to join as "army security helpers." He added that the contract requires a minimum of one year of service and prohibits signees to leave or exit before six months of service.

How did the agents con people?

A multi-State human trafficking network busted by the CBI in a crackdown on visa recruiters in seven cities across India last week revealed how Indian youths were allegedly pushed into the war zone by consultancy firms on the pretext of a better life and livelihood with the Russian military as security guards and helpers, as well as higher education. So far, the probe

agency has found 35 instances of people sent to Russia and listed at least 17 consultancy companies spread across India who were involved in the trafficking.

As per the CBI, the "organised network" lured Indian youth through social media and local agents, offering them highly paid jobs and lucrative employment opportunities in Russia. A number of students were reportedly tricked into enrolling in dubious private universities by agents promising low fees and visa extensions. Once the aspirants reached Russia, the local agents seized their passports and forced them to join the armed forces, the CBI said. At least two Indians with the Russian military have lost their lives in the fighting so far.

What has the government said?

The Indian government is in talks with the Russian authorities about the early release of Indian citizens who were duped into working with the Russian military. "We are doing our best to locate them. We are in touch with the Russian authorities so that they can be released and discharged early," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a regular media briefing last week. "We remain committed to the early release of our nationals serving as support staff with the Russian Army and their eventual return home," the spokesperson added. Noting the findings of the CBI raids, the MEA appealed to Indian nationals not to be "swayed" by offers made by agents for support jobs with the Russian Army.

THE GIST

The deaths of two Indian nationals in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the recent raids by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which uncovered a human trafficking network recruiting Indians as "security helpers" and other personnel for the Russian military have sparked widespread concern.

As per the CBI, the "organised network" lured Indian youth through social media and local agents, offering them paid jobs and lucrative employment opportunities in Russia.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY



The cost of war: A woman mourns beside the body of a dead child, on February 4, in Rafah, Gaza. GETTY IMAGES



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

Mr. N. S. Mani, Maraimalai Nagar, Madras, wants to know the exact meaning of 'flak' and how to use it.

"'Flak' literally means 'anti-aircraft fire.' Figuratively, it means severe criticism or abuse.

The proposal to increase the price of petrol has come in for a lot of flak. The proposal to increase the price of petrol has run into a lot of flak.

It means that the proposal has been severely criticised.

The 'a' in 'flak' is pronounced like the 'a' in 'fan'. 'Flak' is also spelt 'fleck'."

"Mr. K. Bomma Raju, Malleswaram, Bangalore, wants to know the meaning of (a) Tom, Dick and Harry (b) cakewalk."

"'Tom, Dick and Harry' is a Victorian term for 'the man in the street.' It has a derogatory meaning. It means 'people unworthy of notice.'

Do not expect me to listen to every Tom, Dick and Harry.

A 'cakewalk' is a 'dance developed from an American black contest in graceful walking with a cake as prize.' The prize is given to the couple who walk most gracefully round the cake.

Figuratively, it means 'an easy task'.

Winning from this constituency is not going to be a cakewalk for him.

'Cakes and ale' means 'merry making', 'a good time.'

Life is not cakes and ale.

Cakes and Ale is the title of a novel by Somerset Maugham. 'It's a piece of cake' means that it is something that can be done with little effort, something that is easily done. 'To take the cake' means 'to be conspicuously foolish, amusing, annoying, astonishing, outrageous.' This expression is from 'cakewalk'. It originally meant 'to win a prize.' Now it is used ironically.

He takes the cake for sheer stupidity.

'To take the cake' is used informally in British English."

"Mr. M. P. V. Shankar, Channappatna, Madras, wants to know how to pronounce the past tense of 'beat'."

"It rhymes with 'feet' and 'seat'. Most people in this country pronounce it 'bet'. It is incorrect. There is no difference in pronunciation between the present and past tense of the word. Their spellings are also the same. Beat-beat-beaten. The 'ea' in 'beaten' is pronounced the way 'ea' is pronounced in the present and past tense of the word.

"Mr. V. Sankaran, S.P. Hospital, Madras, wants to know what is meant by 'back-formation.'"

"It has nothing to do with posterior development. It is a linguistic term. It describes the formation of a new word by the removal of the prefix or suffix of an existing word. Generally verbs are formed in this fashion from nouns and adjectives. The word 'enthusiasm' was formed from 'enthusiasm'; 'laze' from 'lazy'; 'burgle' from 'burglar'; 'edit' from 'editor'. Other back-formations are legislate, televise, automate, diagnose, liaise, self-destruct."

"Ms. D. Sailaja Sarma wants to know the meaning of 'primrose path'."

"It means 'the pursuit of pleasure, especially with disastrous consequences.'

Be careful. The primrose path appears attractive. But you will be ruined eventually if you take that path.

Published in The Hindu on June 4, 1991.

From the frontlines: what we see when we look at suffering

By witnessing photographs of the assault on Gaza, are citizens around the world marking themselves as unwitting participants in the disquieting intrusion? In the backdrop of violence, we revisit Susan Sontag's observations on photography

Jonathan Koshy Varghese

It has been a little over five months since Israel's assault on Gaza. To mark this dismal occasion, *The New York Times* unveiled a catalogue of images in early March 2024. The online gallery opens with a stark portrayal: Palestinian women grieving for their loved ones lost in Israeli airstrikes at the al-Najjar hospital in Rafah. The photograph zooms in on three anonymous women, their faces etched with anguish. In the frame's centre, a woman embraces two children, unaware of the camera's intrusion. The photographer appeared to have interrupted a moment of private grief. By looking at it, we too turn into voyeurs.

The *Times* arranges the photographs chronologically so that as we scroll down, we are guided through the different stages of human suffering since its unfolding in October 2023. It labels Palestinians and Israelis distinctly on their website, suggesting universal suffering. Photography aspires towards objectivity despite war's bias.

This was impossible, Susan Sontag argued. "War was and still is the most irresistible – and picturesque – news," she emphasised. Her acerbic words are difficult to overlook. It is an idea she expanded in her works, *On Photography* (1977) and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003).

Sontag's Image-World

We live in an age of images. We are seen,

and sometimes we see. We are both observers and the observed, caught in the perpetual exchange of scrutiny. We have come a long way from Talbot's *Pencil of Nature* (1844) or Joseph Nicéphore Niépce's "heliography." We've taken a leap from Louis Daguerre's once revolutionary metal plates to Open AI's DALL-E. We make images just as they make us.

Indeed, in making such progress, we have had to confront our role concerning the technologies of image-making. What makes images human? Is a photograph different from other forms of visual images? John Berger, the renowned art critic and historian, seemed to think so.

In his discerning ode to photography, *About Looking* (1991), Berger asserted that, unlike other forms of visual images, a photograph was not an interpretation or an imitation of its subject but rather a trace of it. While the human eye and camera both "registered" an image, a camera did what the human eye could not. It "fixed" the appearance of the event. It froze time. Berger's words are a discerning annotation to Susan Sontag's celebrated *On Photography* (1977). Unlike Berger, Sontag is dramatic in her assessment. "Reality has always been interpreted through the reports given by images," she asserted on an occasion.

A photograph had little power to summon the past, they insist. Marcel Proust, the author of the monumental *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-27), was distinctively unimpressed by its influence. The photographic process, its output, and

the voluntary deliberateness of the past thus evoked seemed shallow to him. Berger reminds us that while Proust's judgment may seem harsh, it is inevitable. Before the advent of the camera, humans had no means of capturing appearances. The faculty of memory came close. Despite this, Berger clarifies, "unlike memory, photographs do not in themselves preserve meaning. They offer appearances –"

Indeed, even as a photograph preserves appearances, it does not narrate. It freezes time without explaining it. To Berger, the camera transformed modern perception itself. The camera atomised the world, making it manageable. The taking of the photograph was no longer a ritual but a reflex. Reality was no longer inscrutable. Veracity became a function of the apparent. We've all faced moments of helplessness as images commandeer our reality. Photographs have transformed us into consumers of events, of appearances. Images have given rise to what Sontag dubs the Image-World. In this system, unlike other technologies of image-making, the role of the image-maker is rendered negligible. In choosing to photograph, the photographer may assert his own role in the registering of reality. Yet, the end result – the photograph and its correlation to reality – is mediated by chemical processes in a laboratory. The earliest photographer manipulated light. Now, the manipulation is facilitated by the keypad.

Looking at, Looking away

Sontag directs our attention to a crucial aspect concerning the photograph: its ability to depersonalise our connection to reality. She observes that we've devolved into bystanders, voraciously devouring an unrelenting blitz of images depicting violence and suffering. And we remain insatiable.

In her subsequent book-length essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Sontag focuses on the consumers of images. Photographs of the sufferings of others are as seductive to the photographers as it is to us. We look at photographs in a gallery, book, or website. We are stimulated, moved, perhaps shocked. However, just as a visit to the gallery must eventually end, a book must be shut, and websites must inevitably be closed. Even the strongest emotions are transient, Sontag reminds us.

Do we then cease to look? Sontag seems to think otherwise. The impulse to look is rooted in the privilege to look away. If, however, we persist, the structures of violence reveal themselves.

The photographs on the *Times*' website are particularly revealing in this regard. The Palestinians suffer, endure, and die, but the Israelis are privileged to a dignified burial. Palestinians are traced amidst sand and concrete rubble while the Israeli war machine is meticulous. The Palestinian is barely named, while the Israeli is memorialised.

Jonathan Koshy Varghese teaches Literature at Lady Shri Ram College.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Pi Day is observed on March 14 every year. A quiz on the mathematical constant

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

Let's start with a simple one. Why is March 14 observed as Pi Day?

QUESTION 2

Who founded this day and in which year?

QUESTION 3

In 2019, UNESCO designated Pi Day to be celebrated as which day?

QUESTION 4

People also celebrate Pi on other dates in the year. Which are they? Why?

QUESTION 5

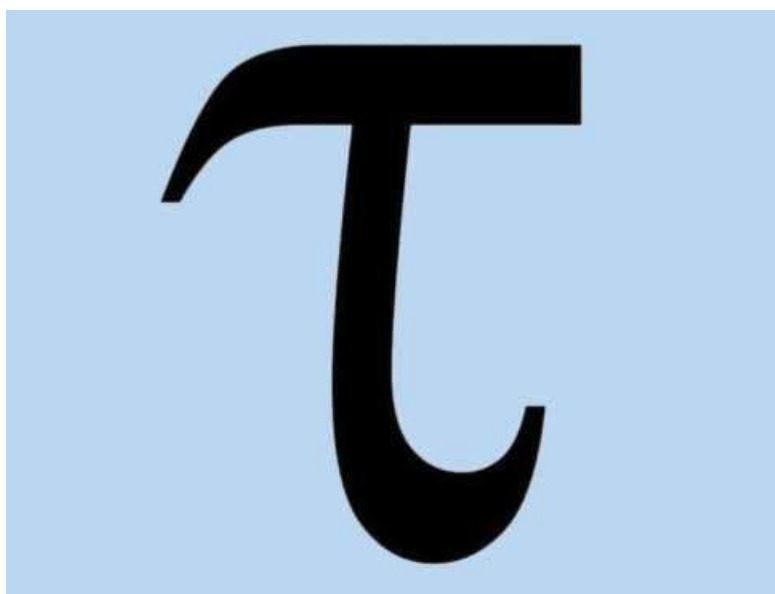
In the year 2015, March 14 was celebrated as Super Pi Day. Why?

QUESTION 6

Name two common ways of celebrating Pi Day.

QUESTION 7

Which famous scientist's birthday falls on Pi Day? A: Albert Einstein



Visual question:

What is the symbol present in the image? How is it related to Pi? There is a specific time associated with the symbol. What is it?

