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## INSIDE



### New rules to save fliers from wait aboard aircraft

**NEW DELHI**  
The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security issued new standard operating protocols for airports and airlines, allowing passengers who have deplaned after any delay in flight to undergo security check at the boarding gate. » PAGE 4

### Heatwaves likely during election season, says IMD

**NEW DELHI**  
The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday warned of "above-normal" heatwave conditions in most parts of the country in April and May. These are the months when polling will be held across the country. » PAGE 6

### Author quits Akademi over 'interference'

**NEW DELHI**  
A controversy erupted in the Sahitya Akademi on Monday after Malayalam author C. Radhakrishnan resigned from the membership of the premier literary body's general council, citing political interference. » PAGE 6

### Pakistan court suspends Imran, wife's jail term

**ISLAMABAD**  
In a temporary relief to jailed former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, a high court on Monday suspended a 14-year sentence handed out to him and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana corruption case. » PAGE 14

# Centre and Cong. spar over Katchatheevu issue

PM and External Affairs Minister flay Congress regimes for indifference towards the island

Congress quotes Centre's 2015 RTI reply, which stated that the island lies on the 'Sri Lankan side'

Opposition leaders ask if the 'change of stance' by Modi govt. is related to 'election politics'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The controversy over India "ceding" the island of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974 escalated on Monday after Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged news reports on the issue for the second day and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar declared that previous Congress governments had given away the rights of Indian fishermen in that area.

Hitting back, the Congress quoted the government's Right to Information (RTI) reply on the issue in 2015, which said the island was situated on "the Sri Lankan side of the International Maritime

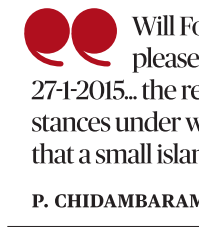
Boundary Line". Mr. Modi, in a post on X, flagged a second news report on the issue that said the DMK, under then Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, was kept in the loop when the Union government decided on ceding Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka.

**PM questions DMK**  
"Rhetoric aside, DMK has done NOTHING to safeguard Tamil Nadu's interests. New details emerging on #Katchatheevu have UNMASKED the DMK's double standards totally. Congress and DMK are family units. They only care that their own sons and daughters rise. They don't care for anyone else. Their callousness on Katchatheevu has harmed the inter-



The Congress and DMK raised the issue in Parliament as if they bear no responsibility for it, while they are the parties which did it

S. JAISHANKAR, External Affairs Minister



Will Foreign Minister Mr. Jaishankar please refer to the RTI reply dated 27-1-2015... the reply justified the circumstances under which India acknowledged that a small island belonged to Sri Lanka

P. CHIDAMBARAM, Congress leader

ests of our poor fishermen and fishermen in particular," Mr. Modi said in his post. Mr. Jaishankar, in his press conference at the BJP's headquarters on Monday, said it was wrong to say that the ceding of

Katchatheevu was an "old issue" that was being resurrected keeping the Lok Sabha election in mind. "It has been frequently raised in Parliament and has been a matter of frequent correspondence between the

### Revisiting pact could affect ties: former diplomats

**NEW DELHI**  
Any move by the government to revisit the 1974 India-Sri Lanka agreement on Katchatheevu island could have a broader diplomatic impact on India's ties in the region and raise questions about other bilateral negotiations, warned former diplomats. » PAGE 4

displayed indifference towards Katchatheevu island and gave away Indian fishermen's rights despite legal views to the contrary. Referring to documents obtained by BJP's Tamil Nadu chief K. Annamalai under the RTI Act, Mr. Jaishankar said that while the 1974 pact ensured fishing rights for Indian fishermen, a 1976 agreement between India and Sri Lanka ended them. "We know who did it, today we are looking for who hid it," he said.

Responding to the Minister's statement, Opposition said the 2015 RTI response of the Ministry clearly stated that previous agreements did not "involve either acquiring or ceding of territory belong-

ing to India". Opposition leaders asked if the "change of stance" by the Narendra Modi government was related to "election politics". "Tit for tat is old. Tweet for Tweet is the new weapon. Will Foreign Minister Mr. Jaishankar please refer to the RTI reply dated 27-1-2015... The Reply justified the circumstances under which India acknowledged that a small island belonged to Sri Lanka," former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram said in a post on X. Former Union Minister Anand Sharma said India's strategic interests and relationship with neighbours must not be lost to electoral narrative.

**'NO BIG CATCH'**  
» PAGE 5

### Gone with the sea



**Skeletal structure:** Houses destroyed by a sea surge on Monday at Mundakkal in Kollam, Kerala. C. SURESHKUMAR

# Israeli air strike destroys Iranian consulate in Syria

**Associated Press**  
DAMASCUS

An Israeli air strike has destroyed the consular section of Iran's embassy in Syria, killing a senior Iranian military adviser among others, Syrian state media said on Monday.

The strike on the Iranian consulate building could mark an escalation of the Israeli military's ongoing targeting of Iranian military officials and allies in Syria, which has intensified since the onset of its war with Hamas.

Israel said it had no comment about the Syrian media reports.

Iranian state television Al-Alam and pan-Arab television station Al-Mayadeen said the strike killed Iranian military adviser Gen.



**Helping hands:** Rescue workers in action at a destroyed building hit by an airstrike in Damascus, Syria, on Monday. AP

Ali Reza Zahdi, who led the elite Quds Force in Lebanon and Syria until 2016.

Iranian Ambassador Hossein Akbari condemned Israel and said as many as seven persons were killed, but first responders were still searching for bodies under the

rubble. He said two police officers who guard the building were wounded.

Mr. Akbari vowed revenge for the strike "at the same magnitude and harshness".

**ISRAEL PULLS OUT OF SHIFA**  
» PAGE 14

# Supreme Court allows Hindu worship to continue inside Gyanvapi premises

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday managed a balancing act, allowing a chosen Hindu priest to continue to offer worship inside the cellar or *tekhana* on the Gyanvapi premises while Muslims used the mosque and the surrounding courtyard for performing *namaaz*.

A three-judge Bench of Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud found it "appropriate" to order the *status quo* in order to "enable both communities to offer religious worship". "This way *namaaz* is offered on the premises of the mosque. The *tekhana* is safeguarded. The arrangement would be maintained between now and the trial," Chief Justice Chandrachud remarked



Police personnel deployed outside Gyanvapi Mosque and Kashi Vishwanath Temple. FILE PHOTO

orally. The court ordered that the *status quo* would not be disturbed by either contesting party.

The Hindu plaintiffs, represented by senior advocate Shyam Divan, claim that the entire area of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi belonged to a temple of Swayambhu Lord Adi

Vishweshwar since Satyug. They said the temple, which once stood on the Gyanvapi plot, was brought down by the "Farman of Emperor Aurangzeb in the year 1669".

Senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, for the mosque's management, Anjuman Intazamia Masjid, claimed

the suit filed in a Varanasi court was only a ruse to encroach into the mosque land.

**Legal battle**  
The mosque managers have been fighting a prolonged legal battle after the suit by the Hindus, who started out seeking a judicial declaration of their right to worship inside the mosque premises, followed by the "discovery" of a "Shivling". However, the Muslim side claimed the structure was a fountain. The courts had allowed Hindu religious rituals in a cellar of the mosque accessed through the southern side of the premises.

Back-to-back orders by the Varanasi court had allowed Hindu religious rituals in a cellar of the mosque accessed through the southern side of the premises.

# No coercive action over tax notices against Cong. in view of polls: I-T Dept.

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

Amidst allegations of "tax terrorism", the Income Tax Department on Monday stated in the Supreme Court its resolve not to take any "coercive steps" against the Congress on tax demands of approximately ₹3,500 crore raised in March, in view of the Lok Sabha election.

At the very outset of the hearing before a Bench headed by Justice B.V. Nagarathna, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta stated that "since election is going on, we do not want any problem to arise for any political party... We will not take any coercive steps till the case is heard again on July 24, 2024".

"He [Mehta] has rendered me speechless..." senior advocate A.M. Singh-

### Poll respite

I-T Dept. submits in SC that the Congress need not have any apprehensions over tax demands till July due to upcoming polls

- Total tax demand made of Congress amounts to ₹3,567 crore
- In the latest notice, tax demand raised was ₹1,745 crore for 2014-15 to 2016-17
- Tax authorities have already withdrawn ₹135 crore from the party's accounts for other years
- Relief comes after party lost its appeal before I-T Appellate Tribunal and Delhi High Court



vi, for the Congress, reacted to the unexpected turn of events.

### Mounting trouble

Trouble had been mounting for the Congress with fresh notices from the Income Tax Department raising a tax demand of ₹1,745 crore for the assessment years 2014-15 to 2016-17.

With the latest notice, the department had raised a total tax demand of ₹3,567 crore from the Congress.

The authorities had ended the tax exemption available to political parties and had taxed the party for gross receipt based on a Delhi High Court order of March 2016.

The Congress has chal-

lenged the High Court order that gross receipt was taxable.

"Gross receipt is never taxable. Only total income is taxable. We are a political party, not a profit-making organisation," Mr. Singhvi argued. He raised the issue that Section 13A of the Income Tax Act provided tax exemption to political parties.

Mr. Mehta said the total of over ₹3,500 crore was a "block assessment" of the past seven years. This was excluding the ₹135 crore recovered from the party through attachment. He said the department had willingly made the "concession" to avoid coercive measures in view of the prevailing circumstances of the elections.

**THE BIGGER ISSUE**  
» PAGE 4



## INBRIEF



## Punjab, Haryana Police review poll preparations

Even as the security has been beefed up in States ahead of the parliamentary polls, the Punjab Police on Monday carried out flag marches at sensitive areas while the Haryana Police reviewed preparations. Punjab Special Director General of Police (Law and Order) Arpit Shukla said police teams with the Central Armed Police Forces conducted flag marches in all 28 police districts, aimed to boost the confidence of the general public. In Haryana, Police DGP Shatrughan Kapur convened a videoconference with senior officers and directed district SPs to conduct thorough audits of their respective police forces.

## SC grants bail to U.P. varsity V-C in conversions case

The Supreme Court on Monday confirmed its interim order of granting bail to Rajendra Bihari Lal, Vice-Chancellor of U.P.'s Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology and Sciences, in connection with two criminal cases pertaining to offences including that of alleged religious conversions. While issuing the notice to the State government on Mr. Lal's bail plea, a Bench, headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, had granted interim bail to him on March 4 in connection with two FIRs lodged at Nawabganj and Naini police stations in Prayagraj. "We are confirming the order passed by us on March 4," the CJI said, adding that Mr. Lal will have to cooperate with police in the pending probe in one of the FIRs. PTI

## U.P. teacher booked for beating boy, making casteist remarks

A primary school teacher has been booked here for allegedly thrashing a Class 6 student and passing casteist remarks after he refused to touch his feet, police said on Monday. The boy's father alleged that his son suffered serious injury in his eyes and back, they said. Based on the complaint, a case has been registered against the teacher from a school in the Urwa police station in Gorakhpur under the SC/ST Act, the police said. According to the complainant, the incident took place on March 27 during the recess period when the teacher asked the boy to touch his feet. When he refused, the teacher allegedly kicked and punched him before picking him up and slamming him on the floor. When the boy started crying, the teacher abused him and threatened to get him expelled from school, the police said. PTI

## Political reality: everybody loves a Bhojpuri star but the language remains marginal to mainstream politics

Sreeparna Chakrabarty  
NEW DELHI

Political parties have been clamouring to get on board as many Bhojpuri stars as they can on their candidate list. The entertainment industry performers hold sway over parts of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, across about 73,000 square kilometres which identifies Bhojpuri as its mother tongue.

Bhojpuri folk singer Neha Singh Rathore, who the Congress party is considering for a Lok Sabha ticket from North East Delhi, said, "Crores of Bhojpuri-speaking people have been waiting for decades for their language to get the official status. It is unfortunate that people who got votes in the name of Bhojpuri have kept the language in a neglected state. Until Bhojpuri is accepted as a language for imparting education, no entrance examinations for jobs can be conducted in the language and it cannot be used for government work." Ms. Rathore has a YouTube channel which has 1.2 million subscribers, through which she has started a movement called



(From left) Bhojpuri stars Manoj Tiwari and Ravi Kishan, and folk singer Neha Singh Rathore. FILE PHOTO



the Bhojpuri Bachao Aandolan.

According to the 2011 Census, 5.6 crore people in India identified Bhojpuri as their mother tongue, ranking sixth in terms of the number of people who speak it in the country. Yet it is not part of Schedule 8 of the Indian Constitution that lists 22 official languages. Bhojpuri speakers and experts believe this needs to be addressed immediately.

Actor-singer Pawan Singh, who has been fielded by the BJP from Asansol, has 3.5 million followers on Instagram and over 11 lakh followers on X. Actor-singer Dinesh Lal Yadav (popularly known as Nirahua), BJP MP from Azamgarh who has been given a ticket again, has 1.8 million Insta-

gram followers and over 25 lakh followers on X. Actor-singer-music director Manoj Tiwari, sitting BJP MP from North East Delhi, has over 8 lakh Instagram followers and 1.7 million followers on X. Actor-producer Ravi Kishan, who is the sitting BJP MP from Gorakhpur and has been fielded from there again, has over 2 lakh Instagram followers and over 56.5 lakh followers on X.

**Words not spoken** For a language, which has long been subsumed under the umbrella of Hindi, Bhojpuri has evolved over the last four decades as a cultural identity which has a dedicated genre of literature, films, and folk music. Linguists say it originated from Prakrit spoken in the

Indo-Gangetic planes of India and drew its grammar from existing tribal languages.

The total number of people who speak Bhojpuri is larger than the combined strength of the speakers of four languages inducted into the list in 2004: Bodo, Dogri, Maithili, and Santhali. The Vishwa Bhojpuri Sammelan (World Bhojpuri Conference) estimates that approximately 20 crore people speak the language worldwide. It is officially recognised in three countries in the world: Mauritius, Fiji, and Nepal.

Ajit Dubey, national president of the Vishwa Bhojpuri Sammelan, says only when it is included in the National Education Policy will it come into the mainstream. "We need defined

parameters to decide which language should be designated as an official language," he said.

On March 9, when the Indian government launched primers in 52 languages to help impart education in a child's mother tongue, Bhojpuri was not part of them. The Sahitya Akademi, the premier literary institution of the country, does not have any awards for the language, as it is not part of the official languages list. "Hindi and Bhojpuri have substantially different origins, but because of geographical proximity, the two languages have developed many common elements," says Prof. G.N. Devy, linguist and author of *People's Linguistic Survey of India*.

According to Peggy Mohan, Bhojpuri scholar and visiting professor at Ashoka University, Sonapat, historically, it grew as the language of the masses and non-elites, lending it a subaltern hue.

"This seems to have continued to the present day. It has created a situation where Hindi is spoken in school, but Bhojpuri otherwise," she said.

## Nashik impasse persists as Shinde Sena stands firm on at least 16 seats

Incumbent MP Hemant Godse from the ruling Sena hits campaign trail in the constituency even as Ajit Pawar faction of NCP pitches Chhagan Bhujbal as the Mahayuti candidate

Shoumojit Banerjee  
PUNE

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena on Monday expressed confidence it would at least be contesting on 16 of the 48 Lok Sabha seats in the State, even as the tussle over the key Nashik seat in northern Maharashtra continued among the ruling Mahayuti alliance.

Given that Hemant Godse, the incumbent Nashik MP, is from the Shinde Sena, the party has claimed the seat as belonging to its quota.

However, the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) faction is aggressively gunning for the candidacy of senior Minister Chhagan Bhujbal, currently an MLA from Yeola in Nashik.

Shinde Sena leader Sanjay Shirsat remained firm on securing the seat. "We are going to take it. We have a sitting MP there," he said.

Mr. Shirsat maintained that his party would not settle for less than 16 Lok Sabha seats; last week, the party had announced its first list of eight candidates.

"Within the next two



Nashik MP Hemant Godse. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



NCP Ajit Pawar faction MLA Chhagan Bhujbal. FILE PHOTO

days, it will be clear who will contest which seat. We estimate that the Nashik, Sindhudurg and Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar seats will be allotted to us. We are preparing to contest 16 to 18 seats. We will not get less than 16 seats," he said.

While there is a tug of war between the Shinde Sena and the NCP (Ajit Pawar) faction over Nashik seat, both the BJP and Mr. Shinde's faction have staked claim on the Sambhajnagar and Ratnagiri-Sindhudurg constituencies.

The BJP has announced candidates on 24 Lok Sabha seats while the Ajit Pawar's NCP has officially declared its candidates for the Baramati and Shirur Lok Sabha seats, while giving the Parbhani seat to Rashtriya Samaj Paksha

chief Mahadev Jankar.

Following the split in the Uddhav Thackeray-led undivided Shiv Sena in June 2022, 13 of the 18 Lok Sabha MPs have gone over to Mr. Shinde's camp.

Mr. Godse has already hit the campaign trail in Nashik. However, Mr. Bhujbal has indicated that he will be contesting the seat and that his candidature had already been 'cleared' by Delhi.

"I was told that my name was decided in the meeting of the Mahayuti alliance held in New Delhi despite me saying that I did not want to contest. This was confirmed by [BJP leader and Deputy CM] Devendra Fadnis. Once the seat and alliance has made up its mind, then I will contest will all my strength," Mr. Bhujbal said.

## Nana Patole in league with BJP: VBA chief

The Hindu Bureau  
PUNE

Following the breakdown of seat-sharing talks between the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) and the Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA), VBA chief Prakash Ambedkar has now targeted Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole, alleging that he was in "league with leaders of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)".

Speaking to reporters, Mr. Ambedkar wondered if some leaders in the Congress had a 'secret relationship' with some BJP leaders in Nagpur and other LS constituencies.

"Nana Patole withdrew from the Bhandara-Gondiya seat. It seems he does not really want to fight against the BJP. The secret relations between Nana Patole and some BJP leaders are now in the open," alleged Mr. Ambedkar, in an allusion to the friendship between Mr. Patole and BJP leader Nitin Gadkari.

## For Assam's UPPL, a test of transfer of votes to ally BJP

Rahul Karmakar  
UDALGURI (ASSAM)

The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) seeks to "reclaim" a reserved Lok Sabha constituency associated with Bodo pride but the real test of its popularity could come from a nearby seat, where its ally the Bharatiya Janata Party is counting on the former's vote bank to win.

Autonomous BTR

The UPPL rules the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in alliance with the BJP and the Gana Suraksha Party (GSP). The Council administers the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) comprising five districts - Baksa, Chirang, Kokrajhar, Tamulpur, and Udalguri.

The Council and the region are named after the Bodos, the largest plains tribe in the northeast but constituting less than 40% of the population across the BTR. The remaining 60% is made up of some 20 ethnic groups, including non-Bodo tribes and Muslims.

The Scheduled Tribe-reserved Kokrajhar constituency elected a Bodo representative from 1957 to 2009 until Naba Kumar Sarania, a former member of the extremist United Liberation Front of Assam, rode the support of the non-Bodos to win the seat in 2014 and as an Independent in

2019. Mr. Sarania, who heads the GSP, hopes to retain Kokrajhar but the UPPL believes it can stop him because of "permanent peace" and mending of ties among various ethnic groups over the past few years.

"Violence and bloodshed ruled the BTR until the BJP-led government in Assam and our coalition government in the Council ensured permanent peace through a historic peace accord (2020). The people know the UPPL is not partisan and addresses the issues of everyone without any prejudice," UPPL president and BTC chief Pramod Borro told *The Hindu*.

11 Assembly segments

Kokrajhar, encompassing 11 Assembly segments, is entirely in the BTR. The UPPL has nominated party MLA Joyanta Basumaty from this constituency and is supporting the BJP's Dilip Saikia in the adjoining Darrang-Udalguri seat.

Formerly Mangaldoi, where alleged manipulation of the electoral rolls to enlist "Bangladeshis" led to the six-year Assam Agitation in 1979, Darrang-Udalguri is partly in the BTR and covers six Assembly seats.

The challenge for the UPPL is to ensure its votes are transferred to the BJP when Darrang-Udalguri votes on April 26.

## Nine isn't fine for Congress in Bihar, highlights former State unit chief's parting shot

NEWS ANALYSIS

Amit Bhelari  
PATNA

Since the Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance) announced its seat-sharing deal in Bihar on March 29, many in the Congress felt that the grand old party had been short-changed by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD). This sentiment came out in the open after former Bihar Congress president Anil Kumar Sharma resigned from the party on Sunday.

While speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Sharma accused the RJD of marginalising the Congress in the State. "The RJD leadership does not treat the Congress as a partner but as a beggar. I fail to understand the reasons to keep supporting the RJD, which, in Bihar, is seen as a reactionary casteist party and promoter of 'Jungle Raj'. It seems that the Congress party has entered into a permanent agreement with the RJD," he said.

Big setback

Mr. Sharma, whose resignation is being seen as a big setback to the Congress ahead of the crucial poll, bristled at the seat-sharing arrangement in Bihar. Out of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in the State, the RJD will contest on 26 seats, with nine seats allotted to the Congress and the remaining five to the Left parties. He reminded that it was the Congress, and not the RJD, which won the lone Opposition seat in the State in the 2019 general election.

Numbers aside, Congress insiders also point at



Anil Kumar Sharma expressed dismay at how RJD gave Congress just 9 LS seats as part of seat-sharing arrangement. FILE PHOTO

the seats that have come into the party's kitty. One leader said the party was counting on getting the Begusarai seat, which has instead gone to the CPI.

**Cutting the party to size** Similarly, Khagaria, which the Congress was keen on, was allotted to CPI(M), which has never contested the seat before. The leader, who did not wish to be identified, said the RJD did this to stop the influence of the Congress, which has won the seat thrice.

The party leader, who holds an organisational post in the State unit, said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi demanded Khagaria for the young leader Chandan Yadav in 2019 as well.

However, the seat was given to the Vikasheel Insaan Party, then part of the grand alliance.

The leader also said that over the years, the number of seats RJD gives to Congress has gradually gone down.

It gave 21 seats to the Congress in the 1998 Lok Sabha poll, which was subsequently reduced to 16 in 1999. In 2004, the Congress was offered just four seats and in 2009 the number came down to three. In

2014, the RJD, after facing a drubbing in 2009, allotted 12 seats to the Congress. However, it again reduced the number to nine seats in 2019.

The Aurangabad Lok Sabha constituency, from which RJD will field a candidate this time, is considered a Congress bastion. It is the constituency from which Nikhil Kumar, former Kerala Governor and Delhi Police Commissioner, secured a win.

Mr. Kumar is the son of former Bihar Chief Minister Satyendra Narayan Sinha, who won the Lok Sabha seat six times, and the grandson of Anugrah Narayan Sinha, the first Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar.

Mr. Kumar, whose wife, the late Shayma Sinha, also won the seat on a Congress ticket, issued a statement saying the RJD had not followed the "coalition dharma" and that he would bring the matter to the notice of the Congress top brass.

Even the Sheohar seat, which has gone to the RJD kitty, was earlier demanded by Congress. Former MLA Amit Kumar Tunna announced that he just needed the blessing of the party leadership to contest the seat.





**Tough battle:** Pinarayi Vijayan has also asked why Rahul Gandhi was not contesting against the BJP in the Hindi heartland. PTI

## Pinarayi slams Cong., says it first clamoured for Delhi CM's arrest

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan launched a scathing attack on the Congress for "hankering" for the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and not expressing remorse for the police complaint that opened the door for the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to investigate and incarcerate the AAP leader.

Speaking to reporters in Kozhikode on Monday, Mr. Vijayan, however, complimented the Congress for belatedly expressing solidarity with Mr. Kejriwal and condemning the Union government's subversion of Constitutional agencies to stifle dissent, jail political rivals, hobble the campaign finances of Opposition parties and engineer defections to the Sangh Parivar fold.

Mr. Vijayan said Congress leaders were increasingly susceptible to inducements and threats from the Union government.

"Rahul Gandhi had said that former Congress leader Ashok Chauhan wept

and admitted that fear of arrest by the ED had compelled him to defect to the BJP," he said.

Mr. Vijayan said politics was not an armchair job, and leaders should have the courage and moral fibre to face and defeat authoritarianism and misuse of the law and order machinery.

The Chief Minister said the Congress leaders were increasingly fickle, and they quit the party to join the BJP at the slightest hint of a threat.

He said the Congress was often blind to national interest and sacrificed it at the altar of political expediency. Its leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, have not spoken against implementing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

"For one, Assam, a BJP-ruled State, has implemented the NRC. At least 19 lakh residents, including Hindus and Muslims, risked losing their citizenship if they could not produce birth certificates and remember the date of birth of their grandfathers," he said.

# SC refers Kerala govt.'s suit on net borrowing cap to five-judge Bench

The court says Centre has given Kerala 'substantial relief' of ₹13,608 crore; it refuses to pass any judicial order directing the government to lift the net borrowing ceiling for Kerala or enable the State to borrow ₹26,226 crore on an immediate basis

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday referred to a Constitution Bench the question raised by Kerala whether a State has an "enforceable right" to raise its borrowing limits from the Union government and other sources.

The court wants a five-judge Bench to decide important questions of law, including whether "fiscal decentralisation" was an aspect of Indian federalism and if Central regulations fixing net borrowing ceilings on States were a violation of the principles of federalism. It raised the issue if financial restrictions introduced by the Centre had meted out a differential treatment to Kerala compared with other States.

The Division Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan also sought the Constitution Bench to examine if the borrowing restrictions of the Centre were in conflict with the role assigned to the Reserve Bank of India as the "public debt manager". Finally, the two-judge Bench framed the question whether it was mandatory for the Centre to have prior consultation with States for giving effect to the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

The reference came on the basis of an original suit filed by Kerala accusing the



The order was *ad interim* in nature and the questions of law raised in the suit would be examined by five-judge Bench which should interpret clause (3) of Article 293

**SUPREME COURT**

Union government of arbitrarily restraining its borrowing limits, due to which the State is skirting on the brink of a financial emergency, unable to pay salaries, pensions and fulfill its other essential financial commitments.

However, the Bench was sceptical about Kerala's prowess to use its funds wisely. It refused to pass any judicial order directing the Union government to lift the net borrowing ceiling for Kerala or enable the State to borrow ₹26,226 crore on an immediate basis. "If the State has essentially created financial hardship because of its own financial mismanagement, such hardship cannot be held to be an irreparable injury that would necessitate an interim relief against the Union... it might set a bad precedent in law that would enable the States to flout fiscal policies and still successfully claim additional borrowings," the court noted.

The Bench observed that the Centre had already allowed a "substantial relief" of ₹13,608 crore to the State for it to tide over the

immediate crisis.

The court noted that the "balance of convenience" lay in favour of the Centre for now as it had already given the additional amount to the State.

The court, however, also highlighted its disapproval of the Centre's conduct during the hearing of the case when it had pressed the State to withdraw its suit in return for financial help.

The court said the order was *ad interim* in nature and the larger questions of law raised in the suit would be examined by the five-judge Bench, which the Chief Justice of India would constitute later on.

The Division Bench noted that there was a vacuum in law concerning Article 293 of the Constitution.

Kerala had approached the apex court arguing that the Centre's shackles on the State's borrowing powers was an attack on federalism and a catalyst to bring about a breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the State. The State had argued that the borrowing limits ought to be fixed by the States.

## A positive step that will benefit other States also: Kerala

**The Hindu Bureau**  
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal on Monday described as "positive" the Supreme Court decision to refer the State government's suit on its borrowing limit to the Constitution Bench.

Mr. Balagopal, reacting to the court decision, portrayed it as a vindication of the State's stand. "The important point here is that the court has held that the suit filed by Kerala is serious enough to be examined by the Constitutional Bench," Mr. Balagopal said, speaking to reporters in Kollam.

The court decision is an important event in Centre-State relations, especially in matters pertaining to federalism and finances, Mr. Balagopal said. It shows that there is indeed substance in the arguments made by the State government regarding federalism and fiscal matters.

