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INSIDE



Rahul promises a nationwide caste census

RANCHI
Congress leader Rahul Gandhi promised a nationwide caste census if the INDIA formed the government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls. » PAGE 2

Quad summit more likely after U.S. polls: envoy

NEW DELHI
Leaders of the Quad nations may not be able to meet for a summit in India before the United States elections, U.S. Ambassador Eric Garcetti said, stressing that the Quad agenda would be "more productive" by 2024-end. » PAGE 4

Opposition raises breach of federal principles in RS

NEW DELHI
The Rajya Sabha on Monday witnessed attacks by the Opposition over "breach" of federal principles during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address to the joint session of Parliament. » PAGE 5

Myanmar Army troops flee into Bangladesh

DHAKA
Nearly a hundred members of Myanmar's Border Guard Police have fled their posts and taken shelter in Bangladesh during fighting between Myanmar security forces and an ethnic minority army, an official of Bangladesh's border agency said on Monday. » PAGE 12

With 47 votes, Champai wins floor test

Twenty-five MLAs of the BJP, the AJSU, and the NCP voted against the trust vote motion

Ex-CM Hemant Soren says he will quit politics if anyone proves he forged land documents

The ED, CBI cannot touch BJP leaders who have gulped crores of money, says Soren

Amit Bhelari
RANCHI

The new Champai Soren government won the trust vote on the floor of the Jharkhand Assembly on Monday after 47 Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led alliance legislators voted for the motion and 29 against it. Mr. Champai Soren moved the motion on which a debate was held.

During the debate, former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged land scam case, accused the Raj Bhavan of being part of his arrest. He said that he would quit politics and leave Jharkhand if anyone proved he forged land documents.

During the voting, 27 MLAs of the JMM, 17 of the Congress and one each of the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)

Liberation voted for the motion. The only nominated MLA, Glen Joseph Galstaun, who represents the Anglo-Indian community, also voted in favour of the motion, taking the total to 47.

Twenty-five MLAs of the BJP, three of the All Jharkhand Students' Union (AJSU) and one of the Ajit Pawar faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) voted against the motion.

Independent MLA Sarayu Roy did not vote. Another Independent MLA Amit Yadav, Indrajit Mahto of the BJP and Ram Das Soren of the JMM were not present in the House.

Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahto made the formal announcement of the Champai Soren government winning the trust vote.

Before leaving the Assembly premises, Mr. Champai Soren said the Cabinet expansion would take place soon.



Decisive victory: Jharkhand Chief Minister Champai Soren with former CM Hemant Soren and JMM-led coalition MLAs after participating in the floor test at the Assembly in Ranchi on Monday. ANI

As soon as Mr. Hemant Soren entered the Assembly, the JMM and Congress legislators shouted slogans in his support. They shouted slogans such as *Jail Ka Tala Tutega Hemant Soren Chutega* (The jail lock will

be broken and Hemant Soren will be released).

"It is probably for the first time a serving Chief Minister or former Chief Minister was arrested at the Raj Bhavan. I feel somewhere even the Raj Bha-

van is involved in my arrest," said Mr. Hemant Soren.

He alleged that the BJP treated tribal people as untouchables and the party wanted them to stay in the jungles only.

"If the BJP thinks that they can suppress my voice by sending me to jail, it's not going to happen. ED, CBI and IT cannot touch those BJP leaders who have gulped crores of money," Mr. Hemant Soren said.

He said the BJP did not want a tribal leader to complete five years of his term.

"The history of Jharkhand will never forgive the BJP. Bring a single document which can prove that I have forged 8.5 acres of land. If you can bring it, then I will leave Jharkhand forever. When ED did not get anything from me, they are now checking the bank accounts of my wife. I fear that the way Bandhu Turkey lost his membership of the Assembly, I may face the same fate," Mr. Hemant Soren said.

Before the floor test, Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan addressed the 14th session of the fifth Jharkhand Legislative Assembly by read-

ing out the achievements of the government.

BJP slams Hemant

During the debate, Leader of the Opposition Amar Kumar Bauri slammed Mr. Hemant Soren and the Congress. "It's only because the BJP was in the Centre you saved your government. You are talking about ED and CBI; it was the Congress government which sent your father Shibu Soren behind bars, he said.

"It was the Congress government which sent Madhu Koda behind bars. It was the BJP which made you Deputy Chief Minister for the first time. It was the support of the BJP due to which Shibu Soren became Rajya Sabha member. Stop blaming the BJP for everything. It is unfortunate that the Congress sent your father to jail and you are running the government with their support," Mr. Bauri added.

Silver lining



Tourist Shikaras on the Dal Lake against the backdrop of snow-capped mountains in Srinagar, on Monday. NISSAR AHMAD

Chandigarh election incident a mockery of democracy, says SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court gave the BJP victory at the Chandigarh mayoral elections a jolt, threatening to order fresh elections after a video played in the open courtroom on Monday showed the Returning Officer "obviously defacing" ballot papers, while taking stealthy glances at the camera overhead like a "fugitive".

"What is he doing? It is obvious that he has defaced the ballot. This man has to be prosecuted... Why is he looking at the camera like a fugitive and then quietly defacing the ballot? This is a mockery of democracy... He is murdering democracy. Is this the way to conduct an election?" Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, addressed Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Union Territory of Chandigarh, and senior advocate Maninder Singh, for the winning candidates.

The Supreme Court directed the sequestration of the entire records of the mayoral election under the custody of the Registrar-General of the Punjab and Haryana High Court forthwith by 5 p.m.

'SC is watching'

These records include the ballot papers and the whole video shot of the electoral process.

The court also stopped the new dispensation of the Chandigarh Municipal Corporation from holding a Budget meeting on Fe-



It is obvious that he has defaced the ballot. This man has to be prosecuted... He is murdering democracy
D.Y. CHANDRACHUD
Chief Justice of India

bruary 7.
"Please tell your Returning Officer that the Supreme Court is watching over him. We will not allow democracy to be murdered like this. The great stabilising force in the country is the purity of the election process... What is happening here?" Chief Justice Chandrachud asked.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, appearing for Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Kuldeep Kumar, said the election process was videographed on the orders of the High Court. He said there were 20 AAP councillors and 16 BJP ones. The Returning Officer was supposed to sign on each ballot paper after the vote.

'Active member of BJP'

"He makes squiggles on eight ballot papers and uses his own squiggles to disqualify the votes. Our votes are reduced to 12 and BJP wins the polls with a margin of four votes. After the voting, he picks up the whole lot of ballot papers and rushes out... This is a complete negation of democracy," Mr. Singhvi submitted.

He said the Returning Officer is "admittedly an active member of the BJP".

Punjab Advocate-General Gurminder Singh said "the man [Returning Officer] has to be prosecuted".
Mr. Singh began in defence to refer to certain regulations on the conduct of elections while Mr. Mehta said they would be able to "satisfy" the court. He said the Bench should not form an opinion without viewing the entire video.

"We are here to satisfy our judicial conscience. If we are not satisfied, we will direct the conduct of fresh elections and appoint the Returning Officer... Mr. Solicitor, this is a mockery of democracy... a mockery! The man defaces the ballot and looks at the camera to see who is looking at him..." the Chief Justice Chandrachud retorted, listing the case on February 19.

The BJP had swept the Chandigarh mayoral elections, retaining all three posts, in a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers by the Presiding Officer.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court had earlier refused to grant the AAP any interim relief.

The AAP has sought fresh election under the supervision of a retired judge.

PM slams Congress, says NDA will return to power with 400 seats

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

Exuding confidence that his government will return to power in the next Lok Sabha election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that he could "gauge the mood of the nation" and that the BJP alone would get at least 370 seats and the NDA would cross the 400-seat mark in the Lok Sabha.

In a speech that went on for more than an hour and a half, on the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address to both Houses of Parliament, Mr. Modi mounted a spirited attack on the Opposition stating that he was convinced that they (Opposition parties) have "lost the courage to



Strong words: Prime Minister Narendra Modi replies to the Motion of Thanks on the President's address in Lok Sabha on Monday. PTI

contest elections and have resolved to stay on the Opposition benches for a long time".

He said the Congress is destined to sit in the Opposition for several more years, and that the third term of the government was not too far. "At the most 100-125 days are re-

maining," he said, referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

The Lok Sabha adopted the Motion of Thanks via a voice vote, following Mr. Modi's speech.

He said that the Congress had for the last 10 years lost the opportunity

to play the role of a constructive Opposition and blamed it solely for the "present condition" of the entire Opposition. "The Congress had a good opportunity to play a good Opposition but failed in that role," Mr. Modi said.

Dynastic politics

Speaking on dynastic politics, Mr. Modi said that he termed parties dynastic where a particular family takes all the decisions, captures the leadership, and the party serves that family, not families where more than one person is in politics, but as part of a party structure. "Rajnath Singh has no political party of his own," he said. Mr. Singh's son Pankaj Singh is an MLA in Uttar Pradesh.

White Paper on economy to be tabled this session

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

The White Paper on the economy's mismanagement prior to 2014 and the transition since then, promised by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the interim Budget, is expected to be tabled in this session of Parliament, Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan, who heads the panel reviewing the National Pension System for government employees, said. Deliberations are on and they had already consulted States and Central government staff associations, he said.

FULL INTERVIEW
» PAGE 5

IN BRIEF



M.P. CM meets Modi ahead of his February 11 visit to State

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi days before the latter's scheduled visit to the State to kick-start the BJP's Lok Sabha election campaign. Mr. Yadav called on Mr. Modi at the Parliament House amid the ongoing Budget Session. "Today, I paid a courtesy visit to the respected Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi at the Parliament House," he said in a post on X. Apart from Mr. Modi, Mr. Yadav also held talks with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP national president J.P. Nadda.

Rajasthan to promote stone sector through easy approval

The Bharatiya Janata Party government in Rajasthan is set to promote the stone sector through a single window clearance system following the approval of business proposals worth ₹2,981 crore at the 12th edition of 'India Stonemart-2024', which ended here on Sunday. The four-day event is expected to create a better business environment for stone sector in the State. The State government's Centre for Development of Stones (CDoS) organised the Stonemart to promote and support the dimensional stone and allied industry. The CDoS has been holding exhibitions, buyer-seller meets, training programmes, and testing of stones for encouraging trade in the stone sector.

Rahul links privatisation to exploitation of tribals, promises caste census

In Ranchi for his ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Congress leader slams the Modi govt. for 'strangling' public sector units and the 'injustice' to HEC employees, promises to stand by them

Amit Bhelari
RANCHI

In Ranchi on the fourth day of the Jharkhand leg of his ongoing Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi exulted over the Champai Soren government in Jharkhand winning the trust vote on Monday. Alleging that the BJP could not accept the fact that a tribal was the Chief Minister, he promised a nationwide caste census and removal of the 50% cap on reservation if the INDIA bloc formed the government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls.

Telangana caste survey
On a day Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy also met him in the Jharkhand capital, Mr. Gandhi said that a caste survey would be carried out in Telangana in accordance with the promise made during the Assembly election in that State.

Addressing a public



Congress MP Rahul Gandhi at a public meeting during his party's 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' in Ranchi on Monday, PTI

meeting at Ranchi's Shaheed ground on Monday, the Congress leader drew a link between the Telangana survey and the fate of employees of the Heavy Engineering Corporation (HEC) Limited in Ranchi, who have not received their salaries for 25 months.

"Soon, we will come to know the exact numbers of OBC (Other Backward

Classes), Dalits and tribals in Telangana. I am saying it because the HEC people who are being harassed are OBC, Dalits and tribals, and all attempts are being to privatise HEC. Privatisation means making OBC, Dalit, tribals and poor people unemployed," Mr. Gandhi said.

He slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and held him

responsible for the injustice to the HEC's employees.

Hundreds of HEC employees gathered at the ground, holding posters and banners against the Central government.

"Slowly and gradually, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his government are strangulating public sector units. I give my assurance. When we form the government, we will give you all possible support," Mr. Gandhi said.

Meets Hemant's wife

Before addressing the public meeting, Mr. Gandhi also met Kalpana Soren, wife of former Chief Minister Hemant Soren, at her residence in Ranchi.

Senior Congress leader and former MP Subodh Kant Sahay, Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh, the party's Jharkhand in-charge Ghulam Ahmad Mir, and State Congress chief Rajesh Thakur also shared the stage, along with Congress MLAs.

Our Hindutva brand is inclusive one, says Uddhav

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE



Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray addressing a rally in Chiplun on Monday.

Stating that the Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) faction's brand of Hindutva is an inclusive one and not one that stirred religious discord between communities, former Maharashtra Chief Minister and the party's chief Uddhav Thackeray on Monday said that Muslims and Christians were joining his party to fight the shadow of dictatorship that was allegedly hovering over the country.

The former CM, who was addressing rallies at Rajapur and Chiplun (in Ratnagiri district) on the second day of his tour of the Konkan region, attacked the rival Sena faction led by CM Eknath Shinde and the ruling BJP, accusing them of unleashing probe agencies to harass Sena (UBT) leaders.

Speaking in Rajapur, Mr. Thackeray said, "I see saffron caps here as well as people from the Muslim community. There is Chhatrapati Shivaji's statue here as well as a dargah. When I was in Raigad recently, Muslims there presented me with a copy of the Quran in Marathi. They have

understood the meaning of our Hindutva. I am saying again that our brand of Hindutva is not one that creates religious discord or sets fire to relations between two communities. It is an inclusive one."