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

- This U.S. singer-songwriter became the youngest two-time Oscar winner. **Ans: Billie Eilish**
 - These actors who presented the award for visual effects and film editing, were an unlikely pairing in this 1988 comedy film. **Ans: Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito; Twins**
 - The Zone of Interest* won the award for Best international feature film. It also won in this category. **Ans: Best sound**
 - This movie won the category in which *The Creator*, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol 3* etc were nominated. **Ans: Godzilla Minus One**
 - The action sequence from this movie made an appearance in a montage celebrating the contribution of stunt actors. **Ans: RRR**
 - Christopher Nolan was nominated previously for this film. **Ans: Dunkirk**
- Visual: Identify this renowned production director. **Ans: Nitin Desai**
Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Akshay Kumar Khanna| Animesh Mohan| Divya Jaiswal| Tamal Biswas

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

Word of the day

Blare:

a loud harsh or strident noise

Synonyms: cacophony, din, clamour, honk, toot

Usage: *He blared the horns of the taxi.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/blarepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /bleɪ/

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

RAMALLAH

Israeli forces kill two Palestinians at West Bank hospital in the north



Israeli forces shot dead two Palestinian men at a hospital in the West Bank on Wednesday, the latest in a spate of killings in the occupied territory since the war in Gaza began. The killings before dawn took place on the compound of the government hospital in Jenin, in the north of the West Bank, the hospital's director said. AFP

LONDON

U.K. mulls plan to pay migrants to move to Rwanda voluntarily



The U.K. government said on Wednesday it was considering a scheme to send rejected asylum seekers to Rwanda voluntarily and will reportedly pay them up to £3,000 to make the move. The plan is an extension of existing voluntary returns arrangements and part of the U.K.'s plan to deport migrants to the East African nation. AFP

WASHINGTON

U.S. House overwhelmingly passes Bill to ban Chinese-owned TikTok



The U.S. House of Representatives approved a Bill that would force TikTok to divest from its Chinese owner or get banned from the U.S. The lawmakers voted 352 in favour and 65 against. The fate of the Bill is uncertain in the Senate, as some consider such a move drastic against an app that has 170 million U.S. users. AFP

VILNIUS

Navalny ally, Volkov, attacked outside home in Lithuania



Leonid Volkov, a close ally of late Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, was assaulted outside his home in Vilnius on Tuesday, an incident that sparked an uproar from the Lithuanian government. Volkov, 43, is a prominent opposition figure and was Navalny's ex-chief of staff and chair of his Anti-Corruption Foundation. AFP

Nepal PM Prachanda wins vote of confidence, third time in 15 months

Floor test was called after he broke an alliance with the Nepali Congress and joined hands with the Unified Marxist-Leninist last week; the Maoist-Centre leader's coalition secured 157 votes, while 110 members, including Congress MPs, voted against

Sanjeev Satgajanya
KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' won a vote of confidence in Parliament on Wednesday with the support of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and other smaller parties.

It was Prachanda's third confidence vote on Wednesday since he was elected Prime Minister in December 2022.

Speaker Devraj Ghimire announced after the vote that Prachanda secured 157 votes, while 110 members voted against.

In the 275-member parliament, he required a mi-



Number game: Prachanda required a minimum of 138 votes to pass the floor test in the 275-member parliament. REUTERS

nimum of 138 votes to pass the floor test. During Wednesday's vote 268 members were present in parliament, the Speaker said. In a dramatic move, Pra-

chanda, a former rebel leader who led an armed struggle from 1996 to 2006, broke his one-year-old alliance with the Nepali Congress on March 4 to

join hands with the UML.

The Nepali Congress, the largest party in parliament with 88 seats, voted against the confidence motion.

Prachanda's Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) had fought the 2022 general elections under an alliance with the Congress. But following a row over which party should lead the government, Prachanda reached out to the UML, the second largest party with 78 seats, which supported him to become Prime Minister. Subsequently, he went for the floor test on January 10 last year, which he passed with flying colours as even the Congress voted in fa-

vour. He had secured 268 votes.

However, riled at Prachanda's decision to support the Nepali Congress presidential candidate, the UML withdrew support to the government in February, paving the way for the Congress to join the government. A year later, Prachanda, last week, ditched the Nepali Congress and forged a new Left alliance with the UML.

On Wednesday, besides the Maoist-Centre and the UML, Rastriya Swatantra Party, Janata Samajbadi Party, CPN (Unified Socialist), Nagarik Unmukti Party and Aam Janata Party (Prabhu Shah) voted in favour of Prachanda.

Biden, Trump set the stage for general election rematch

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump clinched their parties' presidential nominations on Tuesday with decisive victories in a slate of low-profile primaries, setting up a general election rematch that many voters do not want.

The outcome of contests across Georgia, Mississippi and Washington State was never in doubt. Neither Mr. Biden, a Democrat, nor Mr. Trump, a Republican, faced major opposition. But the magnitude of their wins gave each man the delegate majority he needed to claim his party's nomination at the summertime national conventions.

There is no longer any doubt that the fall election will feature a rematch bet-



Pitched battle: Joe Biden and Donald Trump scored major victories in the States of Georgia, Mississippi and Washington. AP

were two flawed and unpopular Presidents.

Different drawbacks

At 81, Mr. Biden is already the oldest President in U.S. history, while the 77-year-old Mr. Trump is facing decades in prison as a defendant in four criminal cases.

Their rematch – the first featuring two U.S. Presidents since 1912 – will al-

most certainly deepen the nation's searing political and cultural divides over the eight-month grind that lies ahead.

Both candidates dominated Tuesday's primaries in swing-State Georgia, deep-red Mississippi and Democratic-leaning Washington. Mr. Trump also won Hawaii's Republican caucus.

Chinese military team visits Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Nepal

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

A Chinese military delegation recently visited the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to discuss further cooperation in defence issues, Beijing said on Wednesday.

Beijing is seeking to build closer ties in South Asia in a push to counter its strategic rival India for influence.

Last week, the Maldives said it had signed a "military assistance" deal with China after ordering Indian troops deployed in the small but strategically-placed archipelago to leave.

Meeting with Muizzu

And Beijing confirmed on Wednesday that a delegation had visited the coun-

try and met with pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu during a trip that also took them to Sri Lanka and Nepal from March 4 to 13.

In all three countries, "they exchanged views on military relations and regional security issues of common concern", the Chinese military said in a statement on its official WeChat account. The delegation of officials from the military's international military cooperation department focused on "in-depth consultations on promoting bilateral defence cooperation".

"A series of consensus was reached to further enriched defence cooperation between the PLA and the relevant countries," it added, referring to the Chinese military by its official acronym.

Dreaming up volcano



Smoke billows from the Popocatepetl volcano in Mexico on Tuesday. A ceremony was led by the 69-year-old Don Antonio Analco Sevilla, who is believed to have the ability to talk with the volcano in his dream. Worshippers bring food to offer to the volcano for the ceremony. AFP

As parties rush aid to Gaza, EU says hunger being used as weapon

Agence France-Presse
GAZA STRIP

Donor nations, aid agencies and charities pushed on with efforts on Wednesday to rush food to war-torn Gaza by land, air and sea after the EU top diplomat Josep Borrell said starvation had become "a weapon of war".

The Israel-Hamas conflict raging since October 7 has caused mass civilian deaths, reduced vast areas to a rubble-strewn wasteland and sparked warnings of looming famine in the Palestinian territory of 2.4 million people.

Vessel on the way

A Spanish charity vessel, the *Open Arms*, was on its way to Gaza from Cyprus, where it had set sail early on Tuesday towing a barge with 200 tonnes of aid, in a first voyage meant to open a maritime corridor.

The flow of aid trucks from Egypt into Gaza has slowed recently – a trend variously blamed on Israel and its security checks of cargo, and on civil unrest in Gaza where desperate crowds have looted aid shipments.

About half a dozen Arab and western nations have airdropped food parcels on parachutes into Gaza, and Morocco has sent a plane-load of relief supplies via Israel's Ben Gurion airport.

The UN World Food Programme, trying an alternative land route from southern Israel, sent an initial six aid trucks on Tuesday into worst-hit northern Gaza, through a gate in the security fence, the Israeli Army said.

The WFP said it had "delivered enough food for 25,000 people" and demanded that, "with people in northern Gaza on the brink of famine, we need deliveries every day. We need entry points directly into the north."

'Man-made' crisis

The European Union's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell told the UN Security Council on Tuesday that the humanitarian crisis "is man-made".

"If we look at alternative ways to provide support, it's because the land crossings have been artificially closed," he said, charging that "starvation is being used as a weapon of war".

Russia ready to use nuclear weapons if sovereignty is threatened, says Putin

Associated Press

President Vladimir Putin said on Wednesday that Russia is ready to use nuclear weapons if its sovereignty or independence is threatened, issuing another blunt warning to the West just days ahead of an election in which he's all but certain to secure another six-year term.

The Russian leader has repeatedly talked about his readiness to use nuclear weapons since invading Ukraine in February 2022. The most recent such threat came in his state-of-the-nation address last



Vladimir Putin

month, when he warned the West against getting too involved in the Ukraine war.

Asked in an interview on Wednesday if he has ever considered using nuclear weapons in Ukraine,

Mr. Putin responded that there has been no need for that. He also said he does not think the world is heading for a nuclear war, describing U.S. President Joe Biden as a veteran politician who fully understands possible dangers of escalation.

Mr. Putin said that in line with the country's security doctrine, Moscow is ready to use nuclear weapons in case of a threat to "the existence of the Russian state, our sovereignty and independence." "All that is written in our strategy, we haven't changed it."

In an apparent refer-

ence to NATO allies that support Kyiv, he also declared that "the nations that say they have no red lines regarding Russia should realise that Russia won't have any red lines regarding them either."

Lithuania's Foreign Minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, had recently said the West too often constrains itself with self-imposed "red lines" regarding Russia. He also welcomed a comment by French President Emmanuel Macron that the possibility of Western troops being sent to Ukraine could not be ruled out.

Pro-Kyiv militias urge civilians to flee cities bordering Russia

Agence France-Presse
KYIV

Russian volunteer forces fighting alongside Kyiv on Wednesday urged civilians to flee Belgorod and Kursk, threatening large-scale attacks on military targets in the Russian border cities.

Groups of volunteer fighters, made up of Russians who oppose the Kremlin, said this week they had crossed into Russia from Ukraine and captured a village in the Russian border region of Kursk.

"We are forced to inflict shelling on military positions that are stationed in the cities of Belgorod and Kursk," said three groups, the Freedom of Russia Legion, the Russian Volunteer Corps and Sibir.

"We call on the local authorities to preserve human lives and begin evacuating the cities of Kursk and Belgorod," they added in a joint statement.

Moscow denied that the fighters had made ground this week, and later posted a statement alleging it had repelled all incursions.



Uncertain future: A child looks on as Palestinians wait to receive food during Ramadan in Rafah on Wednesday. REUTERS



Leader of the Palinau Alliance signs the deal in the presence of the police in Port Moresby on Wednesday. AFP

Warring tribes in Papua New Guinea sign ceasefire deal

Agence France-Presse
PORT MORESBY

Warring tribes in Papua New Guinea negotiated a temporary ceasefire on Wednesday, agreeing to halt a spiralling series of revenge killings in the country's remote highlands.

Years of tit-for-tat fighting in Papua New Guinea's central Enga province has escalated in recent months, with as many as 64 tribespersons killed during a single grisly ambush in February.

Two feuding factions – known as the Yopo Alliance and the Palinau Alliance – met in the capital of Port Moresby on Wednesday to hammer out a three-month ceasefire.

The agreement, said that the running clashes had resulted in “the displacement of thousands of people” leading to a “humanitarian crisis”.

“Both fighting factions agree to lay down arms and cease and desist from all forms of hostile engagements,” read the agreement, signed by tribal leaders and police.

The pact acknowledged “the many lives that have been lost on both sides” and “the massive destruction of homes, livelihoods, land and property”.