"It is equally important that the court has referred to the Constitutional Bench a suit which the Centre wanted summarily rejected when it was filed," he said.

On the court declining



It is equally important that the Supreme Court has referred to the Constitutional Bench a suit which the Centre wanted summarily rejected

**K.N. BALAGOPAL**  
Finance Minister

the State's plea for ₹10,000 crore as interim relief, Mr. Balagopal said it could be because the "pressing needs" for the month of March have been met. The Finance Minister said that the State is optimistic about its prospects before the Constitutional Bench. "This is the first time in the history of Kerala and India that a subject of this nature is going to come up before the Constitution Bench," he said.

"We are hoping that it would prove helpful to other States as well. In fact, we are hoping that it would be helpful to the country itself. Because, India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union 'of' States. Not Union 'and' States. Only if there are States there is the Union," he said.

## Shoot-to-kill order likely as man dies in jumbo attack

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PATHANAMTHITTA

The forest fringes of Pathanamthitta erupted into protests after a 50-year-old man was trampled to death by a wild tusker that wandered into a human habitat in the early hours of Monday. The Forest Department has recommended a "shoot to kill" order for the animal.

The victim, Biju Kudilil, 50, hailed from Puliyan-kunnumala, near Thulappally. The incident occurred around 1.30 a.m. when he ventured into his backyard to drive away the elephant.

According to reports, Biju woke up on hearing the elephant damaging crops on his property and attempted to chase it away. However, the elephant attacked him, resulting in his death.

Upon notification by local residents, officials from the Pampa police station and the Kanamala forest station arrived at the scene. However, enraged residents refused to surrender the body, alleging negligence on the part of the Forest Department despite prior alerts about the animal's presence in the village. The department refuted these allegations.

The protest ceased after Pathanamthitta District Collector S. Prem Krishnan held talks with the protesters. Subsequently, the body was shifted to the Government Medical College Hospital, Kottayam, for a post-mortem examination.

## 'Cong. should have set up panel to pick candidates'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Senior Karnataka Congress leader and Minister for Food and Civil Supplies K.H. Muniyappa said that instead of fielding candidates from outside in Kolar and Bagalkot constituencies, the party should have set up a core committee for discussing the pros and the cons of each candidate before announcing the list of candidates.

Mr. Muniyappa has been sulking after the party denied ticket to his son-in-law Chikka Peddanna to contest from the Kolar reserved constituency in the Lok Sabha election on April 26.

The party has fielded K.V. Gowtham, president of the Bengaluru Central District Congress Committee. Mr. Muniyappa said he has suggested that the party high command form a core committee to look into the issue of not only candidate selection but also for discussions on major issues. The government should take decisions on major subjects after discussions in the core committee of the party, he said.

The seven-time MP from Kolar said the party should have fielded a "consensus candidate".

A group of legislators from Kolar apparently backed by former Speaker K.R. Ramesh Kumar opposed the high command's proposal to field Mr. Peddanna.

Without sorting out differences in the factions of the district, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar had recommended the name of Mr. Gowtham, he said.

## Raining misery



A woman attempts to salvage her belongings after her house was destroyed in a hailstorm, at Boko in Assam on Monday. PTI

## Siddaramaiah links win in Chamarajanagar, Mysuru seats to his political future

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has made it clear that the stakes are high for him in the coming Lok Sabha election in Chamarajanagar and Mysuru constituencies.

Kicking off his three-day election campaign in the two Lok Sabha constituencies by addressing a rally on Monday at Biligere in his home constituency of Varuna, which is part of the Chamarajanagar (reserved for SC) Lok Sabha segment, Mr. Siddaramaiah made an impassioned appeal to people to give the Congress a lead of 60,000 votes in Varuna, but also indirectly linked his continuation in the Chief Minister's post to the performance of the Congress candidate in the constituency.



**Poll pitch:** Siddaramaiah addressing the media in Mysuru on Monday. M.A. SRIRAM

Though the Varuna Assembly constituency is part of Mysuru district, the home constituency of Mr. Siddaramaiah is part of the Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha segment.

**60,000 lead sought**  
Introducing the Congress candidate Sunil Bose as Social Welfare Minister H.C. Mahadevappa's son, Mr. Siddaramaiah appealed to the gathering to give him a

lead of at least 60,000 votes. "If you give him a lead of 60,000 votes, I will be happy. Nobody will be able to touch me," he said.

Though he was against fielding his son and former Varuna MLA Yathindra from Mysuru, Mr. Siddaramaiah has indicated that the candidature of Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) spokesperson M. Lakshmana, a Vokkaliga, has his backing.

## Jagan joins Iftar in Sri Sathya Sai district

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KADIRI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy took part in an Iftar organised by the Muslim minority leaders at Kadiri in Sri Sathya Sai district on Monday night.

The Chief Minister arrived at the venue around 8.30 p.m. and spent about an hour at the Iftar.

The minority leaders of the YSR Congress Party and the community lead-

ers spoke about the various welfare schemes extended to the minorities during the last five years. Religious heads conducted special prayers and blessed Mr. Jagan.

Earlier, the Chief Minister's Memantha Siddham bus yatra passed through various mandals, after starting from Battalapalle in Sri Sathya Sai district at 10.45 a.m. En route, Mr. Jagan Mohan Reddy spoke to farmers and women's groups.

## Congress decides to field ex-BRS MLA's daughter in Warangal

**The Hindu Bureau**  
HYDERABAD

The Congress will field Kadiyam Kavya, daughter of former BRS MLA Kadiyam Srihari who joined the Congress a couple of days ago, from the Warangal (SC) Lok Sabha constituency in Telangana.

The clearance was given by the Congress Election Committee on Telangana, which met in New Delhi on Monday and discussed the names for the four pending

seats from the State. Dr. Kavya, who had been nominated by the BRS to contest Warangal, had switched to the Congress on Sunday.

Though the Congress list is yet to be released officially, sources said Sameer Waliullah, chairman of the Hyderabad City Congress Committee minority wing, will be pitted against AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi in Hyderabad.

A. Praveen Reddy, who had to forego the Husnabad ticket in the Assembly

election, will be the candidate for Karimnagar seat where former BJP State president Bandi Sanjay and former MP of BRS Vinod Kumar are in the fray.

The stalemate over Khammam seat continued and the decision was left to the party high command. Deputy Chief Minister Bhatti Vikramarka is seeking ticket for his wife Nandini while Minister for Revenue Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy wants it for his brother Prasad Reddy.

## A.P.'s 'Diviseema Gandhi' joins JSP

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PITHAPURAM

Mandali Buddha Prasad, the former Deputy Speaker of the Andhra Pradesh Assembly, joined the Jana Sena Party in Kakinada district on Monday. JSP president K. Pawan Kalyan welcomed him into his party.

Mr. Prasad is the son of Gandhian Mandali Venkata Krishna Rao. Popular as 'Diviseema Gandhi', Mr. Prasad has served as Minister for Animal Husbandry

and Dairy Development. He was instrumental in establishing the country's first polytechnic college in fisheries in Bhavadevarapalli. He was elected as TDP MLA of Avanigadda in 1999 and 2004. He has also served as Andhra Pradesh State Official Language Commission Chairman.

Mr. Prasad was the man behind the commissioning of a bridge across the river Krishna to connect the Diviseema region with the rest of the Krishna district.



# Ex-diplomats caution govt. on Katchatheevu

Former envoys to Sri Lanka say External Affairs Ministry's position over the past decade has been in line with stance taken by previous governments; they say any change in position on the issue could affect relations with neighbouring countries and damage India's credibility in the region

## NEWS ANALYSIS

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

Any move by the government to revisit the 1974 India-Sri Lanka agreement on Katchatheevu island could have a broader diplomatic impact on India's ties in the region and raise questions about other bilateral negotiations, warned former diplomats.

Most also questioned whether External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's comments at a press conference on Monday on "ceding" Katchatheevu island, and finding a "solution" for the situation indicated a shift in the Ministry's position as outlined in a number of parliamentary replies over the past decade, submissions in the Supreme Court, and Right to Information (RTI) responses

that categorically denied there had been a "ceding" or "acquisition" of territory in the 1974 agreement.

According to former National Security Adviser (2010-2014) Shiv Shankar Menon, reopening the half-century-old agreement by the government could be a "self-goal".

"The situation on the ground is hard to reverse, but such issues being raised by the country's leadership will damage the credibility of the country and could be a self-goal," Mr. Menon, who served as Foreign Secretary (2006-2009) and India's High Commissioner to Sri Lanka (1997-2000), told *The Hindu*.

"Sovereignty and territorial integrity are not issues where the government's position changes when there is a change in government. If the government were to reopen old



Such issues being raised by the country's leadership will damage the credibility of the country and could be a self-goal

**SHIV SHANKAR MENON**  
former National Security Adviser

agreements, it would set a bad example," said former High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Ashok Kantha, who added that the "whole architecture" of agreements with India's neighbour could be "damaged if there is a change in the original understanding".

Former Foreign Secretary (2009-2011) and High Commissioner to Sri Lanka (2004-2006) Nirupama Menon-Rao said that political trends in India, especially in Tamil Nadu, are watched closely in Sri Lanka and the impact on bilateral ties "cannot be incon-

sequential". She pointed out that most recently in 2022, the government had followed previous governments' position, even saying in court that the task of the retrieval of Katchatheevu was "impossible".

In Ministry responses from 2014 to 2022, available on its website, the government has consistently said – as previous governments had – that the "island of Katchatheevu lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Line", also referring to a number of writ petitions on the issue

that makes the matter "sub-judice" in the Supreme Court.

In addition, according to a reply in Parliament dated March 15, 2017, by then Minister of State for External Affairs General V.K. Singh, the problem of fishermen being arrested by the Sri Lankan government was not linked to Katchatheevu island directly.

Mr. Menon asked: "If PM Modi questions an agreement entered into, then what will stop a future government from questioning an agreement the present government is negotiating?"

They also said that the 1974 agreement had been responsible for an improvement in relations between the two countries. Under the agreement with Sri Lanka, Katchatheevu was found to lie in Sri Lankan waters, although In-

dian fishermen retain the right to visit to celebrate St. Anthony's Day at the church on the otherwise deserted island, and also are allowed to dry their nets there. However, Indian fishermen cannot fish near the island, which has been the source of contention raised regularly by the Tamil Nadu government.

A similar agreement with Bangladesh in 2015 had settled the decades-old land boundary enclaves issue, and India's decision to accept the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague's verdict in 2014 in favour of Bangladesh's maritime boundary claims, led to an overall improvement in Delhi-Dhaka relations. The reopening of the Katchatheevu island row follows the Modi government's decision to write to Pakistan's government last year, calling for renegotiation of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty.

# Police book students after ABVP stages protest against play

**The Hindu Bureau**  
PUDUCHERRY

The Kalapet Police have registered a case against some students and others on charges of "outraging religious sentiments" while staging a play at the annual cultural festival, Ezhini 2k24, at Pondicherry University last week.

The police registered the case *suo motu* following a protest by the Akil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), an affiliate organisation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), on the campus on the night of March 30. The play was staged on March 29.

The ABVP members alleged that characters of the epic *Ramayana*, were depicted in an objectionable manner while staging a play titled *Somayanam*. The play was staged as part of the festival organised by the Department of Performing Arts of the Pondi-

**The play allegedly depicted characters of the Ramayana in an objectionable manner**

cherry University.

"We have registered a case against those involved in staging the play, including the director and script writer. The Kalapet Police have started the inquiry," a senior police official told *The Hindu*.

Meanwhile, the Pondicherry University has also launched an inquiry into the issue. "It is hereby informed that the university has received a complaint against a play staged by students in the Department of Performing Arts. A committee is being constituted to investigate the matter," the Registrar in-charge of the varsity University said in a circular issued on Sunday, March 31.

# RSS group gives CAA 'eligibility certificates' to Hindus from Pak.

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

For the past one week, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)-affiliated group has been organising camps and issuing "eligibility certificates" to members of the Hindu community from Pakistan to help them apply for citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).

The group, Seemajan Kalyan Samiti, which operates in the areas along the Pakistan border, has helped around 330 people from Jaisalmer, Barmer, and Jodhpur in Rajasthan upload their documents on the citizenship portal – *indiancitizenshiponline.nic.in* – launched by the Home Ministry.

The CAA grants citizenship to members of six "persecuted" non-Muslim communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh.

The certificate, a mandatory document to be is-

**Through camps in Rajasthan, it has been helping people apply for citizenship on the CAA portal**

sued by a "locally reputed community institution", is to be enclosed with an affidavit and uploaded on the CAA portal along with other documents.

Vikram Singh Rajpurohit, an advocate and a member of the group, told *The Hindu* that since the Samiti is a registered organisation, it could issue the certificate. "One of our *mantris* [office-bearers], Tribhuvan Singh Rathore, is signing the eligibility certificates," he said.

The certificates, which could also be issued by a local priest, are to validate the religion of the applicant, and whether he or she continues to follow the faith.

A photograph posted on the Samiti's Facebook page said the group was organis-

ing "free citizenship application camp" in Jaisalmer. Around 60 people are seen sitting on the floor in a room, which has posters of Bharat Mata and pictures of former RSS chiefs K.B. Hedgewar and M.S. Golwalkar.

Mr. Rajpurohit said, "There are hundreds of people who came to India before 2010 and are yet to receive citizenship. I met a woman who came here in 1998 but does not have citizenship. In Jodhpur alone, there are around 5,000-6,000 such people." There are around 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in cities like Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jaipur in Rajasthan where an estimated two lakh people are said to be living. These people came to India in different phases.

It is to be noted that since the Pakistani Hindus entered India legally they were eligible for citizenship under Section 5 and Section 6 of the Citizenship Act, 1955.

# JNU to investigate student's complaint on sexual harassment

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) administration on Monday said it had launched an investigation into a sexual harassment complaint by a student.

The victim wrote to the administration and reached out to the students' union on Sunday over the alleged harassment by four men on the intervening night of March 30 and 31.

**Seek immediate action**  
On Monday, the union wrote to the administration alleging that the perpetrators are members of RSS-affiliated Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) and demanding immediate action in the matter.

Chief proctor Sudhir Kumar said on Monday, "We initiated an inquiry into the matter this morning, and spoke to the victim, as

well as the security guards. We have declared two of the four men out of bounds of the university."

In her complaint, the victim said the incident occurred when she and her male friend were taking a walk near the Ring Road around 2 a.m.

They were allegedly followed by four persons in a car. These four men allegedly harassed the female student in the presence of JNU security guards.

Mr. Kumar did not comment on the political affiliation of the perpetrators.

**'Free and fair probe'**  
He said the inquiry will be conducted in a "free and fair manner" irrespective of the affiliation of the accused.

He added that they are trying to ascertain how many of the perpetrators are JNU students.

When reached for comment, the ABVP did not respond.

# Kejriwal sent to Tihar jail for judicial custody till April 15

**Ishita Mishra**  
NEW DELHI

The Rouse Avenue Court on Monday sent Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to judicial custody till April 15 in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy.

He was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate on March 21. He was sent to Tihar jail after Special Judge (PC Act) Kaveri Bajwe passed the orders.

Later Mr. Kejriwal's counsel moved an application seeking to allow him to read three books in jail – the Bhagavad Gita, the *Ramayana* and *How Prime Ministers Decide*. He also sought permission for a special diet and to have a religious lockert.

Orders for his judicial custody came after the ED, through Additional Solicitor-General S.V. Raju, submitted in the court that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief had not been cooperative in the interrogation.



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal being brought to the Rouse Avenue Court on Monday. ANI

"He is found to be giving evasive replies and concealing information during the custodial interrogation," the ED said.

The ED, in its application, also submitted to the court that when Mr. Kejriwal was asked about Vijay Nair, he had stated that Mr. Nair did not report to him but to Delhi Cabinet Ministers Atishi Marlena and Saurav Bharadwaj.

Mr. Nair, as claimed by the ED, was the communication-in-charge of the AAP and was the first person from the party to be arrested in the case.

The Chief Minister was shown the "evidence" of hawala transfers to the tune of ₹45 crore approximately, which was corroborated with call records, seized data of a hawala firm in Goa, and proof of payments being done in part cash and part bill and WhatsApp messages showing this arrangement.

"Even after showing all the above evidence, the arrestee claimed unawareness even though the beneficiary of these funds is the AAP which is headed by the Chief Minister," the agency claimed.

# Issue at hand is larger than tax demand, says Congress

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday welcomed the reprieve it got from the Income Tax (IT) Department on the tax demand of ₹3,500 crore but said the entire episode raised issues that were larger than a tax demand.

Taking to X, former Finance Minister P. Chidambaram asked if demands could be raised on a political party when all parties were exempt from income tax. "Can a demand be raised on a political party for tax, interest and penalty that will effectively cripple the party? Can such demands be made during the period when national elections are held to elect a new Lok Sabha? What will prevail? Democratic elections or tax demands," he asked.

Rajya Sabha member and senior advocate Vivek Tankha, who had appeared for the Congress in the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, said "truth ultimately wins".

# Arunachal Pradesh will always be a part of India: Jaishankar

**Dinakar Peri**  
NEW DELHI

Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will always be a part of India, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Monday in response to China renaming yet another 30 places in the State, which it claims as 'south Tibet'.

The development follows closely after the recent visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the State for the inauguration of the Sela tunnel, built at an altitude of 13,000 ft.

"If today I change the name of your house, will it become mine? Arunachal Pradesh was, is and will always be a state of India. Changing names does not have an effect," Mr. Jaishankar said, responding to questions at a press conference. He also said that the Indian Army was deployed in Arunachal Pradesh.

China's Ministry of Civil Affairs made an announcement on March 30, which said it had "standardized" the names of 30 places in "southern Tibet". The first such "standardised" list of



S. Jaishankar

six places was released in 2017, followed by a second list of 15 places in 2021, and a third list of 11 places in 2023.

In the past too, the Ministry of External Affairs had rejected the renaming. "We have seen such reports. This is not the first time China has made such an attempt. We reject this outright. Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India. Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality," the MEA's spokesperson said in April 2023.

Following Mr. Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh on March 9, China issued statements asserting its

claims over the area and even lodged a diplomatic protest with India.

Responding to questions on March 23, after delivering a lecture at the Institute of South Asian Studies, the National University of Singapore, Mr. Jaishankar termed China's repeated claims as "ludicrous", and said that Arunachal Pradesh was a "natural part of India".

There was also friction over a statement by the U.S. recognising Arunachal Pradesh as part of India. "The U.S. recognises Arunachal Pradesh as Indian territory, and we strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to advance territorial claims by incursions or encroachments, military or civilian, across the Line of Actual Control," the U.S. State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel had said on March 9.

China had reacted sharply to state that the China-India boundary issue was a matter between the two countries, and that Washington had nothing to do with it.

# New rules to save fliers from tiring wait aboard aircraft stuck by delays

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI

Long delays due to reasons such as poor weather have on occasion forced airlines to confine passengers for up to 12 hours within an aircraft waiting on the ground for its turn for a take-off. But this is set to change soon.

In an important security reform for air travellers that seeks to ensure their convenience, the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has issued new standard operating protocols (SOPs) for airports and airlines. In a first, these allow passengers who have deplaned and are escorted back to the terminal building to undergo a security check at the boarding gate itself if a flight is delayed due to either weather or technical issues or the death of a passenger onboard.

Currently, airlines are required to take passengers who have deplaned to the arrivals section of the airport where they have to re-enter the security queue. This is a long and



As per the new protocol, passengers who have deplaned can undergo a security check at the departure gate. R.V. MOORTHY

tedious procedure and could escalate delays and is known to discourage airlines from disembarking passengers.

The BCAS issued the new protocol on March 30. "The SOPs will be implemented once the airports have set up the requisite infrastructure and we have reviewed the same," BCAS Director-General Zulfiqar Hasan told *The Hindu*. No timeline for implementation has yet been prescribed.

Airports will need to earmark space at some of their boarding gates for "return boarding" where CISF personnel and x-ray machines will be deployed

for frisking passengers and scanning cabin bags.

Alternatively, passengers can be taken to the pre-existing security check zone for which a sterile passage will have to be created. Airlines may also print fresh boarding cards, as per the protocols.

During a delay, an airline will assess whether there is a requirement to request for return boarding. It will then have to consult a Chief Airport Security Officer (CASO) or an official of the BCAS who will examine and approve the request.

If an airline fails to request for such a passage and follow the prescribed

SOP despite an unreasonable delay, the BCAS and CASO can also hold it accountable.

In January, when several parts of the country saw their worst fog in several years, there were many instances of passengers being stuck inside aircraft from three to 12 hours as airlines waited for an all-clear for take-off. On January 14, a passenger even hit a pilot on a Delhi-Goa flight because they were confined within the aircraft for nearly three hours and the flight had been delayed for over eight hours. The same aircraft's return journey from Goa was delayed for 12 hours and forced the airline to divert to Mumbai airport for refuelling, following which the passengers refused to leave the tarmac area after being deplaned, resulting in a fine of ₹1.2 crore on the airline and ₹90 lakh on the Mumbai airport.

The same day, passengers travelling on an Air India flight from Delhi to Vancouver were stuck inside a stationary plane from 4:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.



# ELECTIONS 2024



## Pappu Yadav to fight from Purnea seat

Bihar leader Pappu Yadav, who merged his Jan Adhikar Party (Loktantrik) with the Congress, has decided to contest the Purnea seat. He will file his nomination on April 4.

In Bihar, the INDIA bloc has struck a deal in which the RJD will contest 26 seats, the Congress nine and the Left five. Purnea has gone to the RJD.

However, there has been an ongoing tussle over the seat in the bloc even though RJD chief Lalu Prasad gave Rupauli MLA Bima Bharati the nod to contest the seat. Mr. Pappu has been staking claim to contest from Purnea.

On Monday, he posted a message on X saying, "For the convenience of my friends of Purnea constituency spread across the country and those who want to participate in my nomination, instead of April 2, the date of filing my nomination is April 4."



Pappu Yadav will file nomination papers on Thursday. FILE PHOTO

## Weeks after RLD joined NDA, Siddiqui resigns

Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) vice-president Shahid Siddiqui on Monday said he has resigned from his post and the party's primary membership.

Mr. Siddiqui's move comes weeks after the RLD joined the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. "Yesterday, I have sent my resignation letter from the membership of Rashtriya Lok

Dal and the post of national vice-president to national president Jayant Singh. Today, when India's Constitution and democratic structures are in danger, remaining silent is a sin... but with a heavy heart I am forced to distance myself from RLD. India's unity, integrity, development and brotherhood are dear to all. It is the responsibility and duty of every citizen to save it," he said. He added that the RLD becoming a part of the NDA put him in a "piquant situation".



There should not be any sense of overconfidence... Both war and election should be fought with complete caution and full strength

**YOGI ADITYANATH**  
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister

## BJD MP and actor Mohanty joins the BJP

Anubhav Mohanty, the outgoing Biju Janata Dal MP from Kendrapara Lok Sabha seat and a prominent actor in Odia cinema, on Monday joined the BJP ahead of elections. Mr. Mohanty had successfully fought the 2019 Lok Sabha election by defeating Baijayant Panda, BJP's national vice-president.



The only factor in this poll is Modi. Everyone wants to make him the PM again. The result will be same even if all the Opposition parties come together

**HIMANTA BISWA SARMA**  
Assam Chief Minister

## EC censures Ghosh, Shrinate over remarks

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Censuring Bharatiya Janata Party leader Dilip Ghosh and Congress leader Supriya Shrinate, the Election Commission on Monday said it was convinced that the two leaders made "low-level personal attacks" against women and thus violated the provisions of the model code of conduct.

In separate notices issued to both, it said the leaders' election-related communications will be specially and additionally monitored from now on.

A copy of the notices were also marked to the respective party chiefs asking them to sensitise their functionaries to be careful while communicating in public domain.

"You may please issue specific advisory to all party functionaries involved in election campaign and in interactions in public domain not to commit such type of violation as in the instant case, besides following the MCC in letter and spirit so as not to trigger a chain reaction of similar comments vitiating the election campaign," it said.

### 'Offensive comments'

The EC last week slapped show-cause notices on Mr. Ghosh and Ms. Shrinate for their "offensive", "insulting" and "undignified" comments against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and actor and BJP candidate Kangana Ranaut, respectively.

Their remarks were "undignified and in bad taste" and violated the poll code, the EC had said. The MCC has been in force since March 16 when the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls were announced.

The action against Ms. Shrinate was taken following a complaint by the BJP which alleged that she had posted a picture of Ms Ranaut along with "derogatory remarks" on Social media platform, X. The notice to Mr. Ghosh, BJP leader from Bengal, was issued after a complaint by the Trinamool Congress for mocking the West Bengal Chief Minister's family background.

## Falling hook, line and sinker for island pact, but no big catch

The Katchatheevu row has been dusted off yet again, but the Ramanathapuram constituency near which the island is situated has largely supported candidates belonging to the DMK or Congress or those with backing of either of the parties

### IN FOCUS

T. Ramakrishnan  
CHENNAI

Katchatheevu, a barren islet about 14 nautical miles off Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu, refuses to die as a subject of political discourse, though nearly 50 years have lapsed since India and Sri Lanka signed a pact to demarcate the maritime boundary line.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked up a controversy over Katchatheevu, a few weeks ahead of the Lok Sabha election in the State. Citing a report in a daily and posting it on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), he said: "Eye-opening and startling! New facts reveal how Congress callously gave away Katchatheevu..."

Yet, the utility of Katchatheevu as an electoral issue is doubtful, if one goes by the results of Lok Sabha elections in the Ramanathapuram constituency since 1977. Of the 12 elections held so far, only twice (1998 and 2014) did the constituency return candidates who were not backed by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the



Political row: Katchatheevu is a barren islet about 14 nautical miles off Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram district of Tamil Nadu. FILE PHOTO

Congress, both of which are now the targets of attack by their adversaries. In 1974, the Congress was in power at the Centre and the DMK in the State. On all other occasions, the winners either belonged to the DMK or the Congress or enjoyed the backing of either of the parties.

In 2019, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) bagged the constituency, as a part of the front that had the DMK and the Con-

gress. Even now, the IUML is seeking re-election with the support of the two parties. However, A. Anwar Raajhaa, senior All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader who represented Ramanathapuram during 2014-2019, feels it is his party that will stand to benefit under the present circumstances.

"When it was decided in 1974 that Katchatheevu was a part of Sri Lanka, the Congress and the DMK

were the ruling parties. Besides, the BJP, which has been in power for 10 years, did not do anything to get it back," he points out.

He adds it was his party's chief and former State Chief Minister Jayalalithaa who launched a "genuine legal battle" for retrieval of the islet.

Emphasising that Katchatheevu has never caused any electoral impact, A. Gopanna, Tamil Nadu Congress Committee vice-pre-



People of the State would not believe Mr. Modi's words, as it is well known that he is making his point for the sake of electoral gains

A. GOPANNA  
Congress leader

sident, says this time too, there will be no difference. "People of the State would not believe Mr. Modi's words, as it is well known that he is making his point for the sake of electoral gains. Besides, there is no relationship between the islet and fishery dispute, as Sri Lanka is richer in marine resources than us," he asserts.

### 'Exposes the betrayal'

But, C.R. Kesavan, national spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), refers to the implications of the issue, by contending that the matter "exposes the betrayal" of the DMK-Congress combine.

Pointing out that the two parties were in power at that time, he describes the ceding of the islet as a "Shakuni-like match-fixing" by the two parties to give away this land, which is of "strategic national interest to India".

## Take action over Rahul's fixing remark, BJP urges EC

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

A day after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at the Opposition INDIA bloc rally accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "match fixing" the 2024 Lok Sabha through the use of enforcement agencies against Opposition leaders, the BJP urged the Election Commission (EC) to take "strict action".

A BJP delegation comprising Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and BJP national general secretary Arun Singh lodged the complaint against Mr. Gandhi. Addressing presspersons after their meeting with EC, Mr. Puri said Mr. Gandhi's comments during the meet were "extremely objectionable" as they were "not just in violation of the model code of conduct but could have serious implications".