Veiled jab at BJP

In a veiled jibe at the BJP's version of Hindutva, Mr. Thackeray said his party's Hindutva stood for all those who were willing to fight and die for the country.

"While the Hindu community stands behind me, this time even Muslims and Christians are joining me. I am appealing to all people to leave religion and caste aside, and come together as patriots to fight this danger of dictatorship that is hovering over this country," Mr. Thackeray said.

SC notice to Centre over job quota in Haryana

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday sought a response from the Centre on a plea filed by the Haryana government against the Punjab and Haryana High Court order declaring as "unconstitutional" its law providing 75% reservation in private sector jobs to the residents of the State.

A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Arvind Kumar issued notice to the Union of India and the Faridabad Industries Association on the appeal filed by the Haryana government.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Haryana government, submitted that the High Court verdict was devoid of reasoning.

The High Court had also held the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 as "ultra vires".

Marriage dissolution does not efface status of child's parents: HC

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Dissolution of a marriage does not efface the parental status of the mother and father of a child, the Delhi High Court has observed while allowing a man's plea to have his name reflected in the school records of his minor son.

The High Court said when the man was alive, there was no justification for his ex-wife to remove the father's name from the school admission form of their son and replace it with the name of her second husband.

'Can't refuse right'

It said while the woman has every right to have her name reflected in the school records as the mother of the minor, that cannot authorise her to refuse the man's right to have his name also entered in



The Delhi High Court allows a man's plea to have his name reflected in school records of his minor son.

the documents as the child's father.

"The dissolution of a marriage does not efface the parental status of the mother and father of the child borne out of the said marriage," Justice C. Hari Shankar said.

The court said the prayer of the man to have his name reflected in the school record as the father of the child cannot be refused.

Assam proposes jail term, hefty fine for cheating in job tests

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Assam government has proposed up to 10 years in jail and a fine of up to ₹10 crore to stop cheating in public examinations for recruitment and the leak of question papers for such exams.

The Assam Public Examination Bill (Measures for Prevention of Unfair Means in Recruitment), 2024, prescribing the stern measures, was tabled on the first day of the Budget session of the State Assembly on Monday.

The Bill is expected to prevent the repeat of a cash-for-job scam that came to light in 2016, leading to the arrest of more than 120 people, including civil and police service officials.

According to provisions in the Bill, if any examinee indulges in unfair means, he or she shall be liable to

Stern steps follow a cash-for-job scam in which more than 120 people were arrested

be punished with imprisonment for a term that may extend to three years and shall also be liable to a fine not less than ₹1 lakh.

The Bill says if any person, including the examinee, whether or not entrusted or authorised with the conduct of public examinations, indulges or attempts to indulge in unfair means and contravenes or abets to contravene any of the provisions of the Act, he or she shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than five years and may extend to ten years.

The person shall also be liable to a fine which shall not be less than ₹10 lakh and may extend to ₹10 crore.

Father by his side, Nakul Nath announces he is Congress LS candidate from Chhindwara

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

Congress Lok Sabha MP and son of former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath, Nakul Nath said on Monday that he would again contest the forthcoming parliamentary poll from Chhindwara, a seat which the senior Nath won in 2019.

Addressing a public meeting in Parasia area of Chhindwara, where his father was also present, Mr. Nakul said, "For the Lok Sabha (elections) I will be your candidate. These rumours that are going on whether or not Kamal Nath ji will contest the polls, I want to make it clear that Kamal Nathji will not contest, I will. There will be full support and guidance from his side."

Mr. Nakul is currently the only Congress Lok Sabha MP from the State. He



Nakul Nath

represents Chhindwara, a bastion of Mr. Kamal, who has been MP from the seat for nine terms.

Mr. Nakul has announced his candidature even as an official announcement from the Congress is awaited on any of the 29 Lok Sabha seats in the State.

He also said that the Assembly and the Lok Sabha polls are "quite different". "In Assembly polls, there is groupism as there are too many candidates. But in

the Lok Sabha poll, there is no groupism; there is only one candidate," he added.

"You all have given your love and blessings to Kamal Nathji and the Nath family for 42 years and I am assured that you will do the same in the coming LS elections," Mr. Nakul said.

On February 3, Mr. Kamal who won the Chhindwara Assembly seat in the recent State election, had said the party would take a final call on who would contest from the Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat.

Before last year's Assembly poll too, Mr. Nakul had declared the Congress candidates for the Assembly seats falling under Chhindwara before the party's official announcement. Though Congress was defeated by the BJP and won only 66 seats in the State, it bagged all seven Assembly seats in Chhindwara.

Months before Lok Sabha poll, Lord Ram looms large in U.P.'s ₹7.36-lakh crore Budget

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Lord Ram was at the centre of Uttar Pradesh's ₹7.36-lakh-crore Budget presentation on Monday. Finance Minister Suresh Khanna started his Budget speech with a verse of the epic Ramcharitmanas and invoked Lord Ram several times during his 70-minute-long speech. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said the Budget has been dedicated to Lord Ram and is meant for 'Lok Mangal' (public welfare).

The Budget, which comes a fortnight after the consecration ceremony at Ayodhya and roughly three months before the Lok Sabha election, focuses on infrastructure, women, education, and developing cultural/religious centres.

The announcements made by Mr. Khanna on Monday included ₹27,086 crore to boost the State's health infrastructure, ₹2,475 crore for scholarships for students from the backward classes, ₹400 crore for handloom weavers with an aim to generate 40,000 jobs in the handloom and textile sectors, and an increase in the monthly pension for destitute women from ₹500 to ₹1,000.

Mr. Khanna also announced schemes for employment generation, infrastructure development, women empowerment, and the promotion of research and innovation in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence.

The Finance Minister proposed ₹4,000 crore for the distribution of tablets

U.P.'s 'Lok Mangal' budget

Highlights from the ₹7.36-lakh-crore budget, up 6.6% from last year's budget of ₹6.90 lakh crore

₹24,863.57 crore worth of new schemes announced

₹1,000 crore for youth to set up micro-industries

₹2,600 crore for Mahakumbh-2025

₹1,000 crore for youth to set up micro-industries

₹2,600 crore for Mahakumbh-2025

Big thrust on education

₹1,000 crore for the makeover of primary government schools

₹1,000 crore to distribute free sweaters, shoes, and bags to around 2 crore schoolchildren from Classes 1 to 8

₹4,000 crore for distribution of tablets/smartphones to students

₹255 crore to help enrol over 2 lakh children from disadvantaged groups and economically weaker sections in primary schools

and smartphones. The Finance Minister said more than 25 lakh tablets and smartphones have already been distributed.

Mr. Khanna said a provision of ₹1,000 crore had

been made for the construction of flyovers in urban areas to address the issue of traffic congestion in cities and towns. The Budget also proposed an increased allocation of



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with Finance Minister Suresh Khanna at the State Assembly on Monday. SANDEEP SAXENA

Other highlights

₹1,150 crore for Noida International Airport in Jewar

₹150 crore for expansion of the existing airport in Ayodhya

₹2,057 crore for Ganga Expressway project

₹952 crore for establishing health and wellness centres

₹195 crore for sports infrastructure development

₹460 crore for three new agri-related schemes

SOURCE: U.P. GOVERNMENT

₹2,000 crore to ensure continuous power supply during summers, up 33% from the current fiscal.

"The biggest ever Budget of U.P. offers a perfect road map for a balanced development of the State. Lord Ram, who epitomises the well-being of people, is present everywhere, from the start till the conclusion of the Budget," Mr. Adityanath said at a press conference after the Budget presentation.

"The Budget is dedicated to faith, *antydanya* [self-reliance] and *economy*. I congratulate the Finance Minister for presenting such a Budget. The capital expenditure of ₹2.03 lakh crore is a testimony to our government's commitment towards infrastructure in the State," he added.

'Nothing for 90%' The Opposition launched a blistering attack on the BJP-led government and termed it "an anti-people" Budget. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said it had nothing for "90%" of the State population. "Whether the Budget is of ₹7 lakh crore or ₹8 lakh crore is not important. The bigger

question is, what does it have for the backward classes, Scheduled Castes, and minorities? The Budget hasn't addressed the problems faced by the youth, farmers, women and every other section of society. It has failed to provide any road map for U.P.," said Mr. Yadav.

The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief, Mayawati, said the Budget was meant to serve the BJP's "electoral interest" rather than serving the broader "public interest".

"Various announcements, promises, and claims of the government have their own place, but it is also necessary to check whether all the promises made by the government so far have been fulfilled," Ms. Mayawati, a four-time U.P. CM, wrote on X.

Kerala Budget focuses on private investment

Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal, in his Budget speech, says Kerala 'is on the cusp of becoming a sunrise economy'; he proposes Chinese-model special development zones for tapping the potential of the Vizhinjam seaport project and a new 'assured' pension system for government employees

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The State Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal presented by Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal on Monday sought to mop up additional resources and draw private investment in key sectors, even as it proposed Chinese-model special development zones (SDZ) for tapping the potential of the Vizhinjam seaport project and a new 'assured' pension system for government employees.

While focussing on judicious public spending, Mr. Balagopal has sought to attract private investment to the tune of ₹3 lakh crore within the next three years in sectors such as infrastructure and tourism to enliven the economy.

Mr. Balagopal, who later described the Budget as a "platform for a forward leap for Kerala", has sought to raise ₹1,067 crore in additional resources through a slew of rate revisions, including that of electricity duty, judicial court fees and other levies.

The Finance Minister started off his two-and-a-half-hour speech in the Assembly saying that Kerala "is on the cusp of becoming a sunrise economy."



Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal presents the State Budget for the financial year 2024-25. ANI

But he also mentioned a 'Plan B' to keep the State economy and development programmes afloat if the Union government's "neglect towards Kerala" persisted. The Budget left the present ₹1,600 monthly social security pensions untouched.

In a bid to "revitalise" the construction sector, the government will undertake works to the tune of ₹1,000 crore, according to the Budget.

The government has also decided to raise the support price of rubber by ₹10 to ₹180. As part of raising additional resources, the government has decided to permit sand extraction from selected rivers, which is expected to bring in ₹200 crore.

In a bid to boost higher education, the government will explore opportunities for establishing campuses of foreign universities and private universities in Kerala, the Budget said. In line with the govern-

ment's policy of promoting private industrial parks, 25 new parks will be cleared in 2024-25.

The government expects the growth trend in tax revenues to continue in 2024-25. Kerala's own tax revenue is projected to grow by ₹7,845.21 crore and non-tax revenue, by ₹1,503.41 crore over the 2023-24 revised estimates.

Congress slams Budget
Leader of Opposition V.D. Satheesan slammed Mr. Balagopal for making "unrealistic announcements" and using the Budget to make political statements against the Opposition.

Abhishek's absence at Trinamool protest sparks speculation

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA



Abhishek Banerjee

The absence of Trinamool Congress general secretary and Diamond Harbour MP Abhishek Banerjee at the party's ongoing *dharna* in Kolkata's Red Road has sparked speculation among certain sections of the party.

The *dharna* began on Friday last week with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee sitting at the protest site for two days before asking party's women, youth and other wings to take over. The protest was organised by the Trinamool Congress to highlight the Union government's delay in paying wages to the MGNREGS beneficiaries. The Centre has stopped funds to West Bengal under MGNREGS under Section 27 of Act reportedly on account of corruption in the implementation of the scheme.

The high point of the protest came on Saturday when Ms. Banerjee announced that her government would pay the pending wages to about 21 lakh MGNREGS workers on February 21. The protest would continue till February 13 and the Diamond Harbour MP was conspicuous by his absence.

In October 2023, Mr. Banerjee - who was also the Trinamool Congress's general secretary - held protests in Delhi and outside Raj Bhavan in Kolkata on the same issue. He had been time and again emphasising that if people of the State supported him,

he would get the State's dues from the Centre.

Amid discontentment against him for being promoted in the party, Sayani Ghosh - the head of Trinamool's youth wing - downplayed rumours of a rift and said Mr. Banerjee was in Delhi and that his absence was not a big issue. However, a cousin of Mr. Banerjee posted on Monday on social media that the "deserving are not getting opportunities, while those with no abilities are being promoted".

Differences surface

Meanwhile, as political activities gathered pace ahead of Lok Sabha polls, Mr. Banerjee has largely confined himself to his constituency.

There has been talk of differences between him and Ms. Banerjee on the retirement age in politics. While Mr. Banerjee was in favour of young faces, his aunt and party chairperson seemed to be in favour of seniors. The differences could likely play a role during selection of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Karnataka got more funds under NDA than UPA, claims BJP

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The BJP has countered the Congress government's allegations that the Centre has been displaying step-motherly attitude towards Karnataka by maintaining that the total Central allocation to the State has actually increased by three folds during the BJP regime compared with the UPA.

Leader of the Opposition R. Ashok took to social media to accuse the Chief Minister of resorting to lies. "A lie will not become

a truth just because you repeat it 100 times. You too know that the actual truth is that the central allocation has increased by more than threefold during the BJP regime compared with the UPA regime," he said.