Highland clans have fought each other in Papua New Guinea for centuries, but an influx of mercenaries and automatic weapons has inflamed the cycle of violence.

U.S. to moot first-of-its-kind resolution at UN seeking equal global access to AI

The draft resolution, which recognises the rapid acceleration of AI development and use, aims to close the digital divide between countries; it plans to make sure that nations have necessary capabilities to take advantage of the technology when it comes to detecting diseases and predicting floods

Associated Press
UNITED NATIONS

The United States is spearheading the first United Nations resolution on artificial intelligence, aimed at ensuring that the new technology is “safe, secure and trustworthy” and that all countries, especially those in the developing world, have equal access.

The draft General Assembly resolution aims at closing the digital divide between countries and making sure they are all at the table in discussions on AI – and that they have the technology and capabilities to take advantage of its benefits, including detecting diseases, predicting floods and training the next generation of workers.

The draft recognises the rapid acceleration of AI development and use, and stresses “the urgency of achieving global consensus on safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems.” It also recognises that “the governance of artificial intelligence systems is an evolving area” that needs further discussions on possible governance approaches.



Shaping the future: Unlike Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they are an important barometer of world opinion. AP

U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the United States turned to the General Assembly “to have a truly global conversation on how to manage the implications of the fast-advancing technology of AI.”

‘Global support’

The resolution “would represent global support for a baseline set of principles for the development and use of AI and would lay out a path to leverage AI sys-

tems for good while managing the risks,” he said in a statement. If approved, Mr. Sullivan said, “this resolution will be a historic step forward in fostering safe, secure and trustworthy AI worldwide.”

The U.S. began negotiating with the 193 UN member nations about three months ago, spent hundreds of hours in direct talks with individual countries, 42 hours in negotiations and accepted input from 120 nations, a senior

U.S. official said. The resolution went through several drafts and achieved consensus support from all member states this week and will be formally considered later this month, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to speak publicly.

Unlike Security Council resolutions, General Assembly resolutions are not legally binding but they are an important barometer of world opinion.

A key goal, according to the draft resolution, is to use AI to help spur progress toward achieving the UN's badly lagging development goals for 2030, including ending global hunger and poverty, improving health worldwide, ensuring quality secondary education for all children and achieving gender equality.

‘Develop frameworks’

The draft resolution encourages all countries, regional and international organisations, technical communities, civil society, the media, academia, research institutions and individuals “to develop and support regulatory and governance approaches and frameworks” for safe AI systems. It warns against “improper or malicious design, development, deployment and use of artificial intelligence systems, such as without adequate safeguards or in a manner inconsistent with international law.”

Lawmakers in the European Union are set to give final approval to the world's first comprehensive AI rules on Wednesday. Countries around the world, including the U.S. and China, or global groupings like the Group of 20 in-

dustrialised nations also are moving to draw up AI regulations.

The U.S. draft calls on the 193 UN member states and others to assist developing countries to access the benefits of digital transformation and safe AI systems. It “emphasises that human rights and fundamental freedoms must be respected, protected and promoted throughout the life cycle of artificial intelligence systems.”

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield recalled President Joe Biden's address to the General Assembly last year where he said emerging technologies, including AI, hold enormous potential.

She said the resolution, which is co-sponsored by dozens of countries, “aims to build international consensus on a shared approach to the design, development, deployment and use of AI systems,” particularly to support the 2030 UN goals.

The resolution responds to “the profound implications of this technology,” Thomas-Greenfield said, and if adopted it will be “an historic step forward in fostering safe, security and trustworthy AI worldwide.”

Japan PM grilled over events at party meet

Agence France-Presse
TOKYO

Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida was grilled by lawmakers on Wednesday about a gathering of ruling party members at which scantily clad female dancers were reportedly told to use their mouths to receive cash tips.

Footage leaked from the event in November organised by a regional chapter of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) showed women dancing and sitting on participants' laps. The women came from a troupe called Glamor Dancers and were obliged to use their mouths to receive banknotes hanging from those of the participants, media reports said.

One of the organisers, Tetsuya Kawabata, later sought to defend the event by saying that the presence of the “go-go dancers” were intended to ensure “diversity.” “We invited the dancers after studying from various viewpoints, including whether it matches the theme of diversity,” Mr. Kawabata, deputy head of the local LDP youth wing, told broadcaster ANN. He reportedly later resigned from the party. The LDP's nationwide youth wing on Monday apologised and said that two MPs who attended were stepping down from their posts in the Youth Bureau, but will remain party members and lawmakers.

The episode is embarrassing for the LDP as it seeks to get more women into the male-dominated world of politics.

Mr. Kishida said on Wednesday that the event “does not match the Cabinet's goal of diversity.” “What my Cabinet seeks is an inclusive society where all people feel the meaning of life with their dignity and diversity respected,” local media quoted him as saying.

Spiritual feast



United prayer: People pray before breaking their fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramzan, at a free meal distribution point run by a charity group in Karachi in Pakistan on Wednesday. AP

Water cuts add to people's frustration as South Africa prepares for general polls

Agence France-Presse
JOHANNESBURG

Anger is mounting in some Johannesburg districts left without water for more than a week, fewer than three months before general elections marked by voter discontent with South Africa's failing infrastructure.

With power cuts and potholes already part of daily life, recent water shortages have increased the frustration of many over poor service delivery – a key election issue – in the country's most populous city.

Access to basic services such as water, electricity and refuse collection remain a recurring source of anger for many of the 62 million inhabitants in Africa's most industrialised nation.



Residents of the Blairgowrie neighbourhood of Johannesburg, South Africa, demonstrate against the lack of water on Tuesday. AP

Due to a shortfall in energy production and frequent breakdowns at its ageing power stations, South Africa has for years suffered from economy-crushing, rolling power cuts that at their worst last up to 12 hours a day.

These eased in recent months, but water troubles soon appeared, further fuelling widespread frustration at the ruling African National Congress.

Struggling in the polls, the party risks losing its parliamentary majority for the first time since the advent of democracy in 1994 amid accusations of mismanagement and corruption, and high rates of crime, poverty and unemployment.

Some 27.5 million South Africans are registered to vote in national and provincial elections on May 29.

Language key as EU-aligned Moldova 'battles' pro-Russian Gagauzia

Agence France-Presse
VULCANESTI

Language teacher Sorina Stoianova has found herself at the forefront of Moldova's efforts to counter Russian influence in its rebel Gagauzia region, which borders Ukraine.

Already threatened by pro-Russian separatists in breakaway Transnistria – which last month appealed to Moscow for “protection” – Moldova's pro-EU government is trying to reach out to Gagauzians in the south with free classes in Romanian, the country's official language.

The tiny Turkic minority, who are Orthodox Christians, briefly declared themselves independent after the fall of communism. Although their native

language is close to Turkish, most of the 1,35,000 Gagauz now speak Russian.

‘Destabilisation efforts’ And Yevgenia Gutsul, the governor of their autonomous region makes no bones about her ties to Moscow.

Last week, Ms. Gutsul travelled to Russia to ask its President Vladimir Putin for his “support” in the face of alleged “destabilisation by the Moldovan authorities”.

In such a battle for hearts and minds, Moldova believes helping people learn Romanian is key to countering Russian-language “propaganda.” “They (the Gagauz) want to learn the language,” Ms. Stoianova said as she wrapped up the



Spelling out: Romanian language teacher Sorina Stoianova during a class in Vulcanesti town in Gagauzia on November 14, 2023. AFP

day's lesson for about 20 adults in the town of Vulcanesti.

Some 13,000 people applied for the 5,000 places on the free courses this year, up from 6,500 last year. Gagauzia had the highest number of applicants after the capital Chi-

sinau. One of Ms. Stoianova's students, Ivan Gaidarji, said the classes were needed as the former Soviet republic looks to join the EU.

EU membership

Brussels agreed late last year to open membership

talks with the nation of 2.6 million people that lies between EU member Romania and war-torn Ukraine.

“We must study to perfect our knowledge and be able to continue working,” the 46-year-old civil servant said. Another student wanted to be able to help her grandchildren with their homework, according to Ms. Stoianova.

Unlike the self-proclaimed republic of Transnistria, Gagauzia renounced its hopes for independence in 1994 in exchange for being autonomous. But its Soviet legacy is omnipresent, with statues of Lenin and hammer and sickle emblems still dotting the region.

Moldova's President Maia Sandu “is making real efforts to improve relations with Gagauzia, to win the

hearts and minds of its people”, according Wilder Alejandro Sanchez, a Moldovan expert at the Washington-based Second Floor Strategies. Besides the language classes, the government is also upping investment in the region, including a new road to connect Chisinau with southern Moldova, including Gagauzia.

‘Preserving identity’

But he said that it would “take years and years, maybe decades, to change the beliefs of the population” and convince them that “efforts to join the EU will not destroy their identity”.

Moldovan authorities have repeatedly accused Russia of trying to destabilise the country.

An intelligence services

report recently warned of “anti-Chisinau and anti-Brussels rhetoric” in the run-up to the presidential election and a referendum on EU accession later this year.

‘No to Europe’

Some 98% of Gagauz voted to join the Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan customs union and said “no” to joining the EU in two local plebiscites in 2014 that were declared unconstitutional. A decade on, Chisinau hopes mentalities are changing.

“We are working with the young people,” Ms. Sandu said last year, adding the population “has been listening too much to Russian propaganda.”

“We need to better protect people from the propaganda and from the disinformation,” she added.

IN BRIEF



Ramco commences transport on dedicated freight corridor

Ramco Cements said it had begun to move crushed limestone from its mines in Budawada to its integrated cement plant in Jayanthipuram in Andhra Pradesh through the dedicated freight corridor inaugurated under the Gati Shakti cargo terminal project on Tuesday. The railway wagons with crushed limestone from Budawada mines will travel 8.3 km to the Jayanthipuram plant unloading point, of which 3.4 km will be Ramco Cements' dedicated sidings.

Royal Sundaram, Dvara tie up to market insurance products

Royal Sundaram General Insurance Co. Ltd. said it had partnered Chennai-based Dvara KGFS to provide customers access to a comprehensive range of its general insurance products across the country. "Our extensive suite of general insurance products will now be accessible across over 400 Dvara KGFS branches, empowering customers with comprehensive, customised, and affordable solutions," Royal Sundaram MD Amit S. Ganorkar said in a statement.

India allows RBI to import gold without import levies

India has allowed its central bank to import gold without paying import levies, the government said in a notification issued late on Tuesday. Gold importers need to pay basic customs duty and Agriculture Infrastructure and Development Cess. As of September 2023, the RBI held 800.79 metric tonnes of gold, including gold deposits of 39.89 tonnes. Of that, 388.06 tonnes is held overseas and 372.84 tonnes domestically, RBI said in its reserve management report. **REUTERS**

FinMin asks PSU banks to review gold loan portfolio

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has directed all state-owned banks to review their gold loan portfolio as instances of non-compliance with regulatory norms have been noticed by the government.

The Department of Financial Services (DFS) in a communication addressed to heads of public sector banks has asked them to look at their system and processes related to gold loans.

"We have asked banks to undertake comprehensive review of the gold loan business," Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi told PTI.

Petrol, shelter costs drove U.S. inflation higher in February

Reuters
WASHINGTON

U.S. consumer prices increased 3.2% year-on-year in February, with core CPI rising 3.8%, amid higher gasoline and shelter costs, suggesting stickiness in inflation that cast doubts on whether the Federal Reserve would start cutting interest rates in June.

February marked the second straight month of firmer inflation readings. Inflation-weary Americans, however, got some relief from their grocery bills, as food prices were unchanged. U.S. central bank officials, including Fed Chair Jerome Powell have indicated they are in

'First chip from Tata plant to be out in 2026'

Press Trust of India
DHOLERA

The first set of semiconductors will start rolling out from Tata Electronics' plant here in December 2026, Union Minister for Communications and IT Ashwini Vaishnav said on Wednesday.

