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A study by the International  
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# SC will hear petitions to stay CAA on April 9

Centre refuses to state that it would refrain from granting the fast-tracked citizenship

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday agreed to consider the question of staying the operation of the rules notified under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act or CAA on April 9, days before the first phase of the Lok Sabha election, even as the government refused to make a statement that it would not grant fast-tracked citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan during the pendency of the case.

"I am not ready to make any statement," Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, said.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud sought to calm the apprehensions of 237 petitioners that the government would

go ahead and implement the CAA rules in the meantime.

"They do not even have the infrastructure in place," Chief Justice Chandrachud told the petitioners' side, led by senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Indira Jaising.

**Violation of rights**  
However, Ms. Jaising, for Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra, cautioned the court against relying on a "hope-and-trust jurisprudence" in favour of the government.

"But we are here," the Chief Justice assured her. Mr. Sibal and advocate Haris Beeran, for the Indian Union Muslim League, said they should be given the liberty to mention in court if the government began the citizenship process under CAA.

Mr. Sibal said if the Centre could wait nearly five years to notify the CAA

Citizenship based on religious identity violated fundamental rights, says advocate for petitioners

**The big test**

Arguments coming before the Supreme Court on April 9:



- CAA rules operate solely on the basis of religious identity
- Once the process of granting citizenship starts under the CAA rules, it cannot be reversed
- CAA rules have done away with the scrutiny of applications of citizenship by District Collectors, and recommendations of State governments on applications

rules, they could wait till July 2024. He said citizenship, once granted, was irreversible. Fast-tracking citizenship based on the religious identity of a person violated the fundamental rights to non-discrimination and equality under the Constitution.

Advocate Kaleeswaram Raj supported the argument, noting that the top court had stayed the controversial farm laws.

Mr. Mehta sought four weeks' time to file responses

to about 20 applications moved separately by petitioners to stay the CAA rules, notified on March 11.

The law officer argued that the law did not prejudice the petitioners.

The CAA was aimed to grant citizenship only to "illegal migrants" belonging to persecuted members of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, and Christian communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or Pakistan who entered India on or before

December 31, 2014.

"This law does not take away the citizenship of anyone... Those who have entered by 2014 will be considered for grant or refusal of citizenship," Mr. Mehta reasoned.

Advocate Nizam Pasha, also for the petitioners, linked the implementation of the CAA to the 19 lakh people excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) list in Assam. No affirmative decision had been taken about them. He apprehended that the CAA would now apply to these people. Those who do not belong to "one particular community or religion" would get their citizenship applications processed "all of a sudden" while the Muslims who were out of NRC may face executive action.

"That is prejudice."

But Mr. Mehta said similar attempts to "mislead" people had been made out-

side the court. "The NRC is not an issue before the court, only the grant of citizenship under CAA is the issue," he clarified.

**'Will get right to vote'**  
Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, for a party supporting CAA, illustrated the case of a persecuted Hindu migrant from Balochistan. "How does grant of citizenship to me affect anyone else's right?" Mr. Kumar asked.

"They will get a right to vote," Ms. Jaising shot back to objections from Mr. Kumar. Ms. Jaising said the government should let the petitioners either make good their plea in court for a stay or be willing to give a statement that no one would be granted citizenship in the interregnum.

"The latter would save us all a lot of time," she said. The senior lawyer added that they wanted the case to be referred to a

Muslims left out of National Register of Citizens in Assam may face executive action, says petitioner

larger Bench.

Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for a group of petitioners from Assam, contended that the CAA and its rules were a threat to the State's demography. He said 27 districts in Assam were brought under the purview of CAA "for no reason at all".

The lawyer noted that the CAA did not apply to tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, or Tripura included in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution and the areas covered under "The Inner Line" notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873.

He said the cut-off date of December 31, 2014, for the grant of citizenship under Section 6B(l) of the CAA contradicted Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955, which mandated deportation for foreigners who had crossed over after March 25, 1971.

## Set for a splash



**Festival hues:** Workers prepare coloured powder, also known as 'Gulal', at a factory in Jaipur ahead of the Holi festival, on Tuesday. PTI

## 21 lakh SIM cards in use have fake proof: DoT

**S. Vijay Kumar**  
CHENNAI

At least 21 lakh SIM cards have been activated using fake proof of identity or proof of address documents, according to an analysis carried out by the Department of Telecommunications (DoT). In an alert sent to Bharti Airtel, MTNL, BSNL, Reliance Jio, and Vodafone Idea, the DoT provided a list of suspicious subscribers and called for an urgent re-verification of their documents, and disconnection of those found to be bogus.

A fresh pan-India analysis of 114 crore mobile phone connections by the DoT's Artificial Intelligence & Digital Intelligence Unit (AI&DIU) has shown that invalid, non-existent, fake, or forged documents were used to support applications to activate at least 21 lakh SIM issued by various telecom service providers. A majority of these numbers are suspected to be in use for committing various types of cyber crimes or online frauds.

It was found that in 1.92 crore cases, an individual had subscribed for too many mobile connections, crossing the permitted limit of nine SIM cards across service providers across the country. This included connections that were "erroneously" categorised as individual instead of bulk connections.

The nationwide analysis was taken up as part of the Sanchar Saathi, a citizen-centric initiative that empowers citizens to know the mobile connections issued in their name and seek disconnection of any SIM card that they that not applied for.

## SC issues summons to Ramdev in Patanjali misleading ads case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



Baba Ramdev

The Supreme Court on Tuesday asked self-styled yoga guru Baba Ramdev to personally appear in a contempt case initiated against Patanjali Ayurved for publishing misleading advertisements in violation of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 despite an undertaking given to the court in November last year.

A Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Ahsanuddin Amanullah issued a show cause notice to Baba Ramdev to file his response against initiating contempt proceedings against him.

The Bench further directed Acharya Balkrishna, the Managing Director of Patanjali Ayurved, to be present in the court along with Baba Ramdev for the next hearing on April 2.

The court ordered the presence of Balkrishna after learning that he did not file a response to the show cause notice issued to him on February 27. The Bench brushed aside the explanations offered by senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Patanjali, for not filing a reply.

The Bench indicated that Baba Ramdev should be heard in the case as he had endorsed the Patanjali advertisements prohibited by the court on November 21, 2023.

The nationwide analysis was taken up as part of the Sanchar Saathi, a citizen-centric initiative that empowers citizens to know the mobile connections issued in their name and seek disconnection of any SIM card that they that not applied for.

lief" for diseases such as obesity, blood pressure, asthma, etc, in violation of the 1954 Act.

On November 21, the court directed the company to not make any "casual statements" to the print or electronic media about the efficacy of their medicinal products or indulge in any disparaging statements about other disciplines of medicine such as allopathy.

However, a press conference was held by Baba Ramdev, on November 22, the very next day of the Supreme Court order.

"This court is *prima facie* of the opinion that he has also violated the provisions of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954," the court observed.

In the February hearing, the petitioner, the Indian Medical Association, had described Baba Ramdev's association with Patanjali as "everything and nothing at the same time".

"In November, we had specifically said there should be no violation of any law. That means that there should be nothing misleading, especially advertisements of drugs manufactured and marketed by you. But you are still advertising your products as a 'permanent relief'," Justice Kohli had told Patanjali's lawyers at the time.

# Tariff regulator snubs revenue projections at Adani airport in Thiruvananthapuram

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI

The Adani-controlled Thiruvananthapuram airport's projection of revenue from non-aeronautical services such as the sale of food and beverages – used to subsidise costs levied on airlines and passengers – is just a "minuscule" 12% of the norm, according to the country's airport tariff regulator. In fact, it is only a third of what the airport earned before privatisation.

The Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) has recommended that this revenue projection should be hiked four-fold, from the ₹103 crore



The AERA wants the revenue from non-aeronautical services to be hiked four-fold to ₹395 crore over five years. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

proposed by the airport to ₹395 crore, over five years. The Adani-run airport has dismissed the AERA's projection as "notional revenue".

The AERA has also ques-

tioned how the master contract for non-aeronautical services was awarded to an Adani group subsidiary, with restrictive bid criteria and "a low revenue share of 10%".

This structure led to the airport operator reducing the mandatory 30% of non-aero revenue – which must be funnelled back for cross-subsidising the costs borne by airlines and passengers – to 30% of only the 10% of revenue shared, that is, a mere 3% of the total. This arrangement will impact airport users, the AERA has said.

The global airlines body, the International Air Transport Association, has also said that this formula is "not justified".

**Revising tariffs**  
These observations were made in a consultation paper floated by the AERA on February 12 to deter-

mine the revised tariff for the five-year control period, from April 2022 to March 2027.

It invited various stakeholders, such as airlines, airports, and ground handling agencies, to submit their comments by March 15, after which it will issue a tariff order.

The Thiruvananthapuram Kerala International Airport Ltd (TKIAL) is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Adani Enterprises Ltd, which signed a concession agreement with the Airports Authority of India in January 2021 after a privatisation process to operate, manage, and develop the airport for a period of 50 years.



## INBRIEF



## JD(U) leader Ashraf Fatmi quits, likely to rejoin RJD

Janata Dal (United) general secretary and former Union Minister Mohammed Ali Ashraf Fatmi on Tuesday resigned from the party to protect his "moral values". Mr. Fatmi is likely to return to the Opposition Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) with the hope of contesting the upcoming Lok Sabha poll from Darbhanga or Madhubani constituency. As per the seat-sharing arrangement finalised among NDA allies on March 18, the Madhubani and Darbhanga seats both went to the BJP. Mr. Fatmi has won the Darbhanga seat four times so far. He had joined the JD(U) ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha poll.

## 'Not feasible to hold Civils exam in Manipur hill districts'

The Manipur government on Tuesday informed the Delhi High Court that it was not in favour of setting up examination centres for the 2024 Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination (CSE) in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts of the violence-hit State. A letter written by Manipur Chief Secretary was handed over to the court, which was hearing a plea by Zomi Student Federation seeking to set up examination centres in the hill districts of Manipur for the coming CSE. As per UPSC's notification issued in February, Imphal is the only centre in Manipur where the CSE could be held. The High Court would hear the matter again on March 22.

## M.P. student preparing for exams kidnapped in Kota

A 20-year-old student from Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri was allegedly kidnapped in Kota, Rajasthan, where she was preparing for competitive examinations, the police said on Tuesday. According to the police, the student's father received her pictures and videos on his mobile on Monday along with threats and demand of ransom of ₹30 lakh, after which he approached the police. Meanwhile, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, who is BJP candidate for Guna-Shivpuri Lok Sabha seat, also spoke to Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma and requested a speedy probe into the matter to ensure the safe release of the student.

## Portal for water level in dams, canals launched in Rajasthan

A dedicated portal launched in Jaipur last week will provide real time information on the water level in dams and reservoirs and the quantity of water available in canals in different parts of Rajasthan. The portal is expected to help in an efficient water management and facilitate prediction of floods and drought. Water Resources Minister Suresh Singh Rawat said while launching the portal that Rajasthan was the first State to develop a system which would bring the information on the availability of water in the public domain. "This is going to be a milestone in the water and disaster management in the State," Mr. Rawat said.

## Vrindavan temple moves HC over funds withheld by U.P. govt.

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A petition in the Allahabad High Court said that the annuity of nine temples in Vrindavan town in Uttar Pradesh had been withheld for the last four years by District Magistrate and Senior Treasury Officer, Mathura. The High Court noted that it is "painful" that temples and trusts have to knock the doors of the court for getting their dues released from the U.P. government.

The Bench was hearing a petition filed by Thakur Rangji Maharaj Virajman Mandir, a temple built in 1851 AD, seeking the court's intervention to get its payment of the annuity under Section 99 of the U.P. Zamindari Abolition

(UPZA) and Land Reforms (LR) Act. The petitioner told the court that the annuity amounting to ₹9,125,07 had not been released to nine temples due to lack of permission by the Board of Revenue. However, the government submitted that ₹2,23,199 had been paid and now a balance of ₹6,89,308 remained.

The Commissioner/Secretary of the Board of Revenue, in a personal affidavit, told the court that a fund of over ₹6 lakh could not be released to the temples due to paucity of funds. "This court is pained to note that temples and trusts have to knock on the doors of the Court for getting their dues released from the State Government, which should

## New West Bengal DGP shunted out by EC in a day

Election Commission appoints Sanjay Mukherjee as replacement for Vivek Sahay, who was named on Monday in place of Rajeev Kumar

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOLKATA

Senior IPS officer Sanjay Mukherjee was on Tuesday appointed West Bengal Director General of Police (DGP) by the Election Commission of India (ECI).

On Monday, the commission had transferred West Bengal DGP Rajeev Kumar and the State government appointed Vivek Sahay as the new DGP. Sources in the West Bengal administration said Mr. Sahay was appointed by the State government based on his seniority but since he was set to superannuate before the completion of the election process under way, the ECI may have looked at another official for the key position. This has rendered Mr. Sahay the shortest-serving DGP of West Bengal.

Mr. Mukherjee, a 1989-batch officer and hitherto Director General of the State Fire & Emergency Services, was the second



We want SC-monitored Lok Sabha poll as BJP's filthy tricks are destroying institutions like the EC

**DEREK O'BRIEN**  
Trinamool Congress leader

on the list of three officers recommended by the West Bengal government for the post of DGP to the EC after the poll panel directed the removal of Mr. Kumar from that position.

While Mr. Sahay's appointment notification was made by the State Home Department in which it referred to the EC order to post Mr. Kumar to a "non-election related assignment" in line with "efforts to maintain a level-playing field and ensure the integrity of the electoral process", the corresponding notification for Mr. Mukherjee a day later was made directly by the Com-

mission. Meanwhile, Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien on Tuesday said the party wants Supreme Court-monitored Lok Sabha polls as the BJP's "filthy tricks" are "destroying" institutions like the Election Commission. "... Are BJP so nervous to face people that they are turning ECI into a party office to target Oppn?" he said.

The transfers of officials in West Bengal by the ECI has not gone down well with the Trinamool Congress over the years. On several occasions Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee reinstated officials to their earlier posting after elections. During the 2016 Assembly polls in West Bengal, the ECI had removed Mr. Kumar from the post of Kolkata Police Commissioner. He was reinstated by the Chief Minister on the post after the polls.

The 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal will go to polls in seven phases. (With inputs from PTI)

## Action sought against school staff for taking students to PM's rally

**The Hindu Bureau**  
COIMBATORE

Coimbatore District Elementary Education Officer Punitha Anthoniyammal on Tuesday conducted an inquiry into an incident where schoolchildren were brought to participate in a roadshow by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Coimbatore on Monday.

She instructed the management of the government-aided Sri Sai Baba Vidyalayam Aided Middle School to take strict action against the headmaster and staff, and submit a detailed report of the incident.

## 24-hour deadline

"The school has 24 hours to submit its report, and the findings will be shared after the Election Commission of India (ECI) is informed," she said.



Schoolchildren at PM roadshow in Coimbatore on Monday. AVANTIKA B. KRISHNA

During the roadshow, while several children were seen watching it, students of a private school in Vadavalli participated in the programme.

They were seen dressed as Hindu deities, donning saffron-coloured cloth strips bearing the party symbols, at various locations throughout the roadshow, performing on stages arranged by the workers of the BJP.

## Raj Thackeray meets Amit Shah in Delhi as BJP looks to seal alliance with MNS

**Shoumojit Banerjee**  
PUNE

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray on Tuesday called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi amid intense speculation of his party joining the ruling Mahayuti coalition in Maharashtra and the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre.

Mr. Thackeray also met BJP's national general secretary Vinod Tawde in a plush Delhi hotel strongly hinting at a pre-Lok Sabha deal being seal between the two parties.

The MNS president was accompanied by his son, Amit, and Mr. Tawde during the half-hour talks with Mr. Shah.

According to sources, the meeting with Mr. Shah was the result of mediations by Maharashtra BJP leader Devendra Fadnavis,

## BJP allots 10 Lok Sabha seats to PMK; party leaders sign seat-sharing pact

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

The BJP and the PMK on Tuesday morning finalised a seat-sharing arrangement for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, as per which the PMK would contest in 10 constituencies in the State as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

The pact was signed by PMK founder S. Ramadoss and BJP State president K. Annamalai at the former's residence at Thailapuram in Villupuram district after a two-hour deliberation in which PMK president Anbumani Ramadoss and BJP's former State president L. Murugan were present.

Political developments had picked up on Monday when the PMK, which has a substantial political base in the northern Tamil Nadu and parts of the western region among the Vanniya, inclined towards the BJP after having held protracted talks with the AIADMK. It finalised and announced its decision to join the NDA after its district secretaries' meeting at Thailapuram. Mr. Annamalai and Mr.



Joining hands: Leaders of the PMK and BJP at PMK founder S. Ramadoss's residence on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Pact was signed by PMK founder Ramadoss and BJP State chief Annamalai after a two-hour deliberation**

Murugan, who attended Prime Minister Narendra Modi's roadshow in Coimbatore on Monday, reached the PMK founder's residence to seal the deal on Tuesday. In a joint press conference, after the finalising the pact, Mr. Anbumani said that his party had been a part of the NDA in New Delhi for the past 10 years. "The PMK has decided to contest in the 2024 election as a part of the NDA in the interest of the nation, and of Tamil

Nadu...." "The people of Tamil Nadu have had a strong dislike towards the State's rulers for the past 60 years and they want a change. The NDA will secure a massive win, both in Tamil Nadu and in India," he added.

## List in two days

Mr. Annamalai said it was an important decision taken by the PMK to strengthen the objective of Mr. Modi to secure over 400 seats in the 18<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha. He thanked Mr. Ramadoss and recollected the PMK leader's close association with the BJP and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The list of constituencies that the PMK will contest from is expected to be announced in two days.

## Haryana CM Saini expands Cabinet, adds 8 new Ministers

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHANDIGARH

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday expanded his Cabinet by inducting eight MLAs as Ministers, in which seven are new faces.

Mr. Saini was last week sworn in as the new Chief Minister of Haryana after Manohar Lal and his Council of Ministers resigned, as the strained ruling coalition of the BJP and the Janayak Janta Party broke apart amid differences over seat-sharing for the general election.

Governor Bandaru Dattatreya administered the oath of office to the newly-inducted Ministers here in which one has been inducted as a Cabinet Minister, while the rest are Ministers of State. BJP MLA Kamal Gupta is the new Cabinet Minister, who was earlier in the Lal Cabinet.



MNS chief Raj Thackeray with Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday. PTI

who reportedly met Mr. Thackeray at least thrice in the run-up to the Delhi visit.

Sources further said that talks on seat-sharing revolved around MNS showing interest in Mumbai South and Nashik Lok Sabha seats.

While the MNS' Marathi-speaking vote-base in Mumbai South could help the BJP, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) still retains its core base in

## Cong. asked to leave Assam's Barpeta LS seat for Left Front

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

Seventy-seven educationists, intellectuals, cultural and literary activists in Assam have asked the Assam Congress unit to leave the Barpeta Lok Sabha seat to the Left Front so that a key ally of the BJP can be defeated.

In a letter to APCC president Bhupen Kumar Borah on March 17, the signatories said the party should withdraw its candidate for the Barpeta seat in favour of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) to defeat the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) candidate.

The Congress denied a ticket to Barpeta's incumbent MP Abdul Khaleque

and fielded Deep Bayan, the former president of the Assam unit of Seva Dal.

The CPI(M) is one of four Left Front constituents of the 16-party United Opposition Forum, Assam headed by Congress. The others are CPI, CPI (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, and All India Forward Bloc. "Such a liberal and realistic approach on your part will not only take the image of your party in Assam to greater heights but will also ensure the defeat of the BJP and its allies and remove them from power," the signatories wrote.

The Congress has left two of Assam's 14 Lok Sabha constituencies to its allies. These are Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur.

## RITES conducting feasibility studies along IMEC corridor

**Maitri Porecha**  
NEW DELHI

Leading railway PSU, RITES Ltd. has emerged as a key contender among other Indian railway companies eyeing development along the strategic India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), RITES chairman and managing director Rahul Mithal told *The Hindu*.

RITES and AD Ports are now analysing the feasibility of development along missing links across the existing rail corridor that passes through the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, Mr. Mithal said.

"There are multiple missing links across the rail portion and certain corridors which need augmentation to deal with these



Rahul Mithal

kinds of volumes. So, assessments are being done on the kind of capacity augmentation required, kind of designs and costs involved. Even though it is a desert area, the terrain is not that challenging that it can't be done," he noted.

Similarly, a proposed rail route from Jebel Ali (UAE) to Haifa spans 2,565 km with missing link of 745 km, another route from Abu Dhabi to Haifa spans

across 2,449 km with 629 km of missing link, while the proposed route from Dammam port to Haifa is 2,149 km with 289 km of missing link. Lastly, Ras Al-Khair port to Haifa spans 1,809 km with 269 km of missing link. Mr. Mithal said that AD Ports is looking to develop and invest in infrastructure augmentation not only in the UAE leg of the IMEC but across the entire corridor.

"We are analysing the kind of cargo potential for IMEC, and augmentation of infrastructure at ports on various ends," he said.

He added that these are early stages where alignments, corridors, facilities, infrastructure required, and funding mechanisms are being worked out by each of the countries.



# Absence of Muslim candidate triggers row

BJP's Malappuram candidate M. Abdul Salam was allegedly denied permission to accompany Modi during his roadshow in Palakkad; CPI(M) accuses the party of insulting not only Dr. Salam, but the Muslim community as well; this was the Prime Minister's second visit to Kerala within a week

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PALAKKAD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi took out a roadshow in Palakkad town on Tuesday, infusing enthusiasm and excitement in thousands of BJP workers who gathered here to greet him. It was Mr. Modi's second visit to Kerala within a week as part of the BJP's election campaign. He had addressed a rally in Pathanamthitta on March 15. BJP leaders said Mr. Modi would visit the State again to campaign for the party's key candidates in April. The roadshow started at 10.45 a.m. from the Anjuvilakku Junction. Thousands

of BJP workers lined up on both sides of the road and cheered for the Prime Minister. Mr. Modi was flanked by BJP's Palakkad candidate C. Krishnakumar and Ponnani candidate Nivedita Subramanian. BJP State president K. Surendran and two SPG guards stood behind him. **'Not allowed'** However, BJP's Malappuram candidate M. Abdul Salam was denied permission to accompany Mr. Modi during the roadshow. Dr. Salam, the only Muslims candidate on the BJP's first list, reached here on time to join the roadshow, but he was not allowed to



**On the move:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi waving to supporters during a roadshow in Palakkad on Tuesday. PTI

enter the vehicle as his name was not on the SPG list. Dr. Salam left Palakkad saying that "his name was not there on the list." BJP sources said that Dr. Salam could not be accommodated as there was no space in the vehicle. CPI(M) leader A.K. Balan accused the BJP of insulting not only Dr. Salam,

but the Muslim community as well. "The BJP had announced earlier that the candidates of Ponnani, Malappuram and Palakkad would accompany the Prime Minister. But by denying Dr. Salam, the BJP has sent a wrong message. It can be interpreted that Dr. Salam was denied entry because he is a Muslim," said Mr. Balan. He said that minorities would have to suffer more such insults from the BJP. However, Dr. Salam denied Mr. Balan's allegation, saying that it was a fabricated story. "His job is to fabricate such stories," Dr. Salam said in Malappuram. Dr. Salam told a channel that he went to Palakkad to meet Mr. Modi, to take a photo with him, and to invite him to Malappuram. Dr. Salam added that he was disappointed at being denied the opportunity to board the Prime Minister's vehicle. "Who will not like to accompany the Prime Minister? I have no complaint. I knew I was not eligible. But my opportunities are coming," he said. The roadshow covered nearly one kilometre in half-an-hour and concluded at Head Post Office. Elaborate security arrangements were made for Mr. Modi's visit. More than 2,000 police personnel were deployed across the town.

# Police rescue four children sold to couples, arrest two

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THOOTHUKUDI

Police have rescued four children, who were allegedly kidnapped by two persons and sold to issueless people, and arrested the accused. Abandoned by her husband, Sandhya of Gudiyatham in Vellore district was living on the pavement near St. Antony's Church on V.E. Road here along with her four-month-old baby girl. As the baby went missing in the early hours of March 9, Ms. Sandhya filed a complaint with Thoothukudi South Police. Superintendent of Police L. Balaji Saravanan formed 10 special teams, which were coordinated by Thoothukudi Assistant SP Kelkar Subramanya Balchandra, to track the baby. After scanning the footages collected from over 150 CCTV cameras installed near the scene of crime, the police zeroed in on two persons - N. Samy alias Karuppasamy, 47, of Alangulam in Tenkasi district and his associate Rajan alias Raja, 53, of Karumbanur near Alangulam. During interrogation, the police found that the two had kidnapped Ms. Sandhya's baby, a two-and-a-half-year-old girl from Tiruchendur temple on December 21, and a two-year-old girl from Kulasekarpattinam temple on October 21 last. They confessed to the police that they had kidnapped another girl, for which no complaint was

**The parents of three of the children have been identified and steps are being taken to reunite them**

registered in any police station. "The duo sold girl children to issueless couples and the police rescued all the four children. The kidnapers had convinced the couples that they had babies abandoned by poor families living in hilly regions," Inspector General of Police (South Zone) N. Kannan told reporters here on Tuesday. Mr. Kannan said the duo had targeted poor families living on the roadside, in tents, on temple premises, and so on to steal the babies. "We have identified the parents of three children and steps have been taken to restore them to their parents. Since no one has filed a complaint for the fourth child, we are trying to identify the parents," Mr. Kannan said and added that the two accused did not have any case pending against them.

The IG lauded the efforts of the special team members in cracking the case and Mr. Balchandra who coordinated the investigation and honoured them with cash rewards. He appealed to the public not to spread rumours about child kidnappings, but to alert the police. DIG (Tirunelveli Range) Pravesh Kumar was present.

# SC permits BRS leader to withdraw 2023 plea challenging ED summons

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday permitted Bharat Rashtra Samithi MLC K. Kavitha to withdraw a writ petition filed in March last year challenging summons issued by the Directorate of Enforcement (ED) to her in connection with the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy case. Ms. Kavitha is the daughter of former Chief Minister and BRS leader K. Chandrasekhar Rao. Appearing before a Bench headed by Justice



K. Kavitha

Bela M. Trivedi, Ms. Kavitha's counsel, senior advocate Vikram Chaudhri, submitted that his client would like to withdraw the

petition as she had already been arrested on March 15 and remanded in ED custody. The plea was dismissed as withdrawn with liberty to Ms. Kavitha to pursue appropriate remedies in accordance with law. Mr. Chaudhri said a separate petition has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging her arrest and remand. The withdrawn petition filed on March 14, 2023, came two days before Ms. Kavitha was scheduled to appear before the ED for questioning. The BRS leader said she had already been questioned on March 11, 2023. She had argued that the ED summons was an intimidation tactic. Ms. Kavitha alleged that she was compelled to produce her mobile phone and was questioned after sunset the last time. She said her personal details had also been outed. The 2023 petition said she was implicated in the case on the basis of statements extracted out of certain persons using coercion.