He urged the Chief Minister to come out with a White Paper on the Central allocation for Karnataka in the last 20 years so that the truth would be known. Former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai described the proposed protest in Delhi by the Congress as a "political stunt" to cover up its own mistakes.

Karnataka Cong. to protest in Delhi over devolution of taxes by Centre

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Ministers and legislators of the ruling Congress in Karnataka have decided to stage a protest at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday under the leadership of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah against the alleged "step-motherly treatment" by the BJP government at the Centre in devolution of taxes, non-release of drought relief, and denial of clearances for irrigation projects in the State.

Announcing this at a press conference on Mon-



Siddaramaiah

day, the Chief Minister said that Karnataka had incurred a loss of ₹1.87 lakh crore during the 15th Finance Commission period owing to reduction in devolution of taxes, special grants, and non-distribution of funds collected by the Centre under cess on

petrol and diesel, and surcharges.

"A huge injustice was meted out to Karnataka in the 15th Finance Commission (2020-21 to 2025-26) period compared to the 14th Commission (2014-15 to 2019-20). Our protest is not against the BJP, and it is not political. Our protest is to draw the attention of the Centre and the country," said Mr. Siddaramaiah, who also holds the finance portfolio.

For the first time, the Congress government in Karnataka will stage a protest in Delhi against the Narendra Modi-led govern-

ment at the Centre.

The amount allotted to Karnataka from the total collection of taxes, including grants, reduced from 4.71% to 3.64% from the 14th Finance Commission to the 15th Finance Commission. As a result, the State lost ₹73,593 crore, he said.

Karnataka ranks second in collection of taxes ranking next to Maharashtra. The State contributes ₹4.3 lakh crore per year from all types of taxes, but, in turn, the State has been receiving only 12% to 13% of its share from the Centre, Mr. Siddaramaiah said.

Will repeal Land Titling Act if TDP comes back to power: Naidu

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

Continuing his high-intensity pre-poll campaign "Raa Kadali Raa", Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president N. Chandrababu Naidu on Monday promised that he would repeal the Land Titling Act brought by the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) government if his party was voted to power.

Addressing a huge gathering in Anakapalli district, the former Chief Minister said that the Land Titling Act was draconian in nature. "This Act has been framed to enable the land grabbers of the YSRCP to take over your (voters) land by changing the details of the documents online in connivance with the officials. I will not let that happen," he said.

Claiming that the YSRCP had failed the farmers miserably, Mr. Naidu said if elected to power, he would focus on the Sujala Sravanthi project to help farmers irrigate over 8 lakh acres of land in the Uttarandhra region. He also promised to finish the Polavaram project and bring the Godavari water to Raiwada reservoir so that the drinking water issues of the Uttarandhra and Visakhapatnam were sorted out permanently.

In a direct attack on Mr. Jagan, Mr. Naidu referred to the YSRCP's slogan 'Sidham' (ready) and asked the people if they were "ready to throw the ruling party out of power". "Mr. Jagan is not a mentally stable man. He may attack you, himself or even me, so before he can cause further damage, are you 'sidham' to remove him?" he asked.

Starting with a smile



Top frame: Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation employees click a selfie in front of newly launched non-AC buses named "Ashwamedha Classic" near the Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Monday. MURALI KUMAR K.

SC dismisses petition on Sabarimala registration

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a petition seeking "compulsory registration" for pilgrims proposing to visit the Sabarimala temple in Kerala. A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and K.V. Viswanathan asked the petitioner, K.K. Ramesh, to approach the Kerala High Court. The petition said the registration should be like that done in the Amarnath Shrine Board.

The petitioner said a master plan should be framed to regulate the crowd visiting the temple.

"Do some research before you file such PILs..."



JUSTICE SURYA KANT
SC Judge

Look at how they manage the crowd in Tirupati, Vaishno Devi... Visit the gurdwaras and see how beautifully they manage and regulate the visitors at the Golden Temple.

Justice Viswanathan

said the High Court in Kerala had a Devaswom Bench. "The judges in the High Court would know the circumstances, geographical specificities, what kind of people visit there, whether giving advance permissions would outrage religious feelings of the devotees." Justice Kant told the lawyer.

Counsel said that the case would "ultimately" come to the Supreme Court though. "Are you so confident that your petition will be dismissed," Justice Kant asked. "You cannot play the second innings first," Justice Viswanathan told to the appellate system of justice administration.

CMRL pay-off case: SFIO begins probe, inspects Aluva office

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

A team of officials from the Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO) under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs carried out an inspection at the corporate office of the Cochin Minerals and Rutiles Ltd (CMRL) at Aluva in Kerala on Monday as part of its probe into the alleged illegal payments made by the company to T. Veena, daughter of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, and her firm Exalogic Solutions Pvt. Ltd.

It is learnt that the officials checked the documents related to the alleged pay-offs made by the company to Ms. Veena and her firm. Sasidharan Kartha, managing director of the company, was present



Pinarayi Vijayan

at the office at the time of the inspection. The inspection team was reportedly led by M. Arun Prasad, deputy director of SFIO.

The SFIO had set up a six-member team after the Union government ordered an investigation under Section 212 (1) (a) & (c) of the Companies Act into the affairs of Exalogic Solutions Pvt Ltd, the CMRL and the Kerala State Industrial Development Corpo-

ration (KSIDC) Ltd, a State government entity that has a 13.4% stake in the CMRL.

The controversy had erupted after the Income Tax Interim Settlement Board released a report in August 2023 stating that Ms. Veena and her company had received ₹1.72 crore over the last three years as monthly payments from the CMRL despite there being no evidence of any services given in return.

The documents seized by the Income Tax department had allegedly included details of payments made to politicians, temples, government servants and media houses.

The Opposition parties had demanded that Mr. Vijayan should resign following the SFIO investigation ordered by the Centre.

In his farewell speech, TDP MP Jayadev Galla talks of 'weaponisation' of agencies

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Bidding farewell to Parliament, two-time Telugu Desam Party MP Jayadev Galla, on Monday, during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address, said that he is quitting politics and will not contest the forthcoming Lok Sabha election, underlining the "weaponisation" of government agencies. He added that as a businessman, it is not easy to sail on two boats.

Mr. Galla spoke at length about the problems facing business houses. One has to get more than 70 approvals from various agencies to start and run a business in India. And each of these agencies, he said, can be "weaponised" by the party



Jayadev Galla

in power. This, he said, is detrimental to the Make-in-India and *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiatives. It defeats the very objective of ease of doing business.

'Can't sail on two boats'
"I have decided not to contest in this general election. I come from a family that has a legacy of fighting for people but it is not easy to sail on two boats in one go - to be in public life and

also to continue as an entrepreneur. So I have decided to give a pause to my political life," he said.

The 57-year-old Mr. Galla heads the Amara Raja Group which has a net worth of ₹5,300 crores and manufactures batteries under the Amaron brand name. He had announced his retirement from politics for the first time on January 28 citing that he needed to focus on his family and business affairs. He had also alleged that he was facing retribution from the investigating agencies for his views.

"In the developed world, business people are encouraged to be part of the political administration as they can play an important part in helping people take charge of their eco-

nomic destinies. Unfortunately, in our country, this means constant fear of reprisals and vendettas," Mr. Galla said.

"To start and run a business, one has to get more than 70 approvals from various agencies and each of these agencies can be weaponised by the party in power which is detrimental to the Make in India initiative and the *Atmanirbhar Abhiyaan*, and defeats the very objective of ease of doing business," he said.

Mr. Galla asserted that he is still supporting the farmers' agitation going on for more than 1,500 days for making Amaravati the State's sole capital.

In his parting shot, Mr. Galla, also complimented Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

'Lord Ram's teachings of justice gave solace to labourers in Fiji'

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

The struggles and teachings of Lord Ram in exile as narrated by the Ramayana gave "solace and inspiration" to the *girmitiyas* or Indian indentured labourers of the 19th century who carried copies of the epic with them while travelling in ships, Fiji's Deputy Prime Minister Biman Prasad said on Monday. Speaking to *The Hindu* in an exclusive chat, Mr. Prasad said the Fijians of Indian origin, especially of Hindu background, got rid of the caste system and established a more inclusive society because they were united to fight the "brutal" system of indentured labour.

"As indentured labourers during the years of hardship, Fijians of Indian origin, especially of Hindu background, got solace and inspiration from the Ramayana and the life of Lord Ram. The *girmitiyas* identified with the suffering of Lord Ram in forest and his return to Ayodhya after exile, as we read in the Ramayana, reflects the psychological yearning of



Biman Prasad

the Indian diaspora in Fiji which is proud of its Fijian identity while acknowledging their origins," said Mr. Prasad.

Mr. Prasad said Indians of Hindu, Muslim and Christian backgrounds went to Fiji carrying their holy texts and they went on to establish temples and Ramayana mandalis, mosques, markaz and churches and set up schools for their children that the colonial administration was unwilling to support.

Mr. Prasad is on a five-day visit to India during which he will meet with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and travel to Gujarat, Goa and Ayodhya where he is scheduled to attend a religious ceremony at the Shri Ram temple.

Quad summit more likely after U.S. polls in November: envoy

U.S. Ambassador Eric Garcetti says the Quad agenda will be more productive by 2024-end; at a discussion on the grouping's new version, former officials clarify it was the U.S. and Australia, and not India, that pulled out of the Quad in 2007

Subhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Leaders of the Quad nations may not be able to meet for a summit in India before the U.S. elections, U.S. Ambassador Eric Garcetti said, stressing that the Quad agenda would be "more productive" by 2024-end. Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. form the Quad.

Mr. Garcetti, who was speaking at a discussion with envoys from Australia and Japan and former officials at the Jaipur Literature Festival over the weekend, indicated that the election schedules and campaign requirements would make it difficult for U.S. President Joseph Biden to travel to Delhi. Mr. Biden had earlier declined an invitation to attend the Republic Day parade followed by the Quad summit, with the dates proposed by New Delhi for January 26-27.

"Absolutely. It will take place right after the elections," Mr. Garcetti said in



PM Narendra Modi with leaders of U.S., Australia and Japan during the Quad Leaders' Summit last year in Hiroshima, Japan. FILE PHOTO

response to a question from *The Hindu*, clarifying that he meant the U.S. elections, to be held on November 5, 2024.

"As exciting as 2023 was for bilateral relations, with PM Modi's state visit, President Biden's visit to India for the G-20 summit, India being the number one destination for U.S. Cabinet members, and Treasury Secretary Yellen visiting the country four times, we need time to put the agenda back together... This will make the end of the year have more productive

outcomes," the U.S. envoy said.

Mr. Garcetti said there would be some Quadrilateral discussions on technology later this month on the sidelines of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (ICET) meetings.

U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan is expected to lead a delegation to Delhi for talks with his Indian counterpart, Ajit Doval, for the ICET inter-annual meetings, and to address the annual Raisina Conference organised by

the External Affairs Ministry and the Observer Research Foundation on February 21-23.

Mr. Garcetti, however, rejected the idea that the election schedule, or the possibility of Republican frontrunner and former President Donald Trump defeating Mr. Biden in the elections, would affect the India-U.S. bilateral or Quadrilateral relationship.

How it ended

The panel, which included former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, also shed light on how the first round of Quad engagement from 2005 to 2007 had come to an end, until it was revived in 2017 by the four countries involved.

According to Mr. Turnbull, it was Australia that publicly announced its decision to pull out of the Quad first in 2008, although Mr. Saran added that behind the scenes, it was the then-Bush administration that had directly asked

India "not to push [the Quad] forward".

The accounts are at some variance with the belief that it was India, not the U.S. and Australia, that ended the Quad's earlier version.

During a speech in February 2023, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar had said that "in 2007, one country put pressure, you can guess which one and we backed down," he said referring to pressure from China, and comparing the responses in 2007 against 2017.

Mr. Saran, however, described a phone call from a senior U.S. official just before the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Tokyo in 2006.

"Please tell your PM not to encourage Abe [the then Japanese PM] on the Quad. This is not the time we should push this forward," he said. Mr. Saran added the official cited the Iran nuclear deal and North Korea six-party talks as reasons for the U.S.'s desire to not annoy Beijing in 2006.

Centre moves Bill for OBC quota in J&K local bodies

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Monday introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha to provide reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in panchayats and municipal bodies in Jammu and Kashmir.

Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai introduced the Bill on Monday. The number of seats reserved for OBCs will be decided by a commission that will be formed after the legislation is passed by Parliament.

Currently, there is no reservation for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in the Union Territory.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 said the Bill aims to provide reservation to OBCs in the local bodies and bring consistency in the laws with the provisions of the Constitution. "With this, justice will be ensured to the citizens of Other Backward Classes of Jammu and Kashmir for the first time after 75 years of Independence," it said.

7-judge Bench to hear pleas on SC, ST subgroups

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A seven-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud is scheduled to hear from February 6 a series of petitions regarding the validity of sub-classification among reserved categories. Lawyers representing several reserved communities across the country are appearing in the case.

The sub-classification case dates back to 2020 when a five-judge Bench led by Justice Arun Mishra (retd) held that States could sub-classify Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Central List to provide preferential treatment to the "weakest out of the weak".

The questions referred to the seven-judge Bench for an authoritative decision include whether sub-classification could be permitted for the SC and ST categories as the same was permitted for the Socially and Economically Backward Classes category.