Speaking at the groundbreaking ceremony of Tata Group and CG Power chip plants, Mr. Vaishnav said India would be among the top five chip ecosystems in the world by 2029.

"The first chip from Dholera plant will be out in December 2026 and chip from Micron plant will be out by December 2024," the minister said.

He said Tata's Dholera plant will make chips in 28,



Ashwini Vaishnav

50, 55 nanometer node.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday laid the foundation of three chip plants – two units by Tata Electronics and the third by CG Power – entailing total investment of ₹1.26 lakh crore.

These chips driven by advanced technology will cater to multiple sectors.

'Ease e-commerce for MSME exports'

Govt. must simplify merchandise trade processes, establish a single national trade portal for approvals and compliances in order to help spur exports by smaller players, Niti Aayog and Foundation for Economic Development recommend in report

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The government must make it easier for smaller firms to export their goods via e-commerce platforms, simplify merchandise trade processes and establish a single national trade portal for all approvals and compliances, the Niti Aayog recommended in a report on boosting exports from Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

While China exported \$200 billion worth of goods through e-commerce in 2022, India shipped only \$2 billion

Unclog the pipe

Government must make it easier for smaller firms to export their goods through e-commerce platforms, moots Niti Aayog

■ While China exported \$200 billion of goods via e-commerce in 2022, India shipped only \$2 billion

■ Key reason for this gap is cumbersome compliance process tied to exports, especially for payment reconciliation



■ Think tank moots exempting import duties on rejects that come back as returns

ported only \$2 billion, and a key reason for this gap is the cumbersome compliance process associated with exports, especially when it comes to payment

reconciliation, which is particularly challenging for new or small exporters, the public policy think tank noted in the report. Stressing that e-commerce

resolves market access issues that are a significant obstacle hindering MSME exports, the Foundation for Economic Development, which authored the report, said it was essential to create a distinction between 'Exporter on Record' and 'Seller on Record', introduce annual financial reconciliation process for e-commerce exporters and exempt import duties on rejects that come back as returns.

'Unreliable' data

While MSMEs are said to account for 38.4% of India's manufacturing out-

put and contribute 45% of exports, the report's authors reckoned that MSME export numbers were "almost certainly inflated" and needed to be more accurately measured. The current estimates were "likely unreliable" as they relied on an outdated list of reserved sectors for MSMEs, they wrote.

MSMEs can compete in export markets in sectors like handicrafts, handloom textiles, ayurveda and herbal supplements, leather goods, imitation jewellery and wooden products, which have global demand of more than \$340 billion.

'REITs, InvITs and Muni bonds offer high growth opportunity'

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) and Muni (Municipal) bonds have emerged as high growth areas for investment, Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said on Wednesday.

"Within SEBI we have done a very simple exercise, sort of a back of the envelope exercise where we asked ourselves, how big can this market be? And we reached the conclusion that just as our



Madhabi Puri Buch

equity market cap is about one time of the GDP, we believe that the total value of our REITs, InvITs and Muni bonds ecosystem can be another one time of GDP," Ms. Buch said while addressing the SEBI-NISM Research Conference.

"So that is the oppor-

tunity for growth which is available to us as a nation," she said adding that the value of REITs, InvITs and Muni bonds would far exceed the value of goods and services produced by the corporate sector today.

She said fractional ownership of real estate and fractional ownership of infrastructure is where the strength of India will lie.

Ms. Buch said SEBI as a regulator has ensured that the governance and disclosure elements of these asset classes provide comfort and confidence to retail investors so that they can go and invest without any apprehensions.

Sensex declines 1.2% as selling pressure widens

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Key benchmark indices slid sharply on Wednesday as investors turned wary after SEBI's chief flagged signs of 'froth' in the small- and mid-cap segments.

The S&P BSE Sensex plunged 906 points, or 1.23%, to 72,761.89 points. Sensex stocks which lost the most included Power Grid (7.28%), NTPC (6.67%), Tata Steel (5.87%) and Tata Motors (4.28%).

Adani stocks tumble

Adani Group stocks also declined across the board, led by Adani Total Gas, which tumbled 9.5%, and

Adani Green, which plunged 9.07%. While flagship Adani Enterprises fell 6.91%, Adani Ports shed 6.97%, Adani Power lost 4.99% and Adani Energy Solutions dropped 8.54%.

The NSE's Nifty50 fell 1.51% to 21,997.70 points.

"The selling pressure was widespread... metal, realty and energy lost over 5% each," said Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd. "The broader indices extended their prevailing bias and lost in the range of 4-5%."

"We suggest maintaining negative bias in the index now and utilising rebounds to create short positions," he added.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,762	-1.23
US Dollar	82.81	-0.01
Gold	65,950	-0.60
Brent oil	83.39	1.83

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2906.20	-216.30
Adani Ports	1209.55	-91.75
Apollo Hosp	6008.40	-136.40
Asian Paints	2860.15	-16.00
Axis Bank	1080.40	-16.60
Bajaj Auto	8384.90	-142.80
Bajaj Finserv	1573.15	-20.40
Bajaj Finance	6456.15	-20.10
Bharti Airtel	1168.75	-35.50
BPL	597.75	-27.70
Britannia Ind.	4856.65	-12.50
Cipla	1471.25	5.50
Coal India	417.05	-32.25
Divis Lab.	3479.80	-97.95
Dr Reddys Lab	6303.80	-1.65
Eicher Motors	3735.55	-75.20
Grasim Ind.	2149.10	-34.90
HCL Tech	1631.50	-4.10
HDFC Bank	1460.40	-0.85
HDFC Life	610.05	-11.50
Hero MotoCorp	4512.10	-146.80
Hindalco	507.00	-21.95
Hind Unilever	2312.60	-65.55
ICI Bank	1083.95	7.10
IndusInd Bank	1502.65	-30.40
Infosys	1611.40	-1.55
ITC	422.45	18.00
JSW Steel	752.95	-4.85
Kotak Bank	1729.55	-9.20
L&T	3538.55	-83.10
L1Mintree Ltd.	5195.00	-14.20
M&M	1853.70	-41.45
Maruti Suzuki	11390.15	-119.75
NestleIndia	2582.95	-7.20
NTPC	322.50	-22.25
ONGC	255.35	-15.05
PowerGrid Corp.	264.30	-20.85
Reliance Ind.	2864.35	-86.50
SBI Life	1487.35	-29.05
State Bank	747.25	-12.45
Sun Pharma	1558.60	-25.70
TataConsumerPro-	1178.95	-36.25
duct	975.20	-43.30
Tata Motors	148.65	-8.85
Tata Steel	4149.00	-43.25
Tech Mahindra	1277.20	-15.10
Titan	3625.70	-123.10
UltraTech Cement	5993.55	-21.95
UPL	451.90	-22.15
Wipro	504.40	-6.45

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 13

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.66	82.98
Euro	90.34	90.70
British Pound	105.68	106.10
Japanese Yen (100)	55.88	56.10
Chinese Yuan	11.49	11.54
Swiss Franc	94.10	94.48
Singapore Dollar	61.99	62.24
Canadian Dollar	61.25	61.49
Malaysian Ringgit	17.63	17.71
Australian Dollar	54.61	54.82

Source: Indian Bank

'Retail play in F&O eyeing instant profits, is a concern'

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Chief Economic Advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran on Wednesday said he is "worried" about retail investors' play in risky Futures and Options (F&O) segment for instant profits.

Speaking at a conference organised by capital markets regulator SEBI, Mr. Nageswaran said "The biggest risk for sustained capital formation and sustained economic growth is... in our short-termism." Mr. Nageswaran asked India Inc. to reflect on corporate governance practices and analyse its own conduct, while discussing allowing corporate groups to promote banks.

'Latest data further reinforce the case for a patient and vigilant approach from Fed officials'

no rush to start lowering borrowing costs.

"Officials want to see some more evidence of a sustained deceleration in prices towards target before they pivot to rate cuts," said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics. "The latest data further reinforce the case for a patient and vigilant approach from Fed officials as they consider future policy decisions," she added.

India, others call for TRIPS review with development focus

Amiti Sen
NEW DELHI

Following the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, which failed to extend the temporary waiver of certain intellectual property rights (TRIPS) to the production of Covid-19 related therapeutics and diagnostics, India, together with Bangladesh, Colombia and Egypt, have given a joint call at the WTO for review of the TRIPS Agreement with focus on development dimension, technology transfer and other concerns of developing countries building on the lessons learned during the pandemic.

"We, keeping in mind the upcoming 30th anniversary of the TRIPS Agreement, call upon the Council for TRIPS to undertake and finalise its first review under Article 71 on the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement...shall take fully into account the development dimension and shall provide a report on the progress made, including any recommendations, to the Ministers at the 14th Ministerial Conference," the submission stated.

TRIPS Agreement

The TRIPS Agreement came into effect on January 1, 1995, and sets out the minimum standards of intellectual rights protection to be provided by each WTO Member.

One of the primary tasks of India and the others in their submission is fast-tracking of the long-purposed examination of the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the

Changes in TRIPS Agreement are demanded to build effective solutions to future pandemics

protection of traditional knowledge and folklore.

While the CBD recognises countries' sovereign rights over their biological resources, the TRIPS Agreement allows members to provide patents over biological resources (plants, animals and micro-organisms). India and several other developing nations have been long demanding changes in the TRIPS Agreement to bring it in conformity with the CBD and have rules that prevent bio-piracy and protect traditional knowledge.

"Pursuant to paragraph 19 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, we request the Council for TRIPS to expedite ongoing work to examine the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity and the protection of traditional knowledge," read the submission.

Although the WTO MC13 failed to extend TRIPS waiver on vaccines to therapeutics and diagnostics, the declaration stated that work should continue in relevant WTO bodies based on Members' submissions to review and build on all the lessons learned and the challenges experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. This should be done to build effective solutions in case of future pandemics in an expeditious manner, it said.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Global trade growth likely to accelerate in 2024: DHL and NYU

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Globalisation reached a record high in 2022 and stayed almost as high in 2023, despite global shocks over the past decade, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the U.S.-China trade row, DHL and New York University's Stern School of Business said in a report released on Wednesday.

The two entities in their study, "New DHL Global Connectedness Report 2024", also said the share of global output traded internationally was back to a record high level in 2022.

After a slowdown in 2023, trade growth is forecast to accelerate in 2024, they forecast.

The report tracks how flows of trade, capital, information, and people move around the world and measures the globalisation of 181 countries and territories.

Globalisation of information flows has notably surged over the past two decades, even though latest data show a slowdown, partly due to less research collaboration between the U.S. and China.

Corporate globalisation is rising, with companies expanding their international presence and earning sales abroad, they said.

'Globalisation, a force'

"The most recent findings unequivocally dispel the notion of globalisation reversing course," said John Pearson, CEO DHL Express. "Far from being a mere buzzword, globalisation is an influential force that has profoundly reshaped our world and has great potential," he added.



The report ranked Singapore as among the top most globalised countries followed by the Netherlands. According to it, 143 countries became more globally connected, while only 38 saw their levels of connectedness decline.

Further evidence shows that Europe is the world's most globally connected region, followed by North America and the 'Middle East & North Africa'.

The report also shows that U.S.-China ties continue to diminish, with the shares of both countries' flows involving each other decreasing by about one-quarter since 2016.

"Deglobalisation is still only a risk, not a current reality," said Steven Altman, Senior Research Scholar and Director of the DHL Initiative on Globalisation at NYU Stern's Center for the Future of Management.

"Geopolitical threats and public policy shifts have led many to predict a fracturing of the world economy along geographic or geopolitical lines, or even a retreat from international to domestic business," he said.

But the latest data, according to him, still show that international flows are growing and very few countries are cutting ties with their traditional counterparts.