# Radhakrishnan gets charge of Telangana and Puducherry

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD

President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday gave Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan additional charge of Telangana and Puducherry. She also accepted the resignation of Tamilisai Soundararajan who had stepped down from the posts. "The President of India is also pleased to appoint Shri C. P. Radhakrishnan, Governor of Jharkhand to discharge the functions of

the Governor of Telangana and Lieutenant-Governor of Puducherry in addition to his own duties, until regular arrangements are made," a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique said. On Monday, Ms. Soundararajan resigned from the posts amid speculation that she could contest the Lok Sabha election. She is said to be a contender for the Chennai South seat. Mr. Radhakrishnan thanked Ms. Murmu for giving him the additional responsibility.

## IN BRIEF



### Efforts on to keep tusker out of Munnar's residential areas

The Kerala Forest Department is continuing its mission to chase wild tusker Padayappa back to forest from the residential areas in Munnar. The department plans to purchase aircraft-model drone cameras to monitor the wild elephant's movements. According to officials, the tusker has damaged several shops, blocked vehicles, and terrorised local residents in the past month. A team is closely monitoring the movements of the tusker with the help of drone cameras and is trying to chase it back to forest.

### Kumaraswamy to undergo aortic valve replacement

JD(S) president and former Chief Minister of Karnataka H.D. Kumaraswamy will undergo a transcatheter aortic valve implantation (TAVI), a non-surgical procedure, at Apollo Hospitals in Chennai on Thursday. This is the third time that he is undergoing the procedure as he has developed restenosis due to tissue valve degeneration, the previous occasions being in 2007 and 2017. The surgery is being done in Chennai to avoid the regular flow of visitors and his well-wishers to the hospital, sources said.

### NIA arrests PFI worker in RSS leader murder case

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday arrested Shafeekh, a native of Kolathur in Malappuram district and member of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), in connection with the murder of RSS functionary Sreenivasan at Melamuri, Palakkad, on April 16, 2022. He has been absconding since the incident and was tracked to Kollam district, according to a release. He was produced before the NIA Special Court here, which sent him to judicial custody on Tuesday. He was allegedly a part of the hit squad of the PFI. A total of 71 people have been identified as part of the conspiracy.

# T.N. start-up to launch its first rocket on Friday

**Sangeetha Kandavel**  
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu will witness history when one of its space start-ups launches its first rocket on March 22. The Chennai headquartered space start-up Agnikul Cosmos Private Limited will be launching its first rocket Agnibaan Sub Orbital Technology Demonstrator (SORTeD) from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, in Sriharikota. There are several interesting facts about this particular launch - Agnibaan SORTeD - will be India's first launch from a private launchpad, India's first semi-cryogenic engine powered rocket launch and the world's first single



**Ready for lift off:** Srinath Ravichandran, Moin SPM and Satya Chakravarthy founded Agnikul Cosmos in 2017. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

piece 3D printed engine designed and built indigenously. Founded in 2017 by Srinath Ravichandran, Moin SPM, and Satya Chakravarthy, Agnikul Cosmos became the first company in the country to sign an agreement with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) under the IN-SPACe initiative to have access to the space agency's expertise and its facilities to build Agnibaan in De-

ember 2020. Commenting on the launch, Mr. Chakravarthy, co-founder and adviser, Agnikul Cosmos, and professor at the Department of Aerospace Engineering at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, told *The Hindu*, "This would be India's first liquid oxygen-kerosene rocket flight in India, from India's first privately developed launchpad, in Sriharikota." "More importantly, we would be flying our patented world's most integrated single piece 3D printed rocket," he added. He further explained, "This is a sub-orbital launch but it is not a sounding rocket. It has the full stack of closed loop

feedback guidance and control with a gimbaled thrust vector control. As such, this is the first private launch in India requiring a flight termination system and a safety radius from the launchpad calculated from some tens of thousands of simulations of worst case scenarios." He pointed out that the next step post the mission would be post-flight analysis of all the subsystem performance. The immediate future plan is to get ready for the orbital flight. Agnikul's rocket is the second privately-developed rocket in India. In 2022, Vikram-S, India's first privately-developed rocket, lifted off from a launchpad in Sriharikota.

# BJP leaders protest 'assault' on shopkeeper, detained

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The BJP held a 'Hanuman Chalisa Rally' here on Tuesday over the alleged assault on a shopkeeper. The police had refused permission for the rally in light of the Model Code of Conduct, sources said. All three BJP candidates from Bengaluru - Tejasvi Surya (Bengaluru South), P.C. Mohan (Bengaluru Central) and Shobha Karandlaje (Bengaluru North) - who led the protest, were detained by the police and shifted to CAR Ground. Senior police officials said that around 40 BJP leaders and workers were taken into preventive custody and released later. The alleged assault occurred on March 17 when an argument broke out between a group of youth



BJP supporters protesting against the alleged attack on a shopkeeper in Bengaluru on Tuesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

and Mukesh Singh, a mobile phone shop owner. The accused - Sulaiman, Shah Nawaz, Rohith, Danish, Tarun and some others - objected to Mukesh playing music over the loudspeaker. The argument turned ugly when the group allegedly assaulted Mukesh. The police have arrested the accused persons based on Mukesh's complaint.

BJP MPs blamed the Sidaramaiah-led Congress government in Karnataka for the incident, terming it 'anti-Hindu' and said the party's 'appeasement politics' had brought on this situation. Meanwhile, the Congress has lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against Mr. Tejasvi accusing him of violating the poll code.

# Tiger Triumph-24 will boost bilateral ties, says U.S. Ambassador

**The Hindu Bureau**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti and Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, have said that Tiger Triumph-24, the Indo-U.S. bilateral Tri Services Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, will further strengthen the ties between the countries. Mr. Garcetti and Vice Admiral Pendharkar were interacting with presspersons onboard the *INS Jalashwa* as a part of the Tri Services Indo-U.S. amphibious exercise, at the Naval Base here on Tuesday. "Our relations have never been so strong, and we are accelerating our relations. We are India's No. 1

partner in military exercises, No. 1 training partner, and the U.S. and India are moving forward together," the U.S. Ambassador said. Vice Admiral Pendharkar said that, "The current exercises are meant to assess our collective response to natural disasters and to work out SOPs." Earlier, at a programme held to mark the launch of Tiger Triumph, Commanding Officer of *INS Jalashwa* Captain Sandeep Biswal described the event as a "continuation of Milan-2024," which concluded recently. The exercise was aimed at facing the challenges of transnational crimes and natural disasters across maritime borders, apart from collaboration between the partner nations.

# Karnataka HC stays ban imposed on 23 'ferocious' dog breeds

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Tuesday stayed the operation of a circular issued by the Union government banning 23 breeds of 'ferocious and dangerous' dogs. However, the court clarified that the stay of the circular, issued on March 12 by the Animal Husbandry and Dairying Department of the Centre, would be limited only to Karnataka. Justice M. Nagaprasanna passed the interim order on a petition filed by Bengaluru residents. The High Court also directed the Centre to produce those documents, based on which the circular for banning the dog breeds was issued, for examining the prior consultation process. The circular stated that all those who have reared these breeds as pets should sterilise the dogs to stop further breeding.

The Centre's counsel told the court that the circular was issued based on a direction issued by the Delhi HC asking the department to consider the representation of the PIL petitioner for banning certain dog breeds. Noticing that the Delhi HC's order was "unequivocal in directing that all the stakeholders must be consulted before consideration of representation for banning dog breeds...", Justice Nagaprasanna said that there is a need to examine the documents for the decision-making process to ascertain whether the Kennel Club of India was consulted, as consultation with all stakeholders was essential.



# Many pharma companies that bought poll bonds faced regulatory actions

A closer look at the electoral bond data indicates several firms in the pharmaceutical sector that purchased the bonds were under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate or the I-T Department at some point in the past five years; some were also in the cross hairs of U.S. FDA over quality control

**Vignesh Radhakrishnan**  
**Vasudevan Mukunth**

On March 15, *The Hindu* reported that many top purchasers of electoral bonds had also been under the scanner of the Enforcement Directorate or the Income Tax (I-T) Department at some point in the past five years. A closer look at the electoral bond data released indicates more such companies, especially in the pharmaceutical sector.

For example, on July 6, 2022, the I-T Department searched more than 40 offices of the Bengaluru-based pharmaceuticals major Micro Labs Ltd., which makes Dolo 650.

Officials also searched the residences of its owners. In the same month, the Indian government said the searches revealed "substantial incriminating evidence" of unethical practices and freebies to medical professionals to

the tune of ₹1,000 crore.

The same month, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) asked the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) to investigate the matter. The NPPA is an independent regulator attached to the Department of Pharmaceuticals in the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, and is responsible for pricing drugs to keep them affordable. In September, the IPA cleared the company in a report to the NPPA, declaring the "₹1,000-crore expenditure on single brand Dolo 650 on freebies in one year" to be "not correct".

A month later, Micro Labs purchased electoral bonds worth ₹6 crore, an additional set worth ₹3 crore on November 15, 2022, and another worth ₹7 crore on October 9, 2023, taking the total tally to ₹16 crore.

In April 2022, Hetero Drugs Ltd. and Hetero



Pharmaceuticals major Micro Labs Ltd. bought poll bonds worth ₹6 crore after the I-T Department searched its offices. FILE PHOTO

Labs Ltd. each purchased bonds worth ₹20 crore. Six months earlier, on October 6, 2021, after searching the offices of the Hetero pharmaceutical group across six States, the I-T Department reported detecting an "unaccounted income" of ₹550 crore and also seized ₹142 crore in cash.

In December the same year, residents of a village in Visakhapatnam demanded action against He-

tero Drugs Ltd. because, they alleged, it had laid a four-km-long pipe without requisite clearances. In all, these two firms purchased bonds worth ₹55 crore.

Hetero group chairman Bandi Parthasaradhi Reddy is an investor in Hazelo Lab and Hindys Lab, among others. Both Hazelo and Hindys also purchased electoral bonds: for ₹2.5 crore each on July 6, 2022, and for ₹10 crore each on

April 12, 2023. Hindys also purchased another tranche worth ₹5 crore on July 12, 2023.

The MSN Pharma group also faced an allegation of "unaccounted income" of ₹400 crore from the I-T Department in February 2021. In April 2022, MSN Pharmachem Pvt. Ltd. purchased bonds worth ₹20 crore and another tranche of bonds worth ₹6 crore on November 16, 2023.

## Quality issues

Intas, Lupin, and Natco were in the cross hairs of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) over quality control issues at their drug-making facilities in India. On October 10, 2022, Intas purchased bonds for ₹20 crore. In December 2022, the U.S. FDA flagged serious quality control issues at its Ahmedabad facility.

In late 2022, the FDA rapped Lupin for allegedly subpar drug-making condi-

tions at some of its facilities in India. On January 25, 2023, it purchased bonds worth ₹18 crore.

Natco purchased bonds worth ₹25 lakh on October 5, 2019, and in October and November 2023, worth ₹32 crore. On August 5-9, 2019, the FDA inspected a Natco facility near Hyderabad and concluded with six "observations". Natco responded that it would specify corrective actions in two weeks. At another facility in Rangareddy district on October 9-18, 2023, the FDA reportedly found unclean equipment.

In another example, on November 11, 2022, Mankind Pharma Ltd. purchased bonds worth ₹24 crore months ahead of its IPO in May 2023, with a value of ₹4,326 crore. Two days later, the I-T Department raided Mankind's premises over allegations of tax evasion.

(With inputs from Jasmin Nihalani)

# SSC withdraws result for recruitment exam in Manipur

**Abhinav Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

The Staff Selection Commission (SSC) on Monday withdrew the final results for the recruitment of 'Constable (GD) in Central Armed Police Forces, SSF, Rifleman (GD) in Assam Rifles, and Sepoy in Narcotics Control Bureau Examination 2022', in Manipur just days after announcing it on March 15, saying that a revised final result would soon be published.

In the notice issued by the SSC, the government said that given the law and order situation in the State, physical and medical tests were conducted in multiple phases and consequently, the data from one of these phases were misused out in the now-withdrawn result.

## 'Revised result soon'

"The revised final result in respect of Manipur incorporating the complete data of the candidates will be published shortly," the SSC said.

The withdrawal came as

the final result selecting 260 candidates for 597 vacancies in the State had led to a massive uproar from the Meitei community over claims of a disproportionate number of people from Kuki-Zo community being selected.

The Joint Action Committee, an Imphal-based civil society organisation, had met with Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Monday for urgent intervention to correct the "unfair merit list".

Even as the results were announced for other States in August 2023, the last round of selection for Manipur went on till February 2024, following which on March 15, the final results for the 597 vacancies in Manipur were declared, showing the selection of 260 candidates.

According to this result, of the 260 selected candidates, 150 were selected under the Scheduled Tribe quota, three were selected under the Other Backward Classes quota and 107 were selected under the Unreserved category.

# Modi promises strict action against corruption over the next five years

**S.P. Saravanan**  
**M. Sabari**

SALEM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said stringent action would be taken against corruption over the next five years, and asked the people of Tamil Nadu to give the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) a massive mandate in the Lok Sabha election.

Speaking at a public meeting in Salem, Mr. Modi contended that the DMK and the Congress were two sides of the same coin as both the parties were involved in corruption and family rule. "Only after sending the Congress home, 5G technology grew. But in Tamil Nadu, the fifth generation [of the DMK] is coming to power,"



Warm reception: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeting BJP Cadre at a public meeting in Salem on Tuesday. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

he said.

Mr. Modi claimed that the Centre was allocating funds for development schemes to Tamil Nadu, but the DMK government was trying to loot them. "The development of Tamil Nadu is important, and stringent action will be taken against corruption.

The DMK has lost its sleep because of the support that the NDA alliance partners have been receiving in the State...," he said.

Taking a dig at the INDIA Bloc, Mr. Modi said that their motive had become clear after their first rally in Mumbai's Shivaji Park. "They are attacking

Hindu dharma and want to destroy it. They are disrespecting the Hindu religion repeatedly, but not raising a single word against any other religion," he said, adding that the alliance showed its disregard to the scared Sengol when it was installed in Parliament.

Listing various development schemes brought in by the (Union) government, Mr. Modi said that of the two defence industrial corridors announced, one was for Tamil Nadu, and the State would also get a mega textile park.

"The Centre has given ₹260 crore towards railway infrastructure work in Salem region alone," he said, pointing out that women had benefited from various development schemes brought in by the Union government.

# Activist calls for border march in Ladakh to mark land lost to China

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

Around 10,000 people from Ladakh will march to the border along China to showcase how much land has been lost to the neighbouring country, climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk said on Tuesday.

Mr. Wangchuk has been protesting in open in sub-zero temperature in Leh, surviving only on salt and water for the past 14 days, to demand constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory.

"We know from the shepherds that they are not allowed [anymore] to go to the places that they always used to go. In particular areas, they are stopped kilometres before where they used to go earlier. We



No step back: Sonam Wangchuk is on a fast seeking constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory for the past 14 days. ANI

will go and show whether land has been lost or not," Mr. Wangchuk said.

The march would be taken out in Finger area (north and south bank of Pangong Tso), Demchok, Chushul among others along the Line of Actual Control with China.

He said two dates have been shortlisted for the

march - March 27 and April 7.

"The march will also highlight the areas, prime pasture lands, that are being turned into solar parks. On one hand, nomads are losing their land to corporates who are coming to set up their plants, maybe mining in future...on the other hand they are losing

pasture land to China which is encroaching from the north, the Chinese have captured huge chunks of land in the last few years," he said.

## No-go areas

After the June 15, 2020 incident in Galwan where 20 Indian soldiers were killed in violent clashes with the Chinese People's Liberation Army, several rounds of talks between the two armies have taken place leading to disengagement and creation of buffer zones or no-go areas.

At the centre of Mr. Wangchuk's protest that has received huge support from local people is the failure of Statehood talks between Ladakh civil society leaders and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on March 4.

# Former police officer gets life term in fake encounter case

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Tuesday sentenced to life imprisonment former Mumbai Police Inspector Pradeep Sharma for the fake encounter killing of Lakhani Baiya, alias Ramnarayan Gupta, an alleged aide of convicted gangster Chhota Rajan, in 2006.

The court also upheld the life sentence awarded to 13 more people in the case. Twelve of them are former police personnel - Dilip Palande, Nitin Sartape, Ganesh Harpude, Anand Patade, Prakash Kadam, Devidas Sakpal, Pandurang Kokam, Ratnakar Kamble, Sandeep Sardar, Tanaji Desai, Pradeep Suryavanshi and Vinayak Shinde - and one a civilian, Hitesh Solanki.

Gupta was killed on November 11, 2006 at Nana Nani Park in Versova in northwestern Mumbai.

It is alleged that a police team led by Sharma, who was known as an 'encounter specialist', picked up Gupta and his friend Anil Bheda from their home at Vashi in Navi Mumbai. He



Pradeep Sharma

killed Gupta in a staged encounter. Later, Bheda was also found dead.

## 'Perverse acquittal'

The Division Bench of Justice Revati Mohite Dere and Justice Gauri Godse termed the decision by a lower court acquitting Sharma "perverse" and "unsustainable". They said that the charges of wrongful confinement, criminal abduction, and fake encounter had been proven to be true. "It is a matter of shame that Anil Bheda's murderers were not booked. The prime witness in the case lost his life to a gruesome murder. It is travesty of justice for his family," said the court. The

court also dismissed appeals by the 13 accused in the case.

A magisterial inquiry had been ordered on February 2008 after the victim's brother and advocate Ramprasad Gupta filed a petition in the High Court.

In September 2009, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed by the court and IPS officer K.M.M. Prasanna, the then Deputy Commissioner of Police, was appointed to investigate the case.

In April 2010, the SIT filed a chargesheet against 22 accused in the case. It said that a real estate agent, Janardhan Bhangne, had given a murder contract to former inspectors Sharma and Pradeep Suryavanshi against Mr. Gupta over a joint property transaction.

On March 13, 2011, ahead of his testimony before the court, Bheda, the prime witness in the case, went missing from his residence in Vashi. Four days later, his decomposed and burnt body was found in Thane.

A Sessions Court awarded life sentence to 21 accused but acquitted Sharma.

# M.K. Stalin seeks legal action against Union Minister's comments

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Condemning Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje's "reckless" comments against people from Tamil Nadu living in Karnataka, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Tuesday sought legal action against her.

Ms. Karandlaje had reportedly told presspersons that "people from Tamil Nadu who come to Karnataka, get trained in Tamil Nadu and plant bombs in Karnataka". She had also reportedly said that they had placed the bomb in the cafe, in an apparent reference to the recent incident in Bengaluru.

## 'Divisive politics'

"Tamilians and Kannadigas alike will reject this divisive rhetoric of the BJP," Mr. Stalin said in a social media post, accusing her of "causing threat to peace, harmony and national unity".

From the Prime Minister to cadre, "everyone in the BJP should stop engaging in this divisive politics,"



M.K. Stalin

he said, adding that the Election Commission (EC) should take note of the "hate speech" and take action.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami too, condemned the Union Minister and urged the EC to ensure that such hate speeches are not delivered.

Late Tuesday night, the Union Minister apologised for her remarks and posted on social media that she was retracting them. "My remarks were solely directed towards those trained in the Krishnagiri forest, linked to the Rameswaram Cafe blast," she said.

# Delhi HC to hear Cong. plea against tax recovery

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday listed a petition by the Congress challenging tax re-assessment proceedings against it for hearing on Wednesday.

Last week, the High Court had rejected Congress's plea challenging an order of the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal (ITAT) declining to stay an Income Tax Department notice for recovery of outstanding tax. The assessing officer had raised a tax demand of more than ₹100 crore for the assessment year 2018-19 when the income was assessed to be more than ₹199 crore.

Advocate Vivek Tankha, representing the Congress, had said that the party was under tremendous pressure with its bank accounts frozen.

The ITAT on March 8 had dismissed the Congress's application seeking a stay on the February 13 notice of the I-T department initiating recovery proceedings against it.

# Notifying CAA during Ramzan makes it worse: U.S. Senator

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

Adding to the heated exchange of words between Delhi and Washington over the implementation of the Citizenship Amendment Act, the Chair of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee has questioned the timing of the Modi government's decision.

In a statement issued in Washington on Monday, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin said that he was "deeply concerned" by the Indian government's decision to notify the "controversial" CAA and its "potential ramifications" for India's Muslim community.

## 'Shared values'

"Making matters worse is the fact that it is being pushed during the holy month of Ramadan (Ramzan). As the U.S.-India relationship deepens, it is critically important that our cooperation is based on our shared values of protecting the human rights of all persons, regardless of religion."



Ben Cardin

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) declined to comment on the remarks by the U.S. Senator.

Last week the MEA had responded sharply to the U.S. State department statement on the notification of rules for the CAA. In response to the State department's concerns, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal had said there were no grounds for concern on the treatment of minorities in India, calling the U.S. spokesperson's comments "misplaced, misinformed and unwarranted", and accusing the U.S. administration of practicing "vote bank politics".



# Congress manifesto to focus on 25 guarantees, justice plank

CWC approves manifesto, which is likely to include section on poll bonds; party plans to translate it into every major language; Kharge says BJP will meet its 'India Shining' moment in 2024 too

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Asserting that the BJP's guarantees for the 2024 Lok Sabha election would be another "India Shining" moment, the Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Tuesday urged its office-bearers to ensure that the party's 25 guarantees and the five pillars of justice or *paanch nyay* reached every household in India.

After a three-hour discussion, the CWC approved the manifesto that will also include a section on electoral bonds. Former party chief Rahul Gandhi told the closed-door CWC meeting that the electoral bond scheme had "exposed the BJP's corruption and extortion tactics".

Sources said Mr. Gandhi specifically spoke on the issue of electoral bonds and said it showed the BJP's corrupt face and that it needed to be taken to the people. The meeting decided to bring electoral bonds as an issue to be countered in the party's manifesto.

Setting the tone and te-



Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, and Rahul Gandhi at the Congress Working Committee meeting in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

nor of the meeting in his opening remarks, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the country was "fervently demanding a change". "The guarantees currently being touted by the present government would have the same fate as that of the 'India Shining' slogan of 2004," he said. "India Shining" was a slogan used by the BJP ahead of the 2004 Lok Sabha election. The party, however, lost the election.

The Congress manifesto will revolve around the theme of the five *nyay* of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra which are *Hissedari Nyay*, *Yuva Nyay*, *Kisaan Nyay*, *Naari Nyay*, and *Shramik Nyay*. (justice based on share; for youth, farmers, women, and workers)

Former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, who heads the Manifesto Committee, made a presentation on the document. Sources said Mr. Gandhi, as well as party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, underscored the point that the document needs to be made in every language without losing the original essence of the promises. They requested leaders from every State to get involved in the translation effort.

Mr. Kharge lauded Mr. Gandhi for leading the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra and bringing people's issues to the centre stage. Mumbai, where the yatra concluded last Saturday, is an important place for the party, he said, since the Congress

was formed there and it was there that the freedom movement got its final fillip with the Quit India Movement in 1942.

Addressing a press conference, party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal said the document would be a game changer. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees are all lies. What about the ones he gave in 2014? Where are the two crore jobs he promised or the ₹15 lakh in every bank account or doubling the farmer's income," he said.

Apart from the *paanch nyay*, the closed-door discussion included suggestions for a stringent law on violence and hate crimes against castes, religious communities, gender groups, LGBTQ groups, and others.

The CWC is learnt to have evaluated that media would not take the Congress's manifesto to the people and the party would have to take steps towards popularising it. Hence, all State in-charges were asked to prepare a plan over the next 10 days so that these 25 guarantees reached every household.

# Congress committee clears Adhir, Kharge's son-in-law for LS poll

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury is among the candidates whose names were cleared by the party's Central Election Committee (CEC) on Tuesday.

The CEC also cleared the name of Radhakrishnan D., son-in-law of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, as the party's candidate from Gulbarga. Mr. Kharge had represented the seat in 2009 and 2014, but lost it in 2019.

A final decision on a candidate for the Chandigarh Lok Sabha seat has been put on hold as there are two former Union Ministers among the three contenders.

The CEC is headed by Mr. Kharge and includes top leaders, including former party chief Sonia Gandhi and Rajya Sabha MP K.C. Venugopal. Though there is no official word on the CEC's deliberations, sources said it cleared candidates for 14 seats from Karnataka, 12 seats from West Bengal, and three from Telangana in its third meeting.

In Karnataka, the candidatures of Rajiv Gowda from North Bengaluru,



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

Mansoor Ali Khan from Bengaluru Central, and Sowmya Reddy from Bengaluru South have been cleared.

In West Bengal, Mr. Chowdhury will contest from his seat of Baharampur. The MP from Malda South, Abu Hasem Khan Choudhury, will make way for his son Isha Khan Choudhury.

In Telangana, the panel cleared candidates for Chevella, Malkajgiri, and Secunderabad seats.

The CEC also discussed candidates for seats in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal, Puducherry, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, and the remaining seats in Karnataka. Discussions on the remaining seats in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat have been postponed.

## INBRIEF



### Hemant Soren's sister-in-law and MLA Sita Soren joins BJP

In a significant political development, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) legislator Sita Soren, sister-in-law of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, resigned from the party and joined the BJP in Delhi in the presence of the party's national general secretary Vinod Tawde and Jharkhand in-charge Laxmikant Bajpai. Ms. Soren was the JMM MLA from Jama in Dumka district. She is the wife of Durga Soren, the late son of JMM chief Shibu Soren. "I was feeling neglected and isolated in the party. I have also become aware of a conspiracy being hatched against me and my family. I'm left with no choice but to tender my resignation," Ms. Soren alleged. She voiced her disappointment, indicating a deviation from the party's core values by accommodating people whose principles do not align with its ethos.

### No voting arrangement for those who fled Manipur

People who fled the ethnic violence in Manipur and took refuge in the neighbourhood, specifically Mizoram, will be able to vote in the Lok Sabha election only if they return to their home State. Manipur's Chief Electoral Officer Pradeep Kumar Jha said no voting arrangement had been made for people who left the State after the ethnic violence broke out last year. Some 12,000 Kuki-Zomi people took shelter in Mizoram, the government in Mizoram had claimed ahead of the Assembly election in November 2023. On March 16, Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said the poll panel notified a scheme to allow the displaced voters of Manipur to exercise their franchise from their respective camps. Mr. Jha, however, told journalists that the scheme was limited to Manipur's territorial jurisdiction.