HC CJ can take a call in case against T.N. Minister, says SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday left it to the discretion of the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court as master of roster to allocate an appropriate Bench to hear a *suo motu* revision proceedings against Tamil Nadu Revenue Minister K.K.S.S.R. Ramachandran in a corruption case.

An apex court Bench headed by Justice Hrishikesh Roy, however, orally expressed reservations about Justice Anand Venkatesh, acting as a Single Judge Bench of the Madras High Court, taking *suo motu* cognisance to revive the case. Justice Roy said the judge ought to have ideally placed the matter before the Chief Justice of the Madras High Court for passing an order numbering the *suo motu* case and assigning it to a Bench. "We deem it appropriate to say that the *suo motu* matter should be considered by the Chief Justice. He may either proceed to take up

the matter himself or may assign it to a judge of the High Court, as he may consider appropriate," the apex court recorded in its order.

The Bench noted that all proceedings should emanate from the office of the Chief Justice in his administrative capacity of the master of the roster of the particular High Court. "The learned judge could have ideally directed the Registry to obtain orders of the Chief Justice of the High Court to allot *suo motu* revision number. Instead, a direction was issued to the Registry to allot *suo motu* revision number for the case being handled by the Judge," the apex court noted.

In November last year, the lawyers of Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister K. Ponnudiy and his wife were in for a surprise when Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud praised the initiative taken by Justice Venkatesh to initiate *suo motu* proceedings against their clients.

Last edition of Rozgar Mela before polls on February 12

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the last edition of the Rozgar Mela before the Lok Sabha election on February 12. The recruitment drive aims to fill vacancies in Central government offices. Over 1 lakh appointment letters are expected to be distributed during the event.

The cumulative appointments with the help of the expedited recruitment drive are expected to hover around eight lakh, a shortfall of two lakh appointments against the target of 10 lakh jobs as announced by the Prime Minister in 2022.

On June 14, 2022, Mr. Modi announced that 10 lakh existing Central government vacancies will be filled by December 2023 on a "mission mode." In July 2022, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) constituted a task force comprising officials from five Ministries, including Defence, Home, and Railways, asking all government depart-



The cumulative appointments with the help of the recruitment drive are expected to hover around eight lakh. FILE PHOTO

ments to state the vacant positions and steps taken to fill those posts.

"So far 11 editions of Rozgar Mela have been held. The last and the 12th edition will be one of the biggest recruitment drive as over 1 lakh vacancies will be filled in one go," said a senior government official.

The previous editions of the Mela were held on October 22, 2022 (75,000 appointments letters distributed); November 22, 2022 (71,000 letters); January 20, 2023 (71,000 letters); April 13, 2023 (71,000 letters); May 16,

2023 (70,000 letters); July 22, 2023 (70,000 letters); August 28, 2023 (51,000 letters); September 26, 2023 (51,000 letters); October 28, 2023 (51,000 letters); and November 30, 2023 (51,000 letters). On July 27, 2022, the DoPT informed the Lok Sabha that over 7.22 lakh people got permanent Central government jobs between 2014-15 and 2021-22. The government received over 22 crore applications, the reply said.

The Railway Ministry informed the Lok Sabha in August 2023 that there were over 2.6 lakh vacancies in various divisions.

Sri Lankan Opposition JVP leader meets Jaishankar, Doval

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of Sri Lanka's leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or People's Liberation Front), who is currently visiting India on New Delhi's invitation, on Monday met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval, in an indication of the Union government's high-level engagement with the 55-year-old Opposition politician.

Mr. Dissanayake is heading a delegation of his party-led National People's Power (NPP) alliance to India on a five-day, three-city visit, covering New Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Thiruvananthapuram. The visit and meetings assume greater significance, coinciding with his rising popularity in the domestic political sphere, that too in a crucial election year. This is the first time New Delhi has invited the JVP leader.

Following the meeting



Anura Kumara Dissanayake

with him, Mr. Jaishankar said on X that he had a "good discussion on our bilateral relationship and the mutual benefits from its further deepening. Also spoke about Sri Lanka's economic challenges and the path ahead". India, with its Neighbourhood First and SAGAR policies "will always be a reliable friend and trusted partner" of Sri Lanka, the Minister said.

"In our meeting with Mr. Doval, we discussed regional security and bilateral issues concerning India and Sri Lanka," JVP MP Vijitha Herath, who is part of the visiting delegation, told *The Hindu*.

Cong. Bihar MLAs move to Hyderabad ahead of floor test, will stay till Feb. 11

R. Ravikanth Reddy
HYDERABAD

The Congress on Sunday moved its Bihar MLAs to Hyderabad ahead of the floor test of the new Nitish Kumar government on February 12. The MLAs are camping in a resort in Rangareddy district on the outskirts of the city.

Party sources said 17 MLAs have arrived here and a few more would be joining them on Tuesday. The MLAs are likely to be here till February 11 and then fly to Patna.

The Congress has made tight security arrangements for the MLAs, suspecting poaching attempts by the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) that has come to power in



Staying away: Bihar Congress president Akhilesh Prasad Singh with party MLAs at the Hyderabad airport on Sunday. PTI

Bihar after Chief Minister Nitish Kumar switched sides and moved to the NDA deserting the *Maha-gabandhan* (grand alliance). The Congress is the second largest constituent of the grand alliance after the RJD.

The police have barricaded the route to the resort, which is around 40

km from Hyderabad. The MLAs were taken to the resort from the airport after they arrived late on Sunday. No vehicle without checking is being allowed into the resort and the wing they are staying in has been cut off from general visitors. Senior Congress leader Malreddy Ram Reddy is personally super-

vising the arrangements. "They are enjoying their stay here and best arrangements have been made for them," he told *The Hindu*.

Congress leaders from Bihar were coordinating with the Telangana Congress leaders for their safe stay. Chief Minister A. Revanthy Reddy is likely to pay a courtesy call on them on Tuesday.

Mr. Reddy participated in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Jharkhand on Monday afternoon. Later, he left for New Delhi, where he is likely to meet the senior leadership of the party. He is likely to discuss the huge response that the party has received with 306 candidates applying for ticket for 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana.

'Shared interest between India, U.S. to figure out civil nuclear cooperation'

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Termining the India-U.S. nuclear cooperation envisaged under the nuclear deal two decades ago as "an important piece of unfinished business", U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey R. Pyatt said on Monday there is a "shared interest" to figure out how the two countries can move forward, both on the large traditional reactors which were foreseen as part of the nuclear deal but also importantly the "fantastic new opportunities" that are emerging around Small and Modular Reactor (SMR) technology.

Elaborating on the civil nuclear cooperation, Mr. Pyatt referred to the con-



Geoffrey R. Pyatt

versations he had in India, especially at the India-U.S. Forum and said he found strong interest from Indian companies, including Adani, Tata, Reliance, Birla, all of whom have expressed interest in using SMRs as part of their larger decarbonisation strategy.

"Now to move forward on that a couple of things have to happen. One is our companies in the U.S.,

companies in India, companies elsewhere have to figure out how to scale these SMR concepts to take the designs that have been developed and get them to the stage of regulatory approval and industrial deployment. But the other thing that will have to happen in India is a revision of law to enable private companies to participate in the civil nuclear sector as private utilities do here in the U.S. So, this is going to take time, but it's a natural area of convergence," he said in response to a question from *The Hindu* while addressing a virtual press conference.

Mr. Pyatt was in India from January 26 to 31 during which he visited New Delhi and Hyderabad.

Indian regulations have

held up the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) and Westinghouse Electric Company (WEC) for the construction of six nuclear reactors in Kovvada, Andhra Pradesh, eight years after Modi-Obama announced the nuclear deal is done, and worked a way around the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010.

Mr. Pyatt, who is familiar with India, having served in the U.S. Embassy here, said what was driven home for him by the "really good" discussions at the India-U.S. Forum is "how much we have delivered in terms of our strategic cooperation across the broad range of U.S.-India equities."

'Rigid, statutory fiscal targets are getting discredited globally'

A more nuanced and realistic approach to debt sustainability and fiscal responsibility is required, says the Finance Secretary; he adds that the balance between growth and inflation is a delicate one, says India's debt levels are not very high by global standards when compared with other G-20 economies, and the country has a very high nominal growth rate which is likely to be sustained for a long time

INTERVIEW

T.V. Somanathan

Vikas Dhoot

Almost no country seems to adhere to fixed fiscal goals any more, Finance Secretary T.V. Somanathan said, emphasising that the country's high growth trajectory should enable a gradual decline in its debt to Gross domestic product (GDP) ratio. He also noted that inflationary risks have not disappeared so the Central bank, which is reviewing the monetary policy this week, has to strike a deli-

cate balance between growth and price rise concerns. Edited excerpts:

The [interim] Budget gives some broad directions on the government's focus areas for its next term. Can we expect more action points in the identified reform areas in the full Budget likely in July?

Definitely, you can expect more details. But it's too early to say what they will be, as things will evolve between now and then. It's a matter of timing between the new government taking charge and the presentation of the Budget.

The fiscal outlook is not

likely to change substantially, but the composition of programmes or scheme expenditures may change. But nothing can be ruled out. It is, after all, a vote on account and not a full Budget. So, who am I to preempt any decision that could very legitimately be taken? We have made fiscal projections with the information, policies and data available to us today.

The plan to lower borrowings and tackle the fiscal deficit has surprised many. Is there an underlying message to Mint Street?

Unlike monetary policy communication, where communication is itself a



part of the policy, our Budget is not intended as a message to anyone, whether it is bond markets, rating agencies or the Central bank. It is a communica-

tion of the substance of government's fiscal policy, and the direction it wants to take for our own long-term welfare and benefit. It may have implications or

inputs for others in their decision making. That is for them to take into account. There is no intention to use this to communicate anything – that is a burden this statement cannot bear – it can only bear the burden of being a truthful account of what we expect fiscally. That is all it is.

But would easing monetary policy help the broader aim to spur investments and jobs?

That is a matter for the Reserve Bank of India to decide because they also have to keep an eye on inflation. The balance between growth and inflation is a delicate one. It's not as

if inflationary risks are totally absent. I don't want to be prescriptive on that.

The goal to take Central government debt to 40% of debt was set before the pandemic. How do we recalibrate the target?

Personally, I feel the legitimate aspiration would be to see a gradual decline in our debt to GDP ratio.

Beyond that, one should not be unrealistic. Internationally, the remedy of rigid, statutory fiscal targets is getting discredited. This is not unique to India. Almost no one any longer seems to adhere to a rigid, long term fiscal target – neither the European Un-

ion nor many other countries. There are almost no exemplars for that model any more, and perhaps its continued relevance is questionable. A more nuanced and realistic approach to debt sustainability and fiscal responsibility is required. Actually, our debt levels are not very high by global standards if you look at other G-20 economies, and we have a very high nominal growth rate which is likely to be sustained for a long time.

Our growth-rate interest-rate differential is quite favourable compared to many economies. We have high growth, so sustainability is better. This fixation with a single number doesn't work any more.

Nirmala, Adhir spar in Lok Sabha over funds for Karnataka

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Monday witnessed a sharp exchange between Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury after the latter alleged discrimination in devolution of funds to Congress-ruled Karnataka and other non-Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled States.

Replying to a supplementary question by Mr. Chowdhury during the Question Hour, on the Karnataka government's claim that the Centre was not releasing funds that are due to them, she said that devolution of funds was as per recommendations of the Finance Commission.

"This apprehension that some States are being discriminated against is a politically vitiated narrative which, I am sorry to say, vested interests are happy to go about saying," the Finance Minister said.

"This is just not a possibility that any Finance Minister can intervene to say that 'I don't like this State, stop payment'..... It can't happen that way. The sys-

tem is well placed...I have no right to change the rules as per my whims and fancies ... I have no role to play," she said.

"That is what I have done in my term. All Finance Ministers do that. Implement the recommendations of the Finance Commission. It is done without fear or favour," Ms. Sitharaman added.

'Not getting its due'

Mr. Chowdhury said that there was a perception that non-BJP States were not getting their "legitimate due".

"Six months ago, the situation was not there and everything was hunky dory. After the installation of the new government, a non-BJP government has assumed office, trouble has started. What is the reason?" he asked.

In a sharp retort, Ms. Sitharaman said, "If the expenditure is going in areas which it cannot sustain by your Budget, I am not answerable. Which government was there till six months ago is not my role to talk about. If it was hunky dory then and now it is not, introspect, please."

Opposition raises breach of federal principles in RS

Trinamool says Centre was trying to destroy federalism while DMK MP Tiruchi Siva says there was a blatant attempt by the BJP to undermine the regional parties; YSRCP, BJP target Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Monday witnessed attacks and counter-attacks by the Opposition and Treasury Benches over issues such as unemployment, "breach" of federal principles and communal divisions during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address to the joint session of Parliament.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) got support from parties such as the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) while the Trinamool Congress, Left parties and the Congress shared similar points against the Centre.

Trinamool Congress MP Sukhendu Sekhar Ray, who started the debate, said the Centre was hounding Opposition leaders using the Central agencies. Attacking the concept of "one nation, one election," he said the BJP's aim was to destroy federalism.