IIFL Finance looks to raise ₹2,000 cr. via rights issue, NCDs



Fund crunch: The need to raise capital rose after the RBI's action on the NBFC over gold loans. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

Anshika Kavastha
MUMBAI

The board of IIFL Finance has approved raising up to ₹1,500 crore by way of issue of equity shares on a rights basis, the lender notified the exchanges. In addition to the rights issue, the NBFC will also look to raise up to ₹500 crore through the issue of non-convertible debentures (NCDs) on a private placement basis.

Prior to this, Fairfax India Holdings Corporation, a longstanding investor in IIFL Finance, had announced its commitment to invest up to \$200 million as liquidity support to assuage stakeholder concerns amid the regulatory action.

The need for capital raising by the company has risen after the RBI, on March 4, barred the NBFC from sanctioning or disbursing gold loans, and assigning, securitising or selling any of its gold loans. The lender was allowed to continue to service its existing gold loan portfolio through usual collection and recovery processes. The regulatory action is estimated to impact the NBFC's business by 25-30% over the next few quarters.

The board on Wednesday also approved re-designating Chief of Staff Abhiram Bhattacharjee as the Chief Operating Officer of the company, effective immediately. Further, Shivalingam A. Pillai has been appointed the Chief Compliance Officer.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

In Japan, interest rate increases herald a new era for financial markets

Symbolism heavy as Japan seeks to leave behind "lost" years marked by deflation and reawaken the fourth-biggest economy in the world as a destination for investment — a change already rippling through corporate Japan and global markets; policy shift priced by June

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
SINGAPORE

Barely weeks after Japanese stocks broke three-decade highs, the country's financial markets are hurtling toward another phenomenon not seen for the best part of a generation: rising interest rates.

Bankers are attending remedial classes on what to do when rates move and trading rooms are setting up for moribund derivative markets to spring to life — as they have begun to do.

Their pricing implies a matter of months at the most before the last bastion of a decades-long monetary policy experiment with negative short-term rates falls. An exit by the Bank of Japan is expected by June, with an even chance that rates will rise to zero next week.

Such a move, up 10 basis points, would be small, leaving traders to focus on broader signals: whether any change is implemented immediately, or later, and whether the BOJ winds down its enormous buying programme for assets ranging from Japanese government bonds to listed equity funds.

The symbolism is also heavy as Japan seeks to leave behind "lost" years marked by deflation and reawaken the fourth-biggest



Action plan: Bankers are attending remedial classes on what to do when rates move and trading rooms are setting up for moribund derivative markets to spring to life. REUTERS

economy in the world as a destination for investment — a change already rippling through corporate Japan and global markets.

"I personally think this is going to be the beginning of a new era," said Keita Matsumoto, head of financial institutions sales and solutions at Citigroup Global Markets Japan.

"It's a fundamental shift in peoples' mindset," he said, one that may take five or 10 years' adjustment as the economy changes.

Some of the biggest implications may be in Japan's 1.3 quadrillion yen (\$8.7 trillion) government debt market.

Mr. Matsumoto said investors have positioned to benefit from selling of short-dated paper since a rise in central bank deposit rates would quickly draw



The equity market, because of the fact that the Japanese are moving out of a deflation forever situation ... is beginning to attract a lot of attention

banks' capital out of bonds and into cash.

Should a bigger policy shift drive longer-term rates up sharply, Japanese investors, who own some \$2.2 trillion in foreign debt, might also lose their appetite in favour of paper closer to home, which would drag on global bond markets. In foreign exchange, a market that is heavily short the yen has reversed a little in recent days and must ad-

just to paying interest, albeit small, on the Japanese currency.

Equity investors have been snapping up bank shares on bets loans and margins will grow, though in the last few days trade has turned nervous as the potential policy shift draws near. The Nikkei, which made a record high above 40,000 last week, posted its sharpest fall in five months on Monday.

"There has been a fair degree of excitement about the Japanese economy and monetary policy ... becoming 'more normal' and like the other countries," said Niraj Athavle, J.P. Morgan's head of sales and marketing in Singapore.

"The equity market, because of the fact that the Japanese are moving out of a

deflation forever situation ... is beginning to attract a lot of attention — bond markets and swap markets will follow as Japan tends to become a more normal economy."

Sweet spot

Previous hiking cycles in Japan took place under such different circumstances that comparisons are tricky.

In 1989-90 it raised rates by more than 300 basis points, bursting a property bubble and crushing the economy and stock market for a decade. In 2006, an attempt to end a zero-rate policy fell flat as inflation couldn't be sustained.

This time investors and policymakers both point to higher wages and changes in companies' attitudes as new elements. Pay negotiation data due on Friday, before the BOJ meets, can move markets especially if it surprises to the upside.

"Markets still underprice any long-term changes in Japan," said Ales Koutny, head of international rates at Vanguard, who is increasing short exposure to Japanese government bonds.

"A wage number high enough that supports consumption could focus minds on a potential longer hiking cycle."

He sees the five- to 10-year tenors as most vulnerable if the BOJ winds back its support and says 10-

year yields could surpass 1% and in the longer term trade like German bunds, which yield 2.3%, if wages, consumption and inflation start to reinforce one another.

Two-year Japanese yields, which track short-term rate expectations, have hit 13-year highs at 0.2%, five-year yields and 10-year yields are around multi-month highs of 0.4% and 0.77%, respectively.

The yen, after hitting levels near its cheapest on record in real terms, last week climbed 2% for its sharpest weekly jump on the dollar in eight months as short-sellers retreated slightly. To be sure the journey out of such a long period of unorthodox policy is fraught and the distortions wrought on the economy will take a long time to unwind. Smaller businesses in particular face challenges from higher borrowing costs.

Crowded bets on bank stocks are vulnerable to "sell the fact" losses on a policy shift, says Nomura's Japan macro strategist Naka Matsuzawa. Already, the BOJ's refusal to buy equity funds when markets fell this week has unnerved some investors.

A yen rally to 135 or 130 to the dollar could also trigger worldwide reverberations, investors say, as that would likely trigger "carry" trades funded in yen to be unwound.

On the fast lane



Higher mileage: Oliver Blume, CEO of German carmaker Volkswagen (VW), addresses an annual news conference to present his company's results, in Berlin on Wednesday. German auto giant Volkswagen reported a forecast-beating rise in profits for 2023, boosted by higher vehicle deliveries, but gave a cautious outlook for this year. AFP

China central bank adviser urges structural reforms to spur growth

Reuters
BEIJING

China should rely more on structural reforms and less on economic stimulus to drive growth this year, Liu Shijin, a policy adviser to the central bank, said on Wednesday.

Mr. Liu, a member of People's Bank of China monetary policy committee, said the economy can achieve its growth target of 5% this year but that more effort is needed on both stimulus and structural reforms.

"There is no issue with macroeconomic policies becoming moderately loose and more proactive, but there is a tendency to focus solely on macroeconomic policies and not



Stitch in time: Analysts are closely watching out for new reforms from Beijing to address deep-seated economic imbalances. AFP

even remember how to promote some structural reforms," Mr. Liu said. "The relationship between macro policies and structural reforms may need to be straightened out."

Investors and analysts are closely watching out for new reforms from Beijing

to address deep-seated economic imbalances.

China's economy can grow at 5%, with only 1% coming from the effect of policy, with the rest from "basic conditions and institutional policy environment", suggesting reforms are important, he said, ad-

ding some reforms could aid growth immediately.

"Some structural reform policies can also have immediate effects, which may be faster than some macroeconomic policies," Mr. Liu said, amid concerns that reforms may not yield quick economic benefits and that some changes may hurt growth.

Mr. Liu has been calling for reforms to widen migrant workers' access to public services enjoyed by city dwellers, as well as policies that bolster private entrepreneurship.

At the beginning of the annual parliament meeting last week, Premier Li Qiang announced an ambitious 2024 economic growth target of around 5%.

Rising mortgage defaults bring more pain to Chinese households

Reuters
BEIJING/HONG KONG

Chased by debt collectors over a mortgage delinquency in a southern Chinese city, former finance worker Lei Xiaoyu no longer answers her phone as she tries to delay the inevitable.

"It's my only house and I don't want it foreclosed. But what can I do?" said the 38-year-old, who in late 2022 lost her job and stopped repaying the mortgage and credit card debt she took to buy a 1.3 million yuan (\$181,139) home in Huizhou.

"I feel like I wasted my youth," she said, regretting the purchase seven years ago. The number of Chinese in Lei's situation is small, but rising fast, as

growth in the world's second-largest economy remains patchy and fragile due to a property sector crisis, mounting local government debt and fears of deflation.

Rising mortgage delinquencies could have negative spillovers on both property prices and consumer confidence, analysts say, further complicating China's efforts to boost household demand and bring its economy on a more solid footing. The number of foreclosed homes in China rose 43% year-on-year in 2023 to 389,000, said China Index Academy, a major independent real estate research firm. More than 50,000 other units were foreclosed in January, up 64.4% year-on-year, the firm said.



Cascading effect: More auctions in the future will distract would-be buyers from the regular market, which could weigh on prices for both new and second-hand homes. AFP

"It has a certain shrinking effect on consumption and also serves as a warning that excessive investment (in property) should be avoided," Hwabao Trust

economist Nie Wen said. Lei is in no mood to spend money.

She made about 40,000 yuan last year selling goods via livestreaming, not

enough to make any of the 4,200 yuan monthly mortgage payments and barely enough for basic living expenses.

"All the clothes I wear

are from five years ago, but I've gained weight and many no longer fit me. My friend gave me one of her old coats. I haven't travelled since 2017," said Lei. Not being able to support her mother who lives on a 3,000 yuan monthly pension upsets her the most.

More auctions coming

Data from China Index Academy showed a total of 99,000 foreclosed units were sold at auctions in 2023 for a combined 150 billion yuan.

Duan Chenglong, a manager at Beijing Xiangpaipai Information Service, a firm that specialises in foreclosures, says those auctions were the result of debt disputes two- to three-years old, meaning

the trend is likely to pick up pace.

"The post-pandemic economic environment hasn't been good, with many defaulting on their mortgages, including due to job issues," said Duan. "There is still a gap between the volume of properties being auctioned and the amount of distressed assets."

More auctions in the future will distract would-be buyers from the regular market, which could weigh on prices for both new and second-hand homes, Duan said.

In some cities in China, some auctions of foreclosed homes have repeatedly failed.

The ratio of mortgage-related non performing loans in the Chinese bank-

ing sector is estimated at only 0.4%, meaning lenders can tolerate writing off some of these assets.

But the failures highlight the excess housing supply built up during the boom years of the property sector, which accounted for about a quarter of economic activity at its peak in 2021.

Xin, a 30-year-old single mother from Zhumadian, in the central Henan province, lost her flat after she mortgaged it to start a child entertainment business, which failed within weeks due to COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020.

The property, valued in 2019 at 310,000 yuan, was auctioned twice in the past year for the 170,000 yuan Xin owes the bank, but failed to attract any bids.

NERVOUS

It feels like I am going to make my debut again, says Pant



Rishabh Pant will soon be back on the field 14 months after surviving a life-threatening car accident and ahead of that moment, the wicketkeeper-batter is "nervous" like a debutant all over again. "I am excited and nervous at the same time. It feels like I am going to make my debut again," said Pant in a Delhi Capitals release.

PROGRESSING

Looking forward to next stage of my healing journey: Shami



Mohammed Shami on Wednesday said he was looking forward to the next phase of his "healing journey". "It has been 15 days since my surgery, and I recently had my stitches removed. I am thankful for the advancements and looking forward to the next stage of my healing journey," Shami wrote on 'X'.