"Addressing the public meeting, Mr. Gandhi said this [the Lok Sabha election] is a fixed match. He also said that the Centre has deployed its people in the EC. He also raised questions on the credibility of the EVMS and said the Constitution will be cancelled (changed) after elections," Mr. Puri said.

Mr. Singh accused Mr. Gandhi of repeatedly making such comments, and said the EC should consider censuring him from speaking during the Lok Sabha election.

## New toll rates to come into effect after LS polls

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) has asked the state-owned NHAI to go ahead with the calculation of new toll rates on highways, which kicks in annually from April 1 across most of the tolled highway stretches in the country, but said the new user fees should be applicable only after the Lok Sabha election.

Responding to a communication from the Road Transport and Highways Ministry, the poll body has asked the National Highways Authority of India to defer the toll fee hike.

### Annual exercise

The annual revision of toll hikes, which was expected to be in the range of an average 5%, was to come into effect on April 1 for most of the tolled highways and expressways.

"The process required for the decision on the power tariff may be continued by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission. However, tariff award shall be made only on the completion of poll in the relevant State, i.e after the poll date/dates in the state. In respect of the clarification sought, it is stated that user fee may be seen in context of the power tariff as mentioned in the Commission's instruction cited above," the EC said on Monday.

According to a senior official, the change in toll fee is part of an annual exercise to revise the rates that are linked to the changes in the Wholesale Price Index-based inflation.

## Alliance between Apna Dal (K) and AIMIM birthed by BJP, says SP

Mayank Kumar  
LUCKNOW

The Samajwadi Party on Monday said the alliance between the Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) for the Lok Sabha election in Uttar Pradesh has been orchestrated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to divide secular and pro-democratic votes in the State.

The Samajwadi Party said the PDA (*pichda*, Dalit and *alpsankhyak*) communities are solidly behind the INDIA bloc and are aware that such alliances are attempts to make the BJP victorious.

"They (Apna Dal and AIMIM) were reading the BJP's script. The alliance has been formed to help the BJP by dividing PDA votes. But secular and pro-democratic people are aware and will not fall into the trap. The voters have made up their minds to unseat the BJP from power and such tactics will yield no result," Samajwadi Party chief spokesperson Rajendra Chowdhary told



New tie-up: AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi with Apna Dal (K) leader Pallavi Patel announcing the alliance, in Lucknow on Sunday. ANI

### The Apna Dal (K) and the AIMIM on March 31 announced the formation of the PDM Nyay Morcha

### The Hindu.

Mr. Chowdhary said Pallavi Patel, the Apna Dal (K) leader and daughter of party chief Krishna Patel, should relinquish the membership of the Assembly as she had won on the SP symbol in the 2022 Assembly polls from the Si-

rathu seat. "What is the point of still remaining an MLA from the SP when she has parted ways," he asked.

The Apna Dal (K) and the AIMIM, led by Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi, on March 31 announced the formation of the PDM Nyay Morcha, describing it as a political front for justice for *pichda*, Dalits and Muslims in Uttar Pradesh.

### Seat-sharing row

PDM resonates with the PDA pitch designed by

## NC fields candidate from Anantnag, ends chance of PDP tie-up

Peerzada Ashiq  
SRINAGAR

The National Conference (NC) on Monday nominated senior leader Mian Altaf as its candidate for the Anantnag-Rajouri Lok Sabha seat, putting an end to the Congress's efforts to stitch together a pre-poll alliance between INDIA bloc members, including the NC and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), in the Kashmir Valley.

"There will be no better candidate than Mian Altaf from the constituency. He has vast popularity across various segments of the society. He would garner substantial support from the people," NC vice-president Omar Abdullah said.

NC spokesperson Imran Dar said it was a "unanimous decision" of the party to field Mr. Altaf. "We hope the voters will give a decisive mandate and a fitting reply to those forces who snatched J&K's identity," Mr. Dar said.

The NC's decision to field a candidate from the south Kashmir seat has

brought an end to several months of efforts by the Congress to negotiate a seat arrangement between the NC and the PDP.

The two parties are the main constituents of the Peoples Alliance for the Gupkar Declaration, fighting for restoration of the pre-August 2019 position of J&K, when the erstwhile State enjoyed special constitutional status under Article 370 and 35A.

The PDP has not reacted to the development. It has been insisting on fielding a candidate from one of the three seats in the Valley.

The PDP's first choice was Anantnag-Rajouri where its chief Mehbooba Mufti had won in the past and a seat the party considers a bastion. However, the NC has been adamant on fielding candidates from all the three seats, arguing it won them in the 2019 election. J&K has five Lok Sabha seats, two in the Jammu region and three in Kashmir. The Congress, the PDP and the NC have decided to fight together in the Jammu region.



## IN BRIEF



## IAF jets to conduct landing drills on highway in Kashmir

A strip of road in south Kashmir's Bijbehara on the Srinagar-Jammu national highway will be used to conduct emergency landing drills by aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) from Monday night, according to officials. Sukhoi fighters and Tejas light combat aircraft are likely to participate. This is the first such drill to be conducted in the Valley. The IAF will use highways as an alternative runway during emergencies. Landings will be conducted on 3.5 km of highway in Bijbehara. An official said all civilian vehicles were directed on Monday to divert to the old national highway alignment. The health, fire service, and other departments will also participate in the drill.

## NPPA revises ceiling prices of over 900 drug formulations

There has been a marginal hike in the prices of antibiotics and painkillers from Monday. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) had allowed price hike for select medicines by 0.00551%. The Department of Pharmaceuticals has now issued its annual list of revised ceiling prices for 923 scheduled drug formulations and revised retail prices of 65 formulations. This revision is part of a routine exercise. The prices of medicines were hiked by 12% in 2023. In 2019, the NPPA used its emergency powers to raise the ceiling prices of 21 essential drugs by 50% after several companies applied for the discontinuation of products due to high cost.

## SC notice to EC on plea to check EVM, VVPAT counts

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday issued notice to the Election Commission (EC) on a writ petition seeking a direction to mandatorily cross-verify the count in electronic voting machines (EVMs) with votes verifiably recorded as cast by counting all voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) slips.

A Bench of Justices B.R. Gavi and Sandeep Mehta tagged the petition filed by lawyer and activist Arun Kumar Agrawal, represented by advocate Neha Rathi, with pending ones on the same issue.

Ms. Rathi argued for a complete count of VVPAT slips in elections as opposed to the current practice of verification of only five randomly selected EVMs through VVPAT paper slips.

The petition further challenged the EC's guideline that mandated sequential VVPAT verification, that is, one after the other, causing undue delay.

The petition proposed simultaneous VVPAT verification by deploying more personnel for counting in each constituency. "This would allow VVPAT verification to be done in five to six hours," the plea claimed.

## Rise in demand for MGNREGS points to failure of govt.: Cong.

The data point to 'widespread unemployment and stagnant wages' that runs counter to development narrative being talked, says Cong. leader

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Reacting to the latest statistics of the flagship rural employment guarantee scheme showing that demand for work is more than the pre-pandemic level and on a steady rise, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh has said it is a "living monument" to the Narendra Modi government's many failures.

As per the statistics, a total of 305.2 person days (one person working a normal shift) were generated in financial year 2023-24, which is 12 crore more person days than in 2022-23 and 40 crore more than the first pandemic year in 2019-20. In many ways, 2022-23 is seen as the first year after the country came out of the pandemic shock and it took time for the economy to pick up.

In a detailed statement here, Mr. Ramesh pointed out that the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was designed by the Congress government as a safety net



Hitting out: MGNREGS was designed by the Congress government as a safety net for the rural poor. FILE PHOTO

for the rural poor. "It is demand-driven which means that employment is generated only when there is no alternative paying better wages," Mr. Ramesh said.

The Congress general secretary said that data points to "widespread unemployment and stagnant wages". He accused the government of turning a blind eye, since the data run counter to the "development" narrative propagated by the government. "A government that refuses to listen to today's grim reality will be unsuccessful

in combating it," he said.

Copying PM's own words that he used in 2015 to describe the programme, Mr. Ramesh said the increase in MGNREGA person-days last year is in fact a "living monument" to the Modi government's many failures.

He said that despite the Modi government's dismissive attitude towards the programme, it had to rely on the scheme as a primary source of income support for the poor during the pandemic and unfortunately even in the present.

## Heatwave conditions likely during election season, warns IMD

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday warned of "above-normal" heatwave conditions in most parts of the country in April and May. These are the months when polling will be held across the country.

Advisories have been issued to the Election Commission (EC) and the States to take adequate precautions.

Advisories have been issued to the Election Commission (EC) and the States to take adequate precautions. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, north Karnataka, Odisha, and western Madhya Pradesh, which on average see one to three heatwave days during April and May, are likely to experience two to eight heatwave days, the IMD said. Heatwave days occur when day temperatures in a place are at least 4.5 degrees Celsius above normal, or greater than 45 degrees Celsius, on two consecutive days.

While these regions are particularly vulnerable, above-normal temperatures are likely over the entire country barring Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and most of the northeastern States.

Union Minister for Earth Sciences Kiren Rijiju said that advisories had been issued to the EC and the



Advisories have been issued to the EC and the States to take adequate precautions.

States to "take precautions" and equip polling booths with oral rehydration salts for booth officials or voters who may experience a heatstroke.

"Electors are advised to carry wet towels to protect themselves from dehydration and women electors are advised to avoid bringing small children to booths during hot weather conditions," the EC had said in an advisory on March 16. Given that the Lok Sabha election is held in the summer months, these are routine advisories sent by the EC to its officials.

One of the reasons for the expected hotter than usual summers is the continuing effect of the El Nino, M. Mohapatra, Director-General, IMD, said. Associated with the heating of the surface waters of the Central Pacific, the El Nino is linked to drying up of the rains in India.

## Agencies must focus on crimes that truly threaten nation: CJI

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

Underlining that investigative agencies such as the Central Bureau of India (CBI) have been spread "too thin" over the years, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Monday said they must pick their battles to promote efficiency and concentrate attention on crimes that truly threaten the nation's security, economic health, and public order.

Justice Chandrachud made the remarks while delivering the 20th D.P. Kohli Memorial Lecture on "Adopting Technology to Advance Criminal Justice", on the Central Bureau of Investigation Raising Day.

Expressing concern over instances of "unwarranted" confiscation of personal

devices during searches, the CJI said they highlight the pressing need to strike a balance between investigative imperatives and individual privacy rights.

He said that in the era of digital transformation, the interplay between law and technology can result in better crime detection and also ensure criminal justice reform.

"In embracing the capabilities of technology, we reaffirm our commitment to the principles of fairness, equity, and accountability. By leveraging these tools responsibly and ethically, we ensure that the benefits of technological advancement reach all members of society, regardless of their background or circumstances," he said.

(With PTI inputs)

## Author quits Sahitya Akademi citing political interference

Sreeparna Chakrabarty  
NEW DELHI

A controversy erupted in the Sahitya Akademi on Monday after Malayalam author C. Radhakrishnan resigned from the membership of the premier literary body's general council, citing political interference.

In a letter addressed to Sahitya Akademi member secretary K. Sreenivasarao, Mr. Radhakrishnan said: "I strongly protest against this year's Akademi Festival having been inaugurated by a Cabinet Minister of the Government of India, a person without any known credential whatsoever in literature."

He was referring to Union Minister of State for Culture Arjun Ram Meghwal inaugurating the 39th edition of "Sahityotsav: The festival of letters" on



C. Radhakrishnan

March 11. The event witnessed the participation of more than 1,000 authors in over 170 languages.

Though set up by the government in 1954, the Akademi functions as an autonomous organisation, says its website.

The author, known for his critically acclaimed novels, further said: "I would like to clarify that I am not against any particular political party. I protest against the politicisation of administration of culture

eroding the independent stature of the Akademi."

The Sahitya Akademi was quick to respond, and said Mr. Radhakrishnan's written resignation was "misleading".

In a statement, Akademi president Madhav Kaushik said Mr. Meghwal was himself a writer. "He is well-versed in Rajasthani and Hindi," he said listing some of the Minister's published works. "Besides, he actively participated in many programmes for the development of Rajasthani language and extended full cooperation in various capacities for recognition of Rajasthani as an Indian language in the VIIIth schedule of the Constitution," the statement said.

Mr. Radhakrishnan though was unmoved. "Sure, anyone who writes at least a letter, is a writer," he told in a curt reply.

## 'Pannun case probe part of national security interests'

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The investigation into the alleged plot to assassinate U.S.-based Khalistani separatist Gurbaj Singh Pannun is part of India's national security interests, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Monday. He was speaking at a press conference at the BJP headquarters in New Delhi.

Earlier, U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti, in an interview to news agency ANI, had described the alleged plot to kill Pannun on American soil as an "unacceptable red line".

"It is something we are investigating as we believe our own national security interests are involved in that investigation," Mr. Jaishankar said in response

to a question about Mr. Garcetti's comment on the involvement of an Indian official in the alleged assassination plot.

"The position of my government is that in this particular case, there has been certain information provided to us which we are investigating," the Minister said. "So, as and when we have something to say on the investigation we would be very glad to speak about it. At this point we have nothing more to say," he added.

Mr. Garcetti had expressed satisfaction about the Indian investigation and said, "No government or government employee can be involved in the alleged assassination of one of your own citizens... That's just an unacceptable red line."

## In an all-time high, defence exports cross ₹21,000 crore

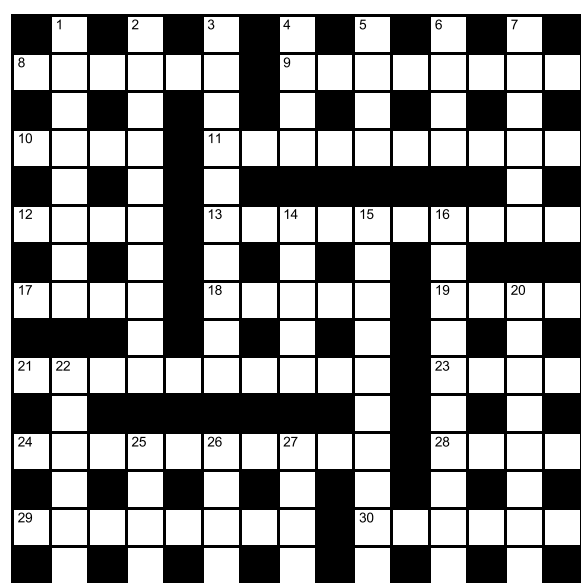
The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

India's defence exports crossed ₹21,000 crore for the first time, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday.

The figures indicated that defence exports had grown by 31 times in the past 10 years compared with FY 2013-14, the Defence Ministry said.

"Delighted to inform that defence exports have scaled to unprecedented heights and crossed ₹21,000-crore mark for the first time in the history of Independent India," Mr. Singh said on X. "Defence exports have reached the level of ₹21,083 crore in the financial year 2023-24 which is a spectacular growth of 32.5% over the previous fiscal."

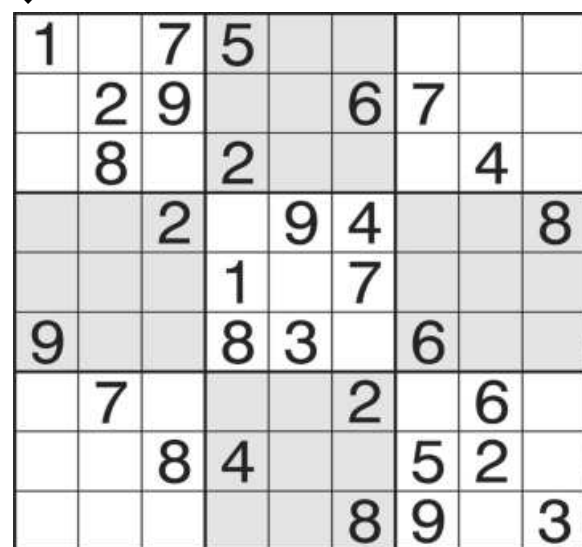
THE CROSSWORD + 14138  
(set by Vidwan)



- To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qrigo.page.link/jjp7n>
- 17 Part of mega lavish celebration (4)  
18 Medico retained by business for data repository (2-3)  
19 Support black sensitivity (4)  
21 Travelling faster than word of mouth? (10)  
23 Chance of noble backing king (4)  
24 Can a small magazine art possibly be a symbol of constitutional democracy (5,5)  
28 Large, adult, male black sheep (4)  
29 Left ousts judge! Removal leads to poll! (8)  
30 Slight wound (6)
- Down**
- 1 Beverage Company from California, County Los Angeles (4,4)  
2 Focus on awfully mean, defining quality of a person (6,4)  
3 Reportedly procure for channel - small derivatives (2-8)  
4 It indicates pitch conditions like erodability, flatness basically (4)  
5 Right, right! Acres for a vegetable! (4)  
6 No right plan for unwise (4)  
7 Country kid, keeping regularly ahead (6)  
14 Run into idle idiot (5)  
15 Popular and kind of mostly modern timeless tactic (10)  
16 Independent bills are questionable source of moral belief in individual and political freedom (10)  
20 Gathering up litter inside well (8)  
22 A new blue rum lacks potency (6)  
25 Part of body of knowledge about Catholic revolutionary (4)  
26 Each item has a receipt (4)  
27 Managed King's file (4)

- Across**
- 8 It goes into more than one rule (6)  
9 Part of Indian diet (3-5)  
10 Returns two-fold praise (4)  
11 Unmanageable sappers' works, involving resistance (10)  
12 Election Victory! Back to people finally! (4)  
13 How to get a message carried by the waves? (10)

## SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

**Solution to previous puzzle**

F	E	N	S	H	I	S	U	P	I	N	E		
R	E	E	M	O	E	O							
S	I	S	T	R	A	P	E	R	A	N	N	U	M
T	A	V	E	T	A	R							
P	R	E	T	T	P	A	S	S	L	O	I	N	
E	D	O	C	T	S								
B	A	D	M	O	U	T	H	C	H	I	C	H	
A	T												
S	C	A	T	I	N								
O	R												
A	N	T	I	S	T	E	W	A	R	D	E	S	
D	A	T	S	G	R	E	T						
T	E	A	R	O	O	M	S	A	M	A	Z	O	N
M	C	R	E	I	M	C							
A	N	T	H	E	M								

**Solution to yesterday's Sudoku**

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

## FAITH

## The key role of parents

The importance of parents in our lives is repeatedly emphasised by the dharma sastras. For an atma to gain liberation, it must first take birth. Since our parents are responsible for our birth, they deserve respect, said Velukkudi Krishnan in a discourse.

Secondly, parents protect us and provide for our needs. So they play the role of a *poshaka* – protector.

Thirdly, they do what we like and also what is good for us. It might sometimes happen that the two are contradictory. For example, a child may want to eat something that is not nutritious. The parents indulge it by allowing a small portion of what it likes. But they also ensure that the child takes good food, which will strengthen it.

When children err, the parents correct them. We often find that when people have broken some law, the parents are quick to say that their children are not inherently bad, but have picked up wrong notions from others.

Even while trying to reform a child, a parent makes excuses for the child's conduct. This quality is *vatsalya*. When a parent scolds a child or punishes it, the parent feels more pain than the child. Lord Narayana has all the above qualities. We take birth according to our karma, and He gives us a birth according to our karma. The Lord protects us. He is full of forgiveness towards us. That is why the Lord and His Consort are considered Universal parents.

Scriptures also say "Matru Devo Bhava", Pitru Devo Bhava" and "Guru Devo Bhava". It gives the first preference to mother, and then to father in worshipping. Later comes the teacher.



# Team led by PRL Ahmedabad finds ozone on Jupiter's moon

Scientists are currently studying various celestial bodies in the solar system that show signs of ozone, suggesting the existence of stable atmospheric conditions and, by extension, the possibility of them being able to host life

Tejasri Gururaj

An international team of scientists, including from India, has discovered strong evidence indicating the presence of ozone on Jupiter's moon, Callisto, shedding light on the complex chemical processes taking place on icy celestial bodies in the Solar System.

The study was published in the March 2024 issue of the journal *Icarus*. It outlines the researchers' investigation into the chemical evolution of 'SO<sub>2</sub> astrochemical ice', which is ice primarily composed of sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>) in the presence of ultraviolet irradiation.

This shed light on the chemical processes and composition of the surface of Callisto. By analysing the data of the UV absorption spectra of the irradiated ice samples, the team was able to identify a distinct signature indicating the formation of ozone.

They corroborated their findings by comparing them with data from the Hubble Space Telescope to understand Callisto's environment and the potential habitability of icy moons in the Solar System.

## The importance of ozone

The earth has life not just because it found a way to originate here; it also has the resources to thrive, evolve, and diversify. These resources include sunlight containing the "right" frequencies of radiation, water, a stable atmosphere providing a stable supply of the requisite gases at the right temperature, and various compounds required for the life-forms' biochemical processes.

This said, not all emissions from the sun are good for organisms on earth. Ultraviolet radiation in particular is harmful to many species (but also useful to some others). Two of its components, called ultraviolet-B and ultraviolet-C, of wavelengths 290-320 nanometres and 100-280 nanometres respectively, can damage DNA, trigger mutations, and increase the risk of skin cancer and cataracts in humans.

Ultraviolet light has also been known to inhibit plant growth and have detrimental effects on various organisms. This is why the ozone layer is a crucial part of the earth's atmosphere: it completely absorbs ultraviolet-B and ultraviolet-C radiation.

The ozone molecule is composed of three oxygen atoms bonded together. The ozone layer, found in the lower part of the earth's stratosphere, around 15-35 km above ground, serves as a shield. Without the ozone layer, ultraviolet radiation levels would be much higher on the planet's surface, rendering it uninhabitable for many species and disrupting entire ecosystems.

Scientists are currently studying various celestial bodies in the Solar System that show signs of ozone, suggesting the existence of stable atmospheric conditions and, by extension, the possibility of their being able to host life.

## Callisto and its unique environment

After Saturn, Jupiter has the most moons in the Solar System. Callisto is one of Jupiter's largest moons and the third-largest moon in the Solar System after Ganymede and Titan.

Callisto, despite its impressive size, is



The surface of Callisto imaged in approximately true colour by the Voyager 2 spacecraft in July 1979. NASA

distinguished by its composition. Despite being as big as the planet Mercury, it has less than half as much mass. Callisto is primarily composed of water ice, rocky materials, sulphur dioxide, and some organic compounds. These substances make the moon a potential candidate for supporting life in the solar system beyond the earth.

Callisto's surface is heavily cratered, indicating a long history of being struck by asteroids and comets. (It may have the oldest surface in the Solar System, in fact.) It also lacks the extensive seismic activity seen on some of Jupiter's other moons, such as Io and Europa.

The presence of relatively few geological features suggests Callisto's surface is geologically inactive. In other words, its surface has likely been relatively stable for a long time. This stability could be vital to preserve any subsurface ocean or potential habitats beneath the icy crust.

The detection of sulphur dioxide on Callisto's surface has encouraged this team of scientists to conduct spectroscopic observations to gain a better understanding of the moon's surface composition and formation.

**Recreating conditions on the earth**  
Scientists led by R. Ramachandran, of the Atomic, Molecular, and Optical Physics Division, Physical Research Laboratory, Ahmedabad, set out to investigate the chemical evolution of sulphur dioxide ice under irradiation, leading to the formation of ozone.

Scientists have previously demonstrated this process in laboratory experiments. The current team's aim was to recreate the conditions required for this process on the surface of Callisto when sunlight hits its surface. To do this, the researchers used vacuum ultraviolet



The ozone molecule is composed of three oxygen atoms bonded together. The ozone layer, found in the lower part of the earth's stratosphere, around 15-35 km above ground, serves as a shield against ultraviolet radiation

photons, which mimic the solar radiation that reaches the moon's surface.

The experiments were conducted at the National Synchrotron Radiation Research Centre (NSRRC) in Taiwan, which provided access to high-energy radiation sources required to recreate the radiation coming from the Sun.

To model the surface of Callisto, the researchers placed a substrate of lithium fluoride in a chamber with very low pressure. This environment recreated conditions similar to those found in outer space. The sulphur dioxide ice samples were deposited onto the substrate, setting the stage for the final step: observing the absorption spectrum.

The absorption spectrum is the unique fingerprint of a substance. It shows the wavelengths of light it absorbs, providing insights into its composition and properties.

The team carefully controlled the temperature of the sulphur dioxide ice samples throughout the experiment.

The samples were initially kept at a low temperature of around 9 K (-264.15 degrees C), in line with the conditions on Callisto's surface. Then they slowly warmed it up to 120 K to resemble different environmental scenarios.

In this process, they irradiated the ice with vacuum-ultraviolet photons (of wavelength 137.7 nanometres) and

recorded its ultraviolet absorption spectrum during and after the irradiation using a photomultiplier tube detector. This device measures low levels of electromagnetic radiation by converting photons into electrical signals.

## Ozone and potential habitability

The ultraviolet absorption spectrum revealed the formation of ozone after the sulphur dioxide ice samples were irradiated. This was evidenced by a distinct signature in the absorption spectrum.

The researchers also compared their experimental data with data collected by the Hubble Space Telescope, which had also suggested the presence of sulphur dioxide and ozone on the surface of Callisto in 1997.

The discovery of ozone on Callisto suggests the presence of oxygen, which in turn is a fundamental ingredient required for the formation of complex molecules required for life (as we know it), such as amino acids, raising questions about the moon's habitability. This extends to other icy moons in our solar system, potentially informing our understanding of habitable conditions beyond Earth.

In addition to the ozone, the researchers observed an unidentified band in the absorption spectrum - similar to that observed on Ganymede in 1996 - hinting at a common molecular source in their surface compositions or chemical processes.

This finding could provide valuable insights into geological and atmospheric processes on these moons. In particular, it could help us to understand the precise mechanisms that led to the formation of Jupiter and its moons, which remain topics of active research.

(Tejasri Gururaj is a freelance science writer and journalist.)



A study has found song lyrics have become angrier and more self-obsessed in the last 40 years. AUSTIN NEILL/UNSPASH

## Song lyrics are getting simpler, more repetitive, says study

Agence France Presse

Song lyrics really are becoming simpler and more repetitive, according to a study published on March 28.

Lyrics have also become angrier and more self-obsessed over the last 40 years, the study found, reinforcing the opinions of cranky, ageing music fans everywhere.

A team of European researchers analysed the words in more than 12,000 English-language songs across the genres of rap, country, pop, R&B and rock from 1980 to 2020.

Before detailing how lyrics have become more basic, the study pointed out that U.S. singer-songwriting legend Bob Dylan - who rose to fame in the 1960s - has won a Nobel Prize in literature.

Senior study author Eva Zangerle, an expert on recommendation systems at Austria's University of Innsbruck, declined to single out an individual newer artist for having simple lyrics.

But she emphasised that lyrics can be a "mirror of society" which reflect how a culture's values, emotions and preoccupations change over time.

Over the 40 years studied, there was repeated upheaval in how people listened to music. The vinyl records and cassette tapes of the 1980s gave way to the CDs of the 90s, then the arrival of the internet led to the algorithm-driven streaming platforms of today.

For the study, published in the journal

**There was a decrease in positive, joyful lyrics and a rise in expressions of anger, disgust or sadness. Lyrics have also become more self-obsessed, with words such as 'me' becoming popular**

*Scientific Reports*, the researchers examined the emotions expressed in lyrics, how many different and complicated words were used, and how often they were repeated.

"Across all genres, lyrics had a tendency to become more simple and more repetitive," Dr. Zangerle summarised.

The results also confirmed previous research which had shown a decrease in positive, joyful lyrics over time and a rise in those that express anger, disgust or sadness. Lyrics have also become more self-obsessed, with words such as "me" becoming much more popular.

The repetition rose most in rap over the decades, Dr. Zangerle said.

The researchers also investigated which songs the fans of different genres looked up on the lyric website Genius. Unlike other genres, rock fans most often looked up lyrics from older songs, rather than new ones.