Dravida Munnetra Kaz-



Trading barbs: Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar during the interim Budget Session of Parliament on Monday. ANI

hagam (DMK) MP Tiruchi Siva said there was a blatant attempt by the BJP to undermine the regional parties and the local issues. He said non-BJP States faced a stepmotherly attitude from the Centre in allocating revenues and resources.

Ayodhya event and PM

CPI(M) MP John Brittas said none of the speeches by the BJP members were completed without Ayodhya and without mentioning Prime Minister. "The

primary responsibility of the Prime Minister is to give 'pran' [life] to citizens, not the Gods. He should obviously stick to his duties... he should go to Manipur and conduct a 'Pran Pratishtha' for citizens. That should be done first," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Arvind Ganpat Sawant said his party was happy about the Ram temple construction. "We should also remember those who sacrificed their lives for the Ram temple. The temple con-

struction has been made possible today not because of the efforts of one person," he said.

YSRCP leader Vijai Sai Reddy said the Congress's existence would be in doubt after the 2029 election as the party's electoral performance had been consistently poor in the past 10 years.

BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi and senior leader Sushil Modi led the counter-attacks of the Treasury benches. Mr. Trivedi said the demand for a caste census from the Congress was a proof of the lack of concern the party had for the welfare of people from backward classes. "You are only indulging in caste-based politics," he said.

Mr. Trivedi said former Prime Ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi did not believe in caste politics, but the present leadership of the Congress was banking on caste census.

Mr. Sushil said economic and social indicators of the country had improved in the last 10 years.

Despite court orders, AAP leader not called for taking oath in RS

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Despite directions from a Delhi court, Aam Aadmi Party leader Sanjay Singh, who was recently elected to the Rajya Sabha for a second term, could not take oath on Monday in the absence of summons from the House Secretariat.

Mr. Singh was not called for the ceremony as four cases of breach of privilege are pending against him before the Privileges Committee of the Upper House, said sources in the office of Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar. The cases pertain to Mr. Singh's previous tenure. He was suspended on July 24, 2023. On August 11, the House passed a motion continuing his suspension till the committee submitted its findings.

Mr. Singh, who is in judicial custody in the Delhi liquor policy case, did not come to Parliament on Monday. Special Judge M.K. Nagpal had on Saturday directed the Jail Superintendent to ensure that Mr. Singh was taken to Parliament on Monday to be sworn-in, under the condition that he would not ad-



Sanjay Singh

dress the press.

Mr. Dhankhar's office said, "Summons were not issued to Mr. Sanjay Singh as he suffered the directives of the House passed on August 11, 2023, disentitling him from participating in the proceedings of the House till the House takes decision on the report of the committee of privileges as and when presented to it. The fact that this matter pertains to his previous term has no impact on this directive."

Reacting to the incident, Rashtriya Janata Dal MP Manoj K. Jha said in a X post, "Our friend Mr. Sanjay was deprived of taking oath today after being elected as MP... This is the new parliamentary paradigm of the so-called Amrit Kaal."

Time to end all signs of slavery: U.P. BJP MP bats for renaming India as 'Bharat'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

BJP leader from Uttar Pradesh Satya Pal Singh said in the Lok Sabha on Monday that the name of the country should be changed from India to Bharat as it was time to end all signs of "slavery". He made the statement while participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to President's Address.

"One sign of slavery is there in the Constitution. Article that says India that is Bharat. This India should end as the country's name is Bharat," said Mr. Singh. Hailing the construction of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, Mr. Singh called it the symbol of faith of millions of people.

Responding to his statement, several Opposition leaders questioned the dominance of religion in affairs of the state. Congress MP from Kerala, Benny Behanan, said the Narendra Modi government was leading the country to-

Several Opposition leaders question the dominance of religion in affairs of the state

wards a "Hindu Rashtra".

"I am afraid our country is heading towards a theocracy by interlinking state and religion. Our Prime Minister, who is a state representative, was recently a part of the *pran prathista* [consecration ceremony] of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya, clearly violating the idea of maintaining principled distance between the state and religion as mandated by secularism," Mr. Behanan said.

'Niti and Rajniti'

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Arvind Sawant said Lord Ram was a matter of *niti* (policy) for his party but for others, it was *rajniti* (politics).

Trinamool Congress member Shatabdi Roy also took a swipe at the BJP over its claim that only the

Narendra Modi government could build the Ram Temple at Ayodhya.

"He [Mr. Modi] is a very powerful person. He can bring god [back to Ayodhya]. He has so much power that he can bring back god but he cannot bring back mere mortals such as Nirav Modi, Mehul Choksi or Vijay Mallya. Can he not bring back black money? These are the questions facing the country," said Ms. Roy, who represents Birbhum in the Lok Sabha.

Seeking to poke holes in the government's claims of pulling out 25 crore people from multi-dimensional poverty, Ms. Roy argued that the data pertained to COVID-19 pandemic years when surveys were not conducted.

She said issues such as unemployment, high inflation, safety and security of girl child, MSP for farmers, violence in Manipur, and the reality of the suffering of train passengers were missing from the President's address.

Bill to check cheating in govt. recruitment exams introduced

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union government introduced a Bill in the Lok Sabha on Monday to check malpractices and organised cheating in government recruitment exams, proposing a minimum of three years' imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹1 crore for persons and organisations indulging in such illegal practices.

The Public Examinations Bill was moved by Union Minister Jitendra Singh in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill said that malpractices in public examinations lead to delays and cancellation of examinations adversely impacting the prospects of millions of youth.

"Therefore, it is imperative that elements that exploit vulnerabilities of examination system are identified and effectively dealt with by a comprehensive Central legislation," the statement said.

The Bill proposes a minimum of three years' imprisonment and a fine of up to ₹1 crore for persons indulging in cheating

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024 mentions "leakage of question paper or answer key", "directly or indirectly assisting the candidate in any manner unauthorisedly in the public examination", and "tampering with the computer network or a computer resource or a computer system" as offences done by a person, group of persons or institutions.

"Any person or persons resorting to unfair means and offences under this Act shall be punished with imprisonment for a term not less than three years but which may extend to five years and with fine up to ₹10 lakh," said the Bill.

The Bill shall serve as a model draft for States to adopt at their discretion.

India can give befitting reply if attacked by any external forces, Rajnath tells Adhir

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday said in the Lok Sabha that India was capable of giving a befitting reply if attacked by external forces.

His remarks came in an exchange with Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, who accused the government of being quiet on the situation in Ladakh in relation to China.

Mr. Chowdhury was speaking during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address. He said the Modi government had failed in its China's policy.

"Not even a word on security concerns was mentioned in the President's Address. The situation in Ladakh is deteriorating day by day. I want to ask our Defence Minister to please tell us what is the situation in Ladakh. You said that the status will be restored... 2,000-square kilometre area is being oc-



Security matters: Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh at the Parliament during the Budget session in New Delhi on Monday. PTI

cupied. Today shepherds are unable to go there. Please ask the people of Ladakh why is this happening. Why are you sitting silent? From Arunachal to Ladakh the situation is worsening," the Congress leader said.

Condemns statement

Mr. Singh immediately intervened and expressed disagreement over the Congress leader's comments pertaining to Line of Actual Control (LAC). "As Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

took my name, I express my disagreement with whatever he said in connection with China and LAC [Line of Actual Control]. I condemn this," he said.

"I would like to assure the House that India is not weak any more. India has become strong. If someone dares to stare at India, India has the capability and strength to give a befitting reply... The country should not be unnecessarily defamed in the forum of the Parliament," he added.

IN BRIEF



Over 50 flyers enter wrong terminal in Mumbai, probe on

Over 50 passengers of a Dubai-Mumbai Vistara airlines were taken to the domestic terminal instead of the international arrival terminal at Mumbai airport on Monday prompting the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BACS) to launch a probe into the breach, an airport official said. The passengers who disembarked and boarded the airport shuttle coach buses, bypassed Customs and immigration clearance. A Vistara spokesperson said: "Our teams worked alongside security agencies and relevant authorities to ensure that the said customers were taken to the designated area to complete their arrival formalities and conclude their journey."

Senior IAS officer Sanjay Jaju takes over as I&B Secretary

Sanjay Jaju, a 1992-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer from Telangana cadre, on Monday assumed charge as Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Upon taking charge of his role, he was welcomed by the outgoing Secretary, Apurva Chandra, and other officials of the Ministry and various media units. Mr. Chandra has been appointed as Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Mr. Jaju has previously served as Additional Secretary to the Government of India from 2018 to 2023 and Director, National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited, from October 2014 to March 2018. He has also served as Secretary to the Andhra Pradesh government.

Indians win big at Grammys: Shakti takes home honours

Tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain wins 3 awards; flautist Rakesh Chaurasia gets 2 prizes; singer Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist S. Vinayakram bags one each

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Indian music struck a chord at the 2024 Grammy Awards with five musicians from the country, including tabla maestro Ustad Zakir Hussain and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, winning the coveted prize in Los Angeles.

While Mr. Hussain was India's big winner with three Grammys, Mr. Chaurasia picked up two awards. Singer Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram, Mr. Hussain's collaborators in the fusion group *Shakti*, won one Grammy each at a glittering ceremony held on Sunday night.

Shakti won the 2024 Grammy Award for best global music album for *This Moment*. The album features the four Indians as well as its founding member, legendary British guitarist John McLaughlin. *This Moment*, which released to critical acclaim in June 2023, is the group's first studio album in more than 45 years.

Besides his award for *Shakti*, Mr. Hussain won



All smiles: Shankar Mahadevan, Ganesh Rajagopalan, Ustad Zakir Hussain and V. Selvaganesh of *Shakti* pose with the award during the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles on Sunday. PTI

two other awards – the best global music performance for *Pashto* and best contemporary instrumental album for *As We Speak*.

Praise from PM

The best global music performance category had eight nominees, including *Abundance In Millets*, a song by Falu and featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, *Shadow Forces* by Arooj Aftab, Vijay Iyer, and Shahzad Ismaili, and *Alone* by Burna Boy.

Mr. Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, bagged two Grammys as part of the ensemble of American banjo player Bé-

la Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer for *Pashto* and *As We Speak*.

"Thanks to the Academy, thanks to all these great musicians for giving us this beautiful [live] music today... Families are here and without them, we are nothing. Without love, music, harmony, we are nothing," the veteran percussionist said.

'Winning as an Indian' Mr. Rakesh Chaurasia said: "More than the joy I felt for myself, the pride of winning it as an Indian musician ranks higher. To win two Grammys on my first ever nomination definitely makes it sweeter."

The musician thanked Mr. Hussain for being an inspiration, saying that it was the tabla aficionado who introduced him to Mr. Fleck and Mr. Meyer. The *As We Speak* team were also nominated for best instrumental composition.

Mr. Mahadevan, who took the stage alongside Mr. Rajagopalan and Mr. Selvaganesh, gave a shout-out to Mr. McLaughlin and Mr. Hussain. While Mr. McLaughlin gave the ceremony a miss, Mr. Hussain was backstage as he had won another Grammy.

Plea for ASI survey of all remaining cellars in Gyanvapi mosque

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Days after a district court allowed *puja* inside one of the cellars of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, a Hindu plaintiff on Monday moved a fresh application before the court, seeking that directions be given to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to conduct a thorough survey of the remaining cellars inside the disputed structure.

The petitioners, Rakhi Singh, who is plaintiff no. 1 in the pending Shringar Gauri worshipping suit of 2022 at a Varanasi court, maintained that the survey of the remaining cellars was necessary to ascertain the religious character of the property in question.

In her application filed under Section 75(e) and Order 26 Rule 10A r/w Section 151 of the Code of Civil Procedure, Ms. Singh claimed that that within the Gyanvapi premises, cellar numbers N1 to N5 (in the north) and S1 to S3 (in the south) exist, and cellar numbers N1 and S1 are completely not accessed because their entrances are blocked.

"She hence demands that the survey of the unaccessed area of the mosque be done by removing the blocked entrance and debris through a safe metho-



A priest offers prayers at 'Vyas Ji Ki Tehkhana' inside the basement of Gyanvapi mosque complex on February 1. ANI

dology," advocate Saurabh Tiwary, Ms. Singh's counsel, said.

The court will hear the matter on Tuesday.

In the HC

Meanwhile, the Allahabad High Court on Tuesday will hear the amended application by the Anjum Intezamia Masjid Committee, challenging the district court's order of January 31 of allowing *puja* to be conducted inside the 'Vyas ka tehkhana'.

The Varanasi district administration, within hours of the lower court's order, ensured its compliance, and *puja* is being performed inside the cellar since then.

Odisha CM launches The Hindu Group's book on Lord Jagannath

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik released *Shree Jagannatha, Lord Of The Universe*, a coffee-table book brought out by The Hindu Group (THG) at the valedictory session of the three-day, first-ever "World Odia Language Conference" here on Monday.

The book, which pictorially narrates traditions and rituals associated with sibling deities of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Devi Subhadra in Puri, one of the four sacred dhams for Hindus, was unveiled in the presence of Raghuvir Srinivasan, Editor of *The Hindu businessline*, who has also edited *Shree Jagannatha, Lord Of The Universe*; and Sridhar Aranala, vice-president, S&D Circulation of THG Publishing Private Limited.