ICING ON THE CAKE

Ravindra becomes the youngest to win Sir Richard Hadlee Medal



Rachin Ravindra became the youngest recipient of the Sir Richard Hadlee Medal at the New Zealand Cricket awards. Kane Williamson won the Test player of the year award while Amelia Kerr clinched the Debbie Hockley Medal after being named the ODI and T20I player of the year and the Super Smash Women's Player-of-the-Year.

CAPTAIN'S KNOCK

Shanto in fine form as Bangladesh cruises past Sri Lanka in first ODI



Najmul Hossain Shanto's unbeaten 122 powered Bangladesh to a six-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the first ODI in Chittagong. **The scores:** Sri Lanka 255 in 48.5 overs (Janith Liyanage 67, Kusal Mendis 59) lost to Bangladesh 257/4 in 44.4 overs (Najmul Hossain Shanto 122 n.o., Mushfiqur Rahim 73 n.o.).

Capitals dwarf Giants to seal a spot in the final

After the Delhi bowlers shackle the Gujarat batters with an incisive display, Shafali's rollicking half-century powers Lanning & Co. to a big win; MI faces RCB in the Eliminator on Friday



In a hurry: Shafali slammed boundaries at will to hasten Capitals' victory. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

WPL SEASON 2

Final points table

	M	W	L	Pts	NRR
Delhi Capitals (Q)	8	6	2	12	1.198
Mumbai Indians (Q)	8	5	3	10	0.024
Royal Challengers (Q)	8	4	4	8	0.306
UP Warriorz	8	3	5	6	-0.371
Gujarat Giants	8	2	6	4	-1.158

Q: Qualified

Lavanya L
NEW DELHI

Math in sports can sometimes be absurd. The inconsequential final league game between Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Giants had one outlandish caveat. If Giants beat Capitals by 118 runs, they could strip the latter of a second straight final appearance and force them to play in the Eliminator.

However, this game was not for those who wanted to watch the world burn. Capitals sauntered to a seven-wicket win at the Arun Jaitley Stadium here on Wednesday to end the league stage on top for the second season in a row.

Beth Mooney opted to bat but fell to Marizanne Kapp for a five-ball duck.

Jess Jonassen ripped one into D. Hemalatha's off-stump after which the South African stuck to her 'two wickets in the Power-Play' routine as Laura Wolvaardt holed out to Shafali Verma.

Ashleigh Gardner and Phoebe Litchfield, who have had an abysmal season with the bat, managed positive starts but lost their bearings to Minnu Mani and Shikha Pandey respectively.

Bharti Fulmali and Kathryn Bryce's resistance, which saw the two stitch

together a 68-run stand off 50 balls, helped the team reach a respectable 126 for nine.

In response, Meg Lanning and Shafali rattled up 31 in the first three overs. Shabnam Shakil, who has listed Lanning and Shafali in her list of dream wickets, was given a taste of quality batting.

While Lanning, who took over the Orange Cap from Deepti Sharma after crossing the 300-run mark in her second straight season, and Alice Capsey fell soon, Shafali dealt in boun-

SCOREBOARD

GUJARAT GIANTS
Laura Wolvaardt c Shafali b Kapp 7 (11b, 1x4), Beth Mooney b Kapp 0 (5b), D. Hemalatha b Jonassen 4 (7b), Phoebe Litchfield c Radha b Minnu 21 (22b, 2x4, 1x6), Ashleigh Gardner b Minnu 12 (12b, 2x4), Bharti Fulmali b Shikha 42 (36b, 7x4), Kathryn Bryce (not out) 28 (22b, 4x4), Tanuja Kanwar b Shikha 0 (1b), Shabnam Shakil run out 1 (2b), Meghna Singh run out 4 (2b, 1x4), Mannat Kashyap (not out) 0 (0b); Extras (b-1, lb-4, w-2): 7; Total (for nine wkts. in 20 overs): 126.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-1 (Mooney, 0.6 overs), 2-12 (Hemalatha, 3.3), 3-16 (Wolvaardt, 4.2), 4-39 (Gardner, 8.4), 5-48 (Litchfield, 10.2), 6-116 (Bharti, 18.4), 7-116 (Tanuja, 18.5), 8-118 (Shabnam, 19.3), 9-122 (Meghna, 19.5).

CAPITALS BOWLING
Kapp 4-0-17-2, Shikha 4-0-23-2, Jonassen 4-0-32-1, Radha 2-0-17-0, Arundhati 3-0-20-0, Minnu 2-0-9-2, Capsey 1-0-3-0.

DELHI CAPITALS
Meg Lanning run out 18 (10b, 4x4), Shafali Verma c Litchfield b Tanuja 71 (37b, 7x4, 5x6), Alice Capsey c Mannat b Tanuja 0 (4b), Jemimah Rodrigues (not out) 38 (28b, 4x4, 1x6), Marizanne Kapp (not out) 0 (0b); Extras (w-2): 2; Total (for three wkts. in 13.1 overs): 129.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-31 (Lanning, 3.1), 2-31 (Capsey, 3.5), 3-125 (Shafali, 12.6).

GIANTS BOWLING
Shabnam 2-0-15-0, Bryce 1-0-16-0, Tanuja 4-1-20-2, Meghna 2-0-28-0, Gardner 2-0-28-0, Mannat 2.1-0-22-0.

Toss: Gujarat Giants.
Player-of-the-Match: Shafali. Delhi Capitals won by seven wickets with 41 balls to spare.

daries even as Jemimah Rodrigues cheered her on from the other end. Shafali fell to Tanuja Kanwar going for a glory shot to finish the game.

However, that didn't stop Capitals from winning with 6.5 overs to spare.

Karun and Wadkar dig deep to thwart Mumbai

RANJI TROPHY

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Karun Nair lived up to the tag of the senior pro with a defiant knock while Akshay Wadkar made an unbeaten fifty. As a result, despite the Mumbai spin trio bowling long spells on a fourth day pitch that offered slow turn, Vidarbha managed to keep the Ranji Trophy final alive.

At the end of the penultimate day's proceedings at the Wankhede Stadium, Vidarbha finished with 248 for five, still 290 runs away from an improbable target of 538.

The specialist batters rectified their mistakes from the first essay, playing close to the body on most occasions. Karun (74, 220b, 3x4), especially, applied himself well for almost five hours on a slow turner. Had wicketkeeper Hardik Tamore not dropped him off Tanush Kotian when he was on 4, Vidarbha could have been in big trouble.

After all, Kotian and birthday boy Shams Mulani were on a roll – having dismissed openers Atharva Taide and Dhruv Shorey in successive overs soon after the drinks break. Kotian bowled the ball of the match, turning one sharply from way outside off and sneaking through a hapless Dhruv Shorey's gap even before he got his bat down.

Vidarbha may have soon been staring down the barrel, derailing from 64 for no loss to 70 for three but Tamore's reprieve gave Karun a chance to build the innings along with rookie Aman Mokhadde who was tight with his defence.

The shot of the day, however, came from captain



Defiant: Karun stepped up to the occasion when the chips were down for Vidarbha. EMMANUEL YOGINI

Wadkar towards the fag end. With speedster Tushar Deshpande employing a short-ball ploy with the second new ball, Wadkar played a magnificent upper cut to raise his bat for a fifty.

Until Wadkar came in when DRS appeal resulted in Yash Rathod being adjudged lbw by Musheer, Vidarbha was playing too cautiously. With the spinners deriving additional turn and the trio pitching it to precision, there was a 23-over boundary-less spell.

The lull was over, thanks to Wadkar's cover drive off the first ball he faced and a pull off the fourth, both off Mulani. Despite Wadkar upping the ante, Mumbai bowlers stuck to their task and Musheer earned the

prize scalp around 15 minutes before stumps with one that was full and turned just enough to kiss the line for Tamore to have the last laugh.

The scores:
Mumbai – 1st innings: 224.
Vidarbha – 1st innings: 105.
Mumbai – 2nd innings: 418.
Vidarbha – 2nd innings: Atharva Taide lbw b Mulani 32, Dhruv Shorey b Kotian 28, Aman Mokhadde lbw b Musheer 32, Karun Nair c Tamore b Musheer 74, Yash Rathod lbw b Kotian 7, Akshay Wadkar (batting) 56, Harsh Dubey (batting) 11; Extras (b-1, lb-7): 8; Total (for five wkts. in 92 overs): 248.
Fall of wickets: 1-64, 2-64, 3-118, 4-133, 5-223.

Mumbai bowling: Mulani 29-8-56-1, Shardul 8-0-35-0, Kulkarni 5-0-20-0, Deshpande 10-0-35-0, Kotian 20-1-56-2, Musheer 20-3-38-2.

Getting runs in county gave me confidence, says Karun

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

The last time Karun Nair batted in a Ranji Trophy match at the Wankhede Stadium – also a final – he registered the highest individual score in a Ranji final with a sterling knock of 328. While Vidarbha would have wanted him to repeat his heroics, Karun stretched the game into the last day's play with a sedate knock of 74 on the penultimate day of the final against Mumbai.

The knock capped off Karun's return to Ranji Trophy with a tally of 690 runs. More than being set to end as Vidarbha's leading run-scorer in his maiden season as a pro (Akshay Wadkar has a tally of 591 and is at the crease), Karun was elated with being back in the domestic circuit after being dropped by his alma mater Karnataka the previous season.

"Quite honestly, I was really happy to play after a year. I haven't faced challenges as such. Everyone has been really welcoming, there is a good atmosphere in the team. Over the season, I really got to know people and understand them better," Karun said.

The 32-year-old admitted that the County Championship stint with Northamptonshire gave him the confidence ahead of the season. "I have batted well this season in all formats. At least this season, I have got quite a few runs. I played a few games in the County Championship and started getting runs and that gave me confidence," Karun said.

"If I could score in the Oval, score 150 when the conditions are much tougher, that gave me a lot of confidence before I came here."

Tanish-Ashwini pair and Lakshya advance

ALL ENGLAND

Press Trust of India
BIRMINGHAM

World Championship bronze medallist shuttler Lakshya Sen moved into the second round with an easy straight game win over Denmark's Magnus Johannessen at the All England Championships here on Wednesday.

The 22-year-old brushed aside the Dane 21-14, 21-15 in 40 minutes in the men's singles opening round contest. In the round of 16, he will meet another Danish opponent in fourth seed Anders Antonsen.

The women's doubles pair of Tanish Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa also



Lakshya. GETTY IMAGES

progressed to the round of 16 with a comfortable 21-13, 21-18 win over Hong Kong's Yeung Nga Ting and Yeung Pui Lam.

However, it was curtains for young Priyanshu Rajawat, who lost a hard-fought men's singles contest to Chico Aura Dwi Wardoyo 19-21, 21-1, 9-21.

Toofans overcome Heroes' challenge, climb to the top of Super 5 standings

PVL

Saikat Chakraborty
CHENNAI

Delhi Toofans registered a 14-16, 15-9, 15-11, 15-13 win to leapfrog opponent Calicut Heroes and go to the top of the Super 5 table in the Prime Volleyball League here on Wednesday.

The first set was a nail-biter, with both teams showcasing their attacking prowess. Calicut's Utkra Pandian and Jerome Vinith displayed their skills, while Delhi's Daniel Aponza countered with a barrage of powerful smashes. However, a crucial net fault by Aponza handed Heroes a two-point advantage, al-



Delhi's Toofan! Anand makes a spectacular return in the match against Heroes. M. VEDHAN

lowing them to snatch the set 16-14. The second set remained equally close, with the score at 8-8. A successful review by Toofans turned the tide in their fa-

vor, and with the help of their opposite hitter Lazar Dodic, they secured the set. The momentum shifted in the third as Dodic and Rohit Kumar stepped up

for Delhi. Aponza continued to shine with impressive blocks, thwarting Heroes' attempts to regain control.

The fourth saw Heroes take an early lead (7-5) but Toofans clawed their way back, tying the score at 11. They strategically called for a 'Super Point,' a high-pressure opportunity to win the set with a single point.