Another way that music has changed is that "the first 10-15 seconds are highly decisive for whether we skip the song or not," Dr. Zangerle said.

Previous research has also suggested that people tend to listen to music more in the background these days, according to her. Put simply, songs with more choruses that repeat basic lyrics appear to be more popular.

"Lyrics should stick easier nowadays, simply because they are easier to memorise," Dr. Zangerle said. "This is also something that I experience when I listen to the radio."

## THE SCIENCE QUIZ

### Is there alien life in the Solar System?

Vasudevan Mukunth

#### QUESTION 1

This Jovian moon is the most geologically active planetary body in the Solar System, rendering life on this body very unlikely - but not impossible, especially since all that activity keeps it quite warm. Name this moon.

#### QUESTION 2

Data collected in 2015-2018 suggested the Solar System's largest asteroid may have a large subsurface ocean of water, but the evidence is weak. Very salty water is still expected to flow to its surface and may contain microbial life. Name this asteroid.

#### QUESTION 3

This moon is the only planetary body in

the Solar System other than the earth to have a complete cycle of a liquid on its surface. On the earth, it's made of water. On this moon, it's hydrocarbons - and this presents the possibility of hosting life. Name the moon.

#### QUESTION 4

This Neptunian moon has a mysterious feature: it's the only moon in the Solar System rotating in the direction opposite to that of its host planet. Scientists expect the radioactive decay of the rock in this moon's interior is releasing enough heat to keep its mantle, made of water, in a liquid state, raising the possibility of life. Name the moon.

#### QUESTION 5

NASA spacecraft have found this Saturnian moon may contain an underground water

ocean. The moon also ejects plumes from the subsurface through the ice shell, into space, containing salt water and organic molecules, hinting at the possibility of life. Name the moon.

#### Answers to March 28 quiz:

- Ink that renders numbers in different colours at different colours - **Ans: Optically variable ink**
- Print that prints features that rise a little above the note surface - **Ans: Intaglio**
- Numbers printed in small lettering between the Gandhi portrait and a vertical band - **Ans: Microlettering**
- Narrow ribbon strip woven across the note since 2000 - **Ans: Security thread**
- Position at which banknotes reveal their value in an image on the obverse - **Ans: Flat at eye level**

Visual: Mysuru

First contact: Shilpi Nigam Chandra | K.N. Viswanathan | Yogapriya K.



Visual: This is an artist's impression of the \_\_\_\_\_ spacecraft. NASA launched it in 2023 and it will reach Jupiter in 2031 to study the moons Ganymede, Callisto, and Europa for signs of life. Fill in the blank with its name (full form). ESA (CC BY-SA IGO 3.0)

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## No man's land

Those in power should not rake up issues that affect ties with neighbours

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, by raking up the contentious matter of Katchatheevu, has set an unhealthy trend of politicising an issue for electoral gains, and one that has bearing on ties with Sri Lanka. Mr. Modi, on March 31 on X, stated that “new facts reveal how Congress callously gave away #Katchatheevu”. Even though the State BJP, like other parties in Tamil Nadu, has been talking about the island's retrieval, the situation gets complicated when its national leadership too lends its voice. As with the Congress-led UPA government, the BJP-led NDA regime too has seen the islet as a part of Sri Lanka. In 2022, the External Affairs Ministry (MEA) informed the Rajya Sabha that “Katchatheevu lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line [IMBL]”. In 2013, the UPA regime told the Supreme Court that the question of retrieval did not arise as no territory belonging to India was ceded to Sri Lanka. It contended that the islet was a matter of dispute between British India and Ceylon and that there was no agreed boundary, a matter settled through the 1974 and 1976 agreements, leading to the IMBL. A little after Mr. Modi became Prime Minister, an MEA affidavit in the Madras High Court stated that sovereignty over Katchatheevu “is a settled matter”. But the present government has also been telling Parliament that the matter relating to the islet is sub judice as it was before the Supreme Court.

The crux of the row now is whether the Congress, under Jawaharlal Nehru or Indira Gandhi, had “callously” handled the matter. Documents from an RTI query by BJP State president K. Anamalai reveal that the Indian leadership, before the agreements of 1974 and 1976, had recognised that it did not have a strong case over the territory, even though the area was part of the zamindari of the Raja of Ramanathapuram since 1803. A report in *The Hindu* (March 1972) says the annual church festival began over “90 years ago”. But, what must have troubled the Indian authorities, going by the minutes of a meeting in Chennai in 1974 between Foreign Secretary Kewal Singh and Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi, were historical facts aiding Sri Lanka. These include the reference by an Indian survey team in 1874-76 to Katchatheevu being a part of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka's assertion of sovereignty since 1921 when talks began to demarcate the fishery line in the Palk Bay, and the inability of the Madras Presidency to establish the islet's original title. Besides, Sri Lanka had been exercising jurisdiction over the territory since the mid-1920s without protest by India. Nehru's observation on “giving up our claim” or constitutional expert M.C. Setavald's favourable opinion is thus cited by critics of the Congress and the DMK, but the RTI documents show that the decision had sound basis. It is understandable if political leaders in Tamil Nadu raise the demand of Katchatheevu's retrieval every now and then, but it would be extremely disturbing if the Prime Minister too joins the bandwagon.

## Solar surge

India's solar industry must grow without compromising on quality

The new financial year has begun with the government finally bringing into effect a policy that will discourage solar power project developers from relying on imported panels. The Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirement for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019, requires module makers to submit to an inspection of their manufacturing facilities by the National Institute of Solar Energy. Being on the list as an ‘approved’ manufacturing facility certifies a company as legitimately manufacturing solar panels within its premises and not importing modules. The major advantage is eligibility to compete for the government's tenders for its flagship solar energy programmes. This includes the recently announced PM solar rooftop scheme.

The creation of such a list was also aimed at restricting imports from China, which controls nearly 80% of the global supply, amid the downturn in diplomatic relations. India has ambitious plans of sourcing about 500 GW, nearly half its requirement of electricity, from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. This would mean at least 280 GW from solar power by that year or at least 40 GW of solar capacity being annually added until 2030. In the last five years, this has barely crossed 13 GW though the government has claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected this trajectory and the country was on track to add between 25 GW-40 GW annually. The difficulty is that meeting the targets requires many more panels and component cells than India's domestic industry can supply. In recent years, a significant fraction of India's solar installations has been met by imports. This affects the interests of domestic panel manufacturers who have to pay the government to be certified while at the same time losing out on orders to the cheaper Chinese panels. To meet demand, the Centre, which has kept postponing the implementation of the approved list, has now decreed that this will take effect from April 1. The yardstick of success is when India meets its 2030 commitment while also ensuring that solar power is affordable to most Indians. This means that domestic manufacturers should be subject to stringent quality checks and not be allowed to compromise on cost and quality merely on nationalistic grounds. While the Indian solar industry must grow and gain a reputation for being a high quality exporter, it should not forget that this is a road with no easy shortcuts.

The Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002 was enacted with a distinct objective. The humongous volume of black money generated through international drug trafficking posed a grave threat to the economy of many countries. There was widespread realisation that the black money generated through the flourishing drug trade and integrated into the legitimate economy was likely to destabilise the world economy and endanger the integrity and sovereignty of nations.

### The background to the law is important

The United Nations took serious note of this, and in 1988, held the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. All countries were urged to take urgent steps to prevent the laundering of the proceeds of drug crimes and other connected activities. Subsequent to this, seven major industrial nations held a summit in Paris (July 1989) and established the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to examine the problem of money laundering and recommend measures to tackle this menace. Thereafter, in 1990, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution, namely, the Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action which called upon all member-countries to enact suitable pieces of legislation to effectively prevent the laundering of drug money.

In pursuance of this resolution of the UN General Assembly, the Government of India used the recommendations of the FATF to formulate a legislation to prevent drug money laundering. As drug trafficking is a trans-border operation, the UN held a special session on June 10, 1998 on the theme ‘Countering World Drug Problem Together’ and made another declaration on the urgent need to combat money laundering. Accordingly, the Indian Parliament enacted the Prevention of Money Laundering Act in 2002. But it was brought into force in 2005.

This narration of the history of this law is necessary in order to emphasise the original objective and the circumstances which lead to the enactment. As is clear from the history, the main focus of the law is on combating the laundering of drug money. Accordingly, the Act of 2002 contained a few offences listed in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985. The UN resolutions, and the FATF recommendations are all focused on the prevention of money from the laundering of drugs. However, the PMLA of India acquired a different character through amendments from time to time.

The law on money laundering revolves around the “crime proceeds” which are laundered. Not



**P.D.T. Achary**

is former Secretary General, Lok Sabha

The most serious aspect of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) is the inclusion of offences which have nothing to do with the original motive — namely, to combat the laundering of drug money

only the persons involved directly in the crime and the generation of the crime proceeds but also persons who have nothing to do with the crime but who have some involvement at a later stage in the laundering process are also guilty under this law.

But the most serious aspect of the PMLA is that it includes a large number of offences in the schedule which have nothing to do with the original purpose of this law — namely, combating the laundering of drug money. The UN resolution on the basis of which the law on laundering was enacted in India spoke only about the offence of the laundering of drug money. This was considered the most serious economic crime which had the potential to destabilise the world economy and endanger the sovereignty of nations, as highlighted above. The preamble to the PMLA endorses it. So, there was global consensus on the need to have a tough law to deal effectively with this crime. Thus, the *raison d'être* of the PMLA is the crime of the laundering of a huge volume of black money generated from the international drug trade and the spectre of destabilisation of the world economy.

### The PMLA's enactment

Further, the PMLA was enacted by India's Parliament under Article 253 which empowers it to make laws for implementing the international conventions. This Article indicates that a law Parliament makes to implement any decision of an international body will be confined to the subject matter of that decision. Item 13 in the Union list of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution is specific on this point. Thus, the law on money laundering enacted under Article 253 and Item 13 of the Union list in the context of the UN resolution referred to above can only be on drug money. Various amendments made in this Act at different times bloated the schedule which now contains such offences which are either ordinary offences listed in the IPC or for which there are special laws in force. Since money laundering as an offence is linked to one of the scheduled offences, the offences contained in the schedule become the starting point of the whole process of operationalisation of the PMLA.

A close look at the schedule will convince a man of ordinary prudence that this law has deviated from its original scheme. The provisions contained in it are draconian which were meant to deal with the dangerous men involved in drug trafficking and the money chain. These provisions are now being used in other scheduled offences too without mitigating their rigour. Offences which by their very nature do not generate crime proceeds of a scale which can destabilise the economy and endanger the

sovereignty of the nation are being tried under this law. One such example is the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 which is aimed at curbing corruption among public servants. This Act was added to the schedule of offences in 2009. The PMLA now applies with all its rigour to public servants. Thus, a public servant charged with corruption and a hard-core drug trafficker are treated alike. A very disturbing thing about the PMLA is that an accused under this law is presumed to be guilty until proved innocent.

A fundamental principle of Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence is that a person is presumed innocent until proven guilty. PMLA turns this principle upside down. An accused will be denied bail by the entire hierarchy of courts because the bail provision contained in section 45 of the PMLA says that a judge can give bail only when he is satisfied that the accused is innocent. Which judge will take such a risk? So the person will rot in jail for years together without trial.

### The bail provision

The bail provision of the PMLA Act (Section 45) is invested with a lot of political significance in present day India. It was held unconstitutional by a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India in *Nikesh Tarachand Shah vs Union of India* (2018) as violating Article 14 and Article 21. However, Parliament, with great alacrity, restored this provision with certain amendments which was upheld by a three-judge Bench headed by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar in *Vijay Madanlal Choudhary vs Union of India* (2022). The top court held that this provision is reasonable and has direct nexus with the purposes and objects of the PMLA Act. Herein lies the problem.

The object of the Act is to curb the laundering of black money and to save the economy from being destabilised. But what about less serious offences which have found a place in the schedule? The learned judges nearly said that inclusion of a particular offence in the schedule comes within the domain of the legislative policy.

The present judicial approach to the issue of bail in PMLA cases appears to be very technical. The judicial perspective on bail was laid out by Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer back in 1978 under the following words in *Gudikanti Narasimhulu And Ors vs Public Prosecutor, High Court Of Andhra*: “Personal liberty, deprived when bail is refused, is too precious a value of our constitutional system recognised under Article 21 that the curial power to negate it is a great trust exercisable, not casually but judicially, with lively concern for the cost to the individual and the community”. From Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer to Justice A.M. Khanwilkar, the apex court has travelled a long distance.

## AI in elections, the good, the bad and the ugly

In an effort to broaden Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reach to a variety of linguistic groups, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has used Artificial Intelligence (AI) to translate his speeches into eight different languages ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, which may potentially be considered India's “first AI election”. Yes, the widespread application of AI, with its seemingly limitless possibilities, is likely to bring about a paradigm shift in the general election in 2024.

### Social media and campaigns

In practically every election over the past three decades, India's electoral strategy has changed due to the process of an integration with and a capitalisation on emerging technologies. Its spread can be traced to the extensive usage of phonecalls in the 1990s, the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election in 2007 that saw the first “mass mobile phone” elections, the use of holograms in 2014, and, now, the current AI era.

For instance, the significance of social media platforms as essential political campaign instruments will be particularly remembered in relation to the 2014 Indian elections. Many analysts even referred to it as India's first “social media elections” or the “Facebook elections,” given the estimated ₹500 crore in digital spending. The BJP, undoubtedly, benefited from being the first to use these technological tools widely to connect with India's sizeable youth population.

A paper in the *Asian Journal of Political Science*, in 2015, titled “India 2014: Facebook ‘Like’ as a Predictor of Election Outcomes” showed a high positive correlation between the number of ‘likes’ a party or its leader secured on their official Facebook fan page and their popular vote share. By the time he took office, Mr. Modi was the sixth-most-followed global leader on X (Twitter) and had amassed over 16 million “likes” on Facebook, second only to former U.S. President Barack Obama among politicians worldwide.



**Atanu Biswas**

is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

The widespread application of Artificial Intelligence is likely to cause a paradigm shift in almost every aspect of an election

The 2019 general election was widely dubbed the “first WhatsApp election” in India. Indeed, in the previous 12 months and earlier, elections in Nigeria, Brazil, and a few Indian States have shown how WhatsApp can be used to spread messages that are designed to mislead voters for political purposes very quickly. In his book, *How to Win an Indian Election* (2019), former election campaign consultant Shivam Shankar Singh explained that WhatsApp is “an effective political platform because it allows for targeted delivery of information to voters and also because it allows an excellent tool to organize and mobilize party workers”.

### Global elections, AI, the dangers

The global elections of 2024, in contrast, are “AI elections”. In January, New Hampshire voters answered a phone call from what sounded like U.S. President Joe Biden. Indeed, it was a robocall made by AI aimed at dissuading Democratic voters not to turn up to polling stations on election day. Two days before parliamentary elections in Slovakia, in September 2023, a recording of a conversation between a journalist and the leader of the pro-North Atlantic Treaty Organization Progressive Slovakia Party was shared on Facebook, purportedly discussing methods of election manipulation. They both immediately called out the audio as fake, and fact checking turned up proof of AI manipulation. But, in a close race, Progressive Slovakia lost out. Was it a “test case” before the global elections in 2024?

It was Argentina's turn in October-November 2023, following which an article in *The New York Times* perceived that “with its expanding power and falling cost, it [AI] is now likely to be a factor in many democratic elections around the globe”. Deepfakes were used in the recent Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh and Telangana, either through doctored clips of the game show “Kaun Banega Crorepati” or a fake video of a leader allegedly pushing voters to support their

opponent. Additionally, fake accounts that amplify particular messages and generate artificial trends can be orchestrated by AI-powered bots to flood social media sites, yielding the false impression that a particular politician or subject is widely supported. Social media, the old instrument, is, therefore, interwoven with AI technology.

### The political landscape is changing

However, AI can play a far wider role in elections than just disseminating disinformation. It can be used in the entire spectrum of campaign strategies, from the preliminary steps of voter identification to the intricate details of content development and delivery. With real-time analytics on campaign performances, AI is raising the bar for political campaigns with its data-driven and effective micro-targeting strategy. The political landscape is changing quickly due to GenAI technology, which presents both the potential and challenges for the 2024 elections.

The United States government has outlawed robocalls using AI-generated voices in its response to the Biden robocall incident. Technology behemoths including Microsoft, Google, OpenAI, and Meta have vowed to combat AI content that aims to deceive voters. But will they be able to complete the task fully proofed?

There is general concern that, similar to Slovakia, election-related generated contents may shape last-minute attempts to deter voters from exercising their right to vote or create an event with a manufactured portrayal of a candidate that is challenging to swiftly debunk. A few months ago, an AI-created image of Donald Trump's arrest went viral. What would happen if a picture like that went viral a day before the election?

AI will be far more efficient five years later, in 2029, but as one might perceive, the world will also be more resilient, accustomed, and prepared for AI's deceptive effects. It is a realm of unknowable unknowns right now. And, a lot of uncertainties remain.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The great Indian election

In its urge to somehow stay on in power, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) could be resorting to the use of many undesirable tactics. Its tall claim of “*na khaunga na khane doonga*” is a narrative that seems to be falling flat in the face of some of its political moves. The BJP may still have many strong advantages such as an absence of strong opponents and a

divided Opposition, but its image as a clean party may no longer be resonating with the people. The party seems to be accommodating many who are involved in corruption and in this the Opposition's claim of the ‘washing machine’ effect could hold true. The electoral bonds scheme has also established that the party is one that is in search of money whatever the

method. In a democracy, such a high-handed and majoritarian party spells danger. I hope the party is taught a lesson or two in this election.

**Soundarajan,**  
Chennai

A joint platform of Opposition parties to fight the dominant Bharatiya Janata Party in the 2024 elections was always an illusion (Page 1,

“Democracy is in danger, warns Opposition at mega Delhi rally”, April 1). It is amusing that the Opposition talks about ‘opposition unity’ just before elections. Have these parties not wasted a precious five years to highlight people's issues and the government's failures? The Opposition parties ought to realise that merely forming an electoral alliance does not spell

Opposition unity.  
**Kshirasagara Balaji Rao,**  
Hyderabad

The cartoon accompanying the article, “Biggest challenge yet for the great Indian election” (Inside pages, ‘Elections 2024’ page, April 1) was enough to convince me why the BJP, despite its faults, is still the better horse to back.

**J.R. Rao,**  
Hyderabad

### MSD, at Vizag

M.S. Dhoni's 16-ball 37 runs, a spell that was laced with three sixes and four fours, against Delhi Capitals (‘Sport’ page, April 1) spelt delight to his fans. His power-hitting batting remains the same today as it existed in the first edition of the IPL. It is unfortunate that Chennai Super Kings lost the match in Vizag.

**K. Pradeep,**  
Chennai



## A speech that put India on the global stage

**O**n April 2, 1954, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made a speech in the Lok Sabha that would put India on the global stage of nuclear disarmament. Prompted by the U.S.'s 'Castle Bravo' thermonuclear test of the previous month, which was reportedly so powerful that it overwhelmed all measuring instruments, Nehru called for "a standstill agreement" on nuclear testing. This speech was marked by pragmatism, vision, and self-assurance. Newly decolonised India, with all the problems of nation-building and none of the traditional markers of international power such as military and economic might – or even nuclear weapons to disarm – was an unlikely candidate for this leadership role; yet such was Nehru's belief in India's global standing that he not only called for this moratorium but also pushed for it at every opportunity and forum. With this speech, he cemented India's claim to leadership, gave impetus to calls that eventually yielded the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), and arguably limited horizontal nuclear proliferation by insisting on treating nuclear weapons as beyond the pale.

**The standstill agreement** The standstill agreement is remarkable for its willingness to accept an incremental approach to what was fast becoming an insurmountable problem of disarmament against the backdrop of the Cold War. The four elements of the proposal called for an immediate moratorium on testing; urged the United Nations Disarmament Commission to address both the immediate moratorium and the longer-term goal of prohibiting the production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons; sought to build public pressure on nuclear states by calling for greater disclosure on the destructiveness and effects of these weapons; and called on all 'states and peoples of the world'



**Priyanjali Malik**

is the author of 'India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb'

Seventy years ago, with a speech in the Lok Sabha, Nehru cemented India's claim to leadership, gave impetus to calls that eventually yielded the Partial Test Ban Treaty, and arguably limited horizontal nuclear proliferation

to recognise the global threat posed by nuclear weapons. Nehru took disarmament out of the confines of the UN Disarmament Commission (with its limited membership) and made it a global problem.

India had effectively put the nuclear weapons states on notice. Nehru was asking them to not only recognise that their tests were imperilling the globe but also calling for more information on the effects of nuclear tests and radiation to exert global pressure on them to disarm. India followed this up with interventions at the UN, including a draft resolution in 1955 calling for a halt to testing, and progress to be reported to the Disarmament Commission. Simultaneously, Nehru convened a conference of scientists to study atomic energy and the effects of nuclear explosions in 1954 and, had the Suez Crisis and the Hungarian Revolution not intervened in 1956, the first meeting of what became Pugwash might well have happened in Delhi, for invitations had been sent out by Bertrand Russell and Joseph Rotblat to the scientists assembled.

### Moral force

It is easy, 70 years later, with the history of India's diplomacy and active participation in negotiations for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty at the Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Commission, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (neither of which New Delhi eventually signed for reasons of national interest), to take for granted India's active role in nuclear disarmament. However, there was nothing preordained about this. India in 1954 was poor and weak. This was before the Bandung Conference, so it did not even have the backing of the non-aligned nations. What it did have, though, was moral force. As Nehru explained in his first address to the UN in 1948, "I have no fear, even though India, from a military point of view, is of no great consequence. I am not afraid

of the bigness of Great Powers, and their armies, their fleets and their atom bombs. This is the lesson which my Master taught me. We stood as an unarmed people against a great country and a powerful empire."

Placing India on a global stage on account of its moral influence was a brilliant move. Of course, the sheen of morality soon wore off as India grappled with using force in Hyderabad and Goa to bring them within the Indian Union, and in discovering that morality would not defeat China. But it gave India a significance far in excess of what might be justified by its material strength. Nor was this stance purely naïve. Nehru spoke the language of disarmament because India had pressing development needs for its scarce resources that might be swallowed up by an arms race. But there was a Plan B. The Atomic Energy Act, 1948 allowed for the sequestration of the nuclear programme to shield any potential weapons development, should the need arise. Homi Bhabha, the father of India's nuclear programme, wanted to develop nuclear weapons. Nehru did not give the go-ahead, but did not entirely discourage him either.

The legacy of the speech in the Lok Sabha, when Nehru explained to his people first what India was doing to secure its place in the world, was most immediately felt in the PTBT that was eventually negotiated by the nuclear weapons states. When the treaty opened for signatures in 1963, India was the fourth to sign. The call for greater information about the effects of nuclear radiation and the mobilising of global opinion against atomic weapons helped solidify a norm against nuclear use that has ensured that these weapons have not been used in anger again after 1945. And, most importantly, the speech put India on a global stage as a voice of reason and morality, and in Nehru's words from 1948, to "be a power for peace and for the good of the world."

## The disgruntled Rajputs of Gujarat

The recent protests show the community's frustration at being sidelined in the BJP

### STATE OF PLAY

**Mahesh Langa**  
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**O**n March 22, during an election campaign speech in Rajkot in Gujarat, Union Minister and Rajkot Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate Parshottam Rupala unwittingly triggered outrage when he praised the Dalits at the expense of the Kshatriyas or Rajputs.

Commenting on British rule, Mr. Rupala said, "Even kings and royals bowed down to the British, started family bonds with them, broke bread with them, and even married their daughters to them but this Rukhi Samaj (a Dalit community) did not budge. I salute them for their fortitude and strength. It is this strength that has kept Sanatana Dharma alive...Jai Bhim!" His reference to *roti-beti vyavahar* (breaking bread and entering into marital relations) caused anger that neither he nor the party anticipated in a State where the BJP enjoys near-complete dominance.

As clips of the speech went viral on social media, the Rajputs, who are descendants of royal or princely families in Saurashtra, began to protest. This was the region where more than 100 large and small princely states existed at the time of independence.

Taken aback by the response, Mr. Rupala, who belongs to the Patidar or Patel community, hastened to apologise twice, stressing that he will regret his remarks for the rest of his life. "It was not my intention to show the royal families or Kshatriya community in poor light... I just wanted to elaborate on the atrocities committed by *vidharmis* (people of other faiths) on our

country and culture," he said. But the apology cut no ice with the community. In fact, in parts of Saurashtra, Mr. Rupala's statements have revived old caste rivalries between the Rajputs and Patels.

In Saurashtra, caste tensions over the years have resulted in conflicts and even killings. In 1988, a Patel legislator of the Congress, Popat Sorathiya, was shot dead in public by a man named Anirudhdhsinh Jadeja on August 15. The following year, Cabinet Minister Valabhbhai Patel was assassinated by another Kshatriya, also called Anirudhdhsinh. In 1995, Jayanti Vadodaria, a civic body member of the BJP in Gondal, was murdered by members of the Kshatriya community.

In the heydays of the Congress in Gujarat, and particularly in Saurashtra, Rajputs held their sway over Patels despite being fewer in number. But in the mid-1990s, the complete consolidation of the Patels in favour of the BJP helped the saffron party wrest the State from the Congress. Since 1995, the BJP has won seven Assembly elections in the State in a row. Today, both the Patels and the Rajputs firmly support the BJP.

However, power is not equally distributed. There are five MLAs and one Rajya Sabha BJP member from the Rajput community from the Saurashtra-Kutch region in the BJP. But Kshatriyas or Rajputs

who are Ministers in the State or Central government exercise little power, according to a political commentator. "Today, Patidar domination in the ruling party and in the government is complete. The Chief Minister is a Patel and Union Ministers including Mr. Rupala and Mansukh Mandaviya are Patels. There is not a single notable Kshatriya face in the State cabinet," he says. He believes that the recent protests by the Rajputs show their frustration with being sidelined within the BJP.

While it is unlikely that there will be any major adverse impact electorally for the BJP or for Mr. Rupala, it would nevertheless be wise for the ruling party leadership to dwell on why only a handful of communities such as the Patels, Brahmins, or Banias corner a large share of the pie in the State government or at the Centre, while other communities including the Kshatriyas, Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes, and Scheduled Tribes remain on the margins. The Scheduled Tribes in Gujarat are roughly the same in number as the Patidars (around 15% of the population), yet, there is not a single tribal leader in the Union Cabinet from the State.

In Gujarat, under the BJP, it is common to see a Dalit Minister be put in charge of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment and an Adivasi Minister be put in charge of the Department of Tribal Development and sometimes Forest and Environment, but never in charge of Finance, Revenue, or Home, the most important portfolios in terms of power and resources. The only exception was during the Vijay Rupani period when a Rajput leader, Pradipsinh Jadeja, was made Minister of State, Home.

## Two States: a comparison on access to life-saving C-sections

While access is equitable, C-section rates are alarmingly high in Tamil Nadu, pointing to the need for corrective measures

### DATA POINT

#### The Hindu Data Team

**A** study published by IIT Madras shows that in Tamil Nadu, access to caesarean section (C-section), an essential medical intervention that can save lives when vaginal deliveries are risky, is more equitable compared to India's average. However, C-section rates among the women of Tamil Nadu are also alarmingly high, especially in private hospitals, pointing to the need for corrective action, the study points out. The report also compares Tamil Nadu's figures with those of Chhattisgarh to show how in certain States, C-sections are more prevalent among richer sections of society, while the poor lack access to it.

A C-section delivery refers to a surgical procedure in which an incision is made in the woman's abdomen to deliver one or more infants. According to the World Health Organization, access to hospitals that are equipped to perform such procedures is crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of both the mother and child in the event of medical necessity. Maternal and neonatal mortality rates decline in countries which have C-section rates of about 10%, the WHO concludes. However, the agency also warns that if C-section rates go beyond 10%, it will not necessarily reduce maternal mortality. In 2021, global C-section rates exceeded 20%. They are projected to rise to 30% by 2030.