In faith: Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik releasing the book *Shree Jagannatha, Lord Of The Universe*. Raghuvir Srinivasan, Editor of *The Hindu businessline*, is seen. BISWARANJAN ROU

Shree Jagannatha, Lord Of The Universe is a compilation of short articles encompassing various aspects of rich traditions including the Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath. Experts on Jagannath culture, journalists, and former bureaucrats have contributed to the book through their authoritative writings.

"This picture-rich coffee-table book attempts to tell the story of Shree Jagannath worship, the temple, and its traditions. It can by no means claim to be a comprehensive account. It is but a humble effort to explain to people the uniqueness of Shree Jagannath, literally the Lord of the Universe," said Mr. Srinivasan.

The sibling deities are known as living divine beings. The book's Editor's Note points out, "Like humans, the idols undergo a process of biological change and are replaced by a new set of idols periodically. Again, in a departure from tradition, the *moola vigraha*, or the main deity, emerges out of the temple twice a year to give *darshan* to devotees."

Photographs have vividly captured events around the Shree Jagannath Temple, which was built in the 12th Century CE.

At the valedictory session, the Odisha CM announced that the "World Odia Language Conference" will be held at five-year intervals. He also declared extension of a museum covering evolution of Odia language and culture for public access by another three days.

CBSE urges schools to prepare for National Credit Framework roll-out

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has urged principals of schools affiliated to the board to start contemplating the pattern for allocating credits to students for subjects, in line with the National Credit Framework (NCF).

The CBSE has proposed draft guidelines open for feedback from its affiliated schools, *The Hindu* has learnt.

Sample framework

The board is set to notify a new set of credit framework for schools next year from Classes 9 to 12, and in anticipation of the notification, has asked its schools to start implementing a sample credit framework at least for Classes 9 and 11.

As per the existing regu-

lations, a student has to clear five subjects (two languages and three main subjects – maths, science and social science) to pass the class. "Nearly 1,050 hours are allotted to five compulsory subjects. In order to aid teachers to implement the credit framework, we have allotted an additional 150 hours for internal assessment of subjects like Physical Education and Health, Art Education, a skill-related subject, and a third language," a senior CBSE official said.

Currently, a Class 9 student passing with five compulsory subjects and completing internal assessment of remaining mentioned subjects will earn at least 40 credits. "In case the student opts for a sixth or seventh subject, and passes the five compulsory subjects, extra cre-

dits totalling up to 54 can be earned," the official added.

Ten subjects

The CBSE proposal says while this is applicable for the current academic session, when the new curriculum according to the National Curriculum Framework kicks in for 2024-2025, students in Classes 9 and 10 will have to study 10 subjects compulsorily.

Additional subjects include a compulsory third language, one subject in inter-disciplinary area, physical education and health, art education, and a skill-related subject.

Of the three languages, two will have to be native to India.

"Under new NCF, importance is given to Physical Education and Art Education. Every child will

learn three languages," the official said.

Academic locker

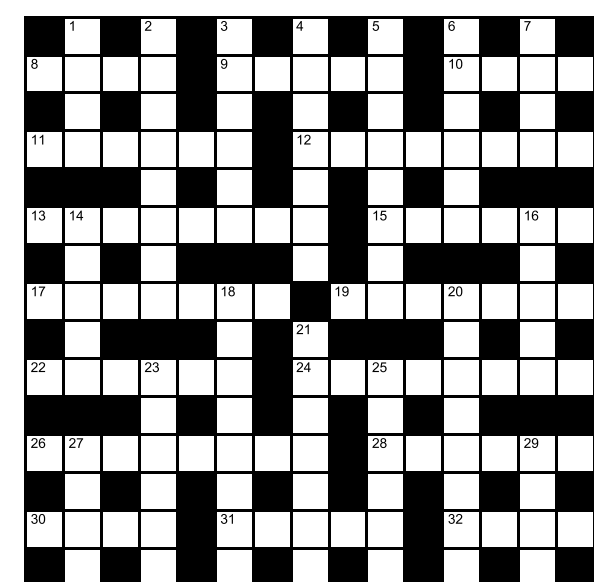
All credits collected by students will be stored in their academic bank of credit in the students' DigiLockers. The Ministry of Education is also working on systems to reconcile credits in case the student goes abroad. The idea of introducing credits right from school-level is to also reconcile it with higher education systems (consisting of under-graduation, post-graduation, and diplomas) for assessment and equivalence purposes.

"We are urging schools to internally start implementing the credit system according to the guidelines we are issuing so that they are better prepared to implement it officially after it is notified next year," the official further said.

TH CROSSWORD+ 14090
(set by Incognito)

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

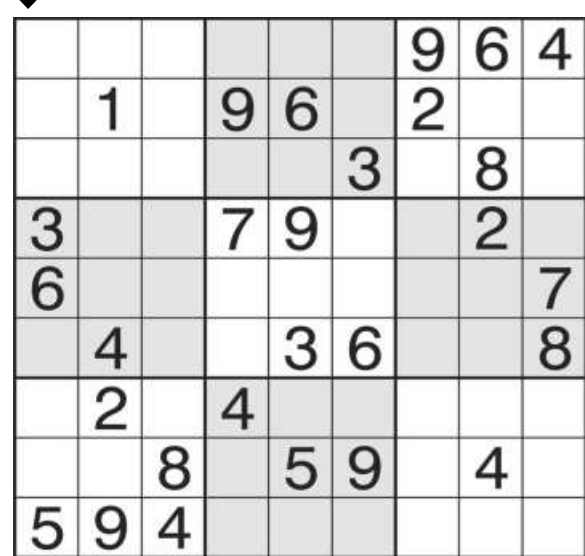
SCAN TO PLAY



- 15 Fly groups within the estate, for starters (6)
17 Rice dish made by spreading bran around one ingredient at first, and including a bit of yoghurt (7)
19 Mark of injury allowed to become red (7)
22 Say softly, "Reject the drink... reject the drink" (6)
24 Military commander has right once more to get jelly like substance (4-4)
26 North African captures Indian at first, one with disease (8)
28 Ammunition that is pointless? (6)
30 Good source of water (4)
31 Groan awkwardly producing gas (5)
32 Work hard, cutting logs (4)
- Down**
1 A couple of mothers' uncle in India (4)
2 Discarded Acts (8)
3 Popular actor at church gives source of energy (6)
4 GI's jaws moved displaying cutting devices (7)
5 Erstwhile office assistant with spasm cannot tolerate wide range of temperature (8)
6 Rodent consumes a bit of sugary dish made of whipped cream (6)
7 Signify average (4)
14 Henry and King adopting artificial intelligence at university to compose Japanese poem (5)
16 Tales wrongly stated in upright stone slab (5)
18 Avengers make agents of chemical warfare (5,3)
20 Stern Tom's worried at last (8)
21 Traitor gets gin cocktail and some snacks for sailors (7)
23 To a large extent, very masculine to capture impala at first (6)
25 Very enthusiastic rat moves around lair (6)
27 When returning, housekeeper carries fencing equipment (4)
29 America has initially focussed on unidentified flying objects (4)

- Across**
8 Father's after Oscar (4)
9 Oliver's dance? (5)
10 Poems from Rhodesia (4)
11 Central Asian sailor follows another sailor (6)
12 New York prison's tribal get together in Oceania (4-4)
13 Double food for dog? Chayote and pickled relish! (4-4)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Lofty qualities

The ability to speak, kindness, empathy, a helpful nature, honesty, forbearance, pleasant speech, analytical ability – many such traits characterise a good human being.

Thiruvalluvar says that a man who has good qualities is treated with the same reverence shown to gods. But people often exhibit undesirable qualities, and Thiruvalluvar shows how undeserving of respect such people are, said Malayaman in a discourse.

A man who does not study may be said to merely exist. There is nothing more to be said about him, says Thiruvalluvar, comparing such a man to infertile soil. If seeds are sown in fertile soil, we get a good yield. But if the same seeds are sown on arid land, nothing comes out of our efforts.

A learned man not only stands to benefit through his learning, but also is of use to society. But a man who does make use of opportunities that come his way to study is comparable to land on which nothing grows. He gets nothing much in life, nor is he of much use to society. A man who does not choose his words wisely is like chaff, says Thiruvalluvar.

A man who lacks spirit and is unenthusiastic about a task he undertakes, is no better than a tree. Can a tree move or talk? It just remains in a place. A man who has no enthusiasm for anything is lifeless as a tree, according to Thiruvalluvar.

Man can read, but animals cannot. And yet, if a man refuses to read good literature, what difference is there between him and an animal, wonders Thiruvalluvar.

The unusual cabbage mutation that could boost crop yield

Forty-four years ago, people found a plant that couldn't make pollen. All the seeds from these plants were the result of their eggs being fertilised by pollen from plants of other strains; none came from the same strain. The former seeds germinated to produce more robust plants

D.P. Kasbekar

The males of plants as diverse as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, tomato, and rice can be made sterile by deleting a very small part of their genome's DNA. This is the take-home message of a paper published in the journal *Nature Communications* in October by researchers at the State Key Laboratory of Vegetable Biobreeding of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Beijing.

The simple deletion resulting in such a drastic outcome brings to mind the story of a kingdom that was lost for want of a horseshoe nail. But here, instead of loss, the researchers assure us of a gain: that the deletion could lead to an abundant harvest of these plants, thanks to a process called heterosis.

Genes and promoters

The DNA molecule consists of two long strands. Each strand is composed of four compounds called nucleotide bases. They are designated A, C, G, and T for simplicity (for adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine respectively). An A on one strand makes chemical bonds, called hydrogen bonds, with a T on the other and a C on one strand makes hydrogen bonds with a G on the other.

The bonds between As and Ts and the bonds between Gs and Cs hold the two DNA strands together. A base-pair, or bp for short, is a single A-T or G-C pair between the two strands, with the dash denoting the bond.

The genome of the cabbage plant (*Brassica oleracea*) consists of around 1.06 billion base-pairs organised in 18 chromosomes, which every cell holds in nine pairs of two each. In each pair of two chromosomes, one chromosome comes from the pollen and the other comes from the egg. The DNA (which is all the base-pairs together) in every chromosome pair share a mostly identical sequence of base-pairs.

A *gene* is a well-defined sequence of typically a few thousand base-pairs, or a few kilo base-pairs (kbp), in the DNA molecule. When a gene is expressed, it means a segment of the base sequence on one of its strands is copied into the sequence of bases in a related molecule, called RNA.

DNA and RNA are the master and working copies of a gene. The RNA is loaded into a cellular machinery called the ribosome. The ribosome uses the base sequence of RNA to specify the sequence in which amino acids are linked together to create the protein encoded by the gene.

In short, a gene's DNA sequence defines the amino acid sequence of its encoded protein and the protein's structure. The cell uses the RNA and the ribosome to manufacture this entity.

Pollen loss promotes heterosis

Around 44 years ago, people found a cabbage plant that contained a natural mutation. As a result of this mutation,



Males of many plants can be made sterile by deleting a small part of their DNA. SCOTT WEBB/UNSPLASH

they found that the plant had lost the ability to make pollen.

At first, scientists didn't know which particular gene in the plant had been mutated. They only named the altered gene, whichever it was, *Ms-cd1*.

The mutation's effect was to make the plant male-sterile, but they had no other defects. In fact, the eggs of the mutant plant could be fertilised by pollen from a normal plant, and the fertilised eggs would go on to make normal seeds.

In other words, all the seeds from the mutant plants were the result of the plants' eggs being fertilised by pollen from plants of other strains - a process called out-crossing. None of their seeds came from self-crossing. (In a self-cross, an egg is fertilised by pollen of the same strain.)

Out-cross seeds - which are also called hybrid seeds - germinate to produce more robust plants than self-cross seeds. This is because of a phenomenon called hybrid vigour or, in technical terms, *heterosis*.

The missing base-pair

The researchers who conducted the new study showed that seeds from the male-sterile plant consistently made bigger cabbages.

Specifically, they found that the *Ms-cd1* mutation was dominant - meaning that if the mutant gene was present in only one of the chromosomes of the pair, the plant wouldn't be able to make pollen. It didn't matter if the other chromosome had a non-mutated gene.

Dominant mutations are relatively rare. Mutations are commonly recessive, meaning the same gene has to be mutated



Researchers who conducted the new study showed that seeds from the male-sterile plant consistently made bigger cabbages

in both chromosomes for its effects to be expressed. Fortunately for us, it is easier to scale up the production of hybrid seeds using dominant male-sterile mutations. One part of this process has to do with fine-tuning protein levels when making pollen.

As it happens, it's not necessary that all of a gene's DNA sequence is copied into RNA. Some sequences aren't copied, and one of them is the *promoter*. This sequence binds to regulatory proteins that determine when and in which cells a DNA sequence is copied to RNA.

The *Ms-cd1* gene of cabbage is about 6 kbp long. Its promoter binds to a regulatory protein called ERF. This binding keeps the *Ms-cd1* gene from being expressed.

Using an approach called genetic mapping, the researchers found that the only difference between a mutated *Ms-cd1* gene and a non-mutated *Ms-cd1* gene was that the promoter in the former was missing one DNA base-pair. This minuscule absence destroyed its ability to bind to ERF. As a result, the *Ms-cd1* protein continued to be expressed when in fact it should have been repressed.