Unsuccessful review
Chirag Yadav's attempt sailed out and Heroes' desperate review proved unsuccessful. Delhi clinched the set 15-13, sealing a hard-fought win.

The result:
Delhi Toofans bt Calicut Heroes 14-16, 15-9, 15-11, 15-13.

Olympian shuttler Bhatia passes away

Sports Bureau
BENGALURU

Wing Commander Satish Bhatia, a former junior World badminton champion, National champion and Olympian, passed away on Wednesday.

The Dehradun-born Wg. Cdr. Bhatia earned the World title in 1960, was crowned India's best in 1968 while representing the then Mysore state and participated in the 1972 Munich Games where badminton was introduced for the first time, as a demonstration sport, in the Olympics. He also featured in the Thomas Cup for India.

Bhatia had a distinguished career in the Indian Air Force which he joined in 1964 as a tran-



Satish Bhatia.
THE HINDU ARCHIVES

sport pilot. He flew Devons and Dakotas from Bengaluru and also from Lucknow, and was part of two wars – the 1965 conflict with Pakistan and the 1971 campaign for Bangladesh's liberation.

Sport

IN BRIEF



Ashwin reclaims top spot among Test bowlers

A nine-wicket haul in his 100th Test match helped Indian off-spinner R. Ashwin reclaim the top spot in the bowlers' list, while his captain Rohit Sharma was back in the top-10 at sixth in the batting charts of the latest ICC rankings on Wednesday.

India takes lead over Lanka in blind cricket series

India defeated Sri Lanka by seven wickets in the third T20 to take an unassailable 3-0 lead in the five-match Samarath championship for blind cricket in New Delhi on Wednesday. Chandana Deshapriya (76) helped Sri Lanka post 162 for three after being asked to bat. Dinesh Rathva, Naresh Tumda, Lokesh and Pankaj Bhue, who was adjudged player-of-the-match, contributed with the bat as India made 164 for three in 15.3 overs.



Kuldeep had inkling he will be my 700th scalp: Anderson

James Anderson revealed that Kuldeep Yadav had a hunch about being his 700th Test wicket when the two came face to face in the final Test against India in Dharamshala. Anderson became the first pacer and third bowler to take 700 Test wickets on March 9 with Kuldeep being his landmark scalp. "Kuldeep edged one down to third man for a single. As he got to the non-striker's end, he said: 'I'm going to be your 700th wicket,'" Anderson said BBC's Tailenders podcast.

Prathyusha Rachapudi loses in first round

Laura Dilekova of Slovakia beat Prathyusha Rachapudi 6-2, 6-2 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt, on Wednesday.

Shrivalli outplays top seed Irina Maria Bara

Shrivalli Bhamidipaty outclassed top seed Irina Maria Bara of Romania 6-3, 6-0 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF women's tennis at the Indore Tennis Club, Indore, on Wednesday. Viktoria Morvayova of Slovakia beat Vaidehi Chaudhari in three sets. Sahaja Yamalapalli eased past Zeel Desai for the loss of four games and will play fourth seed Mananchaya Sawangkaew of Thailand in the pre-quarterfinals. Qualifier Vaishnavi Adkar fought well for two hours and 44 minutes, but lost to Thasaporn Naklo of Thailand. In doubles, top seeds Ankita Raina and Rutuja Bhosale were beaten 6-3, 5-7, [10-7] by the Japanese, Akiko Omae and Mei Yamaguchi.

The results: First round: Shrivalli Bhamidipaty bt Irina Maria Bara 6-3, 6-0; Viktoria Morvayova bt Vaidehi Chaudhari 3-6, 6-2, 6-4; Ekaterina Yashina bt Michika Ozeki 6-1, 6-3; Yeonwoo Ku bt Aanya Choubey 6-1, 6-0; Polina Latcenko bt Akanksha Nitture 6-0, 6-3; Diana Marcinkevica bt Rinon Okuwaki 6-2, 3-6, 6-2; Jacqueline Cabaj Awad bt Daria Kudashova 6-3, 6-3; Sahaja Yamalapalli bt Zeel Desai 6-3, 6-1. Mananchaya Sawangkaew bt Rutuja Bhosale 6-2, 6-0; Thasaporn Naklo bt Vaishnavi Adkar 3-6, 7-6(3), 7-5; Mei Yamaguchi bt Akiko Omae 6-2, 6-1; Dalila Jakupovic bt Ayumi Koshishi 6-3, 6-1. **Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals:** Omae & Yamaguchi bt Rutuja & Ankita 6-2, 5-7, [10-7]; Riya Bhatia & Michika Ozeki bt Sharmada Balu & Rinon Okuwaki 6-1, 2-1 (retired); Ya-Hsuan Lee & Sohyun Park bt Akanksha & Soha Sadiq 6-0, 6-3; Jacqueline & Diana Marcinkevica bt Dayeon Back & Gyeong Seo Lee 7-5, 4-6, [10-5].

Lazio names Martusciello as new coach after Sarri resigns

Lazio officially announced coach Maurizio Sarri's resignation on Wednesday and said his longtime assistant Giovanni Martusciello will take over. Italian media had reported on Tuesday that the 65-year-old Sarri had decided to step down after five losses in Lazio's last six matches. Sarri was in his third season in charge of Lazio and had a contract until the end of next season. Martusciello was Sarri's assistant at Empoli, Juventus and Lazio. He will make his debut at Frosinone on Saturday.



Winning streak: Karnataka's victory helped it complete the red-ball double in age-group cricket, also for the first time. K. MURALI KUMAR

Karnataka clinches its maiden title

It's the first trophy we have got at U-23 level; we just need to carry this momentum and win as many as we can, says skipper Smaran

C.K. NAYUDU TROPHY

Sports Bureau
BENGALURU

Karnataka won its maiden Col. C.K. Nayudu (U-23) Trophy after overcoming Uttar Pradesh by virtue of having secured the first-innings lead, at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Wednesday.

The victory comes less than two months after Karnataka clinched the Cooch Behar (U-19) Trophy, helping complete the red-ball double in age-group cricket, also for the first time.

So special was the victory that it probably deserved a toast. But in the absence of champagne, the boys and the coaching staff made do with packaged drinking water, poking

holes in the bottle cap with the help of shoe spikes. Little did they realise that in the Bengaluru of today, water is more precious than spirit.

Skipper R. Smaran, though, was elated with the win. "We have been waiting for a long time and it's a very proud moment for Karnataka," he said. "It's the first trophy we have got at U-23 level. Earlier, we used to come, play knock-outs and go. Now that we have won this, it is a stepping stone. We just need to carry this momentum and win as many as we can."

The cricket that transpired before all the celebrations wasn't sparkling. Karnataka, starting from an overnight 444 for five was bowled out for 585, but not before K.V. Aneesh helped himself to a fine double-century (214, 273b, 18x4,

6x6). Chasing a mammoth 805, UP threatened to fold and give the host the added satisfaction of an outright win. Pacer Manvanth Kumar (5/36) had UP opener Rituraj Sharma off the second ball of the innings before going on to reduce the visitors to 34 for three.

But a 103-run partnership for the fifth wicket between Swastik (67, 78b, 7x4, 3x6) and Vipraj Nigam (73, 54b, 9x4, 2x6) arrested the slide. UP eventually finished on 174 for six, with the game called off roughly an hour before close.

The scores:

Karnataka 358 & 585 in 151.5 overs (MacNeil H. Noronha 79, Prakar Chaturvedi 86, K.V. Aneesh 214, R. Smaran 40, Kruthik Krishna 86, Kunal Tyagi 4/90) drew with Uttar Pradesh 139 & 174 for six in 31 overs (Swastik 67, Vipraj Nigam 73, Manvanth Kumar 5/36).

Bairstow available for Punjab Kings for full IPL season

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

England batter Jonny Bairstow will be available for the entire duration of the Indian Premier League, beginning March 22.

The BCCI officials were in talks with their England

and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) counterparts over the availability of their players for the IPL.

Ben Stokes, Joe Root and Mark Wood had already made themselves unavailable. "Bairstow is expected to arrive in India on March 18 or 19 and will be

available for the team's first game against Delhi Capitals on March 23," said a source.

Sanjay Bangar, who was appointed as cricket director at Punjab Kings ahead of the 2024 edition, will double up as the batting coach of the side.

Ramkumar has a smooth start



Easy outing: Ramkumar did not have to sweat much against Chanta. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

TENNIS

Kamesh Srinivasan
NEW DELHI

Third seed Ramkumar Ramanathan did not have to sweat much as he beat Thanapet Chanta of Thailand 6-4, 6-4 in the first round of the \$25,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the DLTA Complex on Wednesday.

In the pre-quarterfinals, Ramkumar will play Jang Yunseok of Korea, who eased past Siddhant Bhanthia for the loss of three games.

Siddharth Vishwakarma, Kabir Hans and Chirag Duhan were the other Indians to progress into the second round, and they all beat compatriots, Nitin Kumar Sinha, Yash Chaurasia

and Raghav Jaisinghani.

The results: First round: Kabir Hans bt Yash Chaurasia 6-3, 7-6(2); Grigory Shebekin bt Rishi Reddy 6-1, 3-6, 6-3; Florent Bax bt Manass Dhamne 6-3, 0-6, 6-4; Chirag Duhan bt Raghav Jaisinghani 3-6, 6-4, 6-0; Yuichiro Inui bt Jagmeet Singh 6-0, 6-1.

Wishaya Trongcharoenchaikul bt Sidharth Rawat 6-0, 4-6, 6-2; Siddharth Vishwakarma bt Nitin Kumar Sinha 6-1, 6-4; Woobin Shin bt Aditya Balsekar 6-4, 6-4; Jang Yunseok bt Siddhant Bhanthia 6-1, 6-2; Ramkumar Ramanathan bt Thanapet Chanta 6-4, 6-4; Nam Hoang Ly bt Manish Ganes 6-4, 6-2; Bang Shuo Yin bt Kazuma Kawachi 6-4, 6-3; Mitsuki Leong bt Dev Javia 6-3, 6-4.

Doubles: Pre-quarterfinals: Parikshit Somani & Manish Sureshkumar bt Adil Kalyanpur & Leong 6-3, 6-3; Bhanthia & Vishnu Vardhan bt Shivank Bhatnagar & Rohan Mehra 6-3, 6-3; Ramkumar & Khumoyun Sultanov bt Bax & Karan Singh 7-6(2), 6-2.

Smriti credits RCB management for revival in fortunes

WPL SEASON 2

Lavanya L
NEW DELHI

An improved show with bat and ball helped Royal Challengers Bangalore not only register its first-ever win against Mumbai Indians in the Women's Premier League but also make it to the play-offs of the tournament for the first time. Captain Smriti Mandhana credited the RCB management for its support to players and staff alike.

"Last season didn't go our way. It wasn't a bad team. We didn't step up and play the cricket we wanted to play. A lot of hard work and thought has gone into this over the past 12 months, not only from my side but all the support staff and the RCB management. For them to show their faith in all of us was just amazing," Smriti told reporters after her side's seven-wicket win against MI on Tuesday.

"I wouldn't say that (this has been a) really satisfying



Keeping faith: Smriti believes backing players have done wonders for the side. R.V. MOORTHY

campaign still, but we had a lot of ups and downs, but that's how WPL and T20 cricket is. You'll have good days and bad days."

"One important talk we had was to not look at the other games as its not in our hands. It takes away the cricketing talk. We treated it as quarterfinal, semifinal, final and spoke about playing our best cricket," she said.

Smriti hailed crowd support for the franchise in both legs.

"I was surprised to see the whole crowd chanting

RCB during the match against Delhi Capitals. It's not something you expect to see. At the end of it, women's cricket is the winner. Of course, franchise has its own fan base for the last 15-odd years.

"Their expectations and whatever they say about us - good or bad - is important to have in the group because it motivates us to do better for them.