**Chart 1** shows the change in the share of births delivered by C-sections in public sector hospitals in India, Tamil Nadu, and Chhattisgarh between 2015-16 and 2019-21. **Chart 2** shows the same for private hospitals. It shows that the poor were more likely to have C-sections in private hospitals in Tamil Nadu. "The inversion in income-based inequality in Tamil Nadu in private institutions in 2019-21, with a greater proportion of the poor than the non-poor delivering via C-section, is difficult to explain," the study says.

**Chart 2** shows the change in the share of births delivered by C-sections in private hospitals across India, Tamil Nadu, and Chhattisgarh between 2015-16 and 2019-21. The gap narrowed considerably in private hospitals: close to 64% women underwent C-sections in private sector hospitals in Tamil Nadu in 2019-21 compared to India's average of around 50% and Chhattisgarh's 59%. "In Chhattisgarh, a woman is 10 times more likely to undergo a C-section in a private hospital than in a public hospital. This could be due to a lack of adequate or high-quality services in public health institutions," the study concludes. Assuming that poorer households choose public hospitals for deliveries and richer households prefer private ones, this points to inequitable access at the national level and more equitable access in Tamil Nadu.

The study also shows that the location of childbirth (whether in a public or private institution) had the most considerable influence on the decision to get a C-section delivery. This suggests that 'clinical necessity' isn't always the driving factor for surgical births. Throughout India and Chhattisgarh, individuals who were better off financially tended to choose C-sections more frequently, whereas, in Tamil Nadu, the situation was distinct, with poorer individuals being more prone to undergo C-sections in private hospitals.

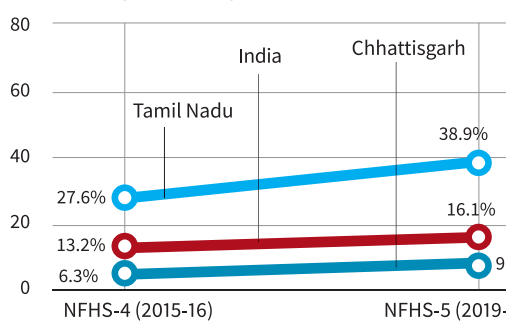
**Chart 3** shows the disparity among women from the poor and non-poor categories in their access to C-sections in public hospitals across India, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh in 2015-16 and 2019-21. **Chart 4** shows the same for private hospitals. It shows that the poor were more likely to have C-sections in private hospitals in Tamil Nadu. "The inversion in income-based inequality in Tamil Nadu in private institutions in 2019-21, with a greater proportion of the poor than the non-poor delivering via C-section, is difficult to explain," the study says.

### Access and misuse

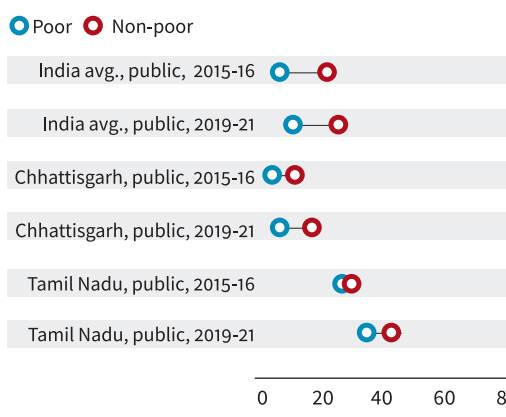
The charts were sourced from the report titled, "Variations in the prevalence of caesarean section deliveries in India between 2016 and 2021 – an analysis of Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh", published in BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth



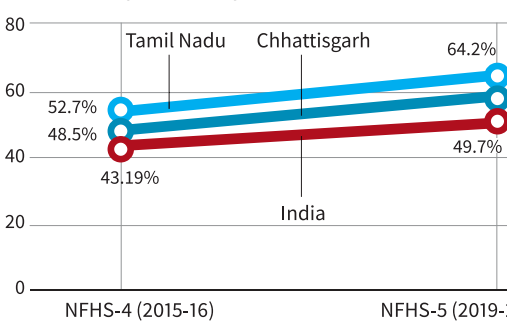
**Chart 1:** Change in % of births delivered by C-sections in public hospitals in India, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh between 2015-16 and 2019-21



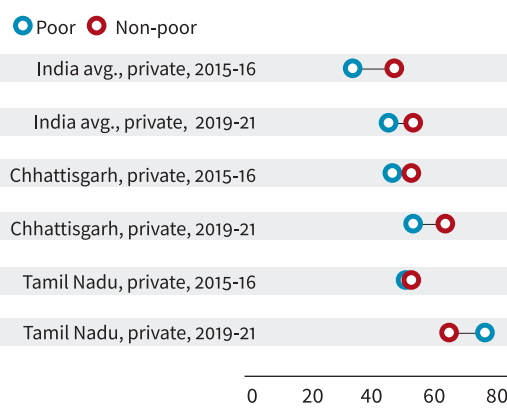
**Chart 3:** Disparity among women from the poor and non-poor categories in their access to C-sections in public hospitals across India, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh in 2015-16 and 2019-21. Figures in %



**Chart 2:** Change in % of births delivered by C-sections in private hospitals in India, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh between 2015-16 and 2019-21



**Chart 4:** Disparity among women from the poor and non-poor categories in their access to C-sections in private hospitals across India, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh in 2015-16 and 2019-21. Figures in %



### FROM THE ARCHIVES

#### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1974

### Israel seeks more planes, missiles from U.S.

Washington, April 1: The Israeli Defence Minister, Gen. Moshe Dayan, to-day asked the United States for more planes, tanks and missiles to offset communist aid to Syria and other Arab nations.

Gen. Dayan presented his shopping list to the U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. James Schlesinger, at a meeting to-day at the Pentagon.

During television interviews yesterday and to-day, Gen. Dayan said Israel particularly needed planes and anti-aircraft missiles. He alleged that communist aid to Syria included the presence of a brigade of Cubans on Syrian territory, an assertion which surprised officials here.

While U.S. intelligence services had known for a long time that small groups of Cuban technicians where training Syrians to operate anti-aircraft missiles and the Soviet-built MIG fighters, they had estimated the Cuban presence at less than the several battalions Gen. Dayan said were in Syria.

Israel still has \$700 millions to spend of the \$2,200 millions in additional military aid granted by Congress to compensate for the losses sustained during the October war in West Asia.

Gen. Dayan arrived in the U.S. last week to present the Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, with detailed Israeli proposals for troop disengagement with Syria on the Golan front.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO APRIL 2, 1924

### Railway management

London, Mar. 31: In the Commons to-day Sir Charles Yata asked whether it was proposed to proceed with the placing of the East Indian and Great Indian Peninsula Railways under State management, in view of the position in the Legislative Assembly and danger to the safety of passengers and maintenance of service if the present management was weakened under State control. Mr. Richard's Under Secretary for India replied that Lord Olivier did not consider there was any reason for modifying the decision to place these railways under State management. Sir Charles Yate declared that the Manager of the Egyptian Railway had resigned because the Minister had taken all power out of his hands and asked if it was to be allowed in India. The speaker intervened at this stage.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**World Bank's growth forecast for Asia this year**

**4.50** in percentage. The World Bank, in its latest report, also says that debt, trade barriers and policy uncertainties dull the region's economic dynamism. AP

**India's hydroelectricity output records steepest fall**

**16.30** in percentage. The drop coincided with the share of renewables sliding since the Prime Minister made commitments to boost solar and wind capacity. REUTERS

**Rise in maximum temperature expected in North India**

**2-3** degrees C. The Met office has predicted a drastic rise in temperature in many parts of North India. However as most of the wheat crop is harvest-ready, it won't impact its production. PTI

**Y-o-y increase in coal sector's output in February 2024**

**11.6** in percentage. As per the index of eight core industries, the coal industry has demonstrated sustained double-digit growth over the past eight months. PTI

**Palestinians killed till Monday in Gaza since October 7**

**32,845** The war has displaced most of the people and driven a third of its residents to the brink of famine. AP  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## Ladakh's protest; a hunger for justice

What are the key demands of the LAB-KDA representatives in negotiations with the Centre? What are the main pressures on local resources in Ladakh, particularly water and land? How does tourism growth contribute to resource strain in Ladakh?

## EXPLAINER

Kavita Upadhyay

## The story so far:

**O**n March 6, in Leh, a town situated at about 3,500 metres in the cold, arid Union Territory (UT) of Ladakh, Sonam Wangchuk, Ladakh's famous educationist and environmentalist, began a 21-day hunger strike that he called a "climate fast". The strike was in support of thousands of Ladakh residents who have been demanding Statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, so they can make decisions regarding the use and management of resources such as land and water, which they currently can't. Mr. Wangchuk discontinued his hunger strike on March 26, as he urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to "prove that they are statesmen". The strike is currently being continued by women in Leh. If their demands stay unmet, the youth, monks, and the elderly have said they will join the hunger strike as well, in phases.

### How has the formation of UTs affected the decision-making powers of Ladakh?

In August 2019, the State of Jammu and Kashmir was split into two UTs: Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. It ended people's exclusive rights to land and jobs.

Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, Ladakh became a UT without a legislature.

"Our UT is administered by a Lieutenant Governor, who is not a Ladakh resident, and yet is appointed to take decisions for our future," said Jigmet Paljor, coordinator of Leh Apex Body (LAB), a collective of political, social, religious, and student organisations of the Buddhist-majority Leh district.

Several bureaucrats in key positions, influencing decisions for the region's future, were also not residents of Ladakh, Sajjad Kargili, a core committee member of the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) of the Muslim-majority Kargil district, said.

Similar to LAB, KDA is a collective of Kargil's political, social, religious, and student organisations. Mr. Kargili further said the existing Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils (LAHDCs) in Leh and Kargil were rendered powerless after the national government declared Ladakh a UT.

The draft Ladakh Industrial Land Allotment Policy, 2023 is a case in point. While the LAHDCs have the powers to make decisions on land use and its management, the draft policy, which has been designed to attract investments in Ladakh, completely excludes them from having any powers related to land allotment and lease-related decision-making.

Mr. Paljor said villagers along the border region in Ladakh were losing grazing land to China, as well as to industries planning on establishing renewable energy projects in the region, and yet the affected residents lacked the authority to intervene in matters concerning their own land.

The LAB and the KDA have contended that the Sixth Schedule could help tackle these issues because it enables the establishment of regional and district councils with the authority to make laws regarding land use for grazing, agriculture, residential purposes, and other purposes that cater to the residents' interests.

Considering more than 97% of Ladakh's population of over 2.74 lakh (2011 Census) is tribal, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes



Call to action: A child holds a placard during Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike protest. ANI

recommended in 2019 that Ladakh be brought under the Sixth Schedule.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) too in its manifestos, ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha and 2020 LAHDC elections, had promised to bring Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule. It remains unmet.

In an effort to persuade the BJP at the Union government to bring Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule, LAB-KDA representatives have engaged in discussions with various Ministers on at least 10 occasions between 2020 and March 4 this year. A few of these negotiations, including the most recent one on March 4, have happened with Mr. Shah.

Mr. Kargili, who has been participating in the negotiations with the Centre, said LAB-KDA's demands since 2021 have included safeguards under the Sixth Schedule, either Statehood for Ladakh or declaring it a UT with a legislature, a separate Public Service Commission for Ladakh, and separate parliamentary seats for Kargil and Leh. The Centre has not yet accepted them.

"The current hunger strike is a result of numerous unsuccessful negotiations with the Centre," Mr. Kargili said.

### What are the pressures on local resources?

According to recent data from the Ministry of Tourism, Ladakh is witnessing a high influx of domestic tourists. In 2022, more than five lakh domestic tourists visited the region. In Leh alone, which is Ladakh's largest town, while just over half a lakh domestic and foreign tourists visited in 2007, by 2018 the number had risen to 3.2 lakh. A research article published in 2019 stated that the built area in the town had increased from 36 hectares in 1969 to 196 hectares in 2017.

Rapid urbanisation and increasing tourist footfall are exerting significant pressure on resources in Ladakh, particularly water.

A report on water-related issues in Leh

published in 2019 by Bremen Overseas Research and Development Association, South Asia (BORDA-SA), and Ladakh Ecological Development Group calculated that in Leh, a tourist used about 100 litres of water a day in summers and 60 litres in winters whereas a local used about 75 litres a day in summers and 50 litres in winters. The poor, especially migrant workers, had access to only 25-35 litres per person per day. To meet these requirements, the dependence on underground water, which is often contaminated, had increased, the report found.

Stanzin Tsephel, former regional director of BORDA-SA and a co-author of the report, said the issue was with water management rather than availability.

The pressure on resources is especially high during peak tourist season, between May and July each year, when about 70% of tourists visit the UT, Deleks Namgyal, president, All Ladakh Tour Operators Association, said.

However, Mr. Namgyal was worried about the possible narrative against tourism the ongoing hunger strike could feed. "We want tourists to visit Ladakh because it is important for our region's economy, but we want sustainable tourism and we are working towards it," he said.

### How does climate change threaten the region?

In the last two decades, Ladakh has been affected by several floods, landslides, and extreme rainfall events. For instance, in August 2010, several parts of Ladakh, especially Leh, were hit by flash floods. Nearly 255 people died in the deluge. In August 2014, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), caused when a glacial lake is breached, damaged houses and bridges in Gya village.

More recently, in August 2021, a GLOF near Rumbak village also damaged roads and a bridge.

A study published in 2020 estimated

that Ladakh has 192 glacial lakes. Several research articles also state that due to increasing temperature caused by global warming, the number and sizes of glacial lakes in the Himalaya are increasing, and glaciers are shrinking.

This trend has increased the threat of possible GLOFs in Ladakh, especially from proglacial lakes that are formed at the edge of glaciers, said Irfan Rashid, a glaciologist from the University of Kashmir, who conducts research in the UT, which lies in the Trans-Himalayan region.

"The increased temperatures are also resulting in permafrost degradation and are causing mudflows in Ladakh," Dr. Rashid added.

According to Sonam Lotus, a scientist at the India Meteorological Department's Meteorological Centre at Leh, the trend over the past few years shows slight increase in the region's minimum temperature.

While the lowest minimum temperature recorded in 2011 was minus 23.6 degrees C, in 2023, 2022, and 2021, it was minus 16.8 degrees C, minus 18 degrees C, and minus 16 degrees C, respectively, Mr. Lotus said.

Despite the challenges posed by climate change, mining and renewable energy companies are eyeing Ladakh, and tourism-related activities are on a rise.

With significant tourist influx, pollutants from vehicular traffic (like black carbon) will settle on snow and ice and expedite melting.

Mohammad Farooq Azam of the Indian Institute of Technology, Indore, who has undertaken glacio-hydrological studies in Ladakh, said mining activities might increase slope instability, making them landslide-prone. Dust from mining that will settle on glaciers could also accelerate their melting.

Kavita Upadhyay is an independent journalist and researcher who writes on issues of environmental governance in the Indian Himalayan Region

## THE GIST

▼ Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike in Leh calls for Ladakh's Statehood and inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to empower locals in decision-making, following the reorganisation of Jammu and Kashmir into separate Union Territories in 2019.

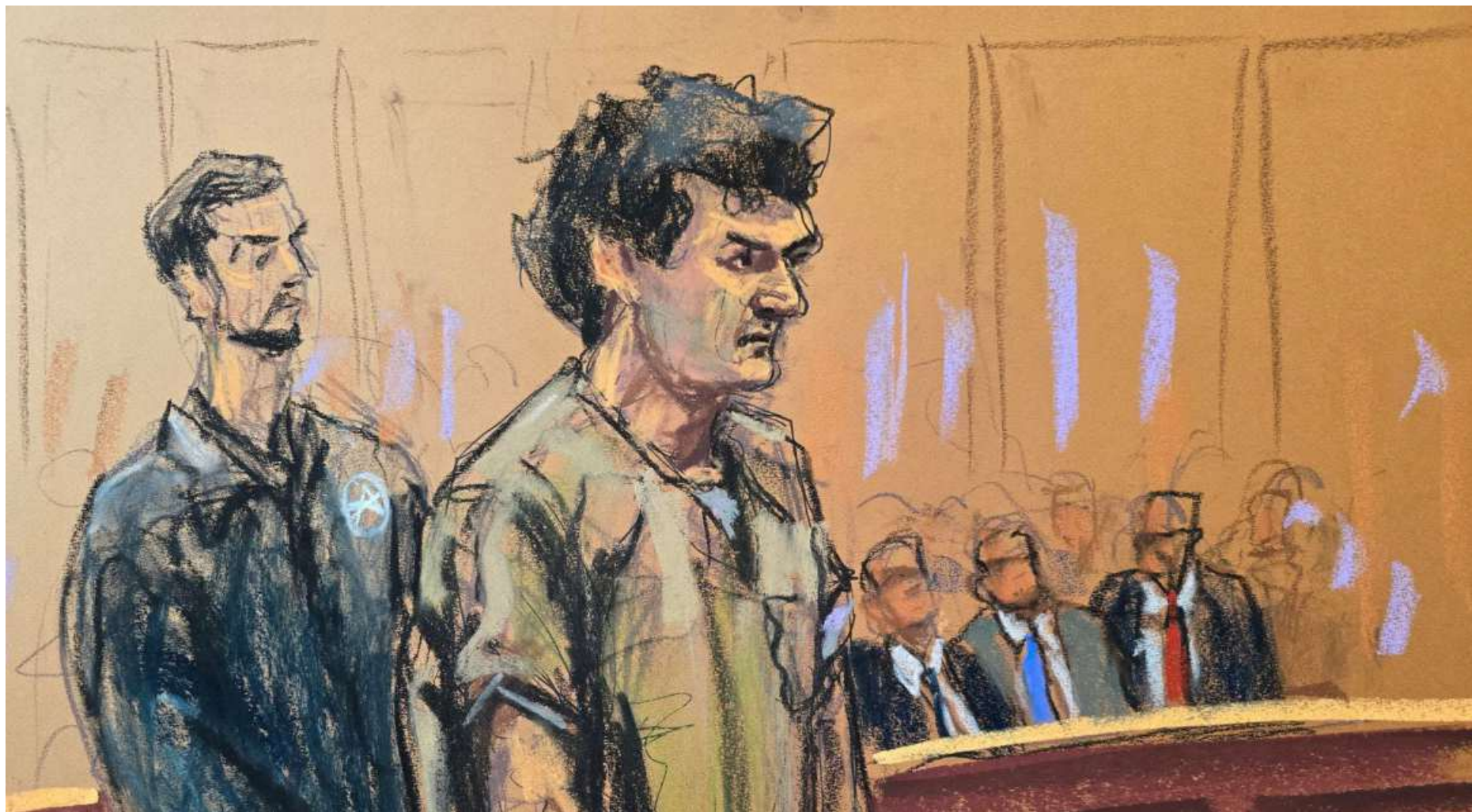
▼ Rapid urbanisation and tourism growth are straining Ladakh's resources, particularly water, leading to concerns over sustainability and equitable access. Dependence on underground water, exacerbated by tourism, is highlighted as a key issue.

▼ Ladakh faces increasing risks from climate change, including glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), permafrost degradation, and rising temperatures.

▼ Despite these challenges, mining, renewable energy projects, and tourism continue to grow, exacerbating environmental concerns.



CACHE



**Legal drama:** Sam Bankman-Fried's high-profile arrest, his disgraced return to the U.S., and the dramatic court proceedings where his own former colleagues and even a romantic partner testified against him made headlines worldwide. REUTERS

# How will Bankman-Fried's legal fallout impact the crypto market's stability?

Former FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for orchestrating one of the largest financial frauds in history, involving at least \$8 billion of customer funds; the sentencing serves as a stark warning to crypto entrepreneurs about the consequences of regulatory violations

Sahana Venugopal

Sam Bankman-Fried, the former CEO of the collapsed cryptocurrency exchange FTX, was sentenced to 25 years in prison on March 28, having been found guilty of multiple counts of fraud in 2023 after the spectacular crash of his crypto exchange and business.

Almost one and a half years after the crash, what does the sentencing mean for the crypto sector and its investors?

## What are the full terms of the sentence?

While Bankman-Fried's lawyers tried to push for a shorter prison sentence of just a few years, prosecutors wanted to see him in prison for 40 to 50 years. Meanwhile, the maximum possible sentence was 110 years.

Throughout a month-long trial in 2023, Bankman-Fried's legal team tried to steer away from the image of him being a malicious fraudster who stole crypto investors' money and instead painted a portrait of a well-intentioned businessman who had been let down by his trusted associates.

Attorney Mark Mukasey referred to Bankman-Fried as an "awkward math nerd," spoke about his autism, and pushed for a shorter sentence so that his client would be able to start a family.

When he was sentenced to 25 years in prison and three years of supervised release, Bankman-Fried accepted that FTX customers had suffered and that such an acknowledgment was "missing" from what he had spoken about during the trial. He also expressed regret about the way he treated his former colleagues.

Bankman-Fried, a former billionaire, will also have to give up around \$11 billion

as part of the sentence.

During the legal proceedings, it was established that customers lost at least \$8 billion, though this figure may vary due to the volatile nature of cryptocurrencies' prices.

The judge authorised the government to use the funds recovered through the forfeiture process to compensate victims, per the U.S. Department of Justice direction released on March 28.

Bankman-Fried's lawyer is planning to appeal.

## What were the charges against Sam Bankman-Fried?

FTX collapsed in late 2022 as customers panicked about the health of the exchange and tried to rapidly pull billions of dollars, triggering a liquidity crisis. It was later established that Bankman-Fried misused customer funds to prop up Alameda Research, a cryptocurrency trading firm. Bankman-Fried was arrested in the Bahamas a month later and was brought back to the U.S. to face trial.

He was found guilty of seven counts in total, made up of two counts of wire fraud conspiracy, two counts of wire fraud, one count of conspiracy to commit money laundering, one count of conspiracy to commit commodities fraud, and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud.

In a statement on March 28, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Damian Williams, used the sentencing to issue a warning that focused on Bankman-Fried as a financial criminal rather than a fraudster in the crypto industry.

"Samuel Bankman-Fried orchestrated one of the largest financial frauds in history, stealing over \$8 billion of his customers' money," said Williams. "His

deliberate and ongoing lies demonstrated a brazen disregard for customers' expectations and disrespect for the rule of law, all so that he could secretly use his customers' money to expand his own power and influence. The scale of his crimes is measured not just by the amount of money that was stolen, but by the extraordinary harm caused to victims, who in some cases had their life savings wiped out overnight."

The co-founder and ex-CEO of FTX has been in custody since last year, because he violated his bail conditions and engaged in witness tampering, according to the judge.

## Will FTX users get their money back?

There is no way to be certain of this, but such an outcome looks highly unlikely, with different parties making vastly different claims about the state of FTX's assets.

Lawyer Andrew Dietderich, who is working with the collapsed crypto exchange, said earlier this year that a strategy was in place to try and repay all those customers and creditors with "legitimate claims," CNBC reported.

Bankman-Fried also said earlier that people would be paid back.

However, Judge Lewis A. Kaplan expressed doubt during the sentencing, noting, "The defendant's assertion that FTX customers and creditors will be paid in full is misleading, it is logically flawed, it is speculative."

## How will the sentencing affect the crypto market?

Bankman-Fried's high-profile arrest, his disgraced return to the U.S., and the dramatic court proceedings where his own former colleagues and even a romantic partner testified against him,

made headlines worldwide.

His chaotic testimony and uncooperative behaviour stunned even the judge and did not help to turn public opinion in his favour.

The cryptocurrency market itself seemed largely unaffected by the news of the sentencing, as top coins Bitcoin (BTC) and Ether (ETH) did not dramatically spike or fall in the past few days. While FTX's token is still trading, it fell by more than 13% on Friday and was worth less than \$2, when compared to its all-time-high of \$85.02.

"The FTX bankruptcy proceedings are underway. The FTX token no longer has any use, and may be liquidated by the estate to pay creditors. Please proceed with caution," said a notice on its CoinMarketCap page.

Bitcoin this year marked a new all-time-high in price and crossed the \$70,000 threshold, injecting the sector with optimism after around two years of depressed prices and a reputational crisis.

FTX was founded in 2019 and former CEO Sam Bankman-Fried was known for his casual dress sense, lavish lifestyle, and a controversial approach to charity known as 'effective altruism'. Bankman-Fried was also a prolific political donor in the U.S. who gave millions of dollars to individuals from both parties, while FTX was known for its high-profile advertising gimmicks, including commercials with comedian Larry David and American football athlete Tom Brady.

The 25-year-long prison sentence serves as a reminder to crypto entrepreneurs everywhere that U.S. regulators can strike quickly when it comes to the fintech sector.

The greatest loss, however, is usually borne by risk-taking investors.

## THE DAILY QUIZ

From significant milestones to remarkable achievements, many interesting events took place on April 2 across the world. Here is a quiz on some of them

Please send in your answers to [dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in](mailto:dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in)

Sindhu Nagaraj

### QUESTION 1

He was the head of the Roman Catholic Church from 1978 and was the first non-Italian pope in 455 years and the first from a Slavic country. He died on this day in 2005. Who was he?

### QUESTION 2

He was the first recognised emperor to rule in the West after the fall of the Western Roman Empire approximately three centuries earlier. Born on April 2, 748, his impact on the Middle Ages, and his influence on the vast territory he ruled has led him to be called the "Father of Europe". Name him.

### QUESTION 3

This Portuguese filmmaker died on this

day in 2015, at the age of 106. Known for his artistic films, in March 2008, he was reported to be the oldest active film director in the world. Identify this person.

### QUESTION 4

This science fiction film noted for its scientifically accurate depiction of space flight, pioneering special effects, and ambiguous imagery premiered on this day in 1968. It was nominated for four Academy Awards, winning the director the award for his direction of the visual effects. Name the film and director.

### QUESTION 5

This German artist was born on this day in 1891. He was a primary pioneer of the Dada movement and Surrealism in Europe. His experimental attitude toward the making of art resulted in his invention of frottage and grattage. Who was he?



### Visual Question:

Identify this character from a very popular TV show that premiered for the first time on this day in 1978. Name the show.

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

- Which was the first product to get the GI tag? **Ans: Darjeeling tea**
  - It is said that the Mughals were visiting a region in present day Madhya Pradesh when they wanted vermicelli. The local Bhils made them out of gran flour and this savoury was given the tag in 2014. Name this edible item. **Ans: Ratlami Sev**
  - Products like Apatani, Monpa, Adi, Galo, and Tai Khamti received GI tags in January 2024. From which State do they originate? **Ans: Arunachal Pradesh**
  - From which State do the Appemidi and Jardalu come? **Ans: Karnataka and Bihar respectively**
  - Which State cultivates the unique saline-tolerant rice variety known as Pokkali? **Ans: Kerala**
- Visual: Which famous GI handicrafted product is the former President Pranab Mukherjee being presented with? **Ans: Aranmula Kannadi**
- Early Birds: Vivek Lokhande | Prashant Nain | Rajmohan. V | K.N. Viswanathan | Vijaya Parimi | Jyot Prakash Gulati



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

MR. M. Jhabar Ali, Hindustan Teleprinters, Madras, wants to know which is correct: (a) The board has decided (b) The board have decided.

Both are correct. When we use the singular verb, we think of the members of the board as a group. When we use the plural verb, we think of the board as individuals that make up the group. Other words like 'board' are government, committee, family, gang, jury, mob, team, public, class, crowd, flock, herd, orchestra, panel, offspring, staff. How is the team? It is fine. How are the team? They are enthusiastic. The committee has submitted its report. The committee are yet to arrive at a decision. The audience were delighted. The audience was unimpressed. These collective nouns can be used either with the singular verb or the plural. But you should not mix the singular and plural.

'The team is noted for their liveliness' is wrong. Either it is the team is noted for its liveliness, or 'The team are noted for their liveliness.' The use of the singular verb or the plural depends on whether you look at the collective noun as a unit or as individuals comprising the unit.