### Taranjit Singh Sandhu, former Ambassador to U.S., joins BJP

Former Indian Ambassador to the United States Taranjit Singh Sandhu joined the BJP on Tuesday. He is likely to contest the Lok Sabha election from Amritsar, where he has been reaching out to people since he retired from the foreign service a few months ago. Mr. Sandhu joined the BJP in the presence of the party's national general secretaries Vinod Tawde and Tarun Chugh. Mr. Sandhu's grandfather, Sardar Teja Singh Samundri, was a freedom fighter, and one of the founders of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee. His father, Bishan Singh Samundri, was the founder Vice-Chancellor of the Guru Nanak Dev University. The BJP is hoping that Mr. Sandhu's lineage, experience as a diplomat, and local connections in Amritsar will help the party win the seat, where it has had a run of bad luck.

# Sharad's NCP faction gets trumpet symbol

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday allowed the Sharad Pawar faction to contest Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly polls under the 'trumpet' party symbol and the name 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar'.

A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant further asked the Election Commission not to allot the 'trumpet' symbol to any other party or Independent candidate.

The court permitted the breakaway Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar to continue using the clock

symbol, the original symbol of the undivided NCP, for the present.

However, the group has been directed to issue a public notice in newspapers in English, Marathi and Hindi editions declaring that the issue regarding the 'clock' symbol was sub-judice in the Supreme Court, and his group was allowed to use the symbol "subject to the final outcome of the proceedings" in court.

The Bench passed the order on a plea by the Sharad Pawar group seeking to restrain the Ajit Pawar faction from using the 'clock' symbol for the polls, as allotted by the Election Commission, on the grounds that it was disrupting the level playing field.

## Colourful appeal



For the people: A woman makes a kolam (traditional art form) at the Collector's office at Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu on Tuesday as part of a voter awareness programme conducted by a government-run women's self-help group. L. BALACHANDAR

# Civil society organisation wants to make farmers' woes an electoral agenda

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

An agenda on agriculture and farmers for political parties, prepared by the Kisan Mazdoor Commission (KMC) of the 'Nation for Farmers' platform ahead of the elections, has sought to mobilise the support of people, scientists and State governments for "much needed legislative actions" to help farmers.

The agenda urged the Union government and State governments to stand with farmers, rural labour, consumers, women, and youth of rural areas. "Society as a whole needs to rapidly act against the policy path promoting corporate control of agriculture," it said.

The leaders of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha and members of the KMC told reporters on Tuesday that the agenda will be circulated among political parties and other organisations during the elections.

### Kisan Mazdoor Commission prepares an agenda for parties, seeking a slew of measures

The key points in the agenda are the right to work for life and dignified livelihood for farmers and workers; social security and protection against natural and other calamities; land, water, forest and all natural resources including common property resources; diversity in seeds, food systems; ecologically and socially just technological choices; and freedom of expression, organisation, representation and struggle through constitutional means for the realisation of demands of farmers and workers.

**'Integral to future'**  
The agenda noted that the well-being of farmers is not just about the economic survival of a majority of In-

dian households but about our national dignity, diversity, civilisational heritage, freedom movement legacy, constitutional vision, and economic, ecological and social justice.

"Farmers are not just a residue from our past; farmers, agriculture and villages are integral to the future of India and the world," the agenda said, urging people to recognise the social responsibility to farmers, artisans and working people.

KMC members said they were feeling alarmed by the economic, ecological, social and existential crises of Indian agriculture; growing corporate control of agriculture; ecological degradation and destruction affecting farmers and their livelihoods; unprecedented increase in land degradation; destruction of agricultural lands and associated resources; commercialisation and privatisation of water and biodiversity.

# Paras resigns from Union Cabinet, slams BJP for 'injustice'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PATNA

Union Minister Pashupati Kumar Paras resigned on Tuesday and accused the BJP of doing "injustice" to his Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party by not including it in the seat-sharing arrangement in Bihar for the Lok Sabha election.

The announcement came at a press conference a day after the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) announced its seat-sharing pact, giving five seats, including Hajipur, to the Chirag Paswan-led Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas). Mr. Paswan is the nephew of Mr. Paras.

"I was waiting for the announcement of seat sharing among the NDA allies which was announced on March 18. I've been grateful to the Prime Minister but my party and I faced injustice. As such, I am resigning as Minister from the Union Cabinet," Mr. Paras told mediapersons in Delhi. Asked about



Pashupati Kumar Paras

his plans, Mr. Paras, who is the Hajipur MP, added, "I will decide this after discussions with party leaders and workers."

However, the buzz in the political circles is that Mr. Paras may be joining the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), which is part of the Opposition Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance, and contest from Hajipur against his nephew. Mr. Paswan, the MP from Jamui (reserved) seat, had expressed his desire to contest from the Hajipur seat "to retain the political legacy" of his father the late Ram Vilas Paswan.

# Remarks on 'Shakti' proof of Congress's anti-women, anti-Hindu stand, says Modi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

For the second successive day, the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi attacked the Congress party and Wayanad MP Rahul Gandhi over his remarks on *Shakti*, making the issue an important theme in the party's campaign for the Lok Sabha election.

In Salem, the Prime Minister alleged at a public rally that the Congress and its allies, including Tamil Nadu's ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), were out to "destroy *Shakti*" but asserted that "they will get destroyed" instead.

Mr. Modi was referring to Mr. Gandhi's remarks, made at the conclusion of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Mumbai on Sunday, when he had raised concerns about electronic voting machines and Central investigative agencies, in the context of the Opposition's struggle against the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a public meeting in Salem ahead of the Lok Sabha election. E. LAKSHMI NARAYANAN

might of the State, noting that "there is a word 'shakti' (might) in Hinduism..." Constituents of the INDIA bloc "would never speak ill about any other faith but would not lose a second in abusing the Hindu religion," Mr. Modi said. "The election campaign has started, but the INDI alliance's plan came out in their first rally in Mumbai. Their manifesto, ill intentions have come out. At Shivaji Park in Mumbai, the INDI alliance openly declared they will destroy '*Shakti*' which is faith.

What does '*Shakti*' mean in Hinduism - everybody in Tamil Nadu knows that," he said, even as 11 women dressed as "goddesses" joined him on stage. BJP spokesperson Ravi Shankar Prasad held a press conference on the same issue in Delhi. "The Congress under Rahul Gandhi's leadership is no longer the Congress of the doctrine and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi. This is a Congress party led by a divisive mind, Maoist, and anti-Hindu thoughts," he said.



## IN BRIEF



## Lokpal asks CBI to probe cash for query case against Mahua

Lokpal, the anti-corruption body, on Tuesday directed the CBI to probe the cash-for-query allegations against Trinamool Congress leader Mahua Moitra who was expelled from Lok Sabha last year. CBI has been asked to submit findings before Lokpal within six months. The CBI, however, submitted that the allegation that Ms. Moitra received ₹2.75 crore cash in two tranches from businessman Darshan Hiranandani in 2019 and 2021 "is not substantiated as sufficient evidence could not be collected due to the limited scope of the inquiry," the order said. The CBI added that a probe is required to unearth the truth of this allegation of a serious nature.

## 2023 was the 'hottest year' on record, confirms WMO

In line with observations by climate agencies, the World Meteorological Organisation has officially confirmed 2023 to be the hottest year on record. "The State of Global Climate Report", published on Tuesday, stated that the global average near-surface temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius (with a margin of uncertainty of ± 0.12 degrees Celsius) above the pre-industrial baseline. It was the warmest 10-year period on record. The previous, joint warmest years were 2016 at 1.29 ± 0.12 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 average and 2020 at 1.27 ± 0.13 degree Celsius.

## SC directs States to give ration cards to 8 cr. workers

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday took exception to the delays in the implementation of its April 2023 order to provide ration cards to about eight crore migrant workers registered in the eShram portal but not covered under the National Food Security Act. The portal has 28.6 crore registrants. Of this, 20.63 crore are registered on ration card data.

A Bench led by Justice Hima Kohli directed ration cards to be given to the remaining eight crore migrant and unorganised sector workers registered with the eShram portal in two months. The court was acting on the arguments raised by advocates Prashant Bhushan and Cheryl D'Souza for activists Anjali Bhardwaj, Harsh Mander and Jagdeep Chhokar. Mr. Bhushan had argued that there could be more than 10 crore workers left outside the protective umbrella of the Food Safety Act as the statistics were based on the 2011 census. The court had said last year that it was the duty of a welfare state to include migrant worker on the ration card roll expeditiously.

## Railways earned ₹1,230 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets in span of three years

Reply to RTI query shows that the number of such cancellations rose from 2.53 crore in 2021 to 5.26 crore in 2023; former official calls for recalibration of waitlisted slots that are on offer

Maitri Porecha  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Railways clocked earnings of ₹1,229.85 crore from cancelled waiting list tickets between 2021 and 2024 (till January), a response to a query under the Right to Information Act has revealed.

The Railway Ministry response to the RTI application filed by Madhya Pradesh-based activist Vivek Pandey also showed that earnings from this source have increased year on year.

For instance in 2021, a total of 2.53 crore tickets on the waiting list were cancelled and the Railways earned ₹242.68 crore. This number rose to 4.6 crore tickets being cancelled in 2022 and the earnings soaring to ₹439.16 crore. In 2023, 5.26 crore tickets that were waitlisted were cancelled and the Railways cashed in ₹505 crore as a result. In 2024, in the month of January alone, 45.86 lakh tickets were



In the month of January 2024, 45.86 lakh tickets were cancelled, leading to earnings of ₹43 crore for the Railways. FILE PHOTO

cancelled, leading to earnings of ₹43 crore for the Railways.

"It is very clear that with limited capacity, the Railways is unable to cater to demand. They should gauge the demand pattern and avoid offering too many waiting list tickets," a former Railway official told The Hindu.

"For instance, an 18-coach train has 720 seats in the sleeper compartment, and the Railways allots a waiting list of 600. There

will be no scope for accommodating such a large number, and tickets are bound to get cancelled so they should recalibrate their waiting list thresholds," the former official pointed out.

## Deepavali week

Between November 5 and November 17 last year, during the Deepavali week, the Railways saw 96.18 lakh ticket cancellations. This number included those cancelling their confirmed,

reservation against cancellation (RAC) and waiting list tickets.

Of these 96.18 lakh cancellations, 47.82 lakh cancellations (up to 49%) were those of waitlisted passengers from all quotas, shows data from the Centre for Railway Information Systems.

Only in the Deepavali week, the Railways clocked earnings of ₹10.37 crore as 'total cancellation earning' from all tickets having final status as waiting list.

If an RAC/waitlisted ticket is cancelled then ₹60 per passenger is deducted from the refund.

E-tickets bought online through IRCTC also attract a service charge that is not refunded when cancelled. The service charge is ₹30 for air-conditioned classes in case the ticket is booked using net banking or through debit and credit cards, and ₹20 per ticket if booked through UPI. For non-AC classes, the charge is ₹15 per ticket (net banking or card) and ₹10 per ticket booked using UPI.

## Kolkata building collapse toll rises to 10

Shiv Sahay Singh  
KOLKATA

Two more people died in the collapse of a five-storeyed building at Garden Reach in Kolkata, taking the toll to 10 as of Tuesday. One person died on Tuesday late on Monday evening and another died on Tuesday. The building was located at Azhar Molla Lane in Metiabruz which is on the city's southwestern fringes. Residents of adjacent shanties on which the under construction building collapsed have been asked to vacate their homes. The building had collapsed on March 17.

Other than the shanties at least three other buildings in the vicinity of the building have been evacuated by the administration. These buildings, erected recently, have been built with barely a couple of feet between the structures. These illegal structures are in a densely populated area of Garden Reach. The alley leading to these houses was not even three to four feet wide. On Paharpur Road, a few metres away from the site of the March 17 accident, two high-rises are leaning on each other leaving no space between them.

## 27.6 million people engaged in forced labour in 2021: ILO

A.M. Jigeesh  
NEW DELHI

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO), released in Geneva on Tuesday, has found that forced labour generates illegal profits worth \$36 billion per year.

This is an increase of 37% of such illegal profits since 2014 and the study said this is fuelled by both a growth in the number of people forced into labour, as well as higher profits generated from the exploitation of victims. For the study, surveys have been conducted among workers, including Indians in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

The report titled "Profits and poverty: The economics of forced labour" also estimates that traffickers and criminals are generating close to \$10,000 per victim, up from \$8,269 (adjusted for inflation) a decade ago. "Total annual illegal profits from forced

## It perpetuates cycles of poverty and strikes at the heart of human dignity, says report

labour are highest in Europe and Central Asia (\$84 billion), followed by Asia and the Pacific (\$62 billion), the Americas (\$52 billion), Africa (\$20 billion), and the Arab States (\$18 billion)," the report said.

The report also said forced commercial sexual exploitation accounts for more than two-thirds (73%) of the total illegal profits, despite accounting for only 27% of the total number of victims in privately imposed labour. "After forced commercial sexual exploitation, the sector with the highest annual illegal profits from forced labour is industry, at US\$35 billion, followed by services (US\$20.8 billion), agriculture (US\$5.0 billion),

and domestic work (US\$2.6 billion). These illegal profits are the wages that rightfully belong in the pockets of workers but instead remain in the hands of their exploiters, as a result of their coercive practices," ILO Director-General Gilbert F. Hounbo said.

"Forced labour perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation and strikes at the heart of human dignity. We now know that the situation has only got worse. The international community must urgently come together to take action to end this injustice," said the ILO Director-General.

There were 27.6 million people engaged in forced labour on any given day in 2021, the report said, meaning 3.5 people for every 1,000 people in the world. "Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people in forced labour increased by 2.7 million," it said.

## U.P. police gun down man accused of murdering 2 minors

Ishita Mishra  
NEW DELHI

The police shot dead a man accused of murdering two brothers aged 12 and 6 in Budaun district of Uttar Pradesh on Tuesday.

A mob set ablaze a shop belonging to the accused man.

Tension gripped Budaun district as news of the murder spread.

The accused, Mohammad Sajid, is said to have slit the throats of the minors and also injured a third brother, aged 8, who managed to escape and reach his parents.

The accused, who ran a salon near the victims' house, killed the boys on their terrace. The accused was known to the family.

## Mob gathers

An angry mob gathered after pictures of the bodies started making rounds on

social media. The mob set on fire shops run by people of the minority community and also tried to barge inside a place of worship.

Police teams were deployed in the area to control the law and order situation.

Bareilly Inspector-General (IG) Rakesh Kumar said the police immediately rushed to the spot and managed to catch the accused who attempted to flee.

"In a bid to escape, the accused fired at the police and was killed in retaliatory fire," he said.

Mr. Kumar stated that the motive for the murder was not yet known and the police were investigating the matter.

The residents of the area, however, claimed that Sajid bore ill will against the victims' mother who ran a beauty parlour in the area.

## Zomato brings 'pure veg' fleet, draws criticism from public

Aroon Deep  
Abhinav Lakshman  
NEW DELHI

Food delivery platform Zomato on Tuesday launched a "pure veg" delivery fleet that would deliver orders from restaurants that do not serve meat, fish, or egg-based dishes. The fleet's personnel are shown in promotional images wearing green uniforms and with green boxes on their bikes. The company will not assign "pure veg" delivery partners to any orders from restaurants where food is not exclusively vegetarian.

While some vegetarian users welcomed the announcement on social media wholeheartedly, it immediately sparked backlash from app-based workers' unions, activists, and academics, who argued that the move will invariably translate into harassment of and violence against ground-level deliv-



Zomato's new 'pure veg' fleet. X/@DEEPIGOAL

ery partners, most of whom are from minority religious backgrounds or from oppressed caste backgrounds.

Sheikh Salauddin, president of Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers (IFAT), said: "The last time someone on Zomato requested for a delivery partner of a particular religion, [Zomato CEO Deepinder] Goyal said 'food has no religion'. Today, he seems to have gone back on this. I ask him directly, is he now going to categorise delivery partners on the lines of caste, community and religion?"

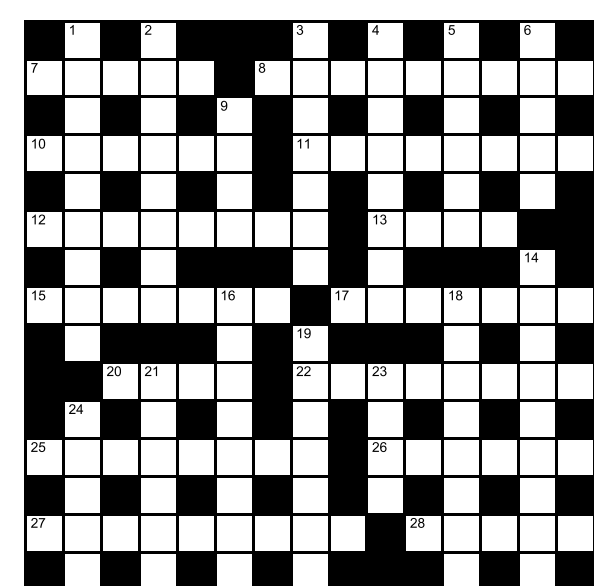
Karti P. Chidambaram, Congress MP from Sivaganga, too weighed in, calling the company "socially regressive and discriminatory".

On announcing the decision, Mr. Goyal said that the "pure veg" fleet "doesn't serve or alienate any religious, or political preference", further saying that the move was planned and rolled out in response to user feedback. "If this is the case, there have been so many cases of users requesting delivery partners of a particular caste and religion, will this be agreed to as well?" asked Mr. Salauddin, adding, "There have already been multiple instances of customers requesting delivery partners of a particular religion or community."

A Zomato spokesperson did not have an immediate response to queries from The Hindu on how exactly delivery partners will be selected for this particular fleet.

TH CROSSWORD+ 14127 (set by Afterdark)

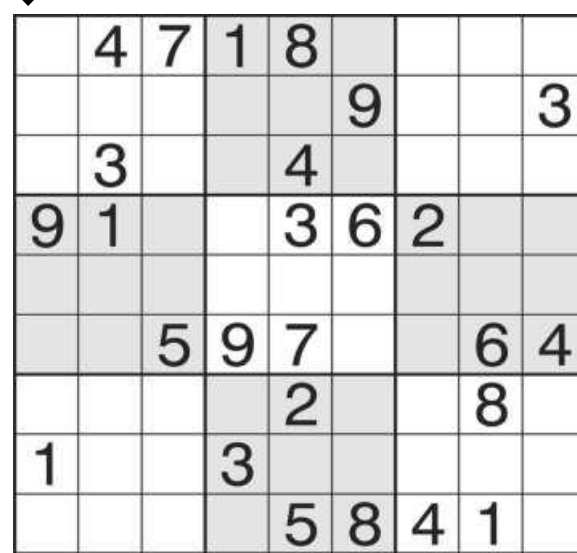
To solve this puzzle online, get access to our crossword site. @ <https://qrqo.page.link/jjpTn>



- 13 Ball takes edge to deviate (4)  
15 Always enters house by east or other side (7)  
17 Worrying after son's accommodation (7)  
20 Turn around for watering-hole (4)  
22 Responded to a news broadcast on leftist (8)  
25 Husband's relative in capital of Georgia gets nostalgic (8)  
26 Country is a primarily egregious leviathan trampling right (6)  
27 Observe that these days tax overwhelms the French and British (9)  
28 Cheat cleared contents of portable shelters (5)
- Down**
- 1 Cops detailed rules on drug possession by people (9)  
2 That woman's seniority overcomes a beginner in team with legacy (8)  
3 Basically someone erected a small idol depicting Eashwar at beach (7)  
4 Awful mistake, kept note outside with book on aisleway essentially (8)  
5 State not in a mess (6)  
6 Trolls out of shelves, not being quiet (5)  
9 For starters, husband exhibits ardour, treats with warmth (4)  
14 Gains in surplus covered by states' 50% subsidy (9)  
16 Say, workers pass current through fuses (8)  
18 Opinions of conservatives binding the man (8)  
19 First neutralise arrogant husband, to be put away for being wayward (7)  
21 Jumps, misses ball and drops (6)  
23 Opening was primarily short and brilliant (4)  
24 Nurses can access records, examine, sedate at the very outset (5)

- Across**
- 7 Two sweethearts crushing Kelvin's son? Clowns (5)  
8 Gave betel nuts and aubergine, maybe (9)  
10 Excellent singer, almost in ecstasy (6)  
11 Virus spreading at England borders, surmounted vaccine primarily and endured (8)  
12 Withdrew from performance as role was subdued (8)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

**Solution to previous puzzle**

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

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

## FAITH

## Superior bhakti

Superior bhakti Lakshmana serves Rama in the forest. Yet it is Bharata's bhakti that is considered superior to Lakshmana's. Lakshmana's bhakti was seshatva, while Bharata's was paratantriya, said Navalpakkam Vasudevachariar, in a discourse. Seshatva is the quality of dedicating oneself to the Lord and serving Him. But paratantriya is the attitude of thinking of oneself as belonging to the Lord. The very existence of such a bhakta is to carry out the Lord's will. Bharata was one such bhakta. He never questioned Rama. Usually an example is given to show the difference between seshatva and paratantriya. Suppose the Lord asks a person whose bhakti falls under the classification of seshatva to jump into a fire, he will ask, "If I am not here, who will serve You?" But if the same order were given to one whose bhakti can be classified as paratantriya, then he will obey, without questioning the Lord.

In his Paduka Sahasram, Vedanta Desika praises Bharata as the one who first proclaimed the greatness of Raghuva paduka (Rama's sandals). There are many conversations that Bharata has with various characters in the Ramayana.

Through every conversation that Bharata has, Valmiki shows us the importance of the dharma sastras. He has nothing but harsh words for Kaikeyi. He assures Kausalya that he had no part in Kaikeyi's decisions. Vasistha insists that Bharata ascend the throne, but Bharata refuses. When he arrives at the bank of the Ganga, he has a conversation with Guha. Looking for Rama, he arrives at sage Bharadwaja's ashram, and talks to the rishi, who tells him where he can find Rama.



# Changing cancer nomenclature can improve treatment outcomes: doctors

Precision oncology allows doctors to find the genetic mutations responsible for a tumour in many cases and target them with drugs. We also know not all cancers from the same organ share the same mutations. Taking these advances together, doctors have articulated a need to reclassify cancers by their genetic features

Sneha Khedkar

**T**he way we classify metastatic cancers may need to be revamped, scientists have said, proposing in its place a classification system that places the molecular characteristics of the cancer over the tissue of origin.

Traditional approaches to treating cancer – including surgery and radiation – target the organs in which the tumour is present. This practice formed the basis of classifying cancers after the organ in which they originate. But most deaths due to cancer are the result of the disease metastasising beyond the organ of origin; individuals with metastatic cancer are almost always treated systemically with drugs that enter the blood.

### What motivates the need for change?

With technological improvements, doctors are also able to find which genetic mutations are responsible for a tumour in many cases, and target them with drugs. All cancers from the same organ don't always share the same mutations, and these mutations aren't limited to cancers of a single organ.

This development in precision oncology requires cancers to be classified based on their molecular and genetic characteristics rather than the organ in which they originate, a team of researchers from France has written in a paper. This way, according to them, cancer patients can also access life-saving drugs sooner.

Fabrice André, a medical oncologist at Gustave Roussy in France and lead author of the commentary, told this author that oncologists spend a lot of time testing new drugs in clinical trials in a sequential manner, leading to "delay in treatment access".

### Has sequential testing caused delays?

There is evidence to support this view. A 2012 clinical trial in the U.S. investigating the drug nivolumab included people with different types of cancers, including melanoma and kidney cancer. Nivolumab targets the receptor of a protein found in some tumours. It ameliorated symptoms in individuals with tumours with that particular protein.

The next logical step would have been to test nivolumab with people with tumours that expressed the protein irrespective of where the cancer originated. But since cancers are classified based on their organ of origin – breast, kidney, lung, etc. – researchers had to conduct trials one after the other for each type of cancer.

As a result, for many years, people



Precision oncology requires cancers to be classified based on molecular and genetic characteristics rather than the organ of origin. NCI/UNSPASH



Most deaths due to cancer are the result of the disease metastasising beyond the organ of origin; individuals with metastatic cancer are almost always treated systemically with drugs that enter the blood

with tumours expressing that particular protein couldn't access nivolumab because the drug hadn't been trialled for their specific type of cancer.

Most drugs tested in clinical trials in the past decade have a similar story.

### How else can the new scheme help?

Naming cancers according to their biology rather than their anatomy "will reduce the time needed to run clinical trials," said Dr. André, "because you only need a few randomised trials, instead of testing the drug in each disease defined by the organ of origin."

Consultant medical oncologist and haemato-oncologist at Mumbai Oncocare Centre Kunal Jobanputra agreed.

A trial for a drug targeting a particular genetic mutation will cover all cancer types with those mutations. "A positive effect could be that it will take less time for the trials to happen," he said.

The revamped classification system could also help patients understand the rationale behind their treatment, according to Dr. André.

For example, two people may have the same cancer but not the same therapy because the biological mechanisms underlying their tumours are different.

This can confuse patients, he said. "Naming cancers with biological mechanisms would decrease such heterogeneity, and will also help the patient to better understand the rationale for his/her therapy."

Physicians often educate their patients about the molecular characteristics of their cancers, Dr. Jobanputra said. "When the connotation changes, the prognosis changes, the cost of treatment changes.

"We are moving towards a more personalised [treatment] approach," he added.

### What will it take to reclassify drugs?

Some change has also been evident over the last few years in regulatory agencies' approval for certain drugs.

In 2017, for example, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of the drug pembrolizumab to treat people carrying a certain mutation regardless of the organ in which the cancer originated.

Following this, the FDA has also approved some other drugs to be used based on their biological targets.

For the various cancers to be reclassified in this way, regulatory agencies, scientific groups, and insurance companies will also need to clarify when a drug should be approved based on its molecular target.

The FDA is working on a guideline to this effect.

A particularly important requirement is for institutions to establish teams that will focus on analysing patients' molecular profiles irrespective of the cancer type, the researchers wrote in their paper. Medical students must be trained to understand the molecular basis

of cancers instead of memorising the characteristics of primary tumours.

### Are there hurdles to implementing?

Finally, this proposed change for classifying cancers can't happen unless patients can access tests that reveal molecular alterations in their tumour.

This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where we must take the proposed change with a pinch of salt, Dr. Jobanputra said, since most patients can't afford genetic testing. These tests currently cost ₹ 7,000-40,000 in Indian labs and up to ₹ 3 lakh abroad. The availability and accessibility of genetic tests should be wider. "Only then can we jump to this diagnostic nomenclature."

The proposed classification system is also not without faults, Dr. Jobanputra added. Unless trials conducted based on molecular signatures have a significant number of patients with each type of cancer, they could generalise the results for all cancers. We can't entirely do away with organ-level information either because disease location is an important factor in the outcome regardless of the genetic mutations, he continued. For example, lung and brain cancers with the same mutations will still behave differently. But "if done properly," the new nomenclature "can improve accessibility of drugs," he said, even if this change will come only gradually.

Dr. André agreed. "It will probably take some decades. There is some important research to be done in terms of trial methodology before moving into that direction."

(Sneha Khedkar is a biologist-turned freelance science journalist based out of Bengaluru.)