"As women cricketers, we've wanted this to happen and it is an amazing thing to watch it happen," she said.

Juventus qualifies for 2025 Club World Cup

Associated Press
GENEVA

Banned by the UEFA from European competitions this season for breaking financial rules, Juventus still qualified for the 2025 Club World Cup on Tuesday when Napoli went out of the Champions League.

Barcelona defeated Napoli 3-1 in the second leg to seal a 4-2 win on aggregate that ensured Juventus advanced through a European ranking system. Juventus is the 21st team to qualify for the inaugural 32-team edition of the Club WC that will be played in the USA in June and July 2025.

Fifty-two entries for 47th MMSC South India Rally

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

The 47th MMSC South India Rally to be held from March 15 to 17 at the Madras Motor Sports Club (MMSC) here has attracted 52 entries.

The three-day event, organised by MMSC, and promoted by Blueband Sports, doubles up as the first round of the AVT Gold Cup FIA APRC South India Rally - Asia Cup which has received 10 entries, all from India, and the Blueband fmcsi Indian National Rally Championship (52 entries, including 10 APRC contenders) to be contested over 137km of 13 special stages and covering an overall distance of about 446 km.



Aroor Arjun Rao.

The Madras International Circuit is the hub of most activity, including the super special and track stages.

The Asia Cup entry list is headlined by Aroor Arjun Rao (co-driver Satish Rajagopal), the 2023 overall National champion, driving a Maruti Suzuki Baleno and representing Mandovi Racing.

Shooters need fine-tuning ahead of the Paris Olympics, says Suma Shirur

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

India's rifle shooting coach Suma Shirur believes the shooters are in a very good zone ahead of the Paris Olympics, and all they need is a bit of fine-tuning leading up to the mega event. The NRAI will hold four trials in April and May to select the Indian shooting team for the Games, and thereafter, the Indian continent will be heading to Munich for the ISSF World Cup.

"Most of the work has been done since last year. In every competition, we were working on little things, making positive changes in their system.



Suma Shirur.
FILE PHOTO: EMMANUAL YOGINI

Now, we need to fine tune those things," Shirur said on the sidelines of the launch of the 14th RR Lakshya Cup 2023, which will be held at the Karnala Sports Academy in Navi Mumbai on March 16 and

17. Around 54 shooters will compete in the tournament and NRAI's high performance director Pierre Beauchamp will attend the event.

Talking about Olympics preparation, Shirur said: "As national coaches, we are not teaching them how to shoot, but now the focus is on how to perform at a bigger stage. That's the main thing for us. Self-regulation is the most important aspect that we are going to work on because no matter how you train, you still need to go out there and perform."

Despite high expectations, India's shooters had a disappointing run in Tokyo Olympics as none of its

campaigners, barring Saubrah Chaudhary, could reach the final.

"Tokyo was a completely different ball game and back then, quite a few decisions had to be taken because of the circumstances. We did not have any control over those circumstances due to COVID. But this time, after the Munich World Cup, we will have our camp and the shooters will come back and emotionally recover, rejuvenate before the Paris Games," Shirur said.

"It's about getting the best out of them. The athletes are in a very good zone, it's just that we need to sharpen them a bit more."

AFC asks Bhattarjee to submit evidence of corruption charges against Chaubey

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has asked AIFF's ousted legal head Nilanjan Bhattarjee to submit evidence for the allegations of corruption he has levelled against national federation head Kalyan Chaubey.

AIFF president Chaubey on March 6 served a legal notice to Bhattarjee for accusing him of corruption.

Bhattarjee, in a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has alleged that Chaubey was part of non-transparent tender processes and made attempts to "siphon off mo-

ney from the federation" for personal expenses.

Taking cognizance of the matter, the AFC has asked Bhattarjee to submit a "full written report" by March 18.

"We refer to the attached media articles in which we note that allegations relating to corruption have been made by you

against the AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey. In light of the seriousness of this matter, we kindly request that you provide the AFC with a full written report setting out your position on the matter by 18 March 2024 at the latest," deputy secretary to the AFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee, Barry Lysaght, wrote.



Perry proves she's cricket's Vitruvian woman

The Perry we see now is a far cry from the Perry of the past. The cherubic multi-sport player has evolved into a cheerful realist, working hard to keep a steady head

Lavanya Lakshminarayanan

Watching Ellyse Perry ply her trade is like watching a National Geographic documentary. Think the ones set against the absorbing baritone of David Attenborough; ones about apex predators effortlessly striking down their prey. There's a lot of hubbub around her but she, in the centre of it all, is unbothered. No aggression, no provocation, just results.

Ironically though, her side – Royal Challengers Bangalore – was the one trying to escape the claws of a much stronger opponent in Mumbai Indians. The stakes? Securing the final spot in the playoffs bracket of the Women's Premier League which also has two other franchises – Gujarat Giants and UP Warriorz – circling the skies around the kill, looking to usurp it for themselves.

Big fights demand big fighters. Perry is as warrior-like as they come in women's cricket. Quietly, often letting her bat and ball do the talking, Perry has – for decades – shown a world sceptical of women's cricket that the girls could play and play marvellously well.

The 33-year-old is a genuine all-rounder and, despite injury struggles every now and again, has an enviable record with bat, ball and the on the field. She's the kind of player you want in the team when you've got your backs to the wall. On a night when her team needed a hero, Perry took six ruthless wickets, took a catch and scored an unbeaten 38-ball 40 to take her team into the playoffs.

Six degrees of supremacy

Smriti Mandhana introduced Perry in the seventh over with MI having lost Hayley Matthews fairly early, courtesy a sharp sliding catch from Perry at deep square leg. S. Sajana was the side's makeshift opener in Yastika Bhatia's absence and understood the brief of keeping the scoreboard ticking. Perry was miserly in her first over, giving away just two runs and asking questions aplenty of Sajana and Nat Sciver-Brunt. She bowled to the stumps, keeping things simple, trying to get the ball into the batter, her consistency at hitting that line almost Test-like. She returned in the ninth over, giving away a generous half volley off the third ball. Sajana was happy to dispatch the ball to the fence. Perry punished her moments after, with a jaffa clipping Sajana's off stump. That already got fans on their feet, but the volumes would hit fever pitch a few seconds later when Harmanpreet chopped a delivery floating outside off back on to the stumps off the very next ball. Two deliveries, two off

stumps left glowing in red at 60 degree inclinations.

Perry's next victim was Amelia Kerr with the ball beating her defence and brushing the back pad. Paschim Pathak was not moved by Perry's persistent appeals. After a conversation with Richa Ghosh and Smriti, a review was taken, showing the ball crashing into the leg stump. Amanjot Kaur was the next batter who thought she could take the bull in red, black and gold by the horns, starting with a boundary that split the field between square and fine leg. But Perry was not to be toyed with, sending in a back of a length delivery that pitched outside off and then swung in to clip the off stump bail.

"You must be kidding! How are you getting so much deviation off this surface!" a gobsmacked W.V. Raman exclaimed on comms.

Perry bowled out in the 13th over, taking out Pooja Vastrakar and Sciver-Brunt in the span of four balls. Perry uprooted Pooja's off-stump as she tried to swing big to reach her five-for. Sciver-Brunt was trapped leg-before, with the ball heading into the side of her front pad.

"The conditions were conducive to the ball moving around a bit off the seam. When that happens, you can get it close to the stumps," Perry said in her assessment of her spell.

"Even Mumbai maximised on that when they were targeting the stumps I think we got a good grasp of the game. Something we targeted was starting the PowerPlay well with our bowling and that came together and I am glad to be a part of it."

Her contribution did not end there as she steadied a dicey chase and brought up a win with Richa Ghosh, the hero of a heartbreaking effort against Delhi Capitals, for company.

Charlotte Edwards, coach of Mumbai Indians, was helpless as she watched along from the team dugout.

"I still stand by what I said five years ago: she is the greatest player I have seen with bat and ball and on the field. She is an unbelievable person as well. We are lucky to have Ellyse in our game as a role model. Sometimes you just have to say well done to the opposition when they've

done better than us," she conceded after the game.

A rematch of the same fixture awaits Edwards and Co. in the Eliminator on Friday and she's counting on Perry running out of luck.

"She had a great day today, hopefully she won't have such a good day on Friday. We are watching greatness, and she will be around for longer," she added.

One with the elements

Perry is happy to credit every external factor she can find for her success – her team, the wicket, the nip in the air, even luck! For the uninitiated, the first thought is humility." In Perry's case, that's not all. It's how that slate remains free of old adamant chalk marks. After a night like this, she reveals that she had a chocolate brownie with ice-cream along with her

teammates, put on her reading glasses and caught up on some reading.

"It's easy to get carried away when things go well for you but I feel like a lot of the time, we don't have a lot of control over things going well for you. Of course, you work hard and put yourself in good positions but there are so many other factors that go into the outcome of a game. As I've grown older, I've learnt not to overreact either way whether it's a good night or a bad night."

"As I said, the sun comes up the next day. Thankfully, there's always another opportunity to play games quickly. Whether that goes well or not, we're so lucky to be out there playing in front of these big crowds that are so fanatical about the game, which is a far cry from what it was like when I first started playing. There was no one coming to our games and no interest in the sport like there is now," Perry said.

Gunning for glory

Perry's transformation in the Australian setup is fabled. So competitive is this

world-beating outfit that it did not hesitate to drop the veteran player in T20s when her form was not fitting into the team's jigsaw. Her career, since then, is one we can trace in two time periods, before and after that decision.

The Perry we see now is a far cry from the Perry of the past. The cherubic multi-sport player evolved into a cheerful realist, working hard to keep a steady head as she meandered through her roles in the team. Over the last few years, including her run in Australia's winter fixtures in India, one saw her bowl far less than one is used to, particularly in this format. Her strike rate benefited as a result. She returned to her boundary-clearing form, strengthening the spine of the Australian effort with the bat.

Perry and those around her broke this turn of fortune to a mindset switch.

"Skills aside, one important thing is to be open to changing your mindset and be able to look at the game and yourself differently. When you've been playing for a while and things have gone okay for you, it's easy to get stuck on defining yourself as that player and one of the cool challenges is trying to stay open to what else is possible and being effective. It's about looking for new potential, even within."

Ahead of this match against MI this season, Perry had bowled six overs going wicketless. So the six she managed going up against a line-up featuring the likes of the cream of international stars makes one wonder if the Australian management is taking notes. Perry isn't wondering as the only thing she takes home is the satisfaction of working for the team.

"I've never looked at it that way, to be honest. The thing I've enjoyed the most is the success we've had as a team in various competitions. Being involved in some World Cup wins and Ashes series triumphs is incredibly satisfying. Rankings and individual successes are so fleeting and unsatisfying in comparison to team successes. Neither have been particularly relevant to me. Just being here has been most gratifying," she said with a shrug.

"Without a doubt, being a part of women's cricket when it just exploded... to think I am sitting here in a chair in the WPL, with crowds over 20,000 and 30,000 people is mind-boggling."

For years, Perry has been the sport's Vitruvian woman, the symbol of renaissance in the women's game. It's in moments like this the Wahoonga-born firecracker provides proof of why she is rated so highly and across so many generations, and grateful are we to have the opportunity to bear witness.

THE GIST

▼ Perry became the first player to take six wickets in a WPL match, breaking Marizanne Kapp's record of five for 15 for Capitals against Giants in the inaugural edition

▼ Perry is the first player (man or woman) to score a century and take six-wicket hauls in First Class (6/32), List A (7/22) and T20 cricket

▼ For RCB, Perry has scored 246 runs in seven innings at an average of 61.50 and a strike-rate of 130.15. She has remained unbeaten thrice

▼ The Australian has been a valuable member of the RCB leadership group, doubling up as a sounding board for skipper Smriti Mandhana and being a pillar of support for the younger crop

RV. MOORTHY