Mr. P. S. Mathur, Indira Nagar, Madras, wants to know whether it is correct to use 'Britisher' for a British person. It is used by Americans and not by the British. 'British' is what is generally used in British English.

*He is British.*

*He is a British citizen.*

The British introduced cricket wherever they went. 'Briton' is also used in Britain to refer to a British person, mainly in newspaper reports concerning British people.

*Ten Britons died in the air crash in Paris.*

'Briton' also refers to the early inhabitants of Britain. Those who live in England are English people. The people of Britain are all British. Britain comprises England, Scotland and Wales. The term was first used in 1604 when James I was proclaimed 'King of Great Britain'. 'Great' was used to distinguish Britain from Britannia Minor, Brittany in France. Those who belong to Scotland are Scots and those who belong to Wales are Welsh. In India, there is a tendency to use 'English' to refer to Scots and the Welsh also. Both resent this. Scotland is a country by itself and so is Wales. England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland comprise the United Kingdom, or the U.K. for short.

There are certain terms where 'Scots' is used as an adjective: Scots law, Scotsman, Scotswoman. But 'Scottish' is more frequently used as an adjective: Scottish universities, Scottish newspapers, Scottish English. 'Scotch' is used for products originating in Scotland: Scotch whisky, Scotch wool. Scots call their national drink whisky rather than Scotch whisky or Scotch. The people of Scotland are Scots or the Scottish people and not Scotch. Scots are offended when you call them Scotch. They used to call themselves 'Scotch' during the 18th and 19th centuries, but now they do not like it. The blacks of America are offended when you call them Negroes. The Japanese dislike being called Japs. Even some highly educated people in India call the blacks 'Negroes' and the Japanese 'Japs' out of ignorance.

*Published in The Hindu on June 11, 1991*

## Word of the day

### Flout:

treat with contemptuous disregard

**Synonyms:** defy, disdain, ignore

**Usage:** *The corrupt politician continued to flout the law.*

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/floutpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /fláwt/

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



## INBRIEF



### NMDC logs record 45 MT iron ore output, 44.5 MT FY sales

India's largest iron ore producer NMDC reported a record 45.1 million tonne production and 44.48 MT sales in the year ended March 31. The state-owned miner said it had become the first mining company in the country to cross the 45 MT mark - on its best-ever yearly physical performance. Compared with the previous fiscal, when it had clocked 40.82 MT iron ore production and sold 38.22 MT, the output was 10% higher and sales was 16% more.

### 'Hospitality sector transaction volumes soar 80% in Q1 CY24'

The country's hospitality industry witnessed an 80% YoY increase, with transaction volumes reaching \$78 million during the first quarter of calendar 2024, said JLL India, a consultancy firm. "The enthusiasm of the sector is further strengthened by the performance of hotel stocks, which also gave confidence to a couple more hotel companies entering public markets and achieving strong valuations," said Jaideep Dang, MD, Hotels and Hospitality Group, India, JLL.

### Value of ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation drops to ₹8,202 cr.

The total value of ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation, which was ₹3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on May 19, 2023, when the withdrawal of ₹2,000 banknotes was announced, declined to ₹8,202 crore at the close of business on March 29, 2024, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Monday. "Thus, 97.69% of the ₹2,000 banknotes in circulation as on May 19, 2023, has since been returned," the central bank said in a status update.

## SUVs drive auto sales to record highs in FY2024, dispatches cross 42 lakh

Press Trust of India  
NEW DELHI

Driven by robust demand for sports utility vehicles, passenger vehicle sales in India soared to a record high in FY24 with dispatch of more than 42 lakh units.

Overall vehicle dispatches from maker to dealers rose to 42.3 lakh units in FY24, an increase of 9%, compared with 38.9 lakh units in FY23.

SUV's share to overall passenger vehicle dispatches rose to 50.4% in FY24 against 43% in FY23.

"This is the first time passenger vehicle sales have crossed the 40 lakh mark in India," said Maruti



Suzuki India (MSI) Executive Committee Member Shashank Srivastava.

SUV segment grew by 28% year-on-year; hatchbacks by 12%; sedans by 6%, while MPVs (Multi Purpose Vehicles) grew by 19% and vans by 6.5% in FY24, Mr. Srivastava said.

But he said the industry

### Panasonic, IOC moot JV for lithium-ion cells, eye EVs

The Hindu Bureau  
HYDERABAD

State-owned refiner Indian Oil Corporation and Panasonic Group company Panasonic Energy Co. have signed a binding term sheet to draw a framework of their proposed JV to manufacture cylindrical lithium-ion cells in India.

The JV is in anticipation of expanding demand for batteries for two and three-wheelers and energy storage systems in India.

The two firms are conducting a feasibility study on battery utilisation technology to facilitate India's transition to clean energy.

## Pilot unrest at Vistara forces the cancellation of 49 flights

Jagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

Ahead of its merger with Air India, discontent among pilots who abstained from reporting to work forced Vistara to cancel at least 49 flights across its network on Monday.

Following the development, the airline announced it had decided to temporarily pare the number of flights it operates.

"Crew unavailability" "We have had a significant number of flight cancellations and delays in the past few days due to various reasons including crew unavailability," Vistara said in

# March's gross GST of ₹1.78 lakh crore lifts FY24 revenue to ₹20.2 lakh cr.

Gross revenues from domestic transactions grew 17.6% in March, outpacing February's 13.9% rise; revenues from goods imports, a calculation by *The Hindu* indicates, shrank about 5% year-on-year in March, after February's 8.5% increase

Vikas Dhoot  
NEW DELHI

Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue hit its second-highest level of ₹1,78,484 crore in March, even as the pace of growth in collections slowed to 11.5%, from February's 12.5%. This lifted the tally for 2023-24 by 11.6% to a little over ₹20.18 lakh crore.

Net GST revenue, after accounting for refunds, grew at a faster pace of 18.4% in March to touch ₹1.65 lakh crore, compared with February when they

### Robust takings

Finance Ministry says average monthly collection for FY24 was ₹1.68 lakh crore, beating FY23's average of ₹1.5 lakh crore

- Gross takings for 2023-24 rise 11.6% to a little over ₹20.18 lakh crore
- Net GST revenue grew at a faster pace of 18.4% in March to ₹1.65 lakh crore
- GST Compensation Cess at ₹12,259 crore, was reckoned as the third-highest monthly collection



had grown 13.6%. For the full financial year, net GST revenue was ₹18.01 lakh crore, a 13.4% growth. "Average monthly col-

lection for this fiscal year stands at ₹1.68 lakh crore, surpassing the previous year's average of ₹1.5 lakh crore," the Finance Minis-

try said in a statement, attributing March's surge in inflows to "a significant rise in GST collection from domestic transactions".

Gross revenue from domestic transactions (which typically include taxes on services imports) grew 17.6%, compared with a 13.9% rise in February. While the Ministry did not share the growth trajectory for tax from goods imports, a calculation by *The Hindu* indicates revenue shrank about 5% in March, after February's 8.5% rise.

On a sequential basis, March's gross GST revenue

rose 6% from February, and net revenue rose 9.3%. GST Compensation Cess at ₹12,259 crore, was reckoned as the third-highest monthly collection.

Central GST collections exceeded FY24's revised estimate, while there was a modest shortfall in GST compensation cess inflows, said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar. For FY25, "the implicit growth needed to meet the Interim Budget Estimate has come down to single-digits [less than 10%], which appears likely to be exceeded," Ms. Nayar added.

## RBI can take global leadership in balancing growth and inflation: Modi

Lalendu Mishra  
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), having achieved the unique feat of balancing growth and inflation control, can become a model for the world and assume global leadership, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday while speaking at an event marking the commemoration of RBI's 90<sup>th</sup> year in Mumbai.

The Reserve Bank was set up on April 1, 1935 in Calcutta as a joint stock company and it was nationalized on January 1,



Narendra Modi

1949. Incidentally, Mr Modi had attended the 80<sup>th</sup> foundation day function in 2014.

"While several developed countries of the world are trying to recover from the economic shock

of the pandemic, the Indian economy is creating new records. The RBI has taken India's success global," he said. Stating that balancing inflation control and growth was a unique requirement for any developing country, he said, "RBI has become a model for this and can take global leadership."

He said for the next 10 years the RBI should develop monetary policy tools to meet the expectations of India's youth and cater to the needs of emerging sectors such as space technology, digital technology and

tourism. "RBI needs to think out of the box," he emphasized.

Pointing out that in 2014, when he attended the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary event, the condition of the Indian banking sector was abysmal, he said rising NPAs had threatened the stability of the banking sector.

"There were concerns from all over. But today India's banking system has established itself as strong and sustainable one. It has now come back to profit and is showing record improvement in credit growth," he added.

### SEBI updates complaint redressal site for investors

The Hindu Bureau  
MUMBAI

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has introduced a new version of its complaint redressal system - SCORES 2.0 - to strengthen investor complaint redress mechanism in the securities market.

The process has been made more efficient through auto-routing, auto-escalation, monitoring by the 'Designated Bodies and reduction of timelines, SEBI said in a statement.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	MONDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	74,015	0.49
Gold	68,420	1.58
Brent oil	87.89	

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3252.10	-55.00
Adani Ports	1375.90	-34.05
Apollo Hosp	6457.25	100.45
Asian Paints	2871.00	24.25
Axis Bank	1053.10	-5.90
Bajaj Auto	9042.15	-106.00
Bajaj Finserv	1646.00	2.15
Bajaj Finance	7250.95	-5.70
Bharti Airtel	1217.35	-11.25
BPCL	600.70	-1.70
Britannia Ind	4895.20	-16.05
Cipla	1498.65	-1.70
Coal India	442.05	7.95
Divis Lab	357.95	12.65
Dr Reddys Lab	6250.35	92.45
Eicher Motors	3946.65	-72.65
Grasim Ind	2292.55	-5.25
HCL Tech	1556.70	13.15
HDFC Bank	1470.50	22.60
HDFC Life	634.75	-1.40
Hero MotoCorp	4680.75	-41.55
Hindalco	568.60	8.35
Hind Unilever	2285.90	6.55
ICI Bank	1099.65	21.35
IndusInd Bank	1542.40	-10.60
Infosys	1495.45	-2.60
ITC	426.70	-1.65
JSW Steel	871.95	41.75
Kotak Bank	1790.70	-5.20
L&T	3888.00	74.10
LTIMindtree Ltd.	4882.60	-55.80
M&M	1915.95	-5.40
Maruti Suzuki	12565.60	-30.75
NestleIndia	2585.60	-36.75
NTPC	342.35	-6.55
ONGC	269.90	-1.85
PowerGrid Corp	280.15	-3.25
Reliance Ind	2969.55	-2.15
SBI Life	1489.95	-10.30
State Bank	758.30	5.95
Shriram Finance		
Ltd.	2431.75	71.95
Sun Pharma	1629.25	-8.70
TataConsumerPro-		
duct	1086.90	-9.30
Tata Motors	992.25	-0.55
Tata Steel	163.15	7.30
TCS	3916.75	40.45
Tech Mahindra	1244.55	-3.55
Titan	3738.40	-63.40
UltraTech Cement	9954.40	205.25
Wipro	484.95	-4.85

### CIL output rises 10%

Coal India's production rose by 10% to 773.6 million tonnes (MT) in 2023-24 but fell short of its production target of 780 MT for the fiscal, according to an exchange filing. Production was 703.2 MT in the preceding fiscal, the miner said in a filing. PTI

### 'Hydro-power records steepest fall in four decades'

Reuters  
SINGAPORE

India's hydroelectricity output fell at the steepest pace in at least 38 years during the year ended March 31, a Reuters analysis of government data showed, as erratic rainfall forced further dependence on coal-fired power amid higher demand.

The 16.3% drop in generation from India's biggest clean energy source coincided with the share of renewables in power generation sliding for the first time since Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed to boost solar and wind capacities at the United Nations climate talks at Paris in 2015.

## Lenders put non-core assets on the block to free up capital for growth

Suresh P. Iyengar  
K. Ram Kumar  
MUMBAI

Riding high on the bullish sentiment in the economy, banks are rushing to put either sell their non-core assets or dilute their stake to partially make up for their shrinking margins amid high cost of funds and free up growth capital.

Despite banking regulator giving two years time to HDFC Bank for holding stake in its wholly owned subsidiary HDFC Education and Development Services (providing services to three education schools), the bank is planning to sell its entire stake via Swiss challenge process to derive the maximum price for the asset.

Canara Bank decided to sell 13% equity shares in its joint venture subsidiary Canara Robeco Asset Management Company by listing the business on the stock exchange. The public sector bank has 51% stake in the mutual fund.

Similarly, the country's largest bank State Bank of India also approved sale of 6% stake in its subsidiary SBI Mutual Fund, but had to call off after market turned volatile due to Russia's invasion on Ukraine.

RBI directive Amit Goel, Chief Global Strategist, Pace 360, said RBI has directed banks to maintain a certain amount of capital relative to the risk-weighted assets and thus, by divesting non-core assets, banks can free up capital that can be redirected towards their core banking activities. This strategic move not



Cashing in: Banks believe the bull market will help them enhance the valuation of their stakes in subsidiaries. REUTERS



Listing subsidiaries doing well on exchanges augurs well for banks' shareholders as analysts will start factoring in the underlying value

SHREY JAIN  
Founder-CEO  
SAS Online

only enhances their financial health but also enables them to invest in areas that could potentially improve their Net Interest Margin, he said.

Margin pressure Shrey Jain, Founder and CEO SAS Online, a deep discount broker, said the rise in policy rates and falling liquidity in the system had inflated the cost of funds for the banks putting put pressure on margins. Listing subsidiaries that are doing well on the stock exchanges augurs well for banks' shareholders as analysts will start factoring in the underlying value, Mr. Jain added.

Vijay Singh Gour, Senior Analyst, Choice Broking

said last June, HDFC sold HDFC Cedilla as RBI asked them to merge the entity before merging HDFC with HDFC Bank or bring down holding to 10% in two years. Merging assets worth ₹15,000 crore of HDFC Credila with assets of ₹25 lakh crore would have taken one year after receiving multiple approvals and the management decided to sell the asset.

No cheap deposits Shreyansh V. Shah, Research Analyst, StoxBox, observed that with the equity market and mutual funds doing well it has become difficult for banks to garner cheap deposits.

Banks believe that the current bull market will help them enhance the valuation of their stakes in these subsidiaries which will help them reap the benefit of premium valuations, he said. "Banks are likely to face the brunt of increased cost of funds on account of intense competition to grow deposits from small finance banks," said Mr. Shah.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

## UPI ends FY24 on high note, processes ₹199-lakh-cr. transactions

Anshika Kavastha  
MUMBAI

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ended FY24 on a strong high, setting new records for volume and value of transactions undertaken during March.

This was despite transactions dipping slightly in February due to the fewer number of days in the month and increase in investment behaviour in customers, ahead of the end of the financial year.

'Squaring off' "Given daily limit of ₹1 lakh on UPI transactions, March, as a month, sees a lot of transactions closer to that limit, given that this is a month where a lot of merchants, business owners and individuals square off transactions. This translates into higher value and higher volume in March," said Vivek Iyer, Partner, Grant Thornton Bharat.

Transactions worth ₹19.78-lakh crore were processed during March, higher than the previous record of ₹18.41-lakh crore set in January. The value of transactions was 40% higher compared with March 2023, as per data by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

The number of transactions on the UPI network rose to 1,344 crore during the month from January's peak of 1,220 crore.

In FY24, the UPI platform processed 13,115 crore transactions aggregating to ₹199.29-lakh crore compared with 8,376 crore transactions valued at ₹139-lakh crore in FY23.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)



## Microfinance loans grow 21% to ₹3.9 lakh cr.



**Lion's share:** MFIs occupy the largest share in the pie with 40%, followed by banks at 32%. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

**K.R. Srivats**  
NEW DELHI

The microfinance industry's loan portfolio grew robustly at 21% at the end of the December 2023 quarter to touch ₹3.93-lakh crore, according to the latest data compiled by Sa-Dhan.

According to this RBI-approved Self Regulatory Organisation (SRO), Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) continued to occupy the largest share in the pie with 40%, followed by banks at 32%, and SFBs at 18%, NBFCs at 11%, and non-profit MFIs at 0.18%.

### On a boom

"Microfinance sector is on a boom with overall improved performance in every parameter. This growth story has been continuing for the last 2 quarters and expected to continue a few more years," Jiji Mammen, ED & CEO, Sa Dhan said.

He also said that microfinance needs to be expanded to other geographies, which are not fully served at present.

Sa-Dhan has taken the lead in identifying issues pertaining to unreached geographies by launching a study with the support of Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). The study report is expected soon and will be made available to the public.

Another challenge is the need to create awareness among the micro borrowers. Sa-Dhan, with the support of DEA Fund of RBI, conducted 2,250 workshops in 19 States covering 1.42 lakh persons and imparting such training.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

# China's forecast-beating economic data buys officials time to figure out a fix

Economic data over the Jan-Feb. period and a factory-owners survey for March offered relief to policymakers seeking to convince foreign investors they could rekindle the world's No.2 economy after it failed to post sustainable recovery following Beijing abandoning strict COVID curbs in late 2022.

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Reuters**  
BEIJING

China's \$18.6-trillion economy has skirted some near-term downside risks as suggested by recent indicators, analysts said, buying officials more time to convince investors they can fire up a new growth engine for 2024 and the years ahead.

Economic data over the January-February period and a factory-owners survey for March offered relief to policymakers seeking to convince foreign investors they could rekindle the world's No.2 economy after it failed to post a sustainable recovery following Beijing abandoning strict COVID curbs in late 2022.

But analysts and investors are cautious: while things might not be getting worse, unless officials can figure out how to get it to fire on all cylinders again, the market once seen as the engine of global growth will stall later in the year.

### Ineffective policy steps

China has taken a series of steps to invigorate its economy, including guiding banks to lend more to high-end manufacturing rather than real estate and reducing the amount banks must hold in reserve, but such policy measures are be-



**Code Red:** Analysts warn officials are running out of time to come up with a new growth model. REUTERS

coming less effective and could even be scaled back, they said.

"China is pushing to have a normal 2024. They know they can still export, and if they push this year, they can buy themselves time," said Alicia Garcia Herrero, chief economist for Asia Pacific at Natixis.

"But China cannot grow more than last year, and it never will, as the fiscal cost of growing more than it did in 2023 is so huge," she added. "China's growth model is not sustainable."

China's factory output and retail sales topped forecasts in January-February, joining better-than-expected exports and consumer-inflation indicators, providing an early boost to Beijing's hopes of reaching what analysts de-



China's factory output and retail sales topped forecasts in January-February, joining better-than-expected exports and consumer-inflation indicators

scribed as an ambitious 5% gross domestic product growth aim for 2024.

Citi on Thursday raised its economic-growth forecast for China for this year to 5% from 4.6%, citing "recent positive data and policy delivery".

But China "faces a fork in the road" and needs to "reinvent itself for a new era of high-quality growth," International Monetary Fund MD Kristalina

Georgieva told an international investment summit in Beijing last week.

The IMF in January revised its forecast up 0.4 percentage points to 4.6%, citing increased government spending, which remains short of last year's actual 5.2% expansion.

### New Productive Forces

Officials are putting their faith in "New Productive Forces", a term coined by Chinese President Xi Jinping in September underscoring the need for economic development based on innovation in advanced sectors. Still, analysts question whether China can maintain growth and transform its economy at the same time.

"China is barely keeping up with a growth rate that

is decelerating, so (the data) is not 'green shoots'," Ms. Garcia Herrero said. "5.2% is not the bottom, it's the top," she added.

Rhodium Group estimates actual growth in 2023 was more like 1.5%, rather than the official government figure, owing to an ailing property market, limited consumer spending, falling trade surplus and battered local government finances.

"Looking ahead, China may see a cyclical recovery to perhaps 3.0-3.5% growth in 2024," the New York-based research group predicted in December.

### Property quandry

Officials are confident China will hit its growth target of around 5% this year.

But investors want more details on the government's plans to limit the damage a long-running debt crisis in the property sector is exacting on growth and how Beijing will boost domestic consumption to keep Washington and Brussels at bay, both of which are weighing up action against Chinese exports.

"China is off the map. And that's something that they've barely started to grapple with," said Rogier Creemers, an assistant professor of Chinese studies at Leiden University.

Analysts warn officials are running out of time to come up with a new

growth model because the latest bounce in the data was buoyed by the government injecting money into the economy and the Lunar New Year, which fell in February this year, giving consumer prices and retail sales data a leg-up.

### 'Structural headwinds'

"Given the near-term tailwinds from stimulus, growth should continue to do reasonably well in the near term," wrote Zichun Huang, China Economist at Capital Economics, in a note. "But, once policy support is scaled back, probably later this year, structural headwinds mean the economy is likely to slow again."

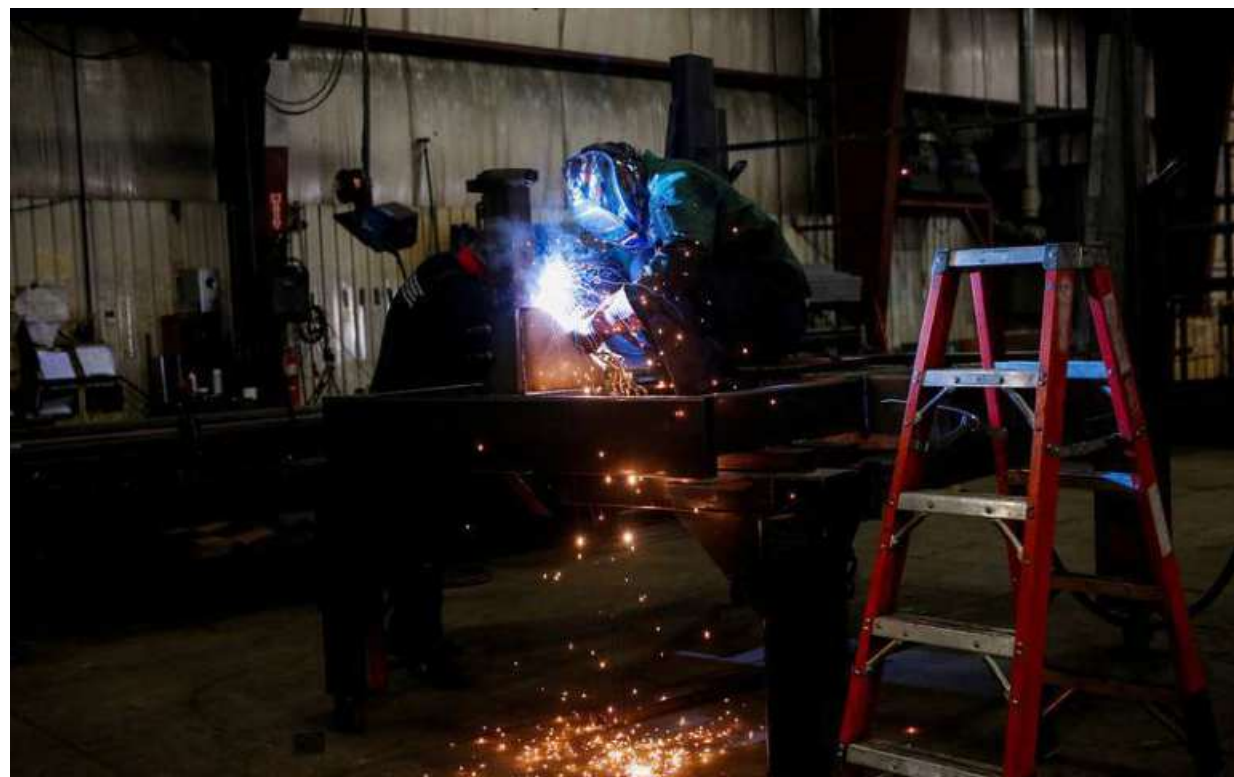
China's property sector, which used to represent 25% of the economy, looms particularly large.

Property investment and sales fell more slowly over the first two months of the year, supported by government efforts to arrest a protracted downturn in the sector, but analysts still worry it could prove to be the economy's undoing.

"(Officials) are basically fire-fighting at the moment to ensure the economy doesn't skid off the rails," said Frederic Neumann, chief Asia economist at HSBC in Hong Kong.

"But there's the longer-term question of what will drive growth in the future, once the property sector subsides."

## Turning the corner



**Sweet and salty:** Matt Dillion and Chad Damron weld an upper deck assembly at Look Trailers cargo trailer manufacturing facility in Middlebury, Indiana. U.S. manufacturing grew for the first time in 1-1/2 years in March as production rebounded sharply and new orders increased, but employment at factories remained subdued and prices for inputs pushed higher. REUTERS

# Debt, trade barriers, policy risks will slow Asia's 2024 growth: World Bank

**Associated Press**  
BANGKOK

Asian economies are not doing as well as they could and growth in the region is forecast to slow to 4.5% this year from 5.1% in 2023, the World Bank said in a report released Monday.

Debt, trade barriers and policy uncertainties are dulling the region's economic dynamism and governments need to do more to address long-term problems such as weak social safety nets and underinvestment in education, the report says.

Asia's economies are growing more slowly than before the pandemic, but faster than other parts of the world. And a rebound



**Slowing pace:** Asian economies are growing slower than before the pandemic, according to a World Bank report. AP

in global trade—trade in goods and services grew by only 0.2% in 2023 but is projected to grow by 2.3% this year—and easing financial conditions as central banks cut interest rates will help offset weaker growth

in China.

"This report demonstrates the region is outperforming much of the rest of the world, but it's underachieving its own potential," Aadiya Mattoo, the World Bank's chief economist for

East Asia and the Pacific, said in an online briefing.

"The leading firms in the region are not playing the ... role that they should," he added.

A key risk is that the U.S. Federal Reserve and other major central banks might keep interest rates higher than before the pandemic. Another comes from the nearly 3,000 trade-distorting measures, such as higher tariffs or subsidies, that were imposed in 2023, the report said.

Most of those policies were set by major industrial economies such as the United States, China and India.

The World Bank is forecasting that growth will slow to 4.5% this year.

# Relentless U.S. credit demand seen driving Q2 rally

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Reuters**

An investor scramble to lock in returns before the Federal Reserve cuts rates is expected to sustain a rally in the U.S. corporate bond market into the second quarter, with one strategist saying it may touch levels not seen in three decades.

Credit markets are being overwhelmed by a buying frenzy, as investors bet the Fed will engineer a soft landing, taming inflation without causing a recession, and then cut interest rates later this year to support growth.

On March 21, the premium paid by companies over Treasuries, called credit

spreads, on investment grade-rated and junk-rated bonds touched their tightest levels in two years — at 91 basis points and 305 basis points, respectively.

### Fund influx

Large bond investors such as insurance companies and pension plans are seeing an influx of money from their clients looking to capitalise on higher interest rates, leading them to seek corporate bonds, credit strategists said. But there may not be enough new issuance to go around.

In the first quarter, for example, investment grade companies raised a record \$538 billion — that's 40% of the \$1.3 trillion of bond supply that was expected for the entire year, as per data from research firm In-



**Making hay:** Credit markets are being overwhelmed by a buying frenzy on rate-cut bets. REUTERS

forma Global Markets. In a sign of strong demand, new offerings have been three to four times oversubscribed on average. Morgan Stanley's credit

strategist Vishwas Patkar likened the current market to conditions in the mid-1990s, when after four cuts in 1995, the Fed kept rates high for an extended

period of time.

"Credit remained very resilient, and spreads hit their modern-era tightests of 56 basis points even as rates were higher," he said.

Mr. Patkar said there was a chance spreads could go as low as 75 basis points, levels not seen since the 1990s, if a soft-landing was achieved.

Earlier this month, Mr. Patkar moved his base case year-end spread target to 95 basis points from 125 basis points.

He's not alone. Bank of America strategists expect spreads to tighten to around 80 basis points over the next month, closer to the 77 basis-point level touched in 2021. They are, however, sticking to a 6-month spread target of 100-120 basis points.

### Mispricing risk

The strong demand for their debt is good news for companies as it allows them to fund themselves

more cheaply. But some investors warned tighter spreads also mean they are getting paid less for the risk they take when buying such debt.