## THE GIST

Nivolumab proved effective in targeting a protein in some tumours. Instead of testing for tumours that expressed the protein, trials were held for each cancer. This meant people could not access nivolumab because it hadn't been trialled for their specific cancer

Naming cancers according to their biology rather than their anatomy 'reduces time needed for clinical trials, because you only need a few randomised trials, instead of testing the drug in each disease defined by the organ of origin'

A revamped classification could help patients understand the rationale behind treatment. Two people may have the same cancer but not the same therapy because the biological mechanisms underlying their tumours are different

## BIG SHOT



Mary Takawira, a villager, shows wilted maize crops in Mumijo, Zimbabwe, on Saturday. Zimbabwe has failed to feed itself since 2000 and most of its population relies on food aid for survival. The crisis has been exacerbated by an El-Nino-induced drought. The government has estimated 2.7 million people will go hungry this year and is considering declaring an emergency. REUTERS

## QUESTION CORNER

### How cooling a car is a drag on mileage



**Q: How does using the AC affect a car's mileage while driving?**

**A:** An air-conditioner

(AC) works by moving heat from an 'inside' space to 'outside'. It achieves this using a refrigerant, a substance that absorbs heat when exposed to the 'inside' and releases it when exposed to the 'outside'. The refrigerant needs to be pressurised before it can absorb heat, which is achieved using a compressor.

In a traditional (non-electric) car, the energy to run the compressor comes from the engine. That is, the AC is another load on the engine aside from running the car itself. As a result, the engine consumes more fuel, but not all the fuel contributes to moving the car: some goes to running the AC. And as a result, the number of kilometres to which a single litre of petrol contributes – a.k.a. the mileage – drops.

The effect of an operating AC on the mileage also varies by the driving conditions. For example, driving within a city forces the engine to stop and start multiple times during a trip whereas on a highway the engine operates more continuously. In this scenario an AC's effect on the engine, and the



The AC is another load on the engine aside from running the car itself. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

mileage, will be more pronounced in the former and less so in the latter. Drivers can also reduce the load on the engine by parking cars in shaded spots and pre-cooling the passenger area through other means before turning the AC on.

-The Hindu S&T Desk

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## Selection and election

The Election Commission needs a selection panel free of executive bias

The quick, if not hasty, filling up of two vacancies in the Election Commission of India (ECI) has attracted justified criticism. The multi-member body got two new members within days of the resignation of Arun Goel, an Election Commissioner (EC) whose appointment itself came in the midst of a Constitution Bench hearing for a truly independent process of selecting members of the panel that conducts and supervises India's elections. Critics are not wrong when they point out that the Act setting out the process of selecting the Chief Election Commissioner and other ECs appeared to fall short of the sort of independence the Constitution Bench verdict of March 2023 envisaged. The selection took place at a time when a petition challenging the validity of the Act was about to be taken up for hearing. To add to the unfortunate set of circumstances, Mr. Goel's resignation for "personal reasons" has gone unexplained. It is a matter of grave concern that an EC whose term was set to go on for a few more years should choose to resign just days before the Commission finalised the Lok Sabha election schedule. It goes without saying that the discussion on the process selecting the ECs has no bearing on the competence or suitability of Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, the two new ECs.

The real problem may lie with the law that Parliament chose to enact last year in response to the Supreme Court of India questioning the absence of any legislation since the inception of the Constitution, as required under Article 324, laying down an appointment process for the ECs. The Court's emphasis was on the ECI's independence from the executive so that the elections the panel conducts are truly free and fair. Towards that end, it sought to fill the vacuum by an interim arrangement under which the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India (CJI) formed the selection committee to choose the CEC and ECs. However, it was meant to be in place only until Parliament enacted a law. In response, the government enacted a law that constituted a panel comprising the Prime Minister and any Union Minister, besides the Leader of the Opposition, or the leader of the largest single party in the Opposition. The question now before the Court is whether a committee in which the executive has a two-one majority can be a truly independent authority. The argument that Prime Ministers have always been selecting the CEC and ECs seems attractive, but, ultimately, an executive-driven process has to yield to one more rooted in the constitutional principle of having an independent body to hold free and fair elections, even if the CJI, as an institutional head, might not be the person most suited to be a part of the selection process.

## Length and breadth

Rahul Gandhi's yatras have energised the Congress, but unsettled some allies

The second edition of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra, the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, concluded in Mumbai on March 17 with a rally that also saw the participation of some of the party's allies. Through the two editions of this yatra, Mr. Gandhi traversed a distance over 10,000 kilometres across the length and breadth of the country, meeting multitudes of people from across society. In the process he has also travelled some distance in his own evolution as a leader, to emerge as the most strident face of anti-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politics in India. If there was novelty and euphoria around the first edition, that was from Kanniyakumari to Srinagar, the second one, from Manipur to Mumbai, was more clinical and functional. With Mr. Gandhi tramping through the picturesque countryside, the first yatra delivered a nebulous message of love and harmony framed around the slogan, *Nafrat Ke Bazaar Mein Mohabbat Ki Dukaan* (outlet of love in a market of hate). To insulate Mr. Gandhi from expectations of immediate politics, the Congress insisted that the yatra was not an electoral exercise, but an ideological campaign. The yatra gained the Congress some electoral advantage in Karnataka and Telangana which it went on to win in the Assembly elections that followed, but the party lost in the elections in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

In the second edition, the yatra's theme was built around social justice, a euphemism for a wider representation of caste groups in power. Both the yatras have achieved the goal of energising the party cadres, who found themselves suitably employed and connected to the party leadership in the run-up to the general election. The paradox for the Congress leaders is that the more success they meet, the stronger will be the push-back from their own allies. A wobbly, weak and flexible Congress at the centre of the anti-BJP alliance is a stronger glue to keep the alliance together. In States where the Congress is subservient to the regional forces, from Tamil Nadu to Bihar, the alliance is in better shape. But in West Bengal, where the State party chief, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, refused to bow down to the Trinamool Congress, the alliance fell through. The planning and management of the two editions of the Bharat Jodo Yatra also turned out to be a notable renewal of the party's organisational capacity. But, equally, the 2024 general election will put to the test Mr. Gandhi's brand of politics centred around left-leaning welfarism and inchoate secularism.

# The curious case of Sosamma Iype and the Vechur cow

This is the unusual story of a quiet, unassuming woman who won the Padma Shri in 2022 for one of the more remarkable reasons imaginable: she saved and resurrected a breed of indigenous cattle, the Vechur cow. Dr. Sosamma Iype's story is located at the heart of India's tussle to industrialise rapidly while seeking to preserve its sublime biodiversity, at a time when the former was fashionable and the latter was not.

**Agrarian transformations, erasure of breeds** Steeped in abject poverty and food scarcity at the time of Independence, India had to lay the foundations of a vigorous industry, which would catapult us into the future, and simultaneously ensure that the most basic necessities of our citizens were met. Exacerbating our woes was the fact that the major bulk of our populace subsisted solely on agriculture and animal husbandry, thus making their modernisation vital. Establishing a host of agricultural universities soon after Independence, we embarked on the quest to modernise our farming and livestock rearing practices, hoping to retrieve them from the depths of antiquity. And though our agricultural output soared with the advent of the Green Revolution and dairy production spiked with the onset of the White Revolution, these miraculous transformations also came at a pernicious cost. They reduced indigenous breeds such as the Vechur cow to the brink of extinction.

Acknowledged as one of the world's smallest cattle breeds, the Vechur cow had little value in the India of the White Revolution. In its pursuit to boost milk production through the crossbreeding of indigenous cattle with high-yielding foreign breeds, the White Revolution's corollary was the erasure of smaller breeds such as the Vechur cow. Cross-breeding served to dilute the genetic purity of native breeds and diminish their population, and the Vechur cow, prized for its adaptability to local environmental conditions, found itself imperilled in the face of a sweeping shift towards larger, more commercially viable cattle. As the White Revolution gained momentum, traditional farming practices that relied on smaller-sized cattle breeds fell into disfavour. The Vechur cow, with its unique characteristics, became a casualty of changing agricultural dynamics and dwindling demand. Indeed, it would have disappeared



**Shashi Tharoor**

is the third-term Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (Congress) for Thiruvananthapuram, and the Sahitya Akademi award winning author of 25 books, most recently 'The Less You Preach, The More You Learn' (co-authored with Joseph Zacharias)

The professor is an authentic Indian heroine who has left an indelible impression upon India's cultural and agricultural landscape

altogether, had it not been for the selfless efforts of one unassuming Indian: Professor Sosamma Iype.

"I don't remember drinking my mother's milk," writes Prof. Iype, "but I remember clearly the taste of the Vechur milk that my mother gave us to drink." Having grown up in an idyllic era when Vechur cows abounded, with a mother and calf in the compound of her own ancestral home in rural Kerala, it must have been disheartening for Prof. Iype to realise, while teaching at a veterinary college in 1989, that the Vechur breed had all but disappeared. Neither in animal husbandry reports nor in official surveys could this cow be traced, leading many a Keralite environmentalist, including Prof. Iype, to conclude dejectedly that it had become extinct. Conveying as much to her students, she resigned herself to the loss of an animal she deeply loved.

### A student's search

But that is where the story takes a turn. Reluctant to accept the depressing reality of the Vechur's loss, Anil Zachariah — one of Prof. Iype's students who is today a renowned veterinarian — set out in search of an animal that, to him, had assumed mythical proportions. After much wandering and asking, he stumbled upon a Vechur cow in Vaikom, Kerala. Exhilarated beyond measure, and unable to keep the news from his mentor, he scaled the wall of Prof. Iype's house at midnight and leapt into her compound, thrilled to be breaking the marvellous news.

No sooner was that first Vechur cow discovered than Prof. Iype poured herself wholeheartedly into a mission to resurrect and nurture not only the Vechur but several of Kerala's other endangered indigenous breeds, such as the Kasargod, Vilwadi and Cheruvally cattle and the Attappady goat. Her Vechur Conservation Unit, founded at the Kerala Agricultural University with only eight cows, rose from strength to strength, boasting of more than 24 cows at the end of the first year itself — a tremendous testament to Prof. Iype's ardour. Yet, the road ahead was riddled with landmines. As with all idealists in India, she and her team had to contend with various obstacles, even as they blazed a trail. Simultaneously contending with government officials averse to her outlook; envious colleagues who sought to foil her efforts,

going so far as to cast bizarre aspersions on her; well-known environmentalists falsely claiming she had facilitated the "patenting" of an Indian animal abroad; and a brutish media accusing her of treachery and "gene theft," Prof. Iype negotiated a perilous terrain. But not once did she flounder or cower. She persevered, she soldiered: a gentle colossus, Kerala's "Vechur Amma".

### The project that became a template

The allure of this pioneering movement was destined to transcend the bounds of Kerala; and it soon gained widespread traction, finding partners in national governmental institutions. Visiting the veterinary college and seeing the glory of the Vechur Conservation Project, R.M. Acharya, of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), incredulously asked Prof. Iype how she had conceived of such a project — and led it to fruition — when even the ICAR had not contemplated it. In the event, the ICAR adopted the Vechur Conservation Project, using it as a template for the whole of India.

For Prof. Iype, it has never simply been about performing a scientific miracle and making history with the astounding success of her mission. Instead, she believes firmly in giving back to society, especially to the destitute farmers and cattle rearers in whose homes the Vechur once occupied pride of place. It was in this spirit that, in 1998, she established the Vechur Conservation Trust, whose purpose was to evolve a culture of community participation and enable innumerable impoverished farmers to rear the Vechur by providing them its germ-plasm. This has empowered them and their families to attain a greater degree of self-reliance.

Prof. Iype does not project herself as a messiah. But she is one — a visionary for whom translating an ideal into reality was always more important than any exercise in self-aggrandisement. Not only has she saved the Vechur cow, but she has also left an indelible impression upon our cultural and agricultural landscape, for which we shall forever remain indebted to her. No one will make a movie about her, but she is an authentic Indian heroine.

*The writer acknowledges the assistance of Baawa Sayan Bajaj in the preparation of this article*

# Ties that epitomise India's neighbourhood first policy

People have always marvelled at how little Bhutan with an area of 38,394 square kilometre and a population of 7.7 lakh as compared with its giant neighbour India with an area of 3.28 million sq.km and a population of 140 crores have been the closest of partners and the best of friends over the past 50 years and more.

The answer is quite simple. Both nations look to each other as equals, we treat each other with the utmost respect and we have long realised that size does not really make a difference in relations between two sovereign nation states. Thus, India has constantly respected Bhutanese identity, Bhutan's unique religious practices and its desire to be economically prosperous while retaining its own way of life. On its part, Bhutan has long known that there is no real threat to its sovereignty or identity from its southern flank. Hence, it has looked to India to help it grow, develop and prosper. India has lived up to this expectation. Over the decades this has developed into a unique level of trust amongst the leadership of the two countries. It has been in evidence in the recent past.

### The Gelephu project

The King of Bhutan paid a visit to India in November 2023 during which he hinted at his plans for a Mindfulness City at Gelephu in southern Bhutan. It is to be like a Special Economic Zone to attract foreign investment and advance prosperity for that nation. Naturally, India, including its business entities, is expected to play a significant role in this effort. Simultaneously, the Gelephu Mindfulness City is to keep sustainability, well-being and environmental concerns at the forefront. Such a project is expected to lead the people of Bhutan to higher income levels while allaying any



**Gautam Bambawale**

is a former Indian Ambassador to Bhutan and is currently the trustee of the think-tank, Pune International Centre

There is much evidence of the unique level of trust between the leadership of Bhutan and India that has led to a strengthening of relations

concerns about its impact on Bhutan as a carbon negative country. Gelephu city is expected to focus on human well-being too with an emphasis on yoga, rest and recreation, spa therapies and mental relaxation channels.

The visit last week by the Prime Minister of Bhutan to India was a follow-up to the king's earlier visit and there were excellent discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as the President of India, Droupadi Murmu. This week, Mr. Modi is to pay a return visit to Bhutan. We must understand that any relationship, whether it is between two individuals or between two nations, needs constant tending, regular dialogue and a lot of care and cooperation. The back-to-back visits of the Prime Ministers of Bhutan and India to each other's nations is a manifestation of this attention placed on the relationship by both governments.

This is a good augury for the continued growth and development of India-Bhutan ties. It epitomises India's Neighbourhood First policy approach.

### The anchor of hydropower cooperation

Hydropower cooperation is the bedrock of India's relations with Bhutan. Several cooperative hydroprojects have been completed and commissioned by the two governments which supply clean electricity to India and provide Thimphu with a stream of revenue due to which it has graduated out of the Least Developed Country status. The delayed Punatsangchu-II hydropower project is expected to be completed in 2024 — yet another successful example of the government-to-government model of cooperation in hydropower.

In recent years, a new joint venture model was developed for the construction of hydroprojects

between India and Bhutan, but none of the proposed five projects has really taken off. Perhaps, it is time to acknowledge that this new proposed model is flawed and there is a need to go back to the drawing board to work out a more practical and potentially successful new model for hydroprojects.

India has also been a major development assistance partner to Bhutan and contributed ₹5,000 crore to its 12th Five Year Plan which just concluded. Critical in this process of development assistance is the fact that India does not merely undertake projects which are of benefit to it but pays a lot of attention to the priorities of the Bhutanese people so that projects of direct benefit to them are constructed. Such confabulation and discussion is an integral part of the successful partnership for prosperity between New Delhi and Thimphu. It is critical that this model continues in the future too.

### Measures to consider

In the years ahead, India must contribute to the success of the Gelephu Mindfulness City and can perhaps consider the following measures: commence direct flights between Mumbai/Delhi and Gelephu; provide our technology and knowledge in building hard infrastructure to Bhutan (the private sector will take the lead); encourage high-end Indian tourists and businesspersons to visit Gelephu in controlled numbers; Encourage Indian businesses to set up shop in the city.

Gelephu is next to remote parts of West Bengal and Assam and the success of the Mindfulness City will have positive socio-economic spillovers for these geographies as well. It will provide yet another example of the win-win cooperation between India and Bhutan.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Donation, transparency

Corruption and donation in the political sphere are not different entities for the common man. Though their interpretation depends on the context and situations in politics to suit political parties of different hues, in general, there is no different meaning. In normal conversation while talking about corruption in politics, we come across the term 'anti-corruption measures taken by the government'. But strangely, this term is not used in the context of "donations" received by political parties in the election phase. There is also no anti-donation drive by the government in power, in the Centre or State. While the Supreme Court of India in its verdicts almost every other day is upholding democratic ethics and

transparency in politics, it is distressing that the malaise continues. If 'donations' are needed, transparency is vital, backed by audits and IT declarations.

**N. Visveswaran,**  
Chennai

### Court to bank

It is disgraceful on the part of the State Bank of India to be selective in information about poll bonds. It must be a first in India's banking history that a bank has been pulled up so sharply by the higher judiciary.

**Satish Murdeshwar,**  
Kothrud, Pune

Repeated court orders cannot be taken lightly. The bank's reluctance belittles the image of the judiciary. When specific details are sought, the bank cannot pretend that it does not

understand them. The senior advocate appearing for the bank must return the brief to his disobedient client. The issue has been hogging the limelight due to the intentional obduracy of the bank. Let the bank be prudent. Does it want to witness an arrest?

**V. Lakshmanan,**  
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

### Funds and the election

The series of directions by the Supreme Court on the electoral bonds issue do not look sufficient enough to reverse a long-existing public perception of 'unclean funds vitiating the election campaign'. The truth is that the 'funding' of political parties and 'returns' thereof have been 'unclean' even before and after the 'bonded' days. The unholy nexus between

industrialists and politicians needs to be curbed by better methods.

**P.R.V. Raja,**  
Pandalam, Kerala

There was a time when public servants who accepted and received as little as ₹500 were remanded, convicted, and sent to jail. This led to extreme situations that left their families shattered. But now we live in an age where lawmakers, who are public servants within the ambit of the Prevention of Corruption Act, receive over ₹500 crores and more, yet claim it to be a measure to bring out unaccounted money and strengthen political parties. We have premier bodies such as FICCI, ASSOCHAM and the CII saying that the revelation of data on the

electoral bonds can have 'business repercussions'. Such a stand casts a dark shadow on the business practices of corporate bodies, on the integrity of law makers and donating individuals. The judiciary should stand firm in these testing times. All those who accumulated ill-gotten wealth should face the same consequences as any other individual under hoarding, money laundering and anti-corruption laws.

**A.S. Khan,**  
Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

### The Russian vote

The result in the Russian election was a foregone conclusion. But it says a lot about the decline in/of democracy. It seems that oppression and authoritarianism are thriving — a shocking

development in this age.

**Balagopal Gopinath,**  
Keerikkad, Alappuzha, Kerala

President Vladimir Putin winning another term was always in the offing. Mr. Putin has effectively said that he is the state.

**C.G. Kuriakose,**  
Kothamangalam, Kerala

### A new dawn

The boost to women's cricket in India arrived with the WPL auction. The win in the WPL has significant implications for Indian cricket, akin to the transformative impact of the IPL ('Sport', March 19).

**Vijaykumar H.K.,**  
Raichur, Karnataka

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# Guaranteed MSP is an ethical imperative

As the general elections draw closer, agrarian concerns have once again taken centre stage. Farmers from the heartland of the Green Revolution have travelled to the border of the capital to not only voice their distress, but also to shape the electoral discourse. The ruling dispensation, sensing adverse electoral implications, attempted to reach out to the farmers. It said it was ready to procure pulses, maize, and cotton at MSP, but this was contingent upon farmers guaranteeing crop diversification. However, these efforts were rejected as the core issues were not addressed, say farm leaders.

The perennial issue of fair pricing of farm produce reigns supreme, now coupled with calls for legal assurances of Minimum Support Price (MSP). However, beyond mere legal mandates lies the pressing concern of maintaining self-sufficiency in food production and addressing the ongoing challenge of distribution. This underscores the ethical imperative of anchoring a legal guarantee for MSP.

The MSP regime was a vital instrument for ensuring food security in India. Given the unique nature of agriculture, farmers lack the ability to exert significant influence, let alone determine the price of their produce. This constitutes a 'market failure.' Thus, MSP ensures that agricultural commodity prices remain above a predetermined benchmark to facilitate remunerative price discovery.

## Produce and perish trap

The MSP is announced annually for 23 crops covering both the kharif and rabi seasons, well in advance of sowing, with 21 of them being food crops. However, despite the announcements, the implementation of MSP remains poor. Only 6% of farmers, primarily those cultivating paddy and wheat in States such as Punjab, benefit from MSP. Most transactions involving these



**T.N. Prakash Kammardi**

is an agricultural economist and former chairman, Karnataka Agricultural Prices Commission, Government of Karnataka

essential food commodities occur below the MSP, rendering farming economically unviable for the majority of producers in India. As a result, farmers are trapped in a dangerous cycle of produce and perish, leading to crippling debt and deaths by suicide. All these emphasise the pressing need to ensure MSP, including the one recommended by the eminent agricultural scientist M.S. Swaminathan (with a 50% profit margin).

Several articles under the Constitution, as well as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants, support the legal recourse to guaranteeing MSP. According to a recent opinion survey by an English TV channel, 83% of landowners and 77% of farm labourers expressed solidarity with the agitating farmers. Notably, 64% of the public also endorsed the farmers' demand for a legal right to MSP.

Sugarcane growers already benefit from a 'statutory' MSP, which sugar factories strictly adhere to when purchasing cane from farmers. A few years ago, Maharashtra attempted to amend its Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) Act to prevent the purchase of agricultural produce below MSP, but the effort failed due to a lack of political will and a comprehensive strategy. The Karnataka Agricultural Price Commission has laid out a clear roadmap, including potential financial commitments, to ensure a legally binding MSP for crops cultivated in the State. A private member bill on The Farmers' Right to Guaranteed Remunerative MSP for Agricultural Commodities was tabled in Parliament in 2018. The Andhra Pradesh government unveiled a draft bill last year aimed at guaranteeing MSP for crops grown in the State. These efforts show that the objective of establishing a legal recourse to MSP has not emerged suddenly, nor is it impossible to attain.

## The solution

A minor amendment to respective

State APMC Acts or the Centre's Essential Commodities Act would suffice to introduce a law ensuring that no transactions of farmers' produce occur at prices below the MSP. The budget outlay will not be as large as projected if legal recourse to MSP is accompanied by essential backward and forward linkages. Crop planning, market intelligence (including price forecasts), and other pre-sowing measures, along with the establishment of post-harvest infrastructure for efficient storage, transportation, and processing of farm commodities, greatly assist in managing the post-harvest glut in the market. Therefore, a legal route to MSP, complemented by the development of such linkages, would provide protection against "market failures" in addressing the surplus, rather than leading to "market distortion," as claimed by some mainstream economists.

Even enhancing MSP to provide a 50% profit margin over total cost is not challenging, considering that current margins already stand at around 22%. Finally, effective procurement and distribution, as envisaged under the National Food Security Act, 2013, is the most appropriate means to not only ensure MSP but also address hunger and malnutrition.

The PM-AASHA comprises schemes for price support and price deficiency payment, along with incentives to private traders to ensure MSP. While it possessed all the necessary elements as precursors to guarantee the MSP, its side-lining in policy circles highlights how political expediency rules the roost.

At present, farmers hardly get 30% of the price paid by the consumers; this will increase if MSP is guaranteed. Establishing a legally binding MSP will anger intermediaries as their share will get reduced. Often, government intervention, and particularly a legally binding MSP, is deemed a problem. It is this adherence to free market dogma that is preventing a just solution to the ongoing crisis in farmer incomes.

# The fight for minority votes

How the Congress and CPI(M) are trying to outdo each other

## STATE OF PLAY

G. Anand  
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The Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Congress are fighting for Christian and Muslim votes in Kerala. The two communities, which constitute 26.56% and 18.38% of Kerala's electorate, respectively, could play a critical role in determining the outcome of the Lok Sabha elections in the State.

Christians and Muslims have rarely behaved as a homogenous voting bloc in Kerala. However, the concerns of the leaders of these communities about the continuing dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the country may galvanise these groups to vote in a more focused and uniform pattern compared to the Lok Sabha polls of 2019.

The Samastha Kerala Jemiyathul Ulama, an influential Sunni organisation, and the Latin Catholic Church have expressed their worry about the divisive politics playing out in the country.

Taking a potshot at the Congress, the Samastha published an editorial in Suprabhaatham, the organisation's mouthpiece, expressing "deep fear" at the "overnight" shift of those who had earlier endorsed the secular and democratic legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, to the Sangh Parivar. The defections of Anil K. Antony, son of former Congress Chief Minister A.K. Antony, and Padmaja Ky. Venugopal, daughter of former Congress Chief Minister K. Karunakaran, to the BJP triggered the opinion piece. The editorial particularly expressed anguish at the fact that they had chosen the BJP over secular parties including the CPI(M).

Soon after, the Latin Catholic Church urged the laity to pray and fast on March 22 as a peaceful form of protest and social action against the rising tide of religious bigotry against minorities. The Church's message seemed to support the INDIA bloc's narrative that the Sangh Parivar poses a threat to secularism, democracy, and diversity.

While the Congress and the CPI(M) are INDIA bloc partners at the national level, they are political rivals in Kerala. In an attempt to outpace the Congress in its minority outreach, the CPI(M) announced last week that Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan would lead huge rallies across Kerala to mobilise public opinion against the Centre's decision to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019, as well as the attacks on Christians in Manipur.

Mr. Vijayan pointedly accused the Congress of pussy-footing around the BJP's move to implement what he termed the "patently anti-Muslim" CAA. He alleged that Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, have been muted in their opposition to the divisive law. In a move likely to have electoral ramifications, Mr. Vijayan also hastily withdrew the cases that his government had registered against anti-CAA protesters in 2019 and against Latin Catholic Church-backed people who had protested against the construction

of the International Seaport at Vizhinjam in 2022. The cases were sore points between the LDF government and the minority communities.

The Congress is yet to announce a counter to the CPI(M)'s minority outreach. Nevertheless, it remains confident that its closest coalition ally, the Indian Union Muslim League, will attract Muslim votes for the United Democratic Front (UDF). Moreover, the Congress believes that Latin Catholics, who constitute 13% of Christians in Kerala, will continue to support it, despite the CPI(M)'s and BJP's repeated efforts to reach out to the community.

Simultaneously, the Congress has attempted to dent the CPI(M)'s staunch anti-BJP image by alleging that both the parties are in cahoots in Kerala. The Leader of the Opposition, V.D. Satheesan, accused a top Left Democratic Front (LDF) leader, E.P. Jayarajan, and Union Minister Rajeesh Chandrasekhar, of being stakeholders in an Ayurveda resort in Kannur. Mr. Satheesan alleged that the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax Department had dropped their investigations into the supposedly dubious sources of funding for the Ayurveda resort after Mr. Chandrasekhar acquired stakes in the institution. In return, the State government too dropped important cases against BJP leaders, he claimed.

In Kerala, given the social, educational, regional, political and economic differences among them, minorities have never voted in a homogeneous manner. However, the BJP's reported ascendancy in the State might alter this voting behaviour. Whether the Congress or the CPI(M) will benefit more from this remains to be seen.