The eventual outcome: the plant couldn't produce pollen and became

male-sterile.

A fine balance

The researchers also induced mutations of their own in mutated and non-mutated copies of the *Ms-cd1* genes, and in both cases the mutant became recessive. That is, plants with one (additionally) mutated copy and one normal copy were male-fertile.

The team also found that the dominant and the recessive mutations derailed pollen development in different ways - which was an indication that the plant makes pollen properly only if it can make the *Ms-cd1* protein in copious amounts at some stages, while in other stages its levels are repressed by ERF binding to the gene's promoter.

If either the protein is not made at all or isn't repressed in a timely manner, the plant loses the ability to make pollen and becomes male-sterile. So as such, proper pollen development depends on a fine balance of the *Ms-cd1* protein's levels.

The researchers also introduced the (dominant) mutant gene into other plant species, such as rice, tomato, and *Arabidopsis thaliana*, a favourite of plant biologists for research. In every case the recipient plants failed to make pollen. This showed that the pollen development pathway, along with the ways in which a plant can fine-tune it, works similarly across plant species.

So deleting the base-pair offers us a new tool to produce hybrid seeds in these and other crops.

That's one small deletion for a genome, one giant cornucopia for humankind. (The author is a retired scientist.)



China has taken the open source route to evade sanctions. REUTERS

China bets on open-source chips to evade sanctions

Reuters

When a Beijing-based military institute in September published a patent for a new high-performance chip, it offered a glimpse of China's bid to remake the half-trillion dollar global chip market and withstand U.S. sanctions.

The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) Academy of Military Sciences had used an open-source standard known as RISC-V to reduce malfunctions in chips for cloud computing and smart cars, the patent filing shows.

RISC-V is an instruction set architecture, a computer language used to design anything from smartphone chips to advanced processors for artificial intelligence.

The most common standards are controlled by Western companies: x86, dominated by U.S. firms Intel and Advanced Micro Devices, and Arm, developed by Britain's Arm Holdings, owned by SoftBank Group.

Beijing and dozens of Chinese state entities and research institutes, many sanctioned by Washington, invested at least \$50 million in projects involving RISC-V between 2018 and 2023

U.S. and UK export controls prevent the sale of only the most advanced x86 and Arm designs - which produce the highest-performance chips - to clients in China.

But as the U.S. widens restrictions on China's access to advanced semiconductors and chip-making equipment, the open-source nature of RISC-V has made it part of Beijing's plan to curb its dependence on Western technology, although the emerging architecture accounts for a fraction of the chip market.

"The biggest advantage of the RISC-V architecture is that it is geopolitically neutral," the Shanghai government's Science and Technology Commission said in a report published in April.

Beijing and dozens of Chinese state entities and research institutes, many sanctioned by Washington, invested at least \$50 million in projects involving RISC-V between 2018 and 2023, according to a Reuters review of over 100 Chinese-language academic articles, patents, government documents and tenders, as well as statements from research groups and companies.

While the figure is modest, recent RISC-V breakthroughs and applications in China, many with government funding, have raised Beijing's hopes that the open-source standard could one day threaten the x86-Arm duopoly, according to state media. Intel and AMD did not respond to questions about the matter, while Arm declined to comment.

RISC-V chips made by Chinese firms and research institutes can now power self-driving cars, artificial-intelligence models and data-storage centres, according to two industry figures and the previously unreported documents.

The military science academy did not respond to a request for comment sent via China's State Council.

Arm and x86 are closed architectures, meaning they are proprietary and charge users a license fee. Their outlines are thousands of pages long, with complex instructions and numerous incompatible versions that can only be modified by their developers.

RISC-V is free to use and has a simpler outline, often leading to more energy-efficient chips, and users can build atop the framework to suit their needs.

Half of the more than 10 billion RISC-V chips shipped globally by 2022 were made in China, the state-run *China Daily* reported in August.

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

On this day last year, deadly earthquakes struck Turkey and Syria

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

The region where the major earthquakes occurred - straddling a part of Turkey's south and a part of northwest Syria - is at the junction of three tectonic plates: the _____, the Arabian, and the Anatolian. This is called the Maraş Triple Junction. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 2

Name the fault that goes from the Maraş Triple Junction to the Karlova Triple Junction (where the Anatolian, Arabian, and the Eurasian tectonic plates meet). The two deadly earthquakes on February 6 occurred along this fault.

QUESTION 3

Both the major earthquakes were transcurrent-fault quakes, with hypocentres 5-10 km and 5-13 km underground. What is the more common name for a transcurrent fault?

QUESTION 4

The two earthquakes triggered separate aftershock sequences. The second earthquake, measuring 7.7 on the moment magnitude (M_w) scale, had two aftershocks that measured up to 6 on the mB scale. What does mB stand for?

Question 5
On the _____ scale, the Turkey-Syria earthquakes had a maximum intensity of "XII. Extreme" - the highest. This scale is named for a volcanologist and Catholic priest. Fill in the blanks.

Answers to February 1 quiz:

- Origin of insulating foam whose displacement led to the Columbia disaster - **Ans: External fuel tank**
- Israel's first astronaut who was onboard Columbia - **Ans: Ilan Ramon**
- Statistician whom NASA consulted to prevent similar disasters - **Ans: Edward Tufte**
- Place to which shuttle crew had to move while waiting for rescue mission - **Ans: International Space Station**
- First Space Shuttle mission after Columbia, on July 26, 2005 - **Ans:**

Discovery

Visual: **Ravi Shankar**; on day 7 of the mission, Mission Control awakened Kalpana Chawla in the morning with the song 'Prabhati' played by him
First contact: Kiran Gadakar | K.N. Viswanathan | Isha Joshi | Muhammed Shahid Suri

Answers to February 2 quiz:

- Major cause of lung cancer in India - **Ans: Air pollution**
- Two Asian countries apart from India recording high cancer burden - **Ans: China and Japan**
- Cancer which is among the top five that affects women in Asia and vaccine India approved to prevent it - **Ans: Cervical cancer, CERVAVAC**
- State with highest cancer rate in India - **Ans: Mizoram**
- Cancer known by two names, thought to be caused by cloth tied around the waist - **Ans: Dhoti/saree cancer**

Visual: V. Shanta

First contact: Viswanathan Neelakantan | Muhammad Shahi Suri | Vikas Singh



Houses destroyed by last year's earthquake, in Hatay, Turkey. The magnitude 7.8 tremor levelled towns in the country's southeast. It killed more than 53,000 people in Turkey and nearly 6,000 in neighbouring Syria. REUTERS

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

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



Honour and exception

Choice of past leaders for Bharat Ratnas is in tune with politics of the present

The Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian honour of the country, has been conferred on 50 people since 1954. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader L.K. Advani and the late socialist leader, Karpoori Thakur, are the newest recipients. The making of national heroes is equally about the recipients as it is about its function as a stimulant of a collective consciousness. It is often the collective that needs heroes to hold itself together. By placing leaders on a higher pedestal, the group seeks to reinforce ideals represented by them. Mr. Advani has been a defining figure of modern Indian history. As he reminisced, he joined the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh at the age of 14. His role in the advancement of the Hindutva ideology has been the biggest by any single leader before Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He has been a mentor to Mr. Modi, with his campaign for a temple in Ayodhya definitively changing the course of Indian politics. The campaign pushed the limits of constitutional order, based on the claim that matters of faith cannot be subject to litigation. As it happens with an extraordinary assertion of popular sovereignty, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement changed the country at several levels; the Supreme Court of India, by 2019, unanimously ruled in favour of the temple that was inaugurated by Mr. Modi on January 22.

Thakur was a central figure in the social justice politics – a euphemism for the demand for better representation of intermediate castes – of Bihar and the larger Hindi belt, who challenged the Congress's hegemony. He served two terms as the Chief Minister of Bihar in the 1970s. Social justice politics went through phases of self discovery, and scattered into numerous parties over the years. One strand is closely aligned with the BJP. There are social justice groups that are still opposed to it, but the BJP owes its current strength considerably to intermediate castes. That ongoing process is being reinforced by honouring Thakur. In 2015, A.B. Vajpayee, the first Prime Minister from the BJP, and Madan Mohan Malaviya, the founder of the Banaras Hindu University, were conferred the Bharat Ratna. In 2019, Pranab Mukherjee, Bhupendra Kumar Hazarika, and Nanaji Deshmukh were recipients. All these selections are in tune with the politics of the present – and how the history of the Bharat Ratna has always been. All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam founder M.G. Ramachandran and B.R. Ambedkar were also conferred the award in the hope that their followers would, in turn, back the party or alliance ruling at the Centre. Mr. Advani and Thakur represent the two legs of BJP politics, namely Hindu consolidation and higher representation for intermediate castes in all fields.

First among firsts

The growth of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland is significant in itself

The rise of the Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill, as the first nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland, is an indication of how the region's political landscape is changing. If the Sinn Fein, which began as the political arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), was on the fringes for decades, it is now a powerful political force in Northern Ireland (part of the U.K.) and the Republic of Ireland (an independent country and European Union member). In the 2020 elections, the Sinn Fein won the largest share of votes. And in 2022, it emerged as the largest party, with 29% of the vote share, in elections in Northern Ireland, while the pro-U.K. Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) finished second with a 21.3% vote share. According to the 1998 Good Friday agreement, which ended three decades of sectarian violence known as the Troubles, Northern Ireland's government should include representatives of the largest and second largest political blocs (unionists, who are largely Protestants, as well as republican nationalists, who are mostly Catholics). After the 2022 vote, Northern Ireland saw chaos with the DUP refusing to join hands with the Sinn Fein to form the government, citing its opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol, which London had agreed on with Brussels to manage post-Brexit trade between the U.K. and the EU. The DUP alleged that the Protocol, which introduced checks on goods being transferred from Britain to the island of Ireland, weakened the union.

In a realistic assessment of the situation, the DUP decided to return to the power-sharing agreement after London agreed to reduce customs checks on the Irish border and spend some £3 billion in Northern Ireland to steady the region's finances. The Sinn Fein, which campaigned on bread and butter issues and promised to address immediate administrative challenges, is now formidable, and delaying the power-sharing agreement will not weaken the nationalists. For the Sinn Fein, which is still committed to the unification of the two Irelands, taking over the office of the First Minister is historic. Party leader Mary Lou McDonald has said that unification is now "within touching distance". It need not be so, as a majority of Northern Ireland's voters still prefer being a part of the U.K. Also, the posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister (to be held by the DUP) are technically equal. However, the symbolic value of the Sinn Fein leading the government in Northern Ireland and being the largest bloc in the Republic of Ireland amid rising economic and political discontents in the island, especially after Brexit, cannot be understated. After decades of the Troubles followed by political reconciliation, the nationalists are on the ascendant, while the unionists are on the back foot.

A critical view of the 'sanitation miracle' in rural India

In the past decade, improving sanitation coverage has been one of the key public policy miracles in India. Access to water and sanitation is Goal 6 in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals envisaged by the United Nations. Public sanitation programmes have a long history in the country, beginning with the launch of the highly subsidised Central Rural Sanitation Programme (CRSP) in 1986. The Total Sanitation Campaign in 1999 marked a shift from a high subsidy regime to a low subsidy one and a demand-driven approach. The public sanitation programme evolved as a mission in 2014 under the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G) to make India Open Defecation Free (ODF) by October 2019.

Data and behavioural patterns

According to information by the Government of India, sanitation coverage in the country improved from 39% in 2014 to 100% in 2019. Encouraged by the achievements under the SBM, the government launched Phase II of the SBM-G. The focus here was on the sustainability of initial achievements by promoting solid and liquid waste management and covering those households left out earlier. The government aims to transform India from ODF to ODF Plus by 2024-25. Around 85% of villages in India have become ODF Plus, according to government data. Nevertheless, this impressive performance also needs to be viewed from the perspective of behavioural change, which will usher in sustainability in a true sense.

The construction of toilets does not automatically lead to their use. A National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) survey (69th round), showed that in 2012, when 59% of rural households had no access to a toilet, 4% of individuals who had access reported not using the facility. The primary reasons for not using one were: not having any superstructure (21%); the facility malfunctioning (22%); the facility being unhygienic/unclean (20%), and personal reasons (23%).

A survey conducted by us in 2018, covering the best and worst covered districts and blocks of three States, showed that 59% of households in Bihar, 66% in Gujarat and 76% in Telangana had toilet access. Among those having access, 38% of households in Bihar, 50% in Gujarat and 14% in Telangana had at least one member who did not use it. A higher non-use of toilets in Gujarat was due to a lack of access to water in Dahod district, one of the two districts selected from the State.

In another study by us in 2020, we observed that 27% of households in survey villages in Gujarat and 61% in West Bengal did not have their own toilets. Moreover, around 3% of households did not use their own toilets in either State.



Indranil De

is Professor, Institute of Rural Management, Anand, Gujarat

One-fourth of non-user households in Gujarat did not cite any specific reason for not using it. Social norms of purity may have dissuaded them from using the toilet. Quality issues were also another major reason. In Gujarat, 17% of those not using toilets reported that the sub-structure had collapsed, and 50% reported that the pits were full. One-third of non-users in West Bengal reported that the superstructure had collapsed, and another one third reported the pit being full. Toilets not used for defecation are used as storerooms. If social norms prevent toilet use on the premises, the facility is used for bathing and washing clothes.