The difference between the credit spreads on bonds rated BBB and those with A ratings were near all-time lows, which meant credit investors are not charging for macro risks — including the risk of a hard landing for the U.S. economy, said Hans Mikkelsen, credit strategist at TD Securities in a report on March 15. Mr. Mikkelsen has a six-month spread target at 130 basis points.

Despite the risks, Wall Street strategists say the market's tailwind is likely to continue for now. Insurance companies are buying corporate bonds to

match a rise in liabilities, as higher interest rates spurred increased sales of annuities, or insurance contracts that pay out a regular income stream.

Total U.S. annuity sales reached a record-high \$385.4 billion in 2023, jumping 23% y-o-y as per industry body LIMRA.

Also adding to demand are re-investments of coupons being paid by companies on their existing bonds.

Goldman Sachs estimates investment-grade and high-yield rated bonds will generate total coupon payments of \$463 billion in 2024. If those payments were all reinvested, it would absorb 77% of the \$600 billion of net issuance expected this year, the firm said.



## KABUL

## Nine children killed in landmine blast in southeastern Afghanistan



Nine children were killed in a blast in southeastern Afghanistan that was caused by a landmine laid during the country's decades of conflict, a provincial official said on Monday. The mine went off as a group of young boys and girls were playing with it in the Geru district of Ghazni province on Sunday. AFP

## LONDON

## U.K. says Channel crossings on small boats hit a record this winter



Channel arrivals on small boats to the U.K. hit a record in the first quarter of 2024 with a nearly 42% rise over last year, the Interior Ministry said on Monday. British officials processed 5,373 migrants landing on the shores of southeastern England in the first three months of the year compared to 3,793 last year. AFP

## MOSCOW

## Russia arrests four more plotters of Moscow concert hall attack



Russia's FSB security service has said that four persons arrested on Sunday in a foiled "terror" plot had provided money and arms for the deadly attack on a Moscow concert hall last month. More than 140 people were killed when gunmen stormed the Crocus City Hall venue on March 22 before setting the building on fire. AFP

## BALTIMORE

## Alternative route opened for ships clearing Baltimore wreckage



The U.S. Coast Guard opened a temporary alternative channel for vessels involved in the clearing of debris at the site of the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, part of a phased approach to opening the main channel leading to the port. The bridge collapsed after a container ship rammed into it after losing power. AP

## Israeli MPs give approval for Bill to ban Al Jazeera

Agence France-Presse  
JERUSALEM

The Israeli Parliament passed a Bill on Monday giving top Ministers the authority to bar from Israel the broadcasts of news channel Al Jazeera – a step Premier Benjamin Netanyahu is poised to take.

This law, which passed by 70 votes to 10, carries the authority to ban the broadcast of content from foreign channels but also allows the closing of their offices in Israel.

Israel had claimed in January that an Al Jazeera staff journalist and a freelancer killed in an air strike in Gaza were "terror operatives".

The following month it said another journalist for the channel, wounded in a separate strike, was a "deputy company commander" with Hamas.

Al Jazeera has fiercely denied the accusations and accused Israel of systematically targeting Al Jazeera employees in Gaza.

## Israel withdraws from Shifa hospital after two-week raid

Tel Aviv claims its operation at Gaza's largest hospital has killed some 200 militants and detained hundreds more; WHO says more than 20 patients died and dozens were put at risk during raid

Associated Press  
DEIR AL-BALAH

Israel's military withdrew from Gaza's largest hospital early on Monday after a two-week raid, in which it said it killed some 200 militants and detained hundreds more. Palestinian residents said the troops left behind several bodies and a vast swath of destruction.

The military has described the raid on Shifa Hospital as a major battlefield victory in the nearly six-month war. But it came at a time of mounting frustration in Israel, with tens of thousands protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday and demanding he do more to bring home dozens of hostages held in Gaza. It was the largest anti-government demonstration since the start of the war.

The fighting showed



Dilapidated state: Palestinians inspect the damage at Gaza's al-Shifa hospital after the Israeli military withdrew on Monday. AFP

that Hamas can still put up resistance even in one of the hardest-hit areas..

The military said that among those killed at Shifa were senior Hamas operatives and other militants who had regrouped there after an earlier raid in November, and that it seized weapons and valuable intelligence.

The UN health agency said more than 20 patients

died and dozens were put at risk during the raid, which brought further destruction to a hospital that had already largely ceased to function.

Bassel al-Hilou said the bodies of seven of his relatives had been found in the wreckage surrounding the hospital. He said they had sought shelter at a neighbour's house after theirs was bombed, but then

another strike hit the home where they were staying.

"There was a massacre in my uncle's house," he said. "The situation was indescribable."

## Toll unknown

It was not yet known how many Palestinian civilians were killed during the raid. The military denied that its forces harmed any civilians inside the compound.

Israel has accused Hamas of using hospitals for military purposes and has raided several medical facilities. Health officials in Gaza deny those allegations.

Critics accuse the Army of recklessly endangering civilians and of decimating a health sector already overwhelmed with war-wounded. Palestinians say Israeli troops forced hundreds of people living near Shifa to evacuate to the south.

## Imamoglu maintains grip on Istanbul mayor post

Agence France-Presse  
ISTANBUL

Ekrem Imamoglu's second convincing victory in an Istanbul city election looks set to propel him into the running for the 2028 presidential vote.

The football-loving 52-year-old, who first became the mega-city's mayor in 2019, on Sunday again defeated Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's chosen candidate in the country's economic powerhouse despite a concerted effort to unseat him by the veteran president.

"Tomorrow is a new spring day for our country," Mr. Imamoglu told tens of thousands of euphoric supporters cheering his re-election late on Sunday, wearing his trademark shirtsleeves and rimless glasses.

Mr. Imamoglu, candidate for the social-democratic Republican People's Party (CHP), had spent much of the campaign targeting Mr. Erdogan rather than his nominal oppo-



People's man: Ekrem Imamoglu had spent much of the campaign targeting Tayyip Erdogan rather than his opponent Murat Kurum. AP

ment, former Environment Minister Murat Kurum.

Largely unknown in 2019, Mr. Imamoglu that year ended 25 years of rule by Mr. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its allies in the city of 16 million where the President was once mayor.

## Minor hiccup

The smooth talking Mr. Imamoglu was initially stripped of his victory when the vote was controversially annulled. But he won by an even bigger margin in a re-run three months later.

He has since become one of Turkey's most popular politicians, even as he was targeted with legal action.

In Sunday's election, Mr. Imamoglu ran as the CHP candidate as he failed to get Turkey's fractured opposition parties to rally around his bid.

The size of his victory will also have stunned those erstwhile allies.

Now Mr. Imamoglu is seen as the most likely potential candidate to beat whoever stands for Erdogan's party in the 2028 presidential election.

## Pakistan PM assures Chinese nationals of foolproof security

Press Trust of India  
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said his government would ensure foolproof security measures for the Chinese nationals working across the country, days after five Chinese workers were killed in a suicide attack in the country's restive northwest.

A vehicle-borne suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Chinese engineers in the remote Besham area of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa on Tuesday last, killing five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver.

"I want to assure you that the government of Pa-

## Shehbaz's guarantee comes days after five Chinese workers were killed in a suicide attack

kistan will not leave any stone unturned, will not spare any opportunity to make sure you get the best possible security for your families and yourself," Mr. Sharif told a gathering of the Chinese workers at the site of Dasu Hydropower Project in Kohistan during a visit to express solidarity with them.

At least 12 persons, including the mastermind, have been arrested in connection with the blast.

## Dogs' day in Taiwan



Dogs sniff each other from their strollers while waiting for their pet-friendly train along the Taipei Mass Rapid Transit. The Taipei Metro on Sunday began operations of two pet-friendly trains with eight trips throughout the day and stopping at all usual stations along the route. AFP

## Court suspends jail terms of Imran, wife in Toshakhana case

Press Trust of India  
ISLAMABAD

In a temporary relief to jailed former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, a high court on Monday suspended the 14-year sentence handed out to him and his wife Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana corruption case.

The beleaguered couple were sentenced to 14 years in jail each by an accountability court on January 31 for alleged corruption in state gifts they got from the state depository, days before the general elections.

According to the verdict, Mr. Khan and Ms. Bushra were barred from holding any public office for 10 years and slapped with a fine of Pakistani Rs. 787 million each.

They challenged the conviction in the Islamabad High Court where a two-member Bench headed by IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq heard the case.

On Monday, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) gave temporary relief to the couple in the case by suspending their sentences and granting them bail in the case.

However, the court announced that their appeals against the conviction would be heard after the Eid festival next month.

But Mr. Khan may not be released as he is convicted in other cases and cannot be released until absolved from charges in



Imran Khan

other cases. Similarly, Ms. Bushra is also convicted in another case and may not be released after her sentence has been suspended.

In the Toshakhana corruption case, the 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician is accused of retaining expensive state gifts they received during his tenure as Pakistan's Premier.

Under the rules governing Toshakhana – a Persian word meaning "treasure house" – government officials can keep gifts by paying a price for them but first the gift should be deposited.

Mr. Khan and his wife either failed to deposit the gift or got it for a low price by allegedly using their authority.

The conviction of Mr. Khan in the Toshakhana case had come a day after he was sentenced to 10 years in jail in the cipher case on January 30.

Earlier, he was also convicted in a different Toshakhana corruption case in August 2023, leading to his arrest.

## Germany gives controversial green light to cannabis

Agence France-Presse  
BERLIN

Cannabis aficionados lit up in Germany on Monday, as the country became the largest EU nation to legalise recreational use, despite fierce objections from opposition politicians and medical associations.

Under the first step in the much-debated new law, adults over 18 are now allowed to carry 25 grams of dried cannabis and cultivate up to three marijuana plants at home.

The changes leave Germany with some of the



As a first step, adults are now allowed to carry 25 grams of cannabis and cultivate up to three marijuana plants at home. REUTERS

most liberal cannabis laws in Europe, alongside Malta and Luxembourg, which

legalised recreational use in 2021 and 2023, respectively.

The Netherlands, known for its permissive attitude to the drug, has in recent years taken a stricter approach to counter cannabis tourism.

As the law took effect at midnight, some 1,500 people cheered in central Berlin by the Brandenburg Gate, according to the police, with some lighting up joints in celebration.

Cannabis consumption has been brought out of the "taboo zone", Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said on X, formerly Twitter.

The new law was "bet-

ter for real addiction help, prevention for children and young people and for combating the black market," Mr. Lauterbach said, responding in part to criticisms levelled against legalisation.

As the next step in the legal reform, from July 1 it will be possible to legally obtain weed through "cannabis clubs" in the country. These regulated associations will be allowed to have up to 500 members each, and will be able to distribute up to 50 grams of cannabis per person per month.

Initial plans for cannabis to be sold via licensed shops were ditched due to EU opposition.

Medical groups have raised concerns that legalisation could lead to an increase in use among young people.

The law has likewise drawn criticism from police, who fear it will be difficult to enforce.

Another potential issue is the implementation of a retroactive amnesty on cannabis-related offences, which could create an administrative headache for the legal system.





The U.S. embassy in Havana in Cuba where the syndrome was first reported in 2016. AP

## 'Havana Syndrome' linked to Russian intelligence: report

Agence France-Presse  
WASHINGTON

The mysterious so-called Havana Syndrome symptoms experienced by U.S. diplomats in recent years have been linked to a Russian intelligence unit, according to a joint media investigation released on Monday.

Havana Syndrome was first reported in 2016 when U.S. diplomats in Cuba's capital reported falling ill and hearing piercing sounds at night, sparking speculation of an attack by a foreign entity using an unspecified sonic weapon. Other symptoms including bloody noses, headaches and vision problems were later reported by embassy staff in China and Europe.

A joint report by *The Insider*, *Der Spiegel* and CBS's *60 Minutes* suggests that the the diplomats may have been targeted by Russian sonic weaponry. The year-long investigation "uncovered evidence suggesting that unexplained anomalous health incidents, also known as Havana Syndrome, may have their origin in the use of directed energy weapons wielded by members of (the Russian GRU) Unit 29155," the report said.

Russia's 29155 unit is responsible for foreign operations and has been blamed for several international incidents, including the attempted poisoning of defector Sergei Skripal in Britain in 2018.

Moscow dismissed the allegations as "groundless" on Monday.

"This topic has been talked up in the press for many years already... But nobody has ever published any convincing evidence, so all this is nothing more than a groundless and unfounded accusation", Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told a news conference.

## U.S. minority students concerned as diversity programmes vanish

Many U.S. universities gave consideration to minority students under 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' programmes, as they sought to correct long-standing inequalities, but the Supreme court put an end to affirmative action in admissions last June

Agence France-Presse  
WASHINGTON

The latest battle in the culture wars cleaving American society centres around diversity programmes on university campuses, now restricted or banned in a growing number of U.S. States.

The debate pits those on the Left, who advocate for boosting minority students victimised by deep-rooted inequality, and those on the Right who say people should be judged on individual merit, not skin colour.

"The idea of present discrimination being the remedy for past discrimination... is inherently wrong," said Jordan Pace, a Republican member of the House of Representatives in the State of South Carolina.

"We don't like the idea of judging people based on immutable characteristics, whether it be gender or race or height or whatever," he said, calling the United States a "hyper-meritocratic society."

Often known as "diversity, equity, and inclusion" (DEI) programmes, many American universities had given special consideration to minority students - particularly those who are Black, Hispanic and Native American - as they sought to correct long-standing inequalities.

Last June, the country's conservative-majority Su-



Struggle to represent: Students at the University of Texas after a law banning diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives from state-funded higher education institutions took effect in January. AP

preme Court put an end to affirmative action in university admissions, reversing one of the major gains of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

Now, Mr. Pace is urging his State to follow the lead of Florida and about a dozen other States that have scrapped campus DEI programmes.

### 'Primary target group'

"The primary target group across the country... are Black people," said Ricky Jones, professor of pan-African studies at the University of Louisville in Kentucky.

Carlie Reeves, 19, was the first person in her family to attend college and when she arrived at the

University of Louisville, it was "very obvious that my professors did not really think I belonged. Did not really see me as intelligent."

DEI leaders on campus "spoke life into me and told me... you have the merit."

Many minority students are at the school "100% because of DEI," she said, raising as an example Black students who benefited from race-based scholarships.

But on March 15, Kentucky lawmakers advanced a proposal to restrict such programmes, spurring Ms. Reeves to co-organise a protest on campus.

"It just felt like my duty to inform the students,

'Hey y'all, these people are trying to literally get rid of us from campus... we have to do something," she said.

Kentucky is following other conservative States, including Texas, Alabama and Idaho.

At the beginning of March, the University of Florida ended DEI programmes and related jobs, part of Republican Governor Ron DeSantis's offensive against what he calls "woke ideology."

"I am extremely worried," said Stephanie Anne Shelton, a professor and director of diversity at University of Alabama's College of Education.

While provisions in the State's new law allow her to teach certain diversity

awareness courses to future educators, she is concerned about "the degree to which concepts like academic freedom remain in place."

In Alabama it is now prohibited to "compel a student... to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere to a divisive concept" - specifying that includes making an individual feel the need "to apologise on the basis of his or her race."

Failure to comply can result in dismissal, the law notes.

Republicans routinely rail against "critical race theory," an academic approach to studying ways in which racism infuses U.S. legal systems and institutions in often subtle ways.

Republican White House candidate Donald Trump has called for making reforms on a federal level.

"On Day One I will sign a new executive order to cut federal funding for any school pushing critical race theory, transgender insanity, and other inappropriate racial, sexual or political content, onto our children," he told a rally in Ohio.

Mr. Jones said the new laws are "a rolling back of the racial clock locally, statewide and nationally."

Going forward, Black scholars will avoid States like Florida and Texas, he said, predicting "a very, very dangerous forgetting that will happen here."

## Meta to shut down content tracking tool ahead of major polls

Agence France-Presse  
WASHINGTON

A digital tool considered vital in tracking viral falsehoods, CrowdTangle will be decommissioned by Facebook owner Meta in a major election year, a move researchers fear will disrupt efforts to detect an expected firehose of political misinformation.

The tech giant says CrowdTangle will be unavailable after August 14, less than three months before the U.S. presidential election. The Palo Alto company plans to replace it with a new tool that researchers say lacks the same functionality, and which news organisations will largely not have access to. CrowdTangle has been a game-changer for years, offering researchers and journalists crucial real-time transparency into the spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech on influential Meta-owned platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.

In recent election cycles, researchers say CrowdTangle alerted them to harmful activities including foreign interference and incitements to violence. Killing off the tool, a move experts say is in line with a tech industry trend of rolling back transparency and security measures, is a major blow as dozens of countries hold elections this year - a period when bad actors typically spread false narratives more than ever.

## Sisi to begin new term as bailouts boost economy

Agence France-Presse  
CAIRO

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi begins his third term this week buoyed by massive fresh financing, but experts say the road out of economic crisis will still be long and arduous.

Mr. Sisi won December's presidential election with 89.6% of the vote. He is set to begin his third term officially on Wednesday, as Cairo struggles to contain the fallout from two years of punishing economic crisis and dire foreign currency shortages. Local media reported that he will swear the oath before parliament on Tuesday.

This six-year term is set to be the 69-year-old's last, unless another constitutional amendment again prolongs his tenure.

As 2024 began, the Arab world's most populous country seemed to be hurtling towards default and economic collapse, analysts said, before it suddenly received more than \$50 billion in loans and investments.

Within weeks, the United Arab Emirates announced a \$35-billion land development deal for Egypt's Ras al-Hikma, the International Monetary Fund more than doubled a \$3-billion loan, and the World Bank and European Union inked fresh financing agreements.

The massive bailout has saved Egypt "from falling into the abyss", according to former deputy Prime Minister Ziad Bahaa-Eldin.

But concern has mounted that, without major reform Egypt could still find itself in a new cycle of crisis.

## Tradition goes political



An effigy representing Venezuelan Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who is barred from holding public office, is burnt during the traditional burning of Judas as part of the Holy Week celebrations in Caracas on Sunday. REUTERS

## Iran's persecution of Bahai minority constitutes 'crime against humanity', says HRW

Agence France-Presse  
PARIS

The Human Rights Watch (HRW) said on Monday that the Iranian authorities' persecution of the Bahai minority since the Islamic revolution of 1979 constitutes a crime against humanity.

The New York-based group said that the Bahai, Iran's largest non-Muslim minority, faced repression including arbitrary arrest, property confiscation, restrictions on school and job opportunities, and even the right to a dignified burial.

"The cumulative impact of authorities' decades-long systematic repression is an intentional and severe deprivation of Bahai's fun-

### The group said that the Bahai faced repression including property confiscation and arbitrary arrest

damental rights and amounts to the crime against humanity of persecution," the HRW said.

### Intentional deprivation

It argued that this fell within the scope of the International Criminal Court whose statute defines persecution as the intentional and severe deprivation of fundamental rights contrary to international law on national, religious or ethnic grounds.

The HRW said that while the intensity of violations

against Bahai "has varied over time", the persecution of the community has remained constant, "impacting virtually every aspect of Bahai's private and public lives".

### 'Extreme animus'

It said the Islamic republic holds "extreme animus against adherents of the Bahai faith" and repression of the minority was enshrined in Iranian law and is official government policy.

"Iranian authorities deprive Bahai of their fundamental rights in every aspect of their lives, not due to their actions, but simply for belonging to a faith group," said Michael Page, deputy Middle East director at the HRW.

## Taiwan group goes offline to help senior citizens 'scrub' off disinformation

Associated Press  
TAIPEI

Their days often began at the crack of dawn. They would head out to a church, a temple, a park and set up a stall. They would seek out seniors in particular, those who are perhaps the most vulnerable citizens of the information-saturated society that has enveloped them. To get people to stop and listen, they would offer free bars of soap - a metaphor for the scrubbing that they were undertaking.

They would teach techniques to punch through the static, to see the lack of logic in conspiracy theories, to find the facts behind the false narratives

that can sometimes shape our lives. In nearly six years, with just one formal employee and a team of volunteers, Fake News Cleaner has hosted more than 500 events, connecting with college students, elementary-school children and the seniors.

Like any democratic society, Taiwan is flooded with assorted types of disinformation. It touches every aspect of a person's life, from conspiracy theories on vaccines to health claims aimed at promoting supplements.

### Personal impact

Despite its very public nature, disinformation has a deeply personal impact - particularly among Tai-



Staying alert: Students of Fake News Cleaner learn how to identify fake news during a class in Kaohsiung City Taiwan. AP

wan's older people. It thrives in the natural gaps between people that come from generational differences and a constantly updating tech landscape, then enlarges those gaps to cause rifts.

"They have no way to communicate," says Melody Hsieh, who co-founded the group with Shu-huai Chang in 2018.

Taiwan is already home to several established fact-checking organisations.

There's Co-Facts, an AI-driven fact-checking bot founded by a group of civic hackers. There are the Taiwan Fact Check Center and MyGoPen. But such organisations presume that you are at least somewhat tech-savvy - that you can find a fact-check organisation's website or add a fact-checking bot.

### 'Patience and respect'

Yet many of the people most affected are the least tech-savvy. Fake News Cleaner believes addressing this gap requires an old-school approach: going offline. At the heart of the group's work is approaching people with patience and respect while educating them about the algo-

rithms and norms that drive the platforms they use.

Ms. Hsieh said she was moved after seeing too many instances of division because of fake news: a couple that got divorced, a mother who kicked her kid out of the house. Many such stories surfaced in 2018 when Taiwan held a national referendum on a number of social issues including on nuclear energy, sex education, and gay marriage.

Fake news relies on emotion to generate clicks. So often, headlines are sensational and appeal directly to three types of emotions: hatred, panic or surprise. A click or a page view means more money

for the websites, volunteer Tseng Yu-huan explained to a crowd of seniors at a community centre

Chuang Tsai-yu, sitting in on a recent lecture by the group in Taipei, once saw a message online that told people to hit their chest in a way that would save them in the case of heart discomfort. She said she actually tried it out herself. Later, she asked her doctor about it. His advice: Go directly to the emergency room and get checked for a heart attack.

"We really do believe the things people will send us," Ms. Chuang said. "Because when you are older, we don't have as much of a grasp on the outside world."



## TOSS APPEAL

## Manjrekar asks Mumbai crowd to 'behave' while introducing Hardik



SPORTZPICS

Sanjay Manjrekar asked the Wankhede crowd to 'behave' as he was introducing Mumbai Indians captain Hardik Pandya — who was being booed by the fans — at the toss. "Got the two captains here with me. Hardik Pandya, captain of the Mumbai Indians. Big round of applause, ladies and gentlemen. Behave," Manjrekar said.

## LOTS TO DISCUSS

## BCCI invites IPL owners for a meeting in Ahmedabad on April 16



SPORTZPICS

The BCCI has invited owners of the 10 IPL teams for an informal meeting in Ahmedabad on April 16, on the sidelines of the game between DC and GT at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Likely discussions could be around the mega auction, covering player retentions and potential increase in the auction purse.

## POSITIVE VIBE

## Dhoni had been playing incredibly well in pre-season: Fleming



K.R. DEEPAK

Stephen Fleming said M.S. Dhoni's knock gave the side a positive vibe despite the loss to DC. "It was beautiful, wasn't it? Even the one-handed one over mid-wicket... he was playing incredibly well in pre-season. He's coming back from a serious operation, but batting superbly. That performance gave us a positive vibe."

## THALA EFFECT

## CSK plays all its matches in home grounds, jokes Khaleel



K.R. DEEPAK

Visakhapatnam has been designated DC's home ground for two matches, but on Sunday, CSK garnered maximum support as the stadium was awash in a sea of yellow. "CSK plays all its matches in home grounds (laughs). We also respect that and enjoy it, and it is fun as he (Dhoni) is our captain as well," DC's Khaleel said.

# Boult bullies and Chahal bamboozles as Rajasthan crushes Mumbai

The strike bowlers pick up three wickets each; Hardik, Tilak help the team make a partial recovery; Parag aces the chase while Madhwal claims three



In the pink of condition: It was a complete performance by Royals who posted their third win on the trot this season. EMMANUEL YOGINI

## IPL-17

Amol Karhadkar  
MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma, the India captain, was cheered. Hardik Pandya was jeered, and cheered as well. Neither Rohit, who continued to be worshipped despite being replaced as Mumbai Indians skipper, nor Hardik, his successor, could withstand the Rajasthan Royals onslaught.

Royals lived up to the reputation of being the best bowling unit in the Indian Premier League to set up a facile win at the Wankhede Stadium.

The left-arm pace duo of Trent Boult and Nandre Burger rattled the Mumbai Indians' top-order. The spin duo of Yuzvendra Chahal and R. Ashwin then ensured the Royals took a firm grip on the game at the break.

Despite Hardik and Tilak Varma's resurrecting partnership of 56 runs for the fifth wicket, Mumbai Indians could only manage 125 for nine.

Akash Madhwal then marked his first outing of the season with an impressive spell but Riyan Parag — who notched up his second successive fifty with consecutive sixes off Gerald Coetzee — took Royals home in the 16th over.

The night, though, belonged to Boult and Chahal. Thrice in his first two overs Boult saw the back of a batter who was facing his first ball. He accounted for Rohit (who poked at one that swung away to be caught by a lunging Sanju Samson) and Naman Dhir (leg-before off one that came into him) off the last two balls of the first over.

At one for two, Dewald Brevis became the earliest Impact Player introduced in IPL. But Boult, whose hat-trick was saved by Ishan Kishan, had Brevis caught at gully by Burger.

When Burger accounted for Ishan in the fifth, at 20 for four, MI was in danger of being bowled out

cheaply. In came Hardik and was booed for the fourth time while taking guard. But as Hardik started timing the ball to precision, the jeers turned into cheers. A charge down the wicket for a one-bounced four over mid-on was the highlight of his three fours.

Chahal then enticed Hardik into mistiming a heave to long-on to peg MI back. He went on to bamboozle the lower-order to finish with superb figures of three for 11.

Despite Boult's barrage, Chahal's chivalry and Riyan's robust hitting, the night will be remembered for how Hardik was treated on his return to his IPL alma mater.

## SCOREBOARD

## MUMBAI INDIANS

Ishan Kishan c Samson b Burger 16 (14b, 2x4, 1x6), Rohit Sharma c Samson b Boult 0 (1b), Naman Dhir lbw b Boult 0 (1b), Dewald Brevis (Impact Player in place of Naman Dhir) c Burger b Boult 0 (1b), Tilak Varma c Ashwin b Chahal 32 (29b, 2x6), Hardik Pandya c sub (Powell) b Chahal 34 (21b, 6x4), Piyush Chawla c Hetmyer b Avesh 3 (6b), Tim David c Boult b Burger 17 (24b, 1x4), Gerald Coetzee c Hetmyer b Chahal 4 (9b), Jasprit Bumrah (not out) 8 (9b, 1x4), Akash Madhwal (not out) 4 (5b); Extras (b-1, lb-2, w-4): 7; Total (for nine wkts. in 20 overs): 125.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-1 (Rohit, 0.5 overs), 2-1 (Dhir, 0.6), 3-14 (Brevis, 2.2), 4-20 (Kishan, 3.3), 5-76 (Hardik, 9.3), 6-83 (Chawla, 11.1), 7-95 (Tilak, 13.2), 8-111 (Coetzee, 16.3), 9-114 (David, 18.3).

## ROYALS BOWLING

Boult 4-0-22-3, Burger 4-0-32-2, Avesh 4-0-30-1, Chahal 4-0-11-3, Ashwin 4-0-27-0.

## RAJASTHAN ROYALS

Yashasvi Jaiswal c David b

Maphaka 10 (6b, 2x4), Jos Buttler c Chawla b Madhwal 13 (16b, 2x4), Sanju Samson b Madhwal 12 (10b, 3x4), Riyan Parag (not out) 54 (39b, 5x4, 3x6), R. Ashwin c Tilak b Madhwal 16 (16b, 1x4), Shubham Dubey (Impact Player in place of Chahal) (not out) 8 (6b, 1x4); Extras (b-2, lb-2, w-10): 14; Total (for four wkts. in 15.3 overs): 127.