# Bonds in buckets: who got how much in the last two years

A look at the donors and political parties that encashed electoral bonds in four periods between July 2, 2021 and January 24, 2024

## Details of bond purchases and encashments

The Data Point published on March 19 listed the companies that purchased bonds and the parties that encashed them in the first two years between April 12, 2019 and April 19, 2021. The following tables look at the share of bonds purchased and encashed in the last two years between July 2, 2021 and January 24, 2024, for which information is currently available in the public domain. On March 14, the Election Commission of India disclosed the list of donors who purchased electoral bonds and the political parties that encashed them. On Monday, the Supreme Court asked the State Bank of India to make a "complete disclosure" of electoral bonds data including their unique hidden serial numbers by Thursday. The numbers that link the purchasers and the donors are awaited. By **Rebecca Rose Varghese** and **Gautam Doshi**

**July 2021-January 2022:** The table looks at the companies/individuals with the highest share in total electoral bonds purchased between July 2, 2021 and January 10, 2022. It also looks at the parties that got the highest share of the electoral bonds encashed between July 9, 2021 and January 24, 2022. This period coincides with the State elections in Uttarakhand, Punjab, U.P., Goa and Manipur

Companies that bought electoral bonds	% of total purchase
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	22%
Qwik Supply Chain	11.9%
MEIL*	8.6%
Vedanta	5%
Haldia Energy	4.3%
Essel Mining & Industries	2.5%
DLF Commercial Developers	2.5%
MKJ Enterprises	2.5%
Prarambh Securities	2.1%
Chennai Green Woods	2%
SWAL Corporation	1.5%
S N Mohanty (Individual)	1.5%
Modern Road Makers	1.3%
IFB Agro Industries	1.2%
Rashmi Metaliks	1.1%
Torrent Power	1%
Dhariwal Infrastructure	1%
Parties that encashed electoral bonds	% of total encashed
Bharatiya Janata Party	37.5%
All India Trinamool Congress	24%
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	10.1%
Congress	9%
Biju Janata Dal	8.8%
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	7.7%
Shiv Sena	1.5%

\* Future Gaming and Hotel Services bought ₹435 crore worth of electoral bonds (22% in total purchases in the period), followed by Qwik Supply Chain (11.9%) and Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd.\* (8.6%). In case of parties, the BJP encashed ₹742.2 crore worth of electoral bonds in the period (37.5% of the bonds encashed), followed by the AITC (24%)

**April 2022-April 2023:** The table looks at the companies/individuals with the highest share in total electoral bonds purchased between April 2, 2022 and April 12, 2023. It also looks at the parties that got the highest share of the electoral bonds encashed between April 6, 2022 and April 26, 2023. This period coincides with the State elections in Himachal, Gujarat, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Karnataka

Companies that bought electoral bonds	% of total purchase
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	12.7%
MEIL*	8.8%
Vedanta	4.1%
Qwik Supply Chain	3.3%
Haldia Energy	3.2%
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	2.6%
Dhariwal Infrastructure	1.7%
MKJ Enterprises	1.6%
Birla Carbon India	1.5%
United Phosphorus India	1.3%
Essel Mining & Industries	1.3%
Chennai Green Woods	1.3%
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories	1.2%
Rithwik Projects	1.2%
DLF Commercial Developers	1.1%
Parties that encashed electoral bonds	% of total encashed
Bharatiya Janata Party	43.2%
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	16.5%
All India Trinamool Congress	13.6%
Congress	9.6%
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	6%
Biju Janata Dal	4.4%
YSR Congress Party	2.3%
Telugu Desam Party	1.8%
Aam Aadmi Party	1.2%

\* Future Gaming and Hotel Services bought ₹478 crore worth of electoral bonds (12.7% in total purchases in the period), followed by Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd.\* (8.8%) and Vedanta (4.1%). In case of parties, the BJP encashed ₹1,628 crore worth of electoral bonds in the period (43.2% of the bonds encashed), followed by the BRS (16.5%)

**July 2023-November 2023:** The table looks at the companies/individuals with the highest share in total electoral bonds purchased between July 3, 2023 and November 20, 2023. It also looks at the parties that got the highest share of the electoral bonds encashed between July 7, 2023 and December 4, 2023. This period coincides with the State elections in Chhattisgarh, Mizoram, M.P., Rajasthan and Telangana

Companies that bought electoral bonds	% of total purchase
MEIL*	7.9%
Western UP Power Transmission Co.	6.4%
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	4.5%
Utkal Alumina International	3.4%
Jindal Steel and Power	3.3%
Bharti Airtel	3.1%
Vedanta	2.4%
MKJ Enterprises	2.3%
B G Shirke Construction Technology	2.1%
Divis Laboratories	1.9%
Qwik Supply Chain	1.7%
Birla Carbon India	1.7%
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	1.6%
Haldia Energy	1.5%
Avees Trading Finance	1.4%
Sasmal Infrastructure	1.2%
Parties that encashed electoral bonds	% of total encashed
Bharatiya Janata Party	38.7%
Congress	20.3%
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	13.6%
All India Trinamool Congress	9.9%
Biju Janata Dal	7.8%
YSR Congress Party	2.8%
Shiv Sena	2.4%
Rashtriya Janata Dal	1.8%

\* Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Ltd.\* bought ₹235 crore worth of electoral bonds (7.9% in total purchases in the period), followed by its subsidiary Western UP Power Transmission (6.4%) and Future Gaming and Hotel Services (4.5%). In case of parties, the BJP encashed ₹1,149.3 crore worth of electoral bonds in the period (38.7% of the bonds encashed), followed by the Congress at 20.3%

**January 2024:** The table looks at the companies/individuals with the highest share in total electoral bonds purchased between January 3, 2024 and January 11, 2024. It also looks at the parties that got the highest share of the electoral bonds encashed between January 8, 2024 and January 24, 2024, just a few months before the Lok Sabha elections

Companies that bought electoral bonds	% of total purchase
Future Gaming and Hotel Services	11%
Rungta Sons Pvt. Ltd.	8.7%
Bharti Airtel	8.7%
Shirdi Sai Electricals	7%
Haldia Energy	6.1%
Western Up Power Transmission Co.	5.2%
Torrent Pharmaceuticals	4.5%
Torrent Power	4.4%
B G Shirke Construction Technology	4.4%
Natco Pharma	3.7%
Genus Power Infrastructures	2.6%
TVS Motor Company	1.7%
IFB Agro Industries	1.7%
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories	1.7%
Bharat Biotech International	1.7%
Sasmal Infrastructure	1.6%
Parties that encashed electoral bonds	% of total encashed
Bharatiya Janata Party	35.4%
All India Trinamool Congress	22.9%
Telugu Desam Party	20.7%
Congress	6.3%
Shiv Sena	4.4%
Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam	3.5%
Jana Sena Party	3.0%
Rashtriya Janata Dal	2.6%

\* Future Gaming and Hotel Services bought ₹63 crore worth of electoral bonds (11% in total purchases in the period), followed by Rungta Sons Pvt. Ltd. (8.7%) and Bharti Airtel (8.7%). In case of parties, the BJP encashed ₹202 crore worth of electoral bonds in the period (35.4% of the bonds encashed), followed by the AITC (22.9%)

## FROM THE ARCHIVES



FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1974

## Wilson Govt. wins crucial vote

London, March 19: A dazzling parliamentary performance by the Employment Secretary, Mr. Michael Foot, and a climb down by the Tory leaders over the challenge to the Wilson Government on pay policy enabled the Labour Party to win a crucial vote in the House of Commons last night. The Tory leaders decided not to press their critical amendment to the Queen's speech only two hours before the crucial vote was due to take place.

Mr. Foot a brilliant parliamentarian and a captivating orator came out with what amounted to a guarantee that statutory control of pay would be retained for the time being. The Tory MPs were awed by Mr. Foot's devastating speech which, as one observer put it, was like "a gorgeous though perilous fireworks display." Both Tory and Liberal leaders came out of it badly bruised and there was no denying that many Tories felt the entire episode was badly handled by Mr. Edward Heath.

Though cold political logic prompted Labour leaders to delight at the spectacle of Tory ranks being in disarray and Liberals thoroughly confused in terms of hard economic reality the Wilson Government is still walking on a tight political rope. Mr. Foot may be a gifted man but it does not mean that he will be able to contain the challenge from the trade unions. It remains to be seen for how long Britain can remain quiet, devoid of industrial strife.

Labour's confidence to survive and perhaps govern has been boosted a little and hence Mr. Wilson will mark his own time to call a general election for a respectable majority.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1924

## Mrs. Naidu in South Africa

Cape Town, March 19: The City Hall was crowded on the occasion of Indian welcome to Mrs. Sarojini Naidu with the result that she was obliged to address an overflow meeting in a minor hall. The meeting presented a striking appearance owing to hundreds of Fezzes on the floor of the hall while the women were accommodated in bays above. The proceedings were most enthusiastic. Mrs. Naidu was supported on the platform by a number of Cape Labour Legislators and other Europeans, besides representatives of practically every Indian or coloured association from the four provinces of the union.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

**NEWS IN NUMBERS**

**Amount raised by NHIT to acquire road from NHAJ**

**16,000** in ₹ crore. The National Highways Infra Trust (NHIT) wants to acquire nearly 900 km of road from the National Highway Authority of India. PTI

**Amount 17 States borrowed from the market**

**50,200** In ₹ crore. In the largest weekly auction ever, 17 States have mopped up debt, 81% higher than ₹27,500 crore indicated in the auction calendar. PTI

**The worth of debt bonds ATC will convert into equity**

**1,440** in ₹ crore. Mobile tower company ATC has opted for converting debt bonds issued by Vodafone Idea into equity, a regulatory filing said on Tuesday. PTI

**Illegal profits made from forced labour every year**

**236** in \$ billion. Illegal profits from forced labour worldwide rose by 37% from \$64 billion in 2021, with sexual exploitation responsible for three-fourths of it. AP

**Number of places Sharath Kamal jumped in ITTF rankings**

**54** Veteran Indian table tennis player Sharath Kamal on Tuesday gained as many as 54 places to jump to the 34th spot in the ITTF World Rankings. PTI  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Decoding electoral bonds data

The SBI has submitted the data on purchases and encashments of electoral bonds. The details disclosed so far includes the date and amount of each transaction alongside the names of each purchaser and encasher. However, in the absence of the unique alphanumeric numbers, it is impossible to establish who has paid whom and when

**ECONOMIC NOTES**

**Prasenjit Bose**

The first tranche of data on electoral bonds disclosed by the Election Commission of India on March 14, 2024, under the directions of the Supreme Court, provides an incomplete picture of the transactions that have taken place between various companies and individuals on the one hand and registered political parties on the other, between April 12, 2019 and January 24, 2024. The apex court has now directed the State Bank of India (SBI) to ensure “complete disclosure of all details in its possession” by March 21, 2024 including “the alphanumeric number and serial number of the Electoral Bonds which were purchased and redeemed”.

**Unique alphanumeric numbers**  
The SBI has recorded every detail of 18,871 purchases and 20,421 encashments of electoral bonds between April 2019 and January 2024. However, in the absence of the unique alphanumeric numbers, only the total amount of electoral bonds purchased by each company or individual can be estimated as also the total amount of electoral bonds each political party has encashed; but it is impossible to establish who has paid whom and when.

The disclosure of the unique alphanumeric numbers becomes imperative because the apex court has struck down the entire electoral bond scheme as unconstitutional. It is only natural that the very large sum of ₹12,155.1 crore worth of electoral bonds, purchased by corporate groups, companies and individuals between April 2019 and January 2024 are matched accurately with ₹12,769.08 crore total worth of electoral bonds encashed by political parties during the same period. In other words, the people need to know which political party got how much from whom, and on which date(s). No further inquiry or investigation can be conducted into these “unconstitutional” transactions, without linking the purchasers of the electoral bonds with the encashers.

**Information asymmetry**  
The Union Home Minister has countered the embarrassment caused to the government by the disclosure of the BJP accounting for ₹6,060 crore, that is over 47% of the total amount of electoral bonds encashed, by pointing at the amounts encashed by other Opposition parties (Table 1).

The problem is that the total amounts encashed in electoral bonds by the various parties neither reveal much, nor can they be cited as actionable evidence of corruption and malfeasance. It is only through an analysis of the granular details of the electoral bonds, like their amounts, dates of purchase and encashment and the linked identities of the purchaser and encasher of each bond that possibilities of *quid pro quo* can be hypothesised, investigated and legally established as evidence. This explains the reluctance of the SBI to reveal the unique identification numbers of the electoral bonds. The political strategy of the ruling party appears to be simple: stall any investigation or legal proceeding against any transaction till the end of the election campaign.

The Union Government, as the owner of the SBI, is already in possession of the entire electoral bond database, which implies that BJP – as the ruling party – has access to complete information in this regard. Both the Opposition parties and the electorate, however, do not. Each

**Table 1: Encashers of electoral bonds (political parties)**

Encashing party name	Total amount of encashed electoral bonds from April 12, 2019 To January 24, 2024 (in ₹ crore)	% of total
Bharatiya Janata Party	6,060.5	47.5
All India Trinamool Congress	1,609.5	12.6
President, All India Congress Committee	1,421.9	11.1
Bharat Rashtra Samithi	1,214.7	9.5
Biju Janata Dal	775.5	6.1
DMK Party In Parliament	639.0	5.0
YSR Congress Party	337.0	2.6
Telugu Desam Party	218.9	1.7
Shiv Sena (Political Party)	158.4	1.2
Rashtriya Janata Dal	72.5	0.6
Aam Aadmi Party	65.5	0.5
Other parties	195.8	1.5
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>12,769.1</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 3: The electoral bonds purchased by corporate groups and companies under investigation by central agencies**

Corporate Group/Company	Total amount of electoral bonds purchased (in ₹ crore)	Action by central agencies (IT DEPT./ED/CBI)
Future Gaming And Hotel Services Private Limited	1,368.0	ED initiated investigation under PMLA and attached assets in July 2019; subsequent ED raids on April 2022 and May 2023
Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (Meil)	966.0	IT raid in October 2019; ED investigation initiated
MK Jalan Group	616.9	ED search in February, 2021
Vedanta Group	402.4	Under ED investigation for bribery charges since mid-2018; CBI investigation since 2022
Haldia Energy Limited	377.0	CBI investigation since March 2020
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	162.0	Search by IT Department in December 2020
DLF Commercial Developers Limited	130.0	CBI raid in January 2019; ED search in November 2023
Jindal Steel And Power Limited	123.0	ED search in JSPL's premises in April 2022
Chennai Green Woods Private Limited	105.0	IT raid in July 2021
Rashmi Group	90.5	ED froze bank accounts after conducting multiple raids in July 2022
Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd	84.0	IT raid in November 2023
Hetero Pharma Group	60.0	IT raid in October 2021
NCC Limited	60.0	IT raid in November 2022
DIVI S Laboratories Limited	55.0	IT raid in January 2019
Aurobindo Pharma Limited	52.0	ED arrests Managing Director on November 10, 2022
United Phosphorus India LLP	50.0	IT raid in January 2020
Shirdi Sai Electricals Ltd	40.0	IT search on December 18, 2023
Kalpataru Projects International Limited	25.5	IT search in August 2023
Hero Motocorp Limited	20.0	IT raid in March 2022; ED raid at Group Chairman's house in August 2023
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,787.3</b>	

political party other than the ruling party, knows about its own transactions only. The voters have no information beyond what has been disclosed by the Election Commission of India. This information asymmetry provides the BJP with an undesired advantage by virtue of its being the ruling incumbent.

This is similar to the non-disclosure of the politically sensitive data on the caste census, which was collected during Census 2011 but has not been released till date. The BJP has utilised the caste census data to its electoral advantage in every election held since May 2014, while the Opposition and citizens have been denied access.

Such abuse of power, through suppression of information and data that are public goods, should be prevented.

**Preliminary analysis**

The data disclosed so far provides ample grounds for suspecting malfeasance. Table 2 provides a list of companies and corporate groups who have purchased electoral bonds worth over ₹100 crore in

total between April 2019 and January 2024, along with a list of individual purchasers of the bonds totalling above ₹5 crore. What stands out from the list are the following:

(a) Some of the largest purchasers of electoral bonds are under investigation by central agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and/or the Income Tax (IT) Department. Table 3 provides a list of 19 such companies which have together purchased ₹4,787.3 crore in bonds; over 39% percent of the total amount.

(b) The names common in Tables 2 and 3 are Future Gaming, Megha Engineering, M K Jalan group, Vedanta Group, Haldia Energy Limited (Sanjiv Goenka Group) etc. If the bulk of the electoral bonds purchased by these companies, which are under investigation by central agencies like ED, CBI or IT department, are found to have been redeemed by the party in power, that is, the BJP, it would imply serious conflict of interest issues and probable *quid pro quo*.

(c) The largest individual purchasers of

**Table 2: The purchasers of electoral bonds**

**(2.1: Corporate companies and individuals who purchased electoral bonds)**

PURCHASERS OF ₹100 CRORE & ABOVE	Number of companies	Total amount (in ₹ crore)	Chairman/Managing Director/Director
Future Gaming And Hotel Services Private Limited	1	1,368.0	Santiago Martin
Megha Engineering and Infrastructures Limited (MEIL)	2	1,186.0	Pamireddy Pitchi Reddy
MK Jalan Group	4	616.9	M. K. Jalan
Sanjiv Goenka Group	6	609.0	Sanjiv Goenka
Aditya Birla Group	7	545.8	Kumar Mangalam Birla
Qwik Supply Chain Private Limited	1	410.0	Vipul Pranlal Mehta, Sridhar Titti, Tapas Mitra
Vedanta Group	1	402.4	Sunil Duggal
Bharti Group	3	247.0	Sunil Bharti Mittal
Jindal Group	5	195.5	Sajjan Jindal
Torrent Group	3	184.0	Sudhir Mehta/ Samir Mehta
DLF Group	3	170.0	Rajib Singh
Yashoda Super Speciality Hospital	1	162.0	Upasana Arora And Prem Narayan Arora
B G Shirke Construction Technology Pvt Limited	1	118.5	Vijay B. Shirke
Avees Trading & Finance Pvt Ltd	1	112.5	Bhal Chandra Khaitan And Ramesh Kumar Saraogi
Chennai Green Woods Private Limited	1	105.0	Rajesh Taraka Dasari And Anil Babu Kolli
Rungta Sons Private Limited	1	100.0	R. C. Rungta
<b>a) Total for purchasers of ₹100 crore and above</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>6,532.6</b>	
<b>b) Total for purchasers below ₹100 crore</b>	<b>1,172</b>	<b>5,622.5</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL (a + b)</b>	<b>1,213</b>	<b>12,155.1</b>	

**2.2: Individual purchasers of electoral bonds**

PURCHASERS OF ₹5 CRORE & ABOVE	Total amount (in ₹ crore)	Corporate group affiliation	Designation
Lakshmi Niwas Mittal	35.0	Arcelormittal	Executive chairman
K R Raja JT	25.0	Reliance Group	Former board member
Laxmidas Vallabhadas Merchant and Asmita Merchant	25.0	Reliance Group	'Group controller' (self-description in linkedin)
Rahul Bhatia	20.0	Indigo	Promoter and managing director
Rajesh Mannalal Agrawal and Smriti Agrawal and Yogesh Mannalal Agrawal	17.5	Ajanta Group	Managing director
Inder Thakurdas Jaisinghani	14.0	Polycab Group	Chairman and managing director
Rahul Jagannath Joshi and Harmesh Rahul Joshi	20.0	Om Group	Managing director
Raju Kumar Sharma	10.0	N.A.	N.A.
Saurabh Gupta	10.0	N.A.	N.A.
Ashok Patni, Suresh Patni, Vivek Patni, Vineet Patni and Kanwar Lal Patni	10.0	Wonder Cement Group	Promoters
Anita Hemant Shah	8.2	N.A.	N.A.
Kiran Mazumdar Shaw	6.0	Biocon	Executive chairperson
Manvar Savabhai	5.5	N.A.	N.A.
Indrani Patnaik	5.0	Ocean Capital Market Ltd.	Director of various Companies
Induru Sudhakara Reddy	5.0	Bi Mining Pvt Ltd & Others	Director of various companies
Mahabir Banka	5.0	Various Company Affiliation	Promoter and director of various companies
Purshottam Lal Gupta	5.0	N.A.	N.A.
Raunak Gupta	5.0	N.A.	N.A.
Sudhakar Kancharla	5.0	Yoda Pharmacy India Pvt. Ltd.	Additional director
Tavinder Singh Kohli (late)	5.0	Guru Nanak Institutions	Chairman
Vikas Parasrampur	5.0	Voler Cars	CEO
<b>TOTAL FOR PURCHASERS OF ₹5 CRORE &amp; ABOVE</b>	<b>246.2</b>		

electoral bonds are either heads of corporate groups and companies or their employees. It is clear that corporate houses and companies have tried to conceal their identities by deploying individual frontmen or making large donations in multiple small tranches. This generates suspicion of large scale bribery, money laundering and other forms of *quid pro quo*, like award of lucrative project contracts and policy changes in

exchange for party donations.

As the party in power at the Centre and the largest redeemer of electoral bonds, the BJP has much to answer for. The Modi government has tried to evade such accountability during the Lok Sabha election campaign, first by delaying the disclosure of data and then by withholding the unique alphanumeric numbers of the electoral bonds.

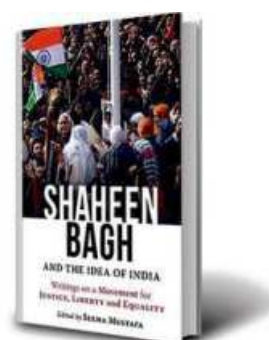
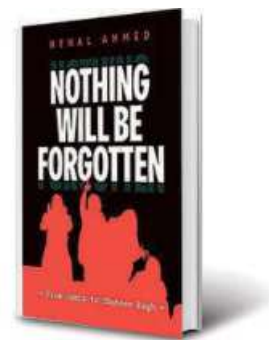
The author is an economist and activist.



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FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

“Ms. S. Hazarika, Jorhat, wants to know the meaning of the idiom ‘to fall between two stools.’”

“It means ‘to be unable to decide between two alternatives and so to be unable to profit from either.’ It is neither verse nor prose. It falls between two stools. The origin of the expression is found in a party game called ‘Choosing the Queen of Sheba.’ A carpet is very tightly stretched between two stools. Each stool is occupied by a lady. A person is asked to come into the room, sit on the carpet and decide which of the two ladies is the Queen of Sheba. After the person steps on the carpet, the ladies abruptly rise, the carpet collapses making the victim fall to the ground. This is the source of the idiom. Not all agree that this is the source of the idiom.”

“Ms. Kulkarni wants to know the difference between ‘proclivity’ and ‘propensity.’”

“‘Propensity’ is ‘a natural inclination or tendency.’ One has a propensity ‘for,’ ‘to’ or ‘towards’ something, it can be used with good or bad things.

He has a propensity for classical music.

‘Proclivity’ means ‘innate or inherent inclination.’ But it is always used with something bad.

He is notorious for his sexual proclivities.

‘Proclivity’ can be used with ‘for,’ ‘to’ or ‘towards.’ ‘Propensity’ and ‘proclivity’ apparently mean the same thing. But while ‘propensity’ goes with good and bad tendencies, ‘proclivity’ goes only with bad tendencies.”

“Mr. C.A. Reddi wants to know the exact meaning of the word ‘lewd.’”

“‘Lewd’ means ‘indecent, obscene, lustful.’

He considers it a lewd novel.

She thinks that he has a permanent lewd expression on his face.

‘Lewd’ rhymes with ‘rude’ and ‘feud.’ In American English, it rhymes with ‘food,’ ‘mood.’”

“Mr. T.L. Srinivasan, Chintadripet, Madras, wants to know whether the following is correct: Come on in.”

“‘Come in’ means ‘come inside, enter the room.’ ‘Come on’ is used to convey one’s enthusiasm, encouragement. Come on in. In this, there is a tone of encouragement, a certain warmth.”

“Mr. V.H. Krishna Prakash wants to know the meaning of ‘apple of discord.’”

“‘The apple of discord’ means ‘the cause of an argument or a quarrel.’ An apple of discord is a bone of contention. Eris, the Greek goddess of Discord, was angry at not being invited to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. Deciding to create discord among the wedding guests, she threw into their midst a golden apple marked ‘for the fairest’. When Hera, Pallas Athena and Aphrodite put in their claims for the apple, Paris was asked to act as judge and he awarded the apple to Aphrodite. The other two goddesses became furious and made up their minds to wreak vengeance on him. The fall of Troy is attributed to their spite. From this story, we get the idiom ‘the apple of discord’ or ‘an apple of discord.’

The apple of discord in the party is his selection for a post in the party.”

Published in The Hindu on June 25, 1991.

# The CAA protests and the birth of the Shaheen Bagh movement

Books document a unique, peaceful resistance, when women came out of their homes to register their protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act. The women took to the streets, pointing out that the CAA has the potential to disproportionately impact Muslims residing in India

Ziya Us Salam

Will December 15, 2019, even old residents of Delhi did not have much of an idea about Shaheen Bagh. Many had never heard of it; others just about knew its location. It all changed one cold December evening as news came of alleged police atrocities on Jamia Millia Islamia students protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in the vicinity. The women of Shaheen Bagh, living around a kilometre from Jamia, were galvanised into action. The CAA had to be opposed, peacefully, persistently. To the surprise of everybody, leading the protests were elderly women of Shaheen Bagh, women in their 70s and 80s, who had never stepped out of their homes. But here they were, holding the Constitution of India in one hand, and copies of the Quran in the other to assert their status as equal citizens of the land.

Women at the centre

The Shaheen Bagh protest soon became a movement which not only spread across the country but also got international attention. The Dadis (grandmothers) of Shaheen Bagh even made it to Time magazine. Reams began to be written on the determined struggle of the Shaheen Bagh women against the CAA, which allows religious minorities of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to get citizenship in India. Among the first books was Shaheen Bagh and the Idea of India, edited by veteran journalist Seema Mustafa, and published by Speaking

Tiger, and Shaheen Bagh: From a Protest to a Movement, published by Bloomsbury.

Mustafa’s book was notable for essays by many women and key Muslim observers who argued that the CAA-NRC (National Register of Citizens)-NPR (National Population Register) combine affected the citizenship of Indian Muslims most strongly, and women in the community were even more vulnerable, as they rarely had any land documents under their name.

Among the essayists were Mustafa Quraishi, Zeyad Masroor Khan and Seemi Pasha besides human rights activists and intellectuals like Harsh Mander, Nayantara Sehgal, Apoorvanand, Zoya Hassan and Nandita Haksar. Each essay opened a little window to the world of Shaheen Bagh protesters, showing the mettle of the women, untrained to lead a protest against a new law, yet able to provide leadership at a critical juncture. Theirs was probably the first movement led by Muslim women since Independence. They had not come out on the streets to protest against the Shah Bano case or the Babri Masjid demolition. They had kept their counsel even on the instant triple talaq case. However, here they were, fighting for Article 14 of the Constitution, sitting under the open sky in the chill of Delhi’s winters. Every day began with a rendition of ‘Sare Jahan Se Achcha’. Every midnight arrived with the national anthem, ‘Jana Gana Mana’. Mustafa’s book was a richly elevating experience, one that quietly exposed the double standards of larger society and

polity. Thanks to the Gandhian struggle, Shaheen Bagh became a pilgrimage spot for all those who swear by the idea of India. And the hijab-clad women of Shaheen Bagh became the unlikely revolutionaries.

Visual document

After these two books on Shaheen Bagh in the summer of 2020, came three others, between 2021 and 2022. There was a visual chronicle in the form of Aasif Mujtaba and Mohammed Meharban’s Hum Dekhenge, Protest and Pogrom: A Photo Document. The book, which had a foreword by noted legal eagle Prashant Bhushan, came with limited but engaging text, and photographs which documented the movement with many heroes as well as some intrepid victims. It had a photograph of some 40,000 women celebrating Republic Day with not an inch of space left at Shaheen Bagh. It also had the picture of the nephew of Mudasir Khan crying before the body of his uncle who succumbed to injuries he suffered during the 2020 riots in north east Delhi.

Then came Nehal Ahmed’s Nothing Will be Forgotten: From Jamia to Shaheen Bagh (LeftWord Books) which was an account of the police action at Jamia Millia Islamia University. Ahmed, a PhD scholar at Jamia, was present on campus when a completely peaceful protest site soon started resembling a war zone. His was a moving account of students shattered by violence on their campus, yet finding creative ways of resistance against the discriminatory law which made religion

the benchmark of providing or denying citizenship to those coming from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh; all but Muslims were welcome under the new law. Ahmed managed to come up with a snapshot of a moment in history.

Props of a protest

A book written in Hindi, Shaheen Bagh: Loktantra ki Nayee Karvat, by Bhasha Singh garnered attention for its immaculate detailing and persuasive research. Bhasha’s book, published by Rajkamal Prakashan, brought to the reader the rich Urdu vocabulary and poetry used by protesters of Shaheen Bagh, their abiding pride in the national flag, their ability to educate the masses about the pitfalls of CAA-NPR-NRC with the use of a mock detention centre, and a library on the pavement at the protest site.

It recounted too how the women gave space to freedom fighters of all hues on their stage yet managed to keep politicians and clerics at bay.

These books prove that the Shaheen Bagh women may have been forced to retreat to their homes due to the pandemic but they managed to force the government not to issue a notification for the new law for four years – the new Rules for the Citizenship Amendment Act, passed by Parliament in December 2019, were issued on March 11, 2024.

The books are a fine example of literature with social responsibility, when writers stepped out of their little cocoons and into the heat of the battle.

THE DAILY QUIZ

On March 19, Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan was appointed as the Governor of Telangana and Lt. Governor of Puducherry. A quiz on the current Governors

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1

He is the current Governor of one of the States in India. Previously, he served as the Governor of Nagaland and Meghalaya. He has been involved in a constant tussle with the Chief Minister of the State and has been criticised for interfering in the administration of the government. Who is he? He is the Governor of which State?

QUESTION 2

He is the 22nd Governor of one of the States. Previously, he has served the country in various capacities, including as Union Minister of Civil Aviation. Who is he?

QUESTION 3

This man is a retired general officer of the Indian Army who is currently serving as the Governor of one of the northeastern States. Identify him.

QUESTION 4

Acharya Devvrat is the current Governor of Gujarat. He served as the Governor of which other State? He also served as the principal of an educational institution. What type of educational institution was he part of?

QUESTION 5

Tamilisai Soundararajan resigned as the Governor of Telangana on Monday. Apart from her, there are two female Governors currently serving for two different States. Who are they?



Visual question: Identify this Governor and the State. He also achieved a feat after becoming the Governor. What is it? FILE PHOTO

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

1. U.S. President Woodrow Wilson signed this Act on March 19, 1918. It is related to this. Ans: Standard Time Act, Daylight saving time
  2. The war between Argentina and Britain which started on March 19, 1982. Ans: Falkland war
  3. The African country which was suspended from the Commonwealth grouping on March 19, 2002. Ans: Zimbabwe
  4. This British science fiction writer co-wrote 2001: A Space Odyssey. Ans: Arthur C. Clarke
  5. This leader of this former Soviet Republic announced his resignation on March 19, 2019. Ans: Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan
  6. This European investment bank was founded in 1856. Ans: Credit Suisse
- Visual: Name this leader. Ans: Chen Shui-bian, then President of Taiwan
- Early Birds: Prashant Nain| K.N. Viswanathan| Rajmohan V| M. Suresh Kumar

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

Word of the day

Intuition: instinctive knowing (without the use of rational processes)

Synonyms: suspicion, hunch

Usage: He had an intuition that something had gone wrong.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/intuitionpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɪntjuːˈʃjən/, /ɪntjuː-/

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



## MADRID

## Two officers among six killed as truck rams checkpoint in Spain



A freight truck ploughed into a police checkpoint in southern Spain early on Tuesday, killing six people including two officers, the regional government said. Three other people were injured in the accident, which happened on a highway near Los Palacios in Seville province, the government of Andalusia said. **AFP**

## MOSCOW

## Russia to evacuate 9,000 children from Belgorod amid shelling



A Russian border region plans to evacuate about 9,000 children from the area because it is being continuously shelled from the Ukrainian side, an official said on Tuesday. The children are to be moved further east, away from the Ukraine border, the governor of Russia's Belgorod border region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said. **AP**

## BANJUL

## Gambian MPs advance Bill lifting ban on female genital mutilation



Gambian lawmakers voted on Monday to advance to the next parliamentary stage a highly controversial Bill that seeks to lift a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM), which has been in place since 2015. This move could make Gambia the first country in the world to reverse legal protections against the practice. **AFP**

## PESHAWAR

## Pakistan to launch fresh Afghan deportations, say officials



Pakistan will begin a renewed push to deport Afghan migrants from the country next month, officials said on Tuesday. More than 5,00,000 Afghans fled after Islamabad set a November deadline for undocumented migrants to leave or face arrest. Pakistan had defended the crackdown by pointing to security concerns. **AFP**

## Israel may be using starvation as a 'weapon of war', says UN

Without a surge of aid, famine would hit the 3,00,000 people in Gaza's war-battered north by May; people are already eating bird seed, animal fodder, grass and weeds, an OCHA spokesperson says

Agence France-Presse  
GENEVA

The United Nations said on Tuesday that Israel's severe restrictions on aid into war-ravaged Gaza coupled with its military offensive could amount to using starvation as a "weapon of war", which would be a "war crime".

United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk denounced the rampant hunger and looming famine in Gaza.

In a statement slammed by Israel, Mr. Turk said that "the situation of hunger, starvation and famine is a result of Israel's extensive restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid and commercial goods". It was also linked to the "displacement of most of the population, as well as the destruction of crucial civilian infrastructure", he said.

"The extent of Israel's continued restrictions on



Losing hope: Palestinian children waiting to receive food as the conflict between Israel and Hamas continues in Rafah. **REUTERS**

the entry of aid into Gaza, together with the manner in which it continues to conduct hostilities, may amount to the use of starvation as a method of war, which is a war crime."

His spokesperson, Jeremy Laurence, told presspersons in Geneva that the final determination of whether "starvation is being used as a weapon of war" would be determined by a court.

The comments came after a UN-backed food se-



war-battered north by May, it said.

The finding comes just over five months into the Gaza war, which erupted after Hamas's unprecedented October 7 that killed about 1,160 people in Israel, mostly civilians, according to a tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory offensive against Hamas has killed more than 31,800 people, most of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Jens Laerke, spokesperson for the UN humanitarian agency OCHA, pointed to the difficulty of clearly determining if the strict criteria have been met to declare a famine.

"The famine thresholds may already be the case in northern Gaza," he told presspersons, highlighting that for weeks people had already been reduced to eating bird seed, animal fodder, wild grass and weeds.

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## Fighting on halt on border with Pakistan, say Taliban

Agence France-Presse  
KABUL

Fighting has stopped on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border after Pakistani air strikes sparked skirmishes, a Taliban spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Pakistan carried out strikes in the border areas in Khost and Paktika provinces in Afghanistan early on Monday.

Islamabad said it had targeted militants it said were responsible for a recent attack on its soil, but Taliban authorities said eight civilians, all women and children, were killed in the bombardment. Kabul said its border forces retaliated by targeting Pakistani military posts along the border.

Border tensions between the two countries have steadily escalated since the Taliban seized power in 2021. Islamabad has accused Kabul's Taliban of harbouring militant fighters, allowing them to strike on Pakistani soil with impunity. However, Kabul has denied the allegations.

## Blinken stresses 'ironclad' support for the Philippines

Associated Press  
MANILA

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken underscored Washington's "ironclad commitment" on Tuesday to help defend the Philippines in case of an armed attack against its forces after clashes between Chinese and Filipino coast guards in the disputed South China Sea recently turned more hostile.

Mr. Blinken, the latest high-level official to visit the United States treaty ally, met his Philippine counterpart Enrique Manalo on Tuesday before separately meeting President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. in Manila.

President Joe Biden will host Mr. Marcos and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in a White House summit in April. The three are likely to discuss growing concerns over increasingly aggressive Chinese actions in the South China Sea and North Korea's nuclear program.

"We stand with the Philippines and stand by our ironclad defence commitments, including under the



Antony Blinken

Mutual Defence Treaty," Mr. Blinken said in a news conference with Mr. Manalo.

## Several face-offs

The Chinese coast guard blocked and used water cannons against Philippine vessels in a confrontation two weeks ago that slightly injured a Filipino admiral and four of his sailors near the disputed Second Thomas Shoal. The March 5 face-off in the high seas also caused two minor collisions between Chinese and Philippine vessels.

The Second Thomas Shoal, which is occupied by a small Philippine Navy contingent but surrounded by Chinese coast guard ships and other allied ves-

sels, was the site of several tense skirmishes between Chinese and Philippine coast guard ships in the past year.

Mr. Blinken renewed a warning on Tuesday that the U.S. is obligated under a 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty to defend the Philippines if Filipino forces, ships or aircraft come under an armed attack anywhere in the South China Sea.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian rejected Mr. Blinken's comments on Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

Both Mr. Blinken and Mr. Manalo described their countries' treaty alliance as being on "hyper-drive," but acknowledged that more could be done. They said efforts to shore up defence ties were not aimed against any country.

Beijing has repeatedly said that Mr. Marcos' decision to allow the expansion of American military presence in the Philippines could undermine the security of China and the region.

## 'Jews who vote for Democrats hate Israel'

Associated Press  
NEW YORK

Former U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday charged that Jews who vote for Democrats "hate Israel" and hate "their religion," igniting a firestorm of criticism from the White House and Jewish leaders.

Mr. Trump, in an interview, had been asked about Democrats' growing criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his handling of the war in Gaza as the civilian death toll continues to mount.

"I actually think they hate Israel," Mr. Trump responded.

Mr. Trump, who last week became the Republi-



Donald Trump

can Party's presumptive nominee, went on to charge: "Any Jewish person that votes for Democrats hates their religion. They hate everything about Israel and they should be ashamed of themselves."

The comments sparked immediate backlash from the White House.

## Dance to trance



Extreme devotion: A Balinese man jabs himself with a "keris", a traditional dagger, to perform "ngurek" or a self-stabbing ritual during a traditional ceremony at a temple in Kesiman in Denpasar on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. **AFP**

## Hong Kong passes new national security law

Associated Press  
HONG KONG

Hong Kong lawmakers unanimously approved a new national security law on Tuesday that grants the government more power to quash dissent, widely seen as the latest step in a sweeping political crackdown that was triggered by pro-democracy protests in 2019.

The legislature passed the Safeguarding National Security Bill during a special session that lasted on Tuesday. It comes on top of a similar law imposed by Beijing four years ago, which has already largely silenced opposition voices in the financial hub.

Hong Kong's Legislative

Council, which is packed with Beijing loyalists following an electoral overhaul, rushed the law through to approval. After the vote, Hong Kong leader John Lee said that the law would take effect on Saturday.

The new law threatens stringent penalties for a wide range of actions authorities call threats to national security, with the most severe - including treason and insurrection - punishable by life imprisonment. Lesser offences, including the possession of seditious publications, could also lead to several years in jail. Some provisions allow criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

## Bolivia seizes \$450 mn of cocaine in second-biggest drug seizure

Reuters  
LA PAZ

Bolivian police have carried out the second-largest drug bust in the country's history, seizing more than 7.2 tonnes of cocaine destined for Belgium with a street value of nearly half a billion U.S. dollars, the Interior Minister said.

The operation was carried out in Bolivia's highland region of Pisisa, on the border with Chile. The drugs were hidden in two

## It was hidden in two trucks transporting scrap iron for export to Europe through Chilean ports

trucks transporting scrap iron for export to Europe through Chilean ports on the Pacific.

Interior Minister Eduardo del Castillo reported that the seller of the drugs had fled the country to the United States, which he blamed on information be-

ing leaked from the prosecutor's office to the media.

In January, Bolivian police carried out the country's biggest anti-drug operation by seizing more than 8 tonnes of cocaine.

Bolivia is one of the world's top producers of coca, the raw ingredient used to make cocaine. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has noted a significant rise in shipments of the drug from the "Southern Cone" of South America, often to Europe.

## Russia gets new Navy chief after Black Sea fleet suffers setbacks in Ukrainian attacks

Agence France-Presse  
MOSCOW

Russia has replaced the head of its Navy, state media confirmed on Tuesday, after reports the previous naval chief had been sacked for repeatedly losing Black Sea warships to Ukrainian attacks.

The former commander of Russia's Northern Fleet Alexander Moiseyev has been appointed acting commander-in-chief, replacing outgoing Admiral

Nikolai Yevmenov, who had been in post since May 2019, the RIA news agency reported.

"Moiseyev was introduced as the Russian Navy's acting commander-in-chief at a ceremony," the agency said.

The Kremlin last week refused to comment on Mr. Moiseyev's appointment, which marks the biggest shake-up in Russia's military top brass in months.

Ukrainian forces claim to have destroyed more



Alexander Moiseyev

than two dozen Russian ships since the conflict began in February 2022, in-

cluding a military patrol boat earlier this month.

The sinkings have been an embarrassment for Moscow, which has been forced to move boats from its historic Sevastopol naval base in Crimea to the port of Novorossiysk, further east.

Russia's Black Sea woes come in stark contrast to its land offensive in east Ukraine, where its forces have advanced in recent months after over a year of deadlocked fighting.

## U.K. to host European leaders in July

Reuters  
LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak will host European leaders at a meeting of the European Political Community at Blenheim Palace on July 18, the government said on Tuesday.

Mr. Sunak also said last week he would not hold a general election in early May, in the strongest indication yet that the national vote would take place later this year.





A view of the archaeological site of Ani ruins. AFP

## A city that could bridge Turkiye and Armenia's division

Agence France-Presse  
KARS

"Look at this stone bridge," said writer Vedat Akcayoz pointing to the crumbling stumps of a 10th-century span over the Arpacay River that marks the closed border between Turkiye and Armenia.

"The fish under the bridge, are they Turkish or Armenian?"

The spectacular ruined city of Ani stands on one of the world's most sensitive borders, dividing two countries daggers drawn over their painful past. Deserted now amid snow-capped peaks, Ani was once the capital of a mediaeval Armenian kingdom before it fell to the Seljuks in 1064, the first city the Turks took as they swept into Anatolia. Their sultan Alparslan converted its cathedral into his "conquest mosque". But its sack by the Mongols and an earthquake sent Ani into terminal decline.

"This is the land conquered by our ancestors," said Ziya Polat, governor of the nearby Turkish city of Kars. "Sultan Alparslan's first Friday prayer, the first Turkish bazaar are all here," he added.

With such symbolic importance to both sides, historians and officials hope restoring the UNESCO World Heritage site might ease relations poisoned by the mass killing of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during World War I, which Turkiye refuses to recognise as genocide.

Mr. Akcayoz, who wrote a book on the ruins, said Ani is "humanity's common heritage". "Ani was Zoroastrian, Ani was Christian, Ani was Muslim, Ani was yours, Ani was ours," he said.

For years Ani was off-limits for tourists. But authorities are now keen to promote its haunting beauty.

# Jan. 6 attack, a cornerstone of Donald Trump's bid for the U.S. White House

The revisionist history of January 6 remains a rally centerpiece of Trump even as he must appeal broadly to a general election audience; he is also shifting blame for his own role in the run-up to the bloody mob siege and asking voters to absolve hundreds of them — and himself — over the attack

Associated Press  
WASHINGTON

Republican Donald Trump has launched his general election campaign not merely rewriting the history of the January 6, 2021, Capitol attack, but positioning the violent siege and its failed attempt to overturn the 2020 election as a cornerstone of his bid to return to the White House.

At a weekend rally in Ohio, his first as the presumed Republican Party presidential nominee, Mr. Trump stood onstage, his hand raised in salute to the brim of his red MAGA hat, as a recorded chorus of prisoners in jail for their roles in the January 6 attack sang the national anthem.

An announcer asked the crowd to please rise "for the horribly and unfairly treated January 6th hostages." And people did, and sang along.

"They were unbelievable patriots," Mr. Trump said as the recording ended. Having previously vowed to pardon the rioters, he promised to help them "the first day we get into office."

Initially relegated to a fringe theory on the edges of the Republican Party, the revisionist history of January 6, which Mr. Trump amplified during the early days of the GOP primary



Election scenario: Former U.S. President and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a Buckeye Values PAC Rally in Vandalia, Ohio, on Saturday. AFP

campaign to rouse his most devoted voters, remains a rally centerpiece even as he must appeal broadly to a general election audience.

In heaping praise on the rioters, Mr. Trump is shifting blame for his own role in the run-up to the bloody mob siege and asking voters to absolve hundreds of them — and himself — over the deadliest attack on a seat of American power in 200 years.

At the same time, Mr. Trump's allies are installing 2020 election-deniers to the Republican National Committee, further institutionalising the lies that spurred the violence. That raises red flags about next year, when Congress will

again be called upon to certify the vote.

And they're not alone. Republicans in Congress are embarking on a re-investigation of the January 6, 2021, attack that seeks to shield Mr. Trump of wrongdoing while lawmakers are showcasing side theories about why thousands of his supporters descended on Capitol Hill in what became a brutal scene of hand-to-hand combat with police.

Five people died in the riot and its aftermath.

Taken together, it's what those who study authoritarian regimes warn is a classic case of what's called consolidation — where the state apparatus is being transformed around a sin-

gular figure, in this case Mr. Trump.

Jason Stanley, a philosophy professor at Yale, said in history the question comes up over and over again: How could people not have taken an authoritarian leader at his word about what was going to happen? "Listen to Trump," he said.

"When a coup against the democratic regime happens and it's not punished, that is a very strong indicator of the end of the rule of law and the victory of that authoritarian movement," he said.

"Americans have a hard time understanding that what happens in most of the world can happen here, too."

Mr. Trump is facing a four-count federal indictment over January 6 — charges he conspired to defraud Americans over his 2020 election defeat and obstructed the official proceeding in Congress to certify the vote for Joe Biden. As the Supreme Court considers Mr. Trump's claim that he should be immune from prosecution, it's unclear when the case will go to trial, raising the possibility it might not be resolved until after the election.

The initial House Select Committee on January 6 found that Mr. Trump criminally engaged in a "multi-part conspiracy" to overturn the lawful results of the 2020 presidential election and failed to act to stop his supporters from attacking the Capitol and beating police.

More than 1,200 people have been charged in the riot, including far-right Oath Keepers and Proud Boys extremists, with hundreds convicted. Mr. Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani and attorney John Eastman also face legal challenges over their work on the 2020 election.

Mr. Trump's campaign, in response to an inquiry from *The Associated Press*, pointed to the work from the House investigators who are trying to show inconsistencies in the Select Committee's probe and its

star witness Cassidy Hutchinson, a former aide who had a front-row seat to inner workings at the White House.

Mr. Trump's national press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the Justice Department has spent more time prosecuting the former President and "targeting Americans for peacefully protesting on January 6th" than other criminals.

"President Trump will restore justice for all Americans who have been unfairly treated," she said.

Even as Republicans worry privately that Mr. Trump risks turning off women and independent voters he would need in the general election rematch against Mr. Biden, top aides have said there is only so much they can do as Mr. Trump is going to be Mr. Trump.

Over the weekend, Mr. Trump focused his attention on Liz Cheney, the former Republican congresswoman, who was vice chair of the Select Committee and personally secured Hutchinson's blockbuster 2022 testimony. "She should go to jail along with the rest of the Unselect Committee!" Mr. Trump posted on social media.

Cheney posted in response — "Hi Donald: you know these are lies" — as she makes dispelling falsehoods about January 6 her singular focus in 2024.

## With strong legal tradition, the Netherlands becomes world's legal battlefield

Agence France-Presse  
THE HAGUE

From conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East to salt mining in Brazil — courts in the Netherlands have become Ground Zero in a global legal battlefield with far-reaching implications.

A strong legal tradition, home to many multinationals and international organisations, and global ease of reach: the country has several trump cards making it the preferred legal arbiter of choice.

Three months into 2024, the city of The Hague's two most influential international courts have already cast headline-grabbing rulings on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the spiralling conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip.

In early March, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for two high-ranking Russian

**Three months into 2024, The Hague's two courts have cast headline-grabbing rulings on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel-Gaza conflict**

commanders, while in January the UN's top International Court of Justice (ICJ) handed down emergency measures telling Israel to boost aid in Gaza and to protect its population.

At the same time, a local civil court handed down a landmark judgement halting the supply of F-35 fighter jet parts from the Netherlands to Israel.

Victims of devastating salt mining in the Brazilian city of Maceio are suing petrochemical giant Braskem for compensation before a Rotterdam court.

An Amsterdam court in February quashed an appeal by Russia in a record

\$50-billion case involving a compensation claim by former shareholders of the dismantled oil giant Yukos.

Recent years have also seen Dutch courts hand down rulings in major climate cases including one won by NGO group Milieudefensie in 2021.

In that case, the court ordered petrochemical giant Shell to curtail greenhouse emissions in what is considered the first major climate change ruling against a corporation.

The country also has a highly skilled legal workforce and a strong belief in upholding the law.

The Netherlands also hosted several international courts and tribunals as well as agencies such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and Europol, "embedding these organisations in the Dutch legal landscape," legal experts said.

### Festive chaos



Revellers participate in a colourful 'flour war', celebrating the 'Ash Monday' or 'Clean Monday', a traditional festivity marking the end of the carnival season and the start of the 40-day Lent period until the Orthodox Easter, in the town of Galaxidi, Greece. REUTERS

## N. Korea's Kim supervises tests of rocket launchers

Associated Press  
SEOUL

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised a live-fire drill of nuclear-capable "super-large" multiple rocket launchers designed to target South Korea's capital as he vowed to boost his war deterrent in the face of deepening confrontations with rivals, state media said on Tuesday.

The report came a day after South Korea and Japan said they detected North Korea firing multiple short-range ballistic missiles toward waters off its eastern coast, adding to a streak of weapons displays that have raised regional tensions.

Experts say North Korea's large-sized artillery rockets blur the boundaries between artillery systems and ballistic missiles because they can create their thrust and are guided during delivery. The North has described some of these systems, including the 600mm multiple rocket launchers that were tested on Monday, as capable of delivering tactical nuclear warheads.

Photos published by the Korean Central News Agency showed at least six rockets being fired simultaneously from launch vehicles and flames and smoke blanketing what appeared to be a small island target.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said later on Tuesday that it assessed North Korea conducted more launches than what was shown in the photos. Lt. Col. Lee Chang-hyun, a deputy JCS spokesperson, said that South Korea categorises the North Korea weapons system tested on Monday as a ballistic missile given its characteristics and capacities.

## Incoming Palestinian PM lays out plans for reform but faces obstacles

Associated Press  
RAMALLAH

The incoming Palestinian Prime Minister said on Tuesday that he will appoint a technocratic government and establish an independent trust fund to oversee Gaza's reconstruction.

In a mission statement acquired by *The Associated Press*, Mohammad Mustafa laid out wide-ranging plans for the kind of revitalised Palestinian Authority called for by the U.S. as part of its postwar vision for resolving the conflict.

But the Palestinian Authority has no power in Gaza, from which Hamas drove its forces in 2007, and only limited authority in parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out any return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza and his government is staunchly opposed to Palestinian statehood.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas designated Mustafa as Prime Minister last week. The U.S.-educated economist and longtime adviser to Abbas



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas appoints Mohammad Mustafa as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. REUTERS

is an independent with no political base.

In the mission statement, Mr. Mustafa said he

would appoint a "non-partisan, technocratic government that can gain both the trust of our people and

the support of the international community."

**'Zero tolerance' policy** He promised wide-ranging reforms of Palestinian Authority institutions and a "zero tolerance" policy toward corruption.

He said he would seek to reunify the territories and create an "independent, competent and transparent agency for Gaza's recovery and reconstruction and an internationally managed trust fund to raise, manage and disburse the required funds."

The vision statement

made no mention of Hamas, which won a landslide victory the last time Palestinians held national elections, in 2006, and which polls indicate still has significant support.

The 88-year-old Abbas, who is in overall control of the Palestinian Authority, has remained in power since his own mandate expired in 2009 and has refused to hold elections, citing Israeli restrictions.

Elections consistently find that a large majority of Palestinians want Mr. Abbas to resign.

Mr. Mustafa said the Pal-

estian Authority aims to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, but he did not give a timetable and said it would depend on "realities on the ground" in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem, territories Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war that the Palestinians want for their future state.

In 2021, Mr. Abbas blamed Israeli restrictions in annexed east Jerusalem for his decision to indefinitely delay elections in which his secular Fatah party was expected to suffer major losses.



## IN BRIEF



## Apollo Hospital names CSO Madhu as President &amp; CEO

Apollo Hospitals Group has appointed its Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) Madhu Sasidhar as President and CEO of its hospital division with effect from April 1. Dr Madhu's appointment is part of a planned transition that has been in effect since October 2023. K. Hari Prasad, the outgoing President of Apollo Hospitals, will be retiring from the position on March 31 after a 27-year career at Apollo, the healthcare major said in a statement.

## RBI imposes ₹1.32 cr. penalty on Tamilnad Mercantile Bank

The Reserve Bank of India has imposed a penalty of ₹1,31,80,000 on Tamilnad Mercantile Bank for non-compliance with certain directions under the Banking Regulation Act. As per a survey, TMB failed to benchmark the interest rate on certain floating rate loans to MSMEs to an external benchmark lending rate; adopted multiple benchmarks within the same loan category; and wrongly reported external rating of certain borrowers to CRILC, the bank said in a filing.