## FALL OF WICKETS

1-10 (Jaiswal, 0.6), 2-42 (Samson, 4.2), 3-48 (Buttler, 6.3), 4-88 (Ashwin, 12.2).

## MUMBAI INDIANS BOWLING

Maphaka 2-0-23-1, Bumrah 4-0-26-0, Madhwal 4-0-20-3, Coetzee 2-3-0-36-0, Chawla 3-0-18-0.

## Toss: Royals.

## PoM: Boult.

RR won by six wickets with 27 balls to spare.

## Next assignment

## RR: April 6 vs RCB

Jaipur, 7.30 p.m.

## MI: April 7 vs DC

Mumbai, 3.30 p.m.

## Points Table

	M	W	L	PTS	NRR
Rajasthan Royals	3	3	0	6	1.249
Kolkata Knight Riders	2	2	0	4	1.047
Chennai Super Kings	3	2	1	4	0.976
Gujarat Titans	3	2	1	4	-0.738
Sunrisers Hyderabad	3	1	2	2	0.204
Lucknow Super Giants	2	1	1	2	0.025
Delhi Capitals	3	1	2	2	-0.016
Punjab Kings	3	1	2	2	-0.337
Royal Challengers	3	1	2	2	-0.711
Mumbai Indians	3	0	3	0	-1.423

## Mayank has the attributes to play all formats, says Broad

S. Prasanna Venkatesan  
CHENNAI

Terming the 21-year-old Mayank Yadav's IPL entry as "one of the most spectacular debuts," former England pacer Stuart Broad said on Monday that the young pacer has all the attributes to perform well in Australia in Test cricket and expected him to debut for India in the "next 18 months."

Mayank's fiery pace (150 kph and above) and shorter lengths fetched him three wickets (three for 27) and helped Lucknow Super Giants defeat Punjab Kings by 21 runs on Saturday.

Speaking on the Star Sports Press Room show, Broad said: "It was one of the most spectacular debuts I think you will see from a young bowler — to come in and change the rhythm of the game like he did. He has great attributes — a very calm and patterned run-up with small strides and a great flow. "He looks a really fan-



Teardown debut: To come in and change the rhythm of the game like Mayank did was spectacular, says Broad. K. MURALI KUMAR

tastic athlete — balanced at the crease with a braced front leg. And what impressed me the most, yes, the 156 kph, but his line was incredible. And he was beating international quality players for pace.

"He looks like he's got the attributes to play every single format. First of all, India go and play the five Test matches against Aus-

tralia in Australia. Does he look like he's got the attributes to perform there? Of course! It looks like he's got a good wrist position. I bet he can swing the red ball as well away from the bat. "Let's let him just develop naturally and develop on a nice upward curve. But I think we'll see him making a debut for India in the next 18 months."

## 'The result is a fair reflection of how the teams played'



Man of the moment: Mukesh's two strikes in one over swung it Capitals' way against Super Kings. K.R. DEEPAK

S. Dipak Ragav  
VISAKHAPATNAM

Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming said his team lost the plot in the PowerPlay with both ball and bat as it suffered its first defeat in the Indian Premier League season to Delhi Capitals here on Sunday.

"I think the result is probably a fair reflection of the way the teams played. We were a little bit off tonight. We were slow to start in the first six overs of

each innings," said Fleming.

"I think we gave away too many in our first six when we bowled. When we batted, they were very good, created pressure, and used conditions very well."

The former New Zealand skipper also praised Rishabh Pant's knock and felt it made the difference. "It was excellent batting. It showed that Pant still has a lot of natural flair, and he played really well under pressure."

## Pant rediscovering his mojo augurs well for Indian cricket

S. Dipak Ragav  
VISAKHAPATNAM

One of the biggest talking points before the start of the tournament was how Rishabh Pant would fare this year. For someone who had to re-learn to walk after suffering life-threatening injuries 14 months ago, the fact that Pant recovered enough to even get back on to the field was astounding.

However, there were doubts about whether he could return to his old self. On Sunday, the 26-year-old dispelled those fears for good with a match-winning knock (51, 32b, 4x4, 3x6) for Delhi Capitals against Chennai Super Kings.

In the first two outings of the IPL, Pant was easing his way back into things. It was understandable, considering he jumped straight into his first competitive match against world-class bowlers.

Against CSK, Pant again started slowly going at run-a-ball for his first 23 runs. The defining moment,



Back in the swing: After a slow start, Pant broke the shackles and played some trademark shots. K.R. DEEPAK

though, came in the 18th when he deposited Mustafizur Rahman over square leg for a six with his trademark one-handed pick-up shot in which the bottom hand comes off the bat.

In the next over, Pant showed he was well on track to rediscover his mojo. On a day when Math-eesha Pathirana was nailing his yorkers at a ferocious pace — he had knocked over Mitchell Marsh and Tristan Stubbs

with 150kph thunderbolts — Pant hit the Sri Lankan down the ground with panache.

From 23 off 23, Pant needed just eight balls to get his next 28 runs. In the context of the game, his knock proved decisive for the Capitals.

That Pant got closer to his best in just his third outing meant Indian cricket could hope for the match-winner's return soon.

see big scores," Flower said in the press conference here on Monday.

LSG waits on the availability of captain K.L. Rahul, who handed leadership duties to Nicholas Pooran in the last match and came on as an Impact Player.

Bengaluru lad Rahul looked fit as he batted in the nets here on Monday. Pooran clarified in the press conference that a call on Rahul's inclusion in the XI has not been taken yet.

All eyes will be on LSG fast bowler Mayank Yadav, who cranked it up to 155.8 kph against Punjab Kings on Saturday. The tempting fare of raw pace unleashed awaits the RCB faithful.

## RCB top-order needs to be more explosive



Impact player: RCB will look to Maxwell to fire on all cylinders.

K. MURALI KUMAR

Ashwin Achal  
BENGALURU

The batting approach of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will come under scrutiny when the side takes on Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium here on Tuesday.

In the previous outing here, RCB failed to get a move on and posted 182 for six. This proved to be woefully inadequate, as Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) romped home with 19 deliveries to spare.

The RCB top-order, reluctant to pull the trigger thus far, will seek to start aggressively and keep that aggression right through the essay. RCB head coach Andy Flower reiterated the need to get big totals.

"If you look around at the totals that sides have gotten, the aggression shown by all batting sides, there are big scores on offer. Particularly so with the Chinnaswamy (Stadium) being smaller, the ball travels in the air, there are big scores on offer.

"Once our big batters start scoring runs, we will

## Today's match



Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.

## HEAD-TO-HEAD

Played: 4

RCB 3 | LSG 1

## PREVIOUS MEETING

RCB won by 18 runs, 2023

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIO CINEMA



**INBRIEF**



**Pankaj Advani claims CCI billiards classic title**

Pankaj Advani constructed two humongous breaks of 801 and 460 to beat Englishman David Causier 1836-743 in a lop-sided four-hour final of the all-India CCI billiards classic in Mumbai on Monday. This was Advani's fourth successive triumph at this venue. He claimed the CCI snooker classic over the last two years and now retained the billiards title. Advani was presented a cash prize of ₹250,000, while the runner-up was richer by ₹125,000.

**Mirabai ends third in WC, set to qualify for Paris Olympics**

Tokyo Olympics silver-medallist Mirabai Chanu all but qualified for the 2024 Paris Games after she finished third in the women's 49kg Group-B event of the IWF World Cup in Phuket, Thailand, on Monday. Returning from a six-month injury lay off, Mirabai lifted a total of 184kg (81kg+103kg) at the tournament, which is the final and a mandatory qualifier for the Paris Olympics. "It feels incredible to come back after an injury. Almost every lift I made today felt clean, clear, and powerful," said Mirabai.

**Maharashtra teams reign in National kho-kho**

Maharashtra emerged champion in both the men's and women's sections in the 56th National kho kho championships in New Dehi on Monday. In an exciting men's final, Maharashtra and Railways were tied 32-32 at the end of two innings. In the extended game, Maharashtra prevailed 52-50. In women's final, Maharashtra beat Airports Authority of India (AAI) 18-16.

**Semifinal results: Men:** Maharashtra bt Kolhapur 30-28; Railways bt Odisha 24-22. **Women:** Maharashtra bt Odisha 24-20; AAI bt Delhi 32-10.



**Sri Lanka on top in second Test against Bangladesh**

Asitha Fernando claimed four for 34 as Sri Lanka bowled out Bangladesh for 178 to take a massive 353-run lead in the first innings on the third day of the second Test in Chittagong on Monday. The visitors were left struggling in the second innings, reaching 102 for six at stumps.

**The scores:** Sri Lanka 531 & 102 for six in 25 overs (Mahmud 4/51) vs. Bangladesh 178 in 68.4 overs (Zakir 54, Asitha 4/34).

**Kean Yew, Intanon take singles honours in Spain Masters**

Singapore's Loh Kean Yew beat France's Toma Junior Popov 21-11, 15-21, 22-20 to win the men's singles crown in the Spain Masters Super 300 badminton tournament at Madrid on Sunday. The women's title was claimed by Ratchanok Intanon, who beat compatriot Supanida Katethong 21-12, 21-9 in the summit clash.

**Former Asiad star Deanna Syme Tewari passes away**

Former Asian Games athlete and a torchbearer at 1982 Delhi edition, Deanna Syme Tewari, passed away in Dubai last Saturday. She was 85. Deanna Syme represented the erstwhile Mysore State, for whom she won the long jump gold at the 1957 National Athletics Championship and at the 1958 National Games. She represented India at the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta and was a torch-bearer – alongside hockey icon (late) Balbir Singh Sr. – at the 1982 Asian Games in New Delhi.

**Nelly Korda emerges the winner of Ford Championship**

Top-ranked Nelly Korda became the first LPGA Tour player in eight years to win three straight starts, shooting a 7-under 65 on a soggy Sunday for a two-stroke victory in Ford Championship at Gilbert (USA). Nelly finished at 20-under 268 for her 11th career LPGA victory.

**I am now more mature and responsible, says Titans' mainstay Sai Sudharsan**

The 22-year-old left-hander, a vital cog in Gujarat's set-up, feels the exposure to different conditions across the globe has helped him grow



**Calm and collected:** Sai Sudharsan is a smart reader of the game. VIJAY SONEJI

**IPL-17**  
**N. Sudarshan**  
AHMEDABAD

At first glance, B. Sai Sudharsan isn't flashy. He is patient, bats in an uncomplicated fashion and doesn't attract a lot of attention. Over the last two years though, the incremental gains have accrued to such an extent that he is now impossible to ignore.

On Sunday at the Narendra Modi Stadium, the 22-year-old carried Gujarat Titans to victory against Sunrisers Hyderabad with a solid 45 (36b, 4x4, 1x6). In three matches so far, Sai Sudharsan has been GT's most consistent batter, and was also the top-scorer (45) in the opening win over Mumbai Indians.

To be sure, Sai Sudharsan's knocks aren't of the

variety that usually make heads turn in the shortest format. But he is a smart reader of the game and is adaptable. In last year's IPL final against Chennai Super Kings, he hit 96 off 47 balls. Against SRH two days ago, he buckled down on a sticky wicket, took the game deep, enabling the team deliver the knockout punch.

This perhaps is indicative of his growing batsmanship. Between the 2023 IPL final and now, Sai Sudharsan has played in the English county championship for Surrey (as an overseas pro despite being uncapped for India), featured for India-A before making his ODI debut last December against South Africa away.

"I feel playing more games, for India-A and then for the country, has given me some maturity," he said after Sunday's win.

"Compared to last year, I feel more responsible. And the skills have improved as well. I am getting exposed to difficult conditions, international conditions and I am learning about what I should improve."

At a time when batters are increasingly picky about formats they play, Sai Sudharsan has been stellar across all three varieties. He is a vital cog in the GT set-up, made half-centuries in his first two ODIs and left a lasting impression in red-ball cricket with knocks of 117 and 97 versus the visiting England Lions earlier this year.

"I believe the difference is in risk-taking," he said. "The decisions I take change for every format according to the match-situation and conditions. Preparation is more often similar, but it is about the amount of risk I can take, and I prepare accordingly."

**Rodrygo nets twice as Real Madrid consolidates LaLiga top spot**

**EURO LEAGUES**  
**Associated Press**  
MADRID

Rodrygo thrived in the absence of Vinicius Junior as Real Madrid beat Athletic Bilbao 2-0 on Sunday to keep an eight-point lead over Barcelona in LaLiga.

Rodrygo scored both goals and Madrid maintained its comfortable lead at the top after Barcelona had won 1-0 at Las Palmas on Saturday.

Vinicius didn't play because of a suspension over yellow cards, but Jude Bellingham was back in the squad after missing two straight league games because of a red-card suspension. The influential England international set up Rodrygo's second goal in Madrid's third straight league win.

Rodrygo's opener came with a beautiful shot into



**Curling it in:** Bilbao defenders found it difficult to contain Rodrygo. REUTERS

the top corner from just outside the area eight minutes into the match at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Meanwhile, title rivals Manchester City and Arsenal played out a goalless

draw in their Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday, leaving Liverpool at the top with a lead of two points.

**The results:**

**LaLiga:** Real Madrid 2 (Rodrygo

7, 73) bt Athletic Bilbao 0.

**Serie A:** Bologna 3 (Orsolini 14, Saelemaekers 44, Lykogiannis 90+2) Salernitana 0; Cagliari 1 (Sulemana 74) drew with Verona 1 (Bonazzoli 30); Sassuolo 1 (Defrel 41) drew with Udinese 1 (Thauvin 44).

**Many new faces in Hockey India women's assessment squad**

**Press Trust of India**  
BENGALURU

Veterans like Savita Punia and Vandana Katariya made the cut among a host of new faces in Hockey India's jumbo assessment squad of 60 for a seven-day camp which started here on Monday, at the end of which trials to select 33 national probables will be held on April 6 and 7.

The 33 probables will be for future camps and international exposure tours.

"The 60-player core group has been shortlisted following the recent 14th HI senior women's National in Pune," HI said

The players will report coach Ankitha B.S., who has been handed the role after Janneke Schopman resigned from the job. HI said Ankitha will hold the position "until such time that a suitable chief coach is appointed".

**Players selected for assessment camp:**

**Goalkeepers:** Savita, Sonal Minj, Bichu Devi Kharibam, Madhuri Kindo, Bansari Solanki, Promila Kr., Ramya Kurmapu.

**Defenders:** Udit, Nikki Pradhan, Ropni Kumari, Lalhunmawii, Preeti, T. Suman Devi, Anjana Dungdung, Nishi Yadav.

**Midfielders:** Monika, Sonika, Neha, Mahima Choudhary, Nisha, Jyoti, Salima Tete, Manashri Shedge, Akshata Abaso Dhekale, Lalruatfeli, Marina Lalramghaki, Prabhleen Kaur, Manisha Chauhan, Ishika Chaudhary, Ritanyana Sahu, Jyoti Chhattri, Ajmina Kujur, Sujata Kujur, Kruthika S.P., Mahima Tete, Mamma Bhat, Edula Jyothi, Anisha Dungdung, Bhavna Khade, Maxima Toppo.

**Forwards:** Deepika, Sharmila Devi, Navneet Kaur, Deepika Soreng, Sangita Kumari, Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Rutaja Dadaso Pisal, Lalrindiki, Lalremiam, Vertika Rawat, Preeti Dubey, Hritika Singh, Mariana Kujur, Mumtaz Khan, Taranpreet Kaur, Baljeet Kaur, Vandana Katariya, Dipi Monika Toppo, Kajal S. Atpadkar, Manju Chorsiya.



Nagal. GETTY IMAGES

**Nagal attains career-high ATP ranking of 95**

**Press Trust of India**  
LONDON

Sumit Nagal on Monday achieved a career-high ranking of 95 in the ATP singles chart, following impressive results in recent times. His previous best was 97 in February, which he had attained after winning the Chennai Open, an ATP Challenger event.

Nagal made headlines in January after became the first Indian to beat a seeded player – Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan – in the Australian Open before losing to Shang Juncheng of China in the second round.



**Climbing the ladder:** Sinner will move to a career-high second in the ATP world rankings with this victory. AFP

**Sinner has it easy against Dimitrov, wins ATP Miami Open title**

**TENNIS**  
**Agence France-Presse**  
MIAMI

Italy's Jannik Sinner won the ATP Miami Open Masters 1000 title on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-1 victory over Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov in the final at the Hard Rock Stadium in Miami. Sinner's third title of the season means he will move to a career-high second in the ATP world rankings on Monday ahead of Spain's Carlos Alcaraz.

Sinner finished the hard court season in electric form, having won 25 of his last 26 matches – the only defeat coming to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells semifinal.

The Italian took care of business in 72 minutes and never looked in danger after he broke in the fifth game of the first set, facing just one break point in the entire match.

"As this tournament went on, I felt better and better. Today's performance was good. I'm just proud of how I handled the situation," Sinner said.

**Mumbai City breezes past Hyderabad FC**



**Drawing first blood:** Chhangte opened the scoring for Mumbai City FC. FOCUS SPORTS/ISL

**ISL-10**  
**Sports Bureau**

Mumbai City FC strengthened its position at the top of the table with a clinical 3-0 victory against Hyderabad FC at the Gachibowli Stadium in Hyderabad in the Indian Super League on Monday. The Islanders have gotten to 44 points from 20 games with this win, five ahead of the second-placed Mohun Bagan Super Giant (39 from 19 matches).

The visitor swept aside the challenge by HFC pretty convincingly, which must have been buoyant after notching its first win of the campaign following its 1-0 victory against Chennaiyin FC in its previous fixture.

However, the might of the MCFC frontline was flawless in its endeavours as it exploited spaces with ease inside the HFC defensive line consistently.

**The result:** Hyderabad FC 0 lost to Mumbai City FC 3 (Chhangte 18, Mehtab Singh 32, Pereyra Diaz 90-pen).

**Jaeger clinches his first PGA Tour title**

**HOUSTON OPEN**  
**Agence France-Presse**  
LOS ANGELES

Germany's Stephan Jaeger held off World No.1 Scottie Scheffler down the stretch to win his first US PGA Tour title at the Houston Open on Sunday.

Jaeger took the solo lead at 12-under with his fourth birdie of the day at the ninth, then parred all nine holes on the back nine to emerge with the victory on 12-under 268.

Playing partner Scheffler responded to a bogey at the demanding par-three 15th with a birdie at 18 that would have forced a playoff. He settled for a two-under par 68 that put him in a five-way tie for second alongside Taylor Moore, Tony Finau, Belgian Thomas Detry and Argentina's Alejandro Tosti.

"I put up a good fight," said Scheffler, who won at Bay Hill and at the Players Championship.



# Upbeat Ramkumar hungry for silverware

Having won international tournaments at home, the 29-year-old looks back at his journey; hopes to partner Rohan Bopanna at the Paris Olympics in his quest for glory



GETTY IMAGES

## Kamesh Srinivasan

There have been quite a few international tennis tournaments at home in the first quarter of this season, especially for the men. Few capitalised on them the way Ramkumar Ramanathan did, with his exploits in both singles and doubles.

After winning the doubles titles in the first two Challengers in Chennai and Bengaluru with Saketh Myneni, the 29-year-old Ramkumar shone bright in the Pune Challenger, briefly though, by knocking out the champion of the Bengaluru event Stefano Napolitano of Italy.

Later, after helping his employer Indian Oil to a bunch of medals in individual and team events in the Petroleum inter-unit event, Ramkumar won the singles title in Delhi in the \$25,000 ITF tournament and finished runner-up the next week in Chandigarh.

An amiable person with a cheerful smile, Ramkumar may have often been misunderstood, or as some may perceive, wrongly projected, but he opted to discuss a variety of topics, very frankly.

## Momentum back

"I have enjoyed the pain and everything which comes with it, the wins and losses. I feel my fitness has picked up and my momentum is back with some good matches in the last six months. God willing, the best is yet to come," said Ramkumar when congratulated for his good work.

Starting with the Davis Cup tie against Pakistan in Islamabad, followed by four Challengers, and two ITF events, it has been continuous tennis for many weeks. Ramkumar, who was ranked a career-best 111 in singles in 2018 and 58 in doubles in 2022, paced himself well to shine bright from start to finish.

"I am happy and have learnt a lot over these weeks. I had good wins along the way, and pushed myself to get some matches the last two weeks of singles. I feel that I can be there at the top again. I have been putting a lot of work back in Chennai. I have also been doing a lot of small things, like keeping a book and noting down points, reminding myself the way I want to approach every match. It helps me to stay in the present and be better on court. I am proud the way I competed all these eight weeks, irrespective of the results. I will keep working on the points to improve," said Ramkumar.

The finish was strong. It could have been two singles titles, but Khumoyun Sultanov of Uzbekistan was able to beat Ramkumar in the final in Chandigarh in the second ITF tournament.

"It is never easy to play a level down, after playing the Challengers. I knew that I would have tough matches, and prepared myself to fight for every single point, physically and mentally.

These two weeks were a fight for me. Just a bit disappointed about the result in the final against Sultanov. I had many break points, and 0-30 situation on opponent's serve. Just could not capitalise. I have noted as to what I could have done better. I am happy that tennis is coming

along on the right track. Obviously a lot of things to work for the next events," said Ramkumar, as he put things in perspective.

The Challengers, four of them in a row in Chennai, Bengaluru, Pune and Delhi, did provide a lot of cheer for Ramkumar. But before that was the exhilarating experience of the Davis Cup in Islamabad.

"It was a great idea to have the preparatory camp in Delhi for the Davis Cup, and get some rhythm on grass", said Ramkumar, as he thanked the captain Rohit Rajpal, the coaches and the physios for their role in preparing the team nicely.

It was a thriller for Ramkumar against the old war horse, Aisam-Ul-Haq Qureshi. Ramkumar prevailed 6-7(3), 7-6(4), 6-0 in the first rubber in three sets. That set the tone for India's 4-0 triumph in the Davis Cup tie in Pakistan.

However, at 3-4 and 15-40 in the second set, it was a tricky situation for Ramkumar and the Indian camp. Ramkumar fired 20 aces in the match and wriggled out of the tight corner for a memorable victory, converting four of six breakpoints to seal the rubber.

"I don't think that I played a bad first set. But Aisam played clutch on first to win it in the tie-break. Our box was full of energy. I felt it and it helped me stay with him and keep it close. I am glad that I was able to turn it around and get that vital point for India. It was a nail biting match with so much of emotions. My dear friend Aisam played out of the world. All the Pakistan team members were extremely friendly. I was happy that tennis united us. Extremely happy that we won the tie on their soil. Was happy that I gave a chance for Niki Poonacha, to play the final rubber, as he is a great guy and has been doing well lately. I was glad that he got his first win. Sriram Balaji also played his part and of course, Yuki Bhambri and Saketh Myneni got us home safely with the doubles. Overall, a brilliant team effort," said Ramkumar.

After the emotional high, it was back to the pro circuit and Ramkumar tuned himself for the competitive grind. "As soon as I finished Davis Cup in Pakistan, I had to fly directly to Chennai for the singles match the next day. So, I prepared as much as I could, but couldn't get the job done against my Spanish opponent Roca Batalla.

"We train at the same club in Barcelona. I was sad after singles. But I was happy that me and Saketh fought hard and won the doubles title. Was happy getting a couple of good wins in singles in the Bengaluru Challenger. Fought hard and the reward came. My level was good, and I had a chance in the quarterfinals. But, due to a few bad line calls, I lost the quarterfinals in a close match. Me and Sake won the doubles again, which was great. Got to Pune on Monday, and played a fantastic match against Stefano Napolitano, from being a set point down, I won the match in two tie-breaks. I lost to the Russian Alexey Zakharov in the second

match, even though I played well. In doubles, me and Saketh lost the semifinals by playing a very average match, which we could have won," said Ramkumar as he jogged through his memory.

The fourth Challenger in Delhi was hard to digest. "When I came to Delhi, the conditions were completely different. I was also a bit tired, and was struggling to adapt. So, I had a tough outing in Delhi, which is acceptable and no comments on that", said Ramkumar.

Quite thoughtfully, Ramkumar thanked all tournament Directors, Hiten Joshi, Sunil Yajaman, Sunder Iyer, Richa Bakshi and the AITA Secretary General, Anil Dhupar, for giving him the singles wild cards "with no questions asked".

Ramkumar assured that he would continue to focus on his singles game and keep getting better.

"I have proved myself doing well in singles. The focus will remain on singles and doubles. I love competing. I know the road ahead is not easy, but it is possible and I believe in myself, which is the most important thing. I will put in the work and leave the rest to the Almighty," he said.

The Asian Games doubles silver medal with Saketh Myneni in Hangzhou was a big morale-booster for Ramkumar, especially after all the criticism that he was chosen ahead of 10 better-ranked players.

"I want to thank God for making me achieve what I did in the Asian Games. I played a good singles match also, but lost to the eventual runner-up Yosuke Watanuki, in a close three-setter. I was very happy that I got the chance to play doubles and even more happy to win the medal. I believe that everything happens

for a reason. I was there because I deserved to be there. I am ok with criticism. The selection was made by the committee and not me. In the past, I was higher ranked than others and was excluded. I was hurt then, but respected the decision of the committee. So, I was a bit sad, and didn't like it, to see other players questioning my selection in the media. It is in the past now. Me and Sake played well. We got better with each match. I have the medal. It could have been gold and it could have been no medal also," he said.

## Best partner

The Olympics in Paris is around the corner. There are a few who believe that Ramkumar will make the best partner for Rohan Bopanna for a shot at the medal.

"Bops is a phenomenal player. He is a great example for all of us, especially the way he became World No. 1 at 43. I am happy that I won two of my biggest titles with Bops. I will cherish them all my life. I have so much respect for him. I will be happy to play Olympics with Bops, and we could be very dangerous together as a pair, as we have 100% record in ATP events. And I am feeling good with my tennis. I am sure Bops will agree on this! Jokes apart, it is Bops' decision on who he has the best shot with at the Olympics. Always wish him well regardless of his choice," said Ramkumar.

With his child coach T. Chandrasekaran travelling for most of his tournaments in the recent spell, Ramkumar was quite at home, competing at his best.

"I am grateful to have Chandra sir these weeks for the Indian stretch. I am grateful for his continuing contribution to my tennis career. He has been extremely supportive. He keeps making me believe that I can get into the top-100 in singles, and keeps motivating me from his heart. He is one of the main reason for me playing tennis and has made a huge contribution to my career," said Ramkumar.

For the last two tournaments in Delhi and Chandigarh, Ramkumar had his mother Alagamma and father Ramanathan, taking turns to be with him. "Mom surprised me by coming to Delhi. It worked out well. She was my lucky charm and the singles title in Delhi will be special as I won the tournament in front of her. She should come more often. I am grateful and thankful to God that I made her proud," said Ramkumar.

He is quite used to having his father around in events. "My dad was enjoying his time in Chandigarh. I gave him a few heart attacks on way to the finals! But, had another positive week. It was tough mentally for me as I was physically a little drained. I pushed myself to the limit and competed well. I was happy to hear my dad say, 'Ram you are playing well.' Very rarely he says that but he meant it. Without my dad, I wouldn't be travelling the world and playing tennis. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank my Appa and Amma for putting me in the sport, through a lot of struggles and sacrifices, in the early days. My sister Uma is also extremely supportive," he said.

It has been a fascinating journey and Ramkumar is keen and energetic to add many more lively chapters to his career.

## THE GIST

▼ The Hangzhou Asian Games doubles silver with Myneni was a big morale-booster for Ramkumar, especially after all the criticism that he was chosen ahead of 10 better-ranked players

▼ With child coach Chandrasekaran travelling with him for most of the tournaments, he says he feels at home

▼ The Paris Olympics is round the corner and there are a few who believe Ramkumar will make the best partner for Bopanna