## FinMin notifies ₹90 coin to commemorate 90 years of RBI

The Finance Ministry on Tuesday notified the issuance of a special commemorative coin of ₹90 denomination to mark the completion of 90 years of the RBI. One side of the coin shall bear the RBI's logo in the centre, with RBI@90 inscribed below. This will be a silver coin with 99.99% silver purity, weighing about 40 grams. The face of the coin shall bear the Lion Capital of Ashoka Pillar in the centre with "Satyameva Jayate" inscribed in Devanagari script below it.

## Poised to merge with AI, Vistara to pay bonus to staff

Jagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

With Tata group's Vistara set to merge with Air India, the smaller airline announced on Tuesday a one-time 'special bonus' for all its employees.

The bonus was based on the airline's operational and financial performance, "to recognise your efforts and contributions in making Vistara the world-class airline it is today," wrote CEO Vinod Kannan in an e-mail.

Sources said pilots would get ₹75,000-₹2.25 lakh. Vistara's employees have expressed concern over their role and remuneration in the merged firm.

## 'Indian economy will face temporary hiccups in Q1 due to general elections'

N. Anand  
CHENNAI

India's economy is likely to face temporary hiccups during April to June with India going to poll, said a leading industrialist.

"There tends to be some period of uncertainty resulting in a temporary slowdown," Wheels India MD Srivats Ram told *The Hindu*. "I see a temporary disruption and a relative inaction for a couple of months," he added.

Pointing out that 2024 is a year of mega elections with India, the U.S. and Indonesia going to polls, he said during the period of elections there is always a certain uncertainty. According to him, In-

## 'Norway will invest almost half of \$100 billion under EFTA'

Mini Tejaswi  
BENGALURU

Switzerland being the largest player is likely to contribute more than half of the \$100 billion free trade pact India recently signed with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), while Norway will bring in the rest, with Iceland and Liechtenstein contributing as well, Norwegian Ambassador to India, May-Elin Stener, told *The Hindu*.

India signed a four-nation trade pact with EFTA countries: Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, on March 10, aiming to attract \$100 billion and to create one million jobs in 15 years in exchange for tariff concessions for their pharma,



May-Elin Stener

chemical and minerals.

"The interest in India is high among Norwegian companies. Some 130 Norwegian companies are already in India with Mumbai and Bengaluru housing most of them. Through this new EFTA pact, we are expecting many new Norwegian entrants and investments into the Indian markets," Ms. Stener said.



Srivats Ram

dian companies' performance during Q1 would be affected but it would not change the overall tone of the Indian economy.

"The Indian economy is strong and there is no reason to be pessimistic about the future. India is also a beneficiary of the China de-risking strategy of global companies," he added. Asserting that the In-

dia's growth trajectory would pick up soon after the elections are over, he said that it has a certain amount of momentum with industrial-related output and the services sector continuing to be positive.

While the services sector posted stellar growth, agriculture is in the negative despite government support and incentives. Mining sector is a mixed bag and the momentum will continue after polls.

Passenger vehicle sector has had a fairly strong growth and is in positive territory. Commercial vehicle is a cyclical market and will pick up after Q1. There are positives in the bus sector. Growth will continue in the wind mill sector as

## Food prices play spoiler

Repetitive incidence of short amplitude food price pressures deter a swifter fall in headline inflation, write RBI officials



■ 'Core inflation's steady decline would have taken headline number towards 4% target sooner and faster but for food prices'

■ Winter easing of vegetable prices had been shallow, short-lived, they observe

■ Onion, potato prices have recorded an upsurge, data till March 15 show

down headline inflation towards the target of 4% even sooner and faster, but for the repetitive incidence of short amplitude food price pressures," they wrote.

Observing that the CPI readings for January and February showed that the winter easing of vegetable prices had been shallow and short-lived, they said

cereal prices had maintained strong momentum, while prices of meat and fish had seen an upsurge.

"Food price pressures on the headline have been capped by core disinflation," they wrote.

High frequency food price data for March (up to the 15th) showed that cereal prices had declined, mainly for wheat, the officials noted. While prices of pulses had registered a broad-based increase, edible oil prices had continued to soften.

"Tomato prices have corrected in March so far while onion and potato

## Direct tax kitty crosses 97% of 2023-24 target

Vikas Dhoot  
NEW DELHI

Growth in India's net direct tax collections slowed a bit over the past month but with a kitty of more than ₹18.9 lakh crore, more than 97% of the revised target for 2023-24 had been met by March 17, as per provisional figures released by the Finance Ministry on Tuesday.

While net direct tax revenues had grown 20.25% as of February 10, the uptick over last year's collections in the corresponding period stood at 19.88% as on March 17.

## States raise record ₹50,206 cr. in debt, push up bond yields

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of the financial year's closure, State governments mobilised a record ₹50,206 crore on Tuesday through the auction of State Development Loan (SDL) bonds, even as their total borrowings in 2023-24 are likely to be far lower than the projected ₹10.88 lakh crore.

While the record mop-up was 81% higher than the ₹27,500 crore indicated for this week, liquidity pressures pushed up States' borrowing rates and widened the gap between central government and State government bond

## Liquidity pressures widened the gap between central and State government bond yields

yields. "The weighted average cut-off of the State government securities climbed to 7.45% from 7.38% last week," rating firm ICRA observed.

Noting that yields inched up due to supply-side pressures, Bank of Baroda economist Sonal Badhan said that 10-year government bond yields had also risen by six basis points to 7.09% over the past week, but similar tenure State

loans' cut-off yields had increased at a sharper pace to a range of 7.44% to 7.5%. One basis point equals 0.01%.

## Final auction of FY24

The final auction of State government bonds for this year is scheduled for next week, with the indicative auction calendar showing borrowings of about ₹29,400 crore, and the cost of borrowings is expected to stay high.

States have borrowed ₹9.28 lakh crore so far, and are not expected to hit their projected borrowing plans, even if they raise more than the indicated amount for next week.

## Bank of Japan raises interest rate, first time in 17 years

Associated Press  
TOKYO

Japan's central bank raised its benchmark interest rate Tuesday for the first time in 17 years, ending a policy of negative rates meant to boost the economy.

The Bank of Japan's lending rate for overnight borrowing by banks was raised to 0-0.1% from minus 0.1% at a meeting, confirming a shift away from ultra-lax monetary policy. It was the first rate hike since February 2007. Policy measures "have fulfilled their roles," Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda said.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	TUESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,012	-1.01
US Dollar	83.03	-0.15
Gold	66,250	0.16
Brent oil	87.44	1.20

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3052.70	-59.05
Adani Ports	1241.20	-25.40
Apollo Hosp	6113.20	-23.35
BPLCL	557.70	-24.60
Asian Paints	2815.10	-31.40
Axis Bank	1050.80	-10.55
Bajaj Auto	8640.20	118.40
Bajaj Finserve	1581.50	4.45
Bajaj Finance	6596.25	91.60
Bharti Airtel	1229.35	3.05
Britannia Ind	4816.95	-163.05
Cipla	1435.70	-52.75
Coal India	419.05	-2.80
Divs Lab	3447.15	-59.45
Dr Reddys Lab	6134.90	-206.15
Eicher Motors	3716.85	17.15
Grasim Ind	2173.80	-29.30
HCL Tech	1599.15	-44.25
HDFC Bank	1449.35	3.30
HDFC Life	632.50	-1.60
Hero MotoCorp	4541.75	-12.45
Hindalco	533.65	2.50
Hind Unilever	2266.95	-33.00
ICICI Bank	1083.95	2.75
Indusind Bank	1434.10	-46.60
Infosys	1561.45	-41.20
ITC	409.55	-7.90
JSW Steel	801.05	-3.35
Kotak Bank	1749.65	11.75
L&T	3501.70	-59.50
LTIMindtree Ltd.	5105.70	-61.75
M&M	1843.90	-12.15
Maruti Suzuki	11597.05	-39.25
NestleIndia	2496.05	-84.30
NTPC	313.45	-3.70
ONGC	259.25	-2.35
PowerGrid Corp	259.00	-5.90
Reliance Ind	2850.50	-28.45
SBI Life	1461.35	-28.35
State Bank	723.80	-7.15
Sun Pharma	1548.45	-22.80
TataConsumerProduct	1146.25	-40.70
Tata Motors	957.75	-14.70
Tata Steel	148.75	-0.95
TCS	3977.30	-175.20
Tech Mahindra	1252.25	-20.40
Titan	3583.40	-3.70
UltraTech Cement	9453.25	-158.10
UPL	461.05	-5.00
Wipro	494.85	-15.35

## EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 19

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.84	83.16
Euro	89.81	90.16
British Pound	105.02	105.44
Japanese Yen (100)	55.01	55.22
Chinese Yuan	11.51	11.55
Swiss Franc	93.16	93.53
Singapore Dollar	61.67	61.92
Canadian Dollar	61.02	61.26
Malaysian Ringgit	17.49	17.58
Australian Dollar	53.91	54.13

Source: Indian Bank

## GeM portal hopes to get more start-ups onboard: official



Adding heft: GeM is looking to encourage more start-ups and small and micro enterprises to list themselves as sellers. THE HINDU

Meenakshi Verma  
Ambawani  
NEW DELHI

The Union government's procurement portal, GeM (Government e-Marketplace) is looking to encourage more and more start-ups and small and micro enterprises to list themselves as sellers.

Since the platform's inception, almost 23,000 start-ups have come onboard, Ajit Chavan, Additional CEO, GeM said in his address at the Start-up Mahakumbh event.

"GeM portal has been one of the earliest successful experiment of the government of India in the digital landscape. From just about ₹422 crore in 2016, we expect to cross ₹4-lakh crore-mark in terms of GMV (gross merchandise value) this year.

## Small enterprises

"We have 1.5 lakh buyers across the three tiers of the government-Central, State and local governments. We have a base of 21 lakh sellers which includes a large chunk of small and micro enterprises, under-served seller groups such as women and SC and ST entre-

preneurs among others," Mr. Chavan stated at the event.

## GeM Sahay 2.0

Encouraging start-ups to leverage on the opportunities offered by the public procurement portal, he said, "Just last year, start-ups fulfilled 84,000 orders worth ₹9,725 crore on the GeM portal."

Stating that the GeM portal offered easy market linkages to start-ups exempting them from certain requirements to list as sellers, Mr. Chavan said that the GeM will soon be introducing a revamped, mobile-based lending platform called GeM Sahay 2.0.

## Collateral-free loans

This initiative endeavours to offer collateral free loans of up to ₹10 lakh to start-ups and entrepreneurs at interest rates of up to 10% and will be approved within 10 minutes.

Mr. Chavan also urged start-ups to leverage on GeM's 'Start-up Runway' initiative, which gives start-ups direct visibility with the buyers of the public procurement portal.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)

## NHAI monetises over ₹16,000 crore road projects via InVIT

Rishi Ranjan Kala  
NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has raised more than ₹16,000 crore through InVIT Round-3 for national highway (NH) stretches.

The monetisation exercise is the largest by the highways development agency and one of the largest in the domestic roads sector, the NHAI said.

The NHAI's National Highways Infra Trust (NHIT) concluded Round-3 of fund-raise exercise for 889 km of NH at an enterprise value of more than ₹16,000 crore. A Letter of Acceptance (LoA) to raise the highest ever concession value through InVIT Round-3 was issued in February, it added.

## Wide interest

In the third round, NHIT raised unit capital of about ₹7,272 crore from marquee domestic and international investors and debt of about ₹9,000 crore from Indian lenders to fund the acquisition of NH stretches at a base concession fee of about ₹15,625 crore and additional concessional fee of ₹75 crore.

The units were subscribed by investors through a book-building process at a cut-off price of ₹124.14 per unit, at a premium over the current NAV of ₹122.86 per unit.

## Strong demand

There was strong demand for the units from both existing and new investors, including foreign pension funds such as the Canada Pension Plan Investment



The total realised value of three rounds of InVIT stands at ₹26,125 crore THE HINDU

Board and the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan Board, which are existing unit holders and subscribed to the maximum limit of 25% each.

## Pension funds

Other investors included domestic pension and provident funds (IOCL Employees PF, L&T Staff PF, Rajasthan Rajya Vidya Karamchari Pension Fund, and SBI Pension), insurance companies (Tata AIG, SBI Life, and HDFC Life), mutual funds (SBI, Nippon India), and banks.

## NHAI subscription

The NHAI also subscribed to its share of about 15% of the units at the same price.

With the completion of the third round of monetisation, the total realised value of three rounds of InVIT stands at ₹26,125 crore and holds a diversified portfolio of 15 operating toll roads with an aggregate length of about 1,525 km spanning across Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

(The writer is with *The Hindu businessline*)



## India to join U.S.-led carbon market project



**Green moves:** India is also considering clean electricity and sustainable aviation fuel initiatives. AP

**Amiti Sen**  
NEW DELHI

India has decided to join at least one of the four cooperative work programmes unveiled last week under the 'clean energy pillar' of the U.S.-led Indo Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) - the one on facilitating and promoting carbon-market activities.

Officials said New Delhi is also considering two of the other co-operative work-programme initiatives, one on clean electricity and the other on the use of sustainable aviation fuel but will take a call on whether to join or not after thorough analysis.

"India will join the cooperative working group on carbon markets through the Ministry of Power and the Bureau of Energy Efficiency will be the nodal body," an official tracking the matter said.

The IPEF, an initiative led by U.S. President Joe Biden, was unveiled in May 2022, bringing together 14 regional partners - Australia, Brunei, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the U.S. and Vietnam.

### Four pillars

Seen by many analysts as an attempt by the U.S. to counter China's growing influence in the region, the IPEF aims at having a common set of rules and standards around four pillars viz. connectivity and digital trade; resilient supply chains; clean energy; and corruption-free fair trade.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

# Nvidia's dizzying rally spurs rush into AI-themed Exchange Traded Funds

The funds run the gamut from those offering a bouquet of the biggest AI winners to more esoteric themes such as robotics, sound generation; the universe of AI-themed ETFs traded in the U.S. has soared to \$6.88 bn as of the end of Feb. from \$2.55 billion a year earlier, Morningstar data show

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Reuters**

The fervour around artificial intelligence has sparked a gold rush into AI-themed ETFs, as investors seek fresh ways to play the burgeoning technology following breathtaking rallies in market darlings such as Nvidia.

The funds run the gamut from those offering a bouquet of the biggest AI winners to more esoteric themes such as robotics and sound generation. All told, the universe of AI-themed ETFs traded in the United States has soared to \$6.88 billion as of the end of February from \$2.55 billion a year earlier, Morningstar data showed.

"It's still so early in the evolution of this category ... that investors are still sorting through the possibilities," said Will Rhind, founder and CEO of GraniteShares.

The exuberance surrounding AI funds echoes previous waves of investor excitement for other technologies viewed as transformative, from dotcom stocks to electric vehicles.

Each wave introduced major new businesses to the economy and generated astonishing wealth for founders like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk as well as ordinary investors. At the



**In the chips:** Nvidia's Blackwell B200 AI chip is 30 times speedier than its previous chip. REUTERS

same time, many of the companies whose shares soared in previous market booms eventually saw their stock prices fizzle, a fate that may await some of the market's current AI favourites.

For now, investors are responding with enthusiasm and Nvidia - whose chips are seen as the gold standard in AI - continues to grab the spotlight.

The assets of the GraniteShares 2x Long NVDA Daily ETF, which seeks to deliver twice the daily return of the chipmaker's shares and is not included in Morningstar's data on AI-themed funds, doubled to \$2 billion earlier this month. Those flows have followed the nearly 80% climb in Nvidia's shares so



The exuberance surrounding AI funds echoes previous waves of investor excitement for other technologies viewed transformative

far this year, after the company's shares tripled in the year 2023.

### Speedier chip

At its developer conference on Monday, the company unveiled the Blackwell B200, an AI chip it says is up to 30 times speedier than its previous chip.

Smaller ETFs have also prospered. Assets in the Themes Generative Artificial

Intelligence ETF tripled to about \$20 million from \$7.5 million earlier this month, said Taylor Krystkowiak, investment strategist at Themes ETFs.

Seven of the 18 diversified AI-related ETFs that Morningstar tracks have launched within the last three years. An eighth was redesigned to target AI more directly.

The funds have had collective inflows of \$2.68 billion in the last 12 months, according to Morningstar. That is almost double the inflows into global real estate ETFs, the firm said.

### Fuelling bubble

Whether investor excitement about the possibilities of AI is fuelling a bubble or just contributing to a

strong bull run in stocks is unclear.

The S&P 500 is up nearly 8% year-to-date, fuelled in part by rallies in AI beneficiaries such as Nvidia and Microsoft, following a 24% gain last year.

The AI fervour has also driven parabolic moves in the shares of other companies, including a more than 250% gain in Super Micro Computer, which joined the S&P 500 this week.

### Limiting exposure

Some investors appear to be limiting their exposure to Nvidia and other stocks that have notched big moves. ETF issuer Global X found that its Global X Artificial Intelligence and Technology ETF, which caps Nvidia exposure to 3%, has tripled in size over the last three months.

By comparison, its Robotics and Artificial Intelligence ETF, which has more than 20% of its assets invested in the chipmaker, grew by 20%.

Others are focused on finding new areas that will benefit from AI, said Rene Reyna, head of thematic ETF strategy at Invesco and manager of the Invesco AI and Next Gen Software ETF.

### 'Changing landscape'

"The conversations we have with investors don't focus on finding the next Nvidia, but more on recognising that these technol-

gies are changing the landscape and finding ways to get exposure to some of this growth," he said.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley last week published a list of 480 individual stocks that may benefit from AI.

Less obvious beneficiaries included Walmart and Caterpillar. The bank also recommended exploring "less crowded sub-themes" like the integration of AI and smartphones.

ETFs are also scrambling to provide offerings for every taste.

Robo Global Robotics & Automation ETF supplements its Nvidia exposure with holdings in stocks some expect to benefit from AI technology, like Intuitive Surgical.

The Roundhill Generative AI & Technology ETF is focusing on companies it expects to be beneficiaries of generative AI, including Salesforce.com and Marvel Technology.

### Sees outflows

Still, at least one flavour of AI-themed ETF has failed to win fans. The WisdomTree US AI Enhanced Value ETF, which uses AI to select its portfolio, has seen outflows of \$48.26 million in the last 12 months and lags the S&P 500.

One possible reason the fund and others in its category have underperformed: many of them lack a position in Nvidia and other AI-related stocks.

## Driving over woods



**Not green anymore:** Environmental activists occupy tree huts in the forest in Gruenheide, southeast of Berlin, protesting against the plans of U.S. electric carmaker Tesla to cut down trees to extend the company's factory. AFP

## Central banks deploy AI to assess climate-related financial risks

**Reuters**  
LONDON

Central bankers said on Tuesday they have broken new ground by using artificial intelligence to collect data for assessing climate-related financial risks, just as the volume of disclosures from banks and other companies is set to rise.

The Bank for International Settlements, a forum for central banks, the Bank of Spain, Germany's Bundesbank and the European Central Bank said their experimental Gaia AI project was used to analyse company disclosures on carbon emissions, green bond issuance and voluntary net-zero commitments.

Regulators of banks, in-



**Clearing the smoke:** Gaia AI was used to analyse firm's disclosures on carbon emissions and voluntary net-zero commitments. REUTERS

urers and asset managers need high-quality data to assess the impact of climate-change on financial institutions. However, the absence of a single reporting standard confronts them with a patchwork of public information spread

across text, tables and footnotes in annual reports.

### Overcoming differences

Gaia was able to overcome differences in definitions and disclosure frameworks across jurisdictions to offer much-needed transparen-

cy, and make it easier to compare indicators on climate-related financial risks, the central banks said in a joint statement.

Despite variations in how the same data is reported by companies, Gaia focuses on the definition of each indicator, rather than how the data is labelled.

Furthermore, with the traditional approach, each additional key performance indicator, or KPI, and each new institution requires the analyst to either search for the information in public corporate reports or contact the institution for information.

With Gaia, adding new KPIs or new institutions is quick and easy, the Central banks said.

# Clamour for collateral clouds China firm Vanke's credit pursuit

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Reuters**

SHANGHAI/BEIJING/HONG KONG

A rare Beijing directive to help Vanke beat a liquidity crisis has left lenders scrambling for the assets that the State-backed developer has proposed for collateral, as parties pull out all the stops to arrest deterioration in the property sector.

China Vanke is gasping for funding after sales in both January and February fell below the monthly break-even point of 20 billion yuan (\$2.8 billion), meaning cash flowed out of the business, an internal memo showed.

China's property sector has been in the throes of a

crisis since mid-2021. Local policymakers' stimulus and easing measures have struggled to boost sales or increase liquidity, while many property developers have defaulted on debt obligations.

### Rare intervention

Reflecting the deepening crisis, regulators asked financial firms and creditors to step up financing support for Vanke - China's second-biggest property developer by sales - in a rare intervention by central government, Reuters reported last week.

With plunging sales as well as bond prices clouding Vanke's outlook, the developer has shared a list of mainly commercial projects such as shopping malls and their revenue



**Contagion effect:** Vanke's financial woes became public after debt defaults of marquee peers. REUTERS

streams with potential lenders to access fresh credit, said two people with knowledge of the matter.

Those lenders include a group of banks, led by Industrial and Commercial

Bank of China (ICBC), which is in early talks to lend as much as 80 billion yuan, two other people said.

Lenders are reviewing as much of the higher-val-

ue assets as they can, the people said. At the same time, insurer-creditors have demanded further collateral before agreeing to extensions to the maturities of their debt holdings,

said a fifth person. Vanke declined to comment. ICBC did not respond to a request for comment.

"The more demanding approach from creditors shows they have turned cautious even with State-related and better-performing developers, generally perceived as safe," said Gary Ng, Natixis Asia-Pacific senior economist.

"Its more difficult situation shows the biggest risk in the property market remains in the sluggish home sales."

Analysts estimate the value of Vanke's unpledged commercial property at 77 to 90 billion yuan, meaning the developer could borrow as much as 45 billion yuan if banks lend at a 50% loan-to-value ratio.

The ratio could be as much as 70% depending on collateral quality, said some bankers and analysts, underscoring the pressure Vanke faces to add high-value guarantees to its list.

### Bond liability

Analysts expect Vanke to have enough cash to repay \$1.4 billion worth of public bonds maturing this year, but question its long-term repayment capability considering its fast-depleting cash and \$3.5 billion worth of debt due in 2025.

Vanke's financial woes became public after the debt defaults of a string of marquee peers, including China Evergrande Group and Country Garden, amid an industry-wide sales drop. Sales by floor area plunged 20.5% in January-

February from the same period a year prior. For all of 2023, sales fell 8.5%.

Confidence among homebuyers as well as investors could drop even more should Vanke struggle to repay debt, considering Vanke is State-backed - about a third held by a State-owned enterprise - and has more projects in more big cities, and so was widely believed to be financially sound, market participants said.

Vanke has asked creditors, including Taikang Insurance, State-owned PICC Property and Casualty and New China Life Insurance for permission to extend debt maturities, Reuters reported this month.

The three firms did not respond to calls and emails seeking comment.



**REPOSING FAITH**

**Rohit backed Bumrah after MI pondered releasing him: Parthiv**



K. MURALI KUMAR

Parthiv Patel talked about how Rohit Sharma backed Jasprit Bumrah when he had a tough start to his IPL career. "Bumrah came into MI in 2014 and his performance wasn't great. They pondered sending him back after half the season. But Rohit believed in Bumrah and the pacer's performance has been excellent since."

**EXCITED**

**Hopefully Pant and I will win matches for DC together: Kushagra**



PTI

Delhi Capitals' wicketkeeper-batter Kumar Kushagra can't wait to play alongside the likes of Rishabh Pant. "I batted with Rishabh Pant for the first time and he gave me a lot of input on my game... he's hitting the ball well and hopefully we'll win matches for Delhi Capitals together," he said in a press release issued by DC.

**NATIONAL DUTY**

**Hasaranga in SL Test squad, to miss SRH's first three IPL fixtures**



AFF

All-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga is set to miss at least the first three IPL matches for Sunrisers Hyderabad after he was named in the Sri Lanka squad for a two-Test series against Bangladesh starting March 22. Hasaranga had announced his retirement from the longest format in August last year to focus on white-ball cricket.

**AT THE HELM**

**Pant appointed captain of Delhi Capitals for IPL 2024**

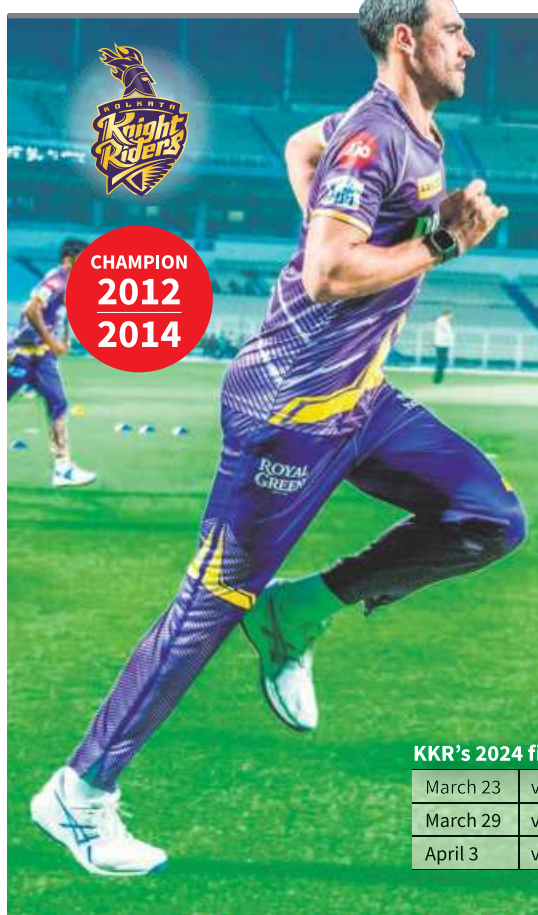


PTI

Rishabh Pant was on Tuesday appointed captain of Delhi Capitals for the upcoming edition of the IPL. "I can't wait to see him walk out team out once again as we look forward to a new season with renewed passion, vigour and enthusiasm," said Capitals chairman and co-owner Parth Jindal in a media release.

# Gambhir's return as mentor augurs well for KKR

The purple-and-gold brigade has not lifted the crown since 2014; the side is packed with batters who have big strike rates; the return of Shreyas and Pandey would strengthen the middle-order



**THE DUGOUT**

Shreyas Iyer (Capt.), Nitish Rana, Venkatesh Iyer, Manish Pandey, Rinku Singh, Angriksh Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Phil Salt, K.S. Bharat, Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Anukul Roy, Ramandeep Singh, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Harshit Rana, Chetan Sakariya, Vaibhav Arora, Muejeb Ur Rahman, Varun Chakravarthy, Suyash Sharma, Sakib Hussain.

**The Influencer**

Left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc is a lethal weapon in the Knight Riders armoury. Sensing that his speed and swing will help the side win the key moments, the Kolkata outfit engaged in a bidding war and hired him for an IPL record price of ₹24.75 crore. The Aussie is also a handy batter down the order.

**KKR's 2024 fixtures\***

March 23	vs. SRH	7.30 p.m.	Kolkata
March 29	vs. RCB	7.30 p.m.	Bengaluru
April 3	vs. DC	7.30 p.m.	Visakhapatnam

\*announced so far

**IPL-17 COUNTDOWN**

**Y.B. Sarangi**

It's resurrection time for two-time IPL champion Kolkata Knight Riders.

A decade's journey without a crown has whetted KKR's appetite like never before. It is evident from the return of the franchise's only successful captain Gautam Gambhir in a new role as the mentor.

After its last title triumph in 2014, KKR has made it to the playoffs thrice (2016-18) and has finished runner-up once in 2021. Gambhir is expected to inculcate the winner's attitude into the purple-and-gold brigade and end its title drought.

The return of captain Shreyas Iyer, who missed out on the last season due to an injury, and big-hitter Manish Pandey would strengthen the KKR middle

order. Packed with batters with big strike rates, including the cool-headed finisher Rinku Singh, sled-gehammer master Andre Russell, his fellow Caribbean southpaw Sherfane Rutherford and experienced Englishman Phil Salt, it is obvious which area of the game KKR is looking to improve upon.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Venkatesh Iyer and the flexible Nitish Rana provide solidity to the batting department along with Shreyas.

**Game-changer**

KKR hopes its costliest purchase, star Australian left-arm pacer Mitchell Starc, will be the game-changer with some support from Sri Lankan Dushmantha Chameera and domestic recruits, including Chetan Sakariya and Harshit Rana.

Once again, the KKR spin department revolves around trusted hands Sunil Narine and Varun Chakra-

varthy. Afghan off-spinner Mujib-Ur-Rahman, left-arm spinner Anukul Roy and Suyash Sharma, who may continue to chip in with his useful leg-spin as an impact player, are likely to provide adequate support.

All-rounders Russell, Narine, Venkatesh, Ramandeep and Ankul increase the side's pliability.

Salt and K.S. Bharat, along with Gurbaz, are the options as wicketkeeper-batters.

Coach Chandrakant Pandit, known for drawing the best out of the players, is proud of the way the team fought under Rana's captaincy despite constraints and remained in the race for a playoffs berth last season. This time Pandit is more confident because of the side's balance. In a season of comebacks, KKR would hope to bank on a stronger squad and the combined cricketing wisdom of Gambhir and Pandit to end its long wait.



**The think-tank:** Gambhir, Pandit and Shreyas charting out Knight Riders' roadmap for the upcoming campaign. ANI

# Capitals need to put the pieces together in quest of maiden title

**S. Prasanna Venkatesan**

Rishabh Pant's comeback has been central to the narrative surrounding Delhi Capitals' build-up to the upcoming edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

It's also symbolic of the team attempting a comeback in quest of the elusive title after finishing ninth last season.

Head coach Ricky Ponting declared, "Anything less than that (the title) for me, I have failed. Not you guys, I have failed," he said in the YouTube video titled 'IPL 2024 Inaugural Speech' put up by the franchise.

Capitals would hope for its opener Prithvi Shaw to not only be consistent, but sustained brilliance is needed from him. He might want to use the season to attempt a successful comeback to the National team. He has to better his fielding and running between the wickets.

Capitals would rely on the experience of David Warner in playing spin on typically slow tracks at Visakhapatnam. It's home ground for the team at the start of the season and is a great fit for its spinners - Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Lalit Yadav, and Pravin Dubey.

It's pace-bowling unit, with the exception of Anrich Nortje, isn't as inspiring. Nortje is making his comeback from an injury layoff and might take some time to get into a fine bowling rhythm.

Australian Jhye Richardson also will need to make



**DELHI CAPITALS**  
FINALIST 2020

**The Influencer**

Given his recent resurgence, Kuldeep Yadav could prove the ace in the pack. The wickets at the Capitals' 'home' ground in Visakhapatnam are expected to be slow and helpful to the spinners. If the left-arm wrist spinner continues his fine form, it would be a big boost for the Delhi side.

**DC's 2024 fixtures\***

March 23	vs. PBKS	3.30 p.m.	Mullanpur
March 28	vs. RR	7.30 p.m.	Jaipur
March 31	vs. CSK	7.30 p.m.	Visakhapatnam
April 3	vs. KKR	7.30 p.m.	Visakhapatnam
April 7	vs. MI	3.30 p.m.	Mumbai

\*announced so far



**Bracing up:** Capitals' head coach Ponting having a pep talk. PTI

adjustments, and thus Mukesh Kumar seems a good option when it comes to swing bowling. Ishant Sharma hasn't been in his prime form. Capitals

would hope for the retained Khaleel Ahmed to repay the faith shown in him.

The batting in general looks shaky. Capitals

would sorely miss Harry Brook who's pulled out of the season after his grandmother's death.

It would hope that batters Tristan Stubbs and Yash Dhull, and all-rounders Mitchell Marsh and Axar Patel, step up and shoulder their batting.

Pant is pivotal, of course, but as Sunil Gavaskar has pointed out, it might be tough for him to strike batting fluency. He's garnered goodwill from even cricket followers and has thus brought some to the team as well. Hopefully, it brings good fortune to Capitals.

# Royals chase elusive consistency to translate class into performance



**The Influencer**

YASHASVI JAISWAL clobbered 625 runs in the last IPL at an average of 48.08 and a strike-rate of 163.61. He followed it up with a hundred on Test debut and two double hundreds in his maiden Test series at home. The Royals will want those runs to continue flowing.

**THE DUGOUT**

**Sanju Samson** (Capt.), Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shimron Hetmyer, Rovman Powell, Dhruv Jurel, Riyan Parag, Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Donovan Ferreira, Kunal Singh Rathore, Shubham Dubey, Abid Mushtaq, R. Ashwin, Yuzvendra Chahal, Avesh Khan, Kuldeep Sen, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma, Trent Boult, Nandre Burger, Adam Zampa.

**RR's 2024 fixtures\***

March 24	vs. LSG	3.30 p.m.	Jaipur
March 28	vs. DC	7.30 p.m.	Jaipur
April 1	vs. MI	7.30 p.m.	Mumbai
April 6	vs. RCB	7.30 p.m.	Jaipur

\*announced so far



Photo: K.R. DEEPAK

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**

If there is a contest for the most mouthwatering batting line-up at this year's IPL, Rajasthan Royals will surely be a contender.

Jos Buttler, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Sanju Samson, Dhruv Jurel, Shimron Hetmyer, Rovman Powell... That line-up oozes class, style, experience and power. Not to mention the form Riyan Parag has displayed in domestic cricket.

**Needed consistency**

When you add one of the most potent spin attacks in the competition, Royals look good enough to make the Playoffs. But they need

to be consistent, something they certainly weren't last year.

After winning four of their first five matches, their campaign went off the track. They could finish only fifth, a year after reaching the summit clash.

That final of 2022 had ended in huge disappointment for RR, which went down to debutant Gujarat Titans.

The only time RR won the IPL it was a debutant too, but as were all the other teams, back in 2008.

The late Shane Warne had inspired that Royals team to a surprise victory in the tournament's inaugural edition.

The Aussie spin legend was both the captain and coach.

**T20 World Cup audition**

This edition is important for the current captain Samson on a personal note, too. It is also the audition for the T20 World Cup.

If Samson could stay at the wicket long enough and often enough, not merely his team benefits, his chances of making the Indian team will improve, too.

The Royals team management must be hoping there will be plenty of runs on the board before the skipper reaches in the mid-

dle. Jaiswal has been in the form of his life for a year and is threatening to be one of the world's most feared all-format batters, while Buttler has few peers in white-ball cricket.

In R. Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal, RR has a deadly spin duo. If its slow bowling needs to be deadlier, there is Adam Zampa, who took 23 wickets in Australia's World Cup victory a few months ago in these very conditions.

In Trent Boult, the new arrivals Avesh Khan and Nandre Burger, Navdeep Saini, Sandeep Sharma and Kuldeep Sen, the pace-bowling department also looks fine.



**INBRIEF**



**What Kohli has achieved for India is remarkable: Smriti**

RCB skipper Smriti Mandhana feels it's not right for people to undermine Virat Kohli's achievements for the Bengaluru franchise in the wake of her side's Women's Premier League title triumph. "The title is one thing, but what he (Kohli) has achieved for India is remarkable. So, I don't think that comparison is right in terms of where my career is and what he has already achieved," Smriti said on Tuesday. "The reason why I do not like the comparison is that what he has achieved is great; he has been an inspirational person. A title does not define a lot of things," said the India vice-captain.



**Afghanistan proves too strong for Ireland**

Afghanistan proved too strong with bat and ball against Ireland as it claimed a 57-run victory in Sharjah on Monday to edge the T20I series 2-1. An unbeaten 72 from Ibrahim Zadran, backed up by the bowling of Azmatullah Omarzai, gave the host victory in the final match of Ireland's tour against Afghanistan. The Irish were unable to chase down a target of 156, with Omarzai's four wickets for just nine runs helping bowl the tourists out for 98 inside 18 overs.

**The scores:** Afghanistan 155/7 in 20 overs (Ibrahim Zadran 72 n.o.) bt Ireland 98/10 in 17.2 overs (Naveen-ul-Haq 3/10, Azmatullah Omarzai 4/9). **Afghanistan won by 57 runs, clinches the series 2-1. Toss:** Afghanistan; **PoM:** Ibrahim Zadran; **Pos:** Rashid Khan.

**IOC urges leaders to avoid Russia's 'Friendship Games'**

Facing a Russia-organised potential rival to the Olympics, the International Olympic Committee urged sports and political leaders on Tuesday not to take part in the Friendship Games due to launch weeks after the Summer Games in Paris. The IOC denounced diplomatic moves to promote the inaugural event in September as "a cynical attempt by the Russian Federation" to bring politics into sports.



**Lakshya moves up to 13th spot in latest rankings**

India's Lakshya Sen on Tuesday jumped five places to reach World No. 13 in the latest BWF rankings, following his impressive run at the All England Championships. The 22-year-old from Almora had reached the semifinals in Birmingham and his effort saw him improve to World No. 12 from the 15th spot a week back in the Olympic Games Qualification.



**Injured Messi out of Argentina friendlies**

Lionel Messi will not play in Argentina's two friendlies in the United States this month due to a right leg muscle injury, the Argentine Football Association said on Monday. The 36-year-old will miss Argentina vs. El Salvador on Friday in Philadelphia and a friendly against Costa Rica four days later in Los Angeles. AFA said in a statement. Both games are warmups for Argentina for the Copa America in June-July, which will also be in the U.S.

**I would like to see Dhoni smash the ball the way he loves to, says Vijay**

The former CSK batter says MSD has the edge over others because of his smart captaincy, adds that Rizvi is a great talent but can't be compared with a star player like Rayudu

**IPL-17**

**Tarun Shastry**  
CHENNAI

**S**ameer Rizvi made the headlines in December 2023 when he became the most expensive uncapped player at the IPL auction. He was bought by Chennai Super Kings for a whopping 8.40 cr.

The promising youngster from Uttar Pradesh is known for his power-hitting abilities in the middle-order, making him the ideal player to fill the role that Ambati Rayudu played for the five-time champion.

Speaking about Rizvi's talent, former India and CSK opener M. Vijay said on the sidelines of the Deaf EnAble Foundation inter-State men's and women's cricket championship, "Sameer (Rizvi) is a great talent, but you can't compare him to a star player like my friend Rayudu."

"This is a fantastic opportunity to play for a team like CSK. If he performs well, everyone will look up and take notice. Good luck to my younger brother."



**Iconic leader:** Vijay says Dhoni understands the game better than many others. FILE PHOTO: R. RAGU

CSK will rely on skipper M.S. Dhoni to lead from the front in its title defence. Speaking about what makes the Chennai side and Dhoni different, the former CSK batter said, "Dhoni has the edge over others because of his smart captaincy and understanding of the game."

"He has delivered under pressure for nearly 10-15 years, which speaks vol-

umes about his career.

"He is an iconic figure in Indian cricket. He should enjoy his batting and should give his all to the fans. As a huge Dhoni fan, I would like to see MS smash the ball the way he loves to and that will be a treat for all."

When asked about his former India and Super Kings teammate R. Ashwin's milestone achieve-

ment (100 Tests and 500 wickets), Vijay was lavish in his praise.

"He is definitely one of the greatest off-spinners the world has seen. He has proved it time and again. I feel so proud coming from the same State. I have seen his growth from the school level and to see him pursue something for so long and keep achieving is something special in my books."

**Royal Challengers Bangalore is now Royal Challengers Bengaluru**



**Change in nomenclature:** Smriti, du Plessis, and Kohli unveiling the new identity. K. MURALI KUMAR

**Sports Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Royal Challengers Bangalore has changed its name to Royal Challengers Bengaluru. The announcement came at the RCB Unbox event at a packed M. Chinnaswamy Stadium on Tuesday.

RCB's women team captain Smriti Mandhana, men's team skipper Faf du Plessis, and star batter Virat Kohli unveiled the new name. Former RCB and India pacer Vinay Kumar was inducted to the RCB Hall of Fame.

RCB opens its IPL 2024 campaign against Chennai Super Kings at Chennai on March 22.

**CUP THAT CHEERS**



**Smile of success:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Smriti goes around the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium with the WPL 2024 trophy at the franchise's Unbox event on Tuesday. K. MURALI KUMAR



Navjot Singh Sidhu. PTI

**Sidhu back in commentary box this IPL**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Set to be back in the commentary box after a decade with the upcoming Indian Premier League, flamboyant former India cricketer Navjot Singh Sidhu says the glitzy league would help decide the T20 World Cup squad of not just India but also other countries.

After a decade-long stint in the unforgiving world of politics, Sidhu and his 'Sidhuisms' will be back on air starting with the IPL.

**Air of anticipation as Pant prepares to take guard again**



**BETWEEN WICKETS**  
**Suresh Menon**

There are so many things Rishabh Pant knows he has to be thankful for. Sixteen months ago, the fact that his career might be over seemed a minor issue at the time. He had survived a ghastly car accident, and as he said later, he thought his "time in this world was over."

He didn't have a fracture, but he had torn all the ligaments in his knee which finished at a right angle to his hip while he landed face down. Each one had to be replaced. The what-might-have-beens are too frightening to speculate about. His re-

covery was steady (and must have been painful too), and he kept everybody's spirits up as he learnt to walk again, sending out social media messages of hope and cheer.

"I didn't think I would ever enjoy brushing my teeth," he said in an interview.

Yet the idea that he would be playing serious cricket in less than 15 months would have sounded bizarre then. Which is why despite the presence of some new stars and plenty of old ones, the IPL for many around the world will be about one man - Rishabh Pant. He will lead Delhi Capitals and keep wickets beside playing what Rohit Sharma has called 'Rishball' cricket.

Teammates and opponents as well as spectators

would be happy to give him time to ease into the many roles.

Sunil Gavaskar has said the injured knee means Pant may not hit the ground running (so to speak), sensibly advising impatient fans that the player will need time and we ought to grant him that.

Watching any player return from injury sustained in a match is both heartening and fraught. Watching a favourite return after what happened will be life-affirming.

**Age factor**

His greatest advantage, besides his courage and determination, is his age. He is only 26 after all those centuries and sixes and catching and chatter from behind the stumps. The cricket board secretary has said that if he keeps

wickets he will be back in the Indian team for the T20 World Cup in June this year. I am not sure if it is the official's place to make such promises (teams are chosen by a selection committee), but the sentiment is understandable.

**Special player**

Pant is a special player and needs special treatment. Some of the strokes we see Indian batters play with such flair today were first essayed by Pant. What was seen as audacious, mischievous, even insolent when he played it is commonplace now. When he reverse swept Jimmy Anderson and the new ball above the head of the slip fielders, time stood still for a moment to allow us to absorb that moment.

His batting was seen as India's media were at one

**IPL continues to empower the Indian sports industry**

**Dhruva Prasad**  
CHENNAI

As the IPL juggernaut rolls on for the 17th year, the T20 spectacle also continues to drive the Indian sports industry.

According to the latest edition of the 'India Sports Sponsorship Report' published by GroupM ESP, the industry has swelled 6.5 times since the IPL boom in 2008. Its revenue from sponsorship, endorsement and advertising spending has grown from ₹2,423 crore in 2008 to a whopping ₹15,766 crore in 2023.

The bulk of the heavy lifting has been done by cricket, which contributed an astounding 87% of the total industry spends in sports in India.

This massive upsurge in the commercialisation of the most popular sport in India was largely driven by the IPL, whose brand value has ballooned by 433% since its inception in 2008.

The media rights sale for different platforms resulted in a per-match valuation of ₹118.5 crore for the IPL, second only to the National Football League.

The growth in sports spending in India was spurred by sponsorship and endorsement, which grew by 24% each.

Cricket enjoyed the lion's share in sports sponsorship spending, contributing 79% to the total re-

venue of ₹7,345 crore recorded in 2023.

Franchise fee registered 60% growth in 2023, and the inaugural Women's Premier League played a significant part, fetching the BCCI a revenue of ₹4,669 crore.

The IPL continued its outsized dominance in 2023, accounting for more than half of the sponsorship spending on cricket.

Athlete endorsements, which grew at the same pace as sponsorship in 2023, again saw cricketers pull away from the pack significantly. Out of the 536 endorsement deals that went to Indian athletes in 2023, 380 were snapped up by cricketers alone.

The only category of sports spending that witnessed a de-growth in 2023 was advertising on sports-related content.

Even here, cricket held its own with a share of 94% in 2023.

Despite a fall of ₹59 crore in spending in 2023, media spends still accounts for the largest share (over 47%) in sports commercialisation in India.

While TV advertising still comprises more than 50% of the total media spending, it fell by 16% in 2023, even as the share of digital swelled by 40%.

This shift was visible during IPL 2023 too, where TV ads spending declined but digital spending grew by 25%.



# How Molineux, Royal Challengers' spin ace, repaid Smriti's faith

After multiple injuries pushed her to the sidelines for over two years, the Australian left-arm off-spinner makes a strong case for a return to the squad for the T20 World Cup in September with her title-winning performance for RCB in the WPL



K. MURALI KUMAR

## Lavanva Lakshminarayanan

Think of yourself as someone putting a franchise cricket team together. Would you pick a player who last featured in a T20I in 2021? More so if you're an established club in the world of franchise cricket looking for greener pastures after an underwhelming showing in the first season of the biggest women's T20 tournament in the world? Royal Challengers Bangalore did just that.

After a disappointing first rodeo in the Women's Premier League, the RCB management sat captain Smriti Mandhana down and said, "This is your team, build it the way you want." That conversation also involved asking Smriti if she had any recommendations for RCB's next coach. The first name that came to her mind was Luke Williams, the assistant coach at Southern Brave in The Hundred, which she had been part of.

"During The Hundred is where Luke and I started jotting down a few names and tracking a few players. Sophie Molineux was one of them," Smriti told *The Hindu* after RCB's maiden WPL title triumph. "She was injured so we had to track her. Luke kept close tabs on the Australian system and we went through with her."

### Ever the fighter

If you're an Indian women's cricket fan, you might remember Molineux copping a bouncing ball to the face during the third ODI against India at Mackay in 2021. She cut her lip but came back with her mouth taped to bowl the death overs, making the visitors work for their two-wicket win in the final over. That victory halted Australia's world record 26-match unbeaten streak but Molineux's resilience became the talking point of the day.

Her tryst with injuries continued as she sustained a stress fracture to her right foot at the end of the same year. That was curtains for her participation in the Women's National Cricket League (Australia's domestic 50-over tournament) and the Ashes.

She also missed the 2022 Women's World Cup in New Zealand, which Australia won for the seventh time, and the Commonwealth Games where Australia defeated India.

The eight-month-long lay-off eventually cost her the Australian national contract. The southpaw returned to cricket in The Hundred, where she took five wickets and scored 65 runs in five games.

During the Women's Big Bash League that year, Molineux – leading Melbourne Renegades – ruptured her anterior cruciate ligament which needed mandatory surgery and ruled her out of competitive cricket for 12 months. Consequently, she missed Australia's

triumphant 2023 T20 World Cup campaign.

Molineux made a return to cricket in the Australian domestic circuit in December 2023, captaining Victoria in the WNCL. She hit the ground running, scoring 62 runs and taking six wickets in only her second game. After leading the wicket-takers' chart for much of the tournament, she finished fourth in the list with 17 scalps in six matches; she also contributed 167 runs in six innings.

The Bairnsdale-born all-rounder then made it to the Governor General's XI which beat South Africa ahead of the multi-format series Down Under. She was named Player-of-the-Match for her 41-ball 59 and one wicket. Molineux featured in the one-off Test against South Africa where she went wicketless but was economical. She has now taken Jess Jonassen's place in Australia's squad for the tour of Bangladesh ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup to be held in the Asian country later this year.

"I've always loved the game. I used to play three games a weekend back home and just loved it. When you get caught up in doing it day-in-day-out as a job, you don't stop and then you probably don't take it for granted when it's not there," she had said when she made her comeback in Australian colours.

"We've been following her for a very long time. I remember her bowling against us in the one-day series, which we nearly won, when we went to Australia. She was the difference between the Australian team and the Indian squad, and the way she bowled in the last four-five overs and it always stuck with me somehow – her performance," Smriti said after the WPL triumph.

"The last two years, with a few injuries, have been really tough on her. She went through ACL and I can feel that pain (having gone through it myself)... so really happy for her," she added.

### WPL run

Coming into WPL Season 2, RCB had to deal with the loss of England captain Heather Knight who chose to prioritise national duty for the tour of New Zealand in the run-up to the World Cup. That opened the door for Molineux to repay the faith Smriti and Williams had shown in her.

In the first game, she left UP Warriorz skipper Alyssa Healy flummoxed with a ripper that straightened instead of spinning in. RCB won that game by two runs.

Facing Gujarat Giants next, Molineux claimed three scalps – Veda Krishnamurthy, Kathryn Bryce and Sneha Rana – in RCB's eight-wicket win. She went wicketless in RCB's 25-run loss to Delhi Capitals and seven-wicket loss to Mumbai Indians. Molineux had Healy's

number again in the reverse fixture with another peach of a delivery that appeared to turn well past leg-stump but straightened. Richa Ghosh did the rest behind the stumps, leaving Healy short of her crease. The left-armed also got rid of Poonam Khemnar as RCB scripted a 23-run win.

Molineux dismissed D. Hemalatha, but was expensive in RCB's 19-run loss to Gujarat Giants.

The crunch game against Delhi Capitals saw the Bengaluru outfit open the batting with the all-left combo of Molineux and Smriti. It was a call that left many puzzled as it exposed the Indian to her off-spin weakness early on. Though Smriti fell early, Molineux managed a 30-ball 33 in a chase that RCB agonisingly fell short by a solitary run. That loss put its playoff chances in danger. Molineux was expensive, going for more than 11 runs an over in that game, with questions emerging about her spot in the line-up.

However, Ellyse Perry helped RCB seal its place in the Eliminator with an all-round show against Mumbai Indians. Molineux retained her place in the knockout fixture against the same opponent, giving away just 16 runs in her four overs and taking a wicket.

It was in the final that Molineux truly came into her own. Taking on a dominant Delhi Capitals, RCB's spin trio of Shreyanka Patil, Molineux and Asha Sobhana proved to be a formidable spin web that pulled Meg Lanning & Co. into its trap. It was a spell-binding over by Molineux that turned the game on its head.

DC was 64/0 at the end of the seventh over. Molineux, who had conceded 10 runs in her first over in the PowerPlay, rocked Capitals with three strikes in a single over, removing Shafali Verma with a tossed up delivery which the opener struck straight to midwicket.

She then took out Jemimah Rodrigues and Alice Capsey off consecutive deliveries, both heading in between the middle- and off-stump. She went on to concede just 20 runs in the game and also pulled off a remarkable run out to send Arundhati Reddy back to the hut. Her performance powered RCB to its maiden title and she deservedly won the Player-of-the-final honour.

"To be picked by RCB after not playing cricket for a while... it is an incredible competition and it is only going to go from strength to strength. Proud to be a part of it and this one (the POTM award) is special," Molineux said. She had repaid the faith when it mattered the most.

### Soph, the leader

During India's multi-format series against Australia late last year, Perry had walked up to her RCB teammate Shreyanka Patil with a message about her prospective

colleague and spin partner Molineux.

"Pez said, 'Sophie Molineux is a terrific person. You have a lot to learn from her. She is a very experienced player.' That got me excited. I just wanted to meet her instantly," Shreyanka revealed.

"After every over she bowled, she would come up to the other spinners and tell them what's happening on the wicket. You don't get that from everyone. She would come up and say, 'there's something in this area of the wicket. If you bowl here, it will help you.' She would give those little tips that would be so helpful. One over can change you, one ball can change the whole game," Shreyanka added.

A day after the tense final, Molineux admitted that the whole night was still a "blur." She and her compatriots (Perry and Georgia Wareham) would barely have time to digest it all, with a flight scheduled to Bangladesh for a tour.

"We were really calm. We knew we were up against some world-class players and that it would take just one good over or a couple of wickets to turn the game," she said.

When asked how she guides the spin groups in the teams she plays for, there was almost a hint of embarrassment.

"We made a conscious decision as a group that communication was going to be the key in this tournament, particularly for the spin group as we were playing on different pitches each night," she told *The Hindu*.

Smriti's smile – one akin to that of a gambler's when their punt pays off – was understandable.

"She is brilliant. She is one of the smartest bowlers I've seen in a while. She has a good yorker. She has a slower one that turns and one that goes into the wicket. That's great news for a captain.

"Sometimes, she would ask if a player would play a certain delivery or respond to it with a certain shot. That's it. She would do the rest. She leads (Melbourne) Renegades, so obviously... (she's tactically sound)," Smriti said.

She was, however, quick to add that not too many insights were passed on as the pair will be on opposite ends in the World Cup.

With her incredible displays at the age-group level, Molineux was always regarded as the next big thing growing up in a country that is used to ruling the world in the sport. It comes as no surprise that she leads the Victoria side which also has the likes of Lanning and Perry.

Molineux attributed a big part of RCB's change of fortunes to belief. It is incredible how that single factor has guided her comeback to the game.

The emphatic performances thereafter have boosted her chances of returning to the XI for Australia's World Cup title defence in September.

## THE GIST

Molineux has been part of two T20 World Cup triumphs for Australia (2018 and 2020)

She finished her maiden season in the Women's Premier League with 12 wickets in 10 matches with best figures of three for 20 and economy rate of 7.31

Molineux leads Melbourne Renegades in the WBBL and Victoria in the WNCL. She is also a part of Birmingham Phoenix in The Hundred

She has also represented Canterbury Magicians in New Zealand's Super Smash