The variations across surveys of the percentage of households having access to toilets and their use are due to the selection of different districts. The more comprehensive National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS)- Round-3 (2019-20), conducted by the Ministry, shows that 95% of the rural population had toilet access in India. Access to owned, shared, and public toilets was available to 79%, 14% and 1% of households, respectively. It was also reported that 96% of toilets were functional, and almost all had access to water. However, the same report suggests that only 85% of the rural population used safe, functional, and hygienic toilets. Assuming that the same percentage of people have toilet access as the households, the gap rises to 10% between access to toilets and their use.

These surveys throw up two major issues – the left-out households and toilets unused for defecation. The left-out households appear substantial and need to be covered in Phase II. On the other hand, the government should identify the shortcomings of the previous phase and cover the gaps in the present phase.

Household size, social norms

Our econometric models show that along with economic conditions and education, toilet use depends on household size. The higher the household size, the greater the chances of not using the toilet. Overcrowding and social norms prevent all household members from using the same toilet. Our survey of 2020 shows that only 3%-4% of households have more than one toilet. Further, the chances of using a toilet are reduced if access to water is difficult. Toilet use is found to be very high in remote and backward villages if households have doorstep access to water. The chances of toilet use are also reduced if a household has a detached bathroom.

Phase II of the programme does not have any criteria mandating multiple toilets for households larger than a certain size. Neither does it have any provision for building an attached bathroom. The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) programme was launched to provide tap water to each household by 2024.

The government needs to identify the shortcomings in the existing programme if it wants to transform India from open defecation free to open defecation free-plus status by 2024-25

An Uttar Pradesh model to tackle malnutrition

Uttar Pradesh is a remarkable example of the importance of women's empowerment in tackling malnutrition by supporting community-based micro enterprises led by self-help groups. These enterprises produce fortified and nutritious foods for pregnant/breastfeeding mothers and children, provided as take home ration through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme.

In 2020, the Department of Women and Child Development and the Uttar Pradesh State Rural Livelihood Mission collaborated to set up a decentralised production of take home rations by women's enterprises. The model involves the production of different variants for ICDS beneficiaries. This is done by a 20-member women group that uses automated equipment with a capacity of five metric tonnes per day. Once the rations are delivered to Anganwadi centres by the women's groups, the women are reimbursed according to ICDS cost norms. The feasibility of this model was demonstrated by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) by using two pilot plants in Unnao and Fatehpur in 2021.

After positive feedback and commitment from the Government of Uttar Pradesh, this project expanded to 202 production units across 43 districts in just over two years. This has created livelihood opportunities for 4,080 women, reaching 12 million ICDS beneficiaries.

Women's empowerment for nutrition

Engaging women from the community to run the take home ration production units is a game-changer. This unique gender-transformative approach provides livelihood opportunities to local women, empowering them economically. Over 4,000 women have organised themselves into 204 self-help group micro enterprises across 204 blocks in 43 districts. They have been provided with machinery and raw materials such as wheat at subsidised rates to produce and



Manoj Kumar Singh

is Agriculture Production Commissioner, Government of Uttar Pradesh



Elisabeth Faure

is the Country Director, United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP), in India

Community-based micro enterprises, led by women's self-help groups, produce fortified and nutritious foods as take home ration through the Integrated Child Development Services programme

distribute take home ration. This project presents an excellent opportunity for them to earn a livelihood and contribute to the local economy as several ingredients are procured locally.

In the past, Uttar Pradesh followed a centralised model to produce and distribute take home rations, where private companies were awarded tenders. However, with the government shifting to a de-centralised model, women from self-help groups are responsible for preparing specific caloric values ration and its supply. The aim is to generate an additional income of ₹8,000 a month for each woman.

The Department of Women and Child Development has also used the opportunity to re-formulate the take home ration – it is nutritious with the inclusion of high-quality milk powder, oil, vitamins and minerals, which can help to support the health and well-being of children and prevent malnutrition. Different formulations were designed for different groups to address the monotony issue, and the packaging was reworked to reflect a sense of quality and create demand in the community. National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories-accredited laboratories test the products before dispatch to Anganwadi centres to certify the requisite calorie and protein values and ensure food safety.

Strengthening demand

The WFP has collaborated with the Department of Women and Child Development to enhance the nutritional value and utilisation of supplementary nutrition provided through the ICDS scheme in the State. The focus has been on making the take home ration products more nutritious and diverse to increase consumption. This has been achieved through a validated process that improves existing products and develops new products under ICDS norms and global guidelines.

To ensure good uptake of the variety of products developed, there was research which

Nevertheless, no relation has been observed between per capita central expenses made on the JJM and the percentage of villages declared ODF Plus across States. Neither is there any relation between the percentage of ODF Plus villages in a State and households having tap connections.

Social norms that act through social networks play a significant role in toilet construction and use. Examining the networks through which others influence people for their sanitation behaviour, we observed that the size and characteristics of these networks can be different in various parts of the country. In one of the upper caste-dominated villages, lower castes were found to have high brokerage (ability to connect others) to make social norms acceptable and enforceable. Many networks pass through high brokerage nodes, making associated individuals highly connected. Hence, sanitation decisions are less likely to be taken independently. On the contrary, sanitation networks in upper caste villages are more cohesive, smaller and diverse.

Sanitation behaviour also varies across socio-economic classes. NARSS-3 finds that access to toilets was highest for upper castes (97%) and lowest for Scheduled Castes (95%). Our multi-State study finds that the percentage of non-users is higher among upper castes than backward castes. Hence, sanitation behavioural change campaigns should consider two steps: construction and use. Further, the variation in networks between villages should be considered in campaign design as in some villages, behavioural change of households can happen independently, and collectively in others. Phase II of the SBM-G does not seem to have given enough thought to social engineering through the social networks in a society haunted by regressive norms and caste hierarchy.

Lack of synergy

Around 10 crore toilets were constructed between 2014 and 2019 during the initial phase of the SBM-G. The spurt in coverage has also triggered awareness regarding safe sanitation practices. However, collective behavioural change in the nation has still to take place. Our studies suggest that behavioural change in sanitation cannot happen independently. It is contingent upon social networks and an overall improvement of living standards, including better housing and access to basic services. There are separate programmes for each of these basic needs, but they are not well coordinated. The lack of overall planning in India has led to a lack of synergy of programmes despite high levels of expenditure in fulfilling basic needs. Uncoordinated efforts would lead to an inefficient utilisation of precious public finances.

included production trials, shelf-life analysis, and an acceptability study. The products include sweet and savoury options, such as *aata besan halwa*, *aata besan barfi*, *daliya moong dal khichdi*, and energy-dense *halwa*. Ready-to-eat meals come in age-appropriate colour-coded packaging that includes helpful information on infant and young child feeding practices. The packaging label also lists the ingredients, nutritional information, cooking instructions, directions for storage, food safety and hygiene messages, manufacturing dates, and batch numbers. All these aspects have been included in alignment with the regulations set by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

Fostering innovation and sustainability

An app-based solution is being developed to build the capacities of women to produce take home rations. To improve the viability of the production units, women will receive training to develop nutritious products for the local market. They will use the same units they use to produce take home rations, which will enhance their income, improve the revenue of the take home ration units, and ensure the availability of nutritious food in local markets.

A pilot project is being implemented to strengthen the supply chain and track home rations using QR codes during delivery. The WFP supports this project and will enable government officials to track the Take home ration production, delivery status, and value chain.

The State-wide expansion of micro-enterprises led by women who produce take home rations for supplementary nutrition confirms successful targeting and demonstrates how empowering women can bring about effective and sustainable processes that help improve long-term nutrition in a community. This also highlights the significance of a multi-stakeholder approach towards technically sound and comprehensive solutions that are scalable by leveraging the strengths of the community.

that enable one to clarify, affirm, reignite, explore and develop commitment to shape a future where millions more autonomous young people can thrive.

Anthony Joseph,

New Delhi

Ennore gas leak

Revenue officials of the Chennai Corporation such as licence inspectors play a vital role in identifying such

R. Solairaj,

Chennai

firms and factories (Chennai, February 5).

These inspectors must have thorough knowledge of the area they are working in, which would include the identification of hazardous materials. The health department must also be involved in safety operations for swift action in a mishap.

R. Solairaj,

Chennai

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Old school

Bharat Ratna L.K. Advani is a patriarch of the BJP who managed to bring in a degree of moderation in the party from the extreme position he himself had led in the first place in the 1990s. The mellowing of Hindutva under Mr. Advani was received well by a nation that had entered an era of economic growth. In time as

party hardliners sought to reclaim its original forte of Hindutva, the strident denigration of opponents and self-promotion saw Mr. Advani being openly uncomfortable with the aligning of his style with the dominant mode. In his much quoted blog, he had said, "those who disagree with us are not our enemies". Today's leadership may well

find Mr. Advani's postulates effete, but before long it must realise the worth of his old school wisdom.

R. Narayanan,

Navi Mumbai

Micro-credentials

Valorising micro-credentials (Editorial page, February 5) in higher education for employability is at best a procrustean view of sharing and learning. Myopic skills

and competencies are all too evident, in the exacerbation of an individualism increasingly disconnected from society. The purported demand for 'skills over degrees' appears to be yet another opportunity for the spawning and grooming of regimented citizens for a preferred future. Higher education would do well to help learners discover tools

that enable one to clarify, affirm, reignite, explore and develop commitment to shape a future where millions more autonomous young people can thrive.

Anthony Joseph,

New Delhi

Ennore gas leak

Revenue officials of the Chennai Corporation such as licence inspectors play a vital role in identifying such

The road to a healthy democracy

The prospect of elevating India to the status of a developed nation by 2047, the 100th year of its Independence, is captivating. This vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) has never been as achievable as it is today. Today, India is taking a quantum leap in every sector. There has been a massive expansion in social and economic infrastructure, a boost to entrepreneurship, rural transformation, and a manifold increase in the number of universities and colleges. Chandrayaan has set a new milestone in science and technology and our digital public infrastructure, from Aadhaar to UPI, is the envy of the world. This does not just narrate a story of self-reliance but also showcases to the world what India can do. The Viksit Bharat Mission embodies the spirit of progress and development, aiming to transform our nation into a powerhouse of innovation, economic strength, and social prosperity. Central to this mission is the well-being of our citizens and identifying ways to bring health equity for all. It is in the realm of healthcare that we find the foundation for a healthier, more resilient, and productive society. Over the past two decades, we have emerged as a hub of medical innovation and talent. The explosive evolution of Indian healthcare is a testament to the transformative role the sector can play in our quest for a developed nation and the time to expand its contributions is now.



Prathap C. Reddy

is founder and chairman, Apollo Hospitals Group

and a substantially high economic burden. India bears the dubious distinction of being the diabetes capital with 101 million diabetics and 136 million with prediabetes. Cardiovascular diseases top the mortality charts, and cancer incidence is projected to rise by 57.5% by 2040. Trends over the past decade also indicate a reduction in the average age of people impacted by chronic diseases. It is important to prioritise preventive healthcare to avoid the onset of chronic diseases and equip every individual with the knowledge and action they need to stay one step ahead of it. With technological innovations, scientific research, and a growing understanding of risk factors, preventive healthcare has touched new possibilities. Based on their family history, current lifestyle, genomics data and more, today an individual has the power to know what they are possibly at risk for well in advance and take the steps to reverse its onset. Artificial Intelligence (AI), too, is playing a transformative role in preventive healthcare, from risk stratification, early detection, to creation of personalised prevention plans with targeted behaviour interventions. We need to work towards ensuring every individual has access to necessary preventive care tools that gives them control of their own health. Healthcare professionals, too, should advocate for preventive measures and encourage timely interventions and modifications to their patients at every juncture.

Leading the world by example India's healthcare sector is at the cusp of transformation, potentially giving rise to a new healthcare model for the world to follow. We have already proven our clinical excellence and prowess with success rates that surpass global benchmarks. We are pioneers in redefining healthcare delivery, with the patient at the absolute centre. The effective integration of AI and Machine Learning (ML) is further fuelling the emergence of

these new care models that take care to the patient, enhance their access to services, and ensure a step change in quality of care. Instead of merely expanding hospital capacity, healthcare providers in this new model are expanding patient touch points, ranging from neighbourhood facilities and clinics to every individual's mobile device and wearable. While this will help boost access and reduce the cost of care for every Indian, it also sets an example for the world to follow in the type of health care service every individual deserves. India is also globally famed for a world class healthcare infrastructure and incredible clinical talent that delivers the best in clinical outcomes at scale and at a fraction of the global cost – approximately one-tenth. This establishes India's healthcare industry as a global leader in infrastructure, technology, specialist doctors, and nursing professionals. With patients from over 145 countries choosing India for their treatments, we have emerged as a medical value travel hub, particularly in the highly specialised areas of oncology, cardiology, orthopaedics, transplants, and robotic surgeries. A significant milestone has also been the introduction of Proton Beam Therapy technology, making India a regional leader in cancer treatment. Medical value travel can play a strategic role in creating employment, earning foreign exchange, and bolstering India's position in the global competency scale. India stands at a pivotal moment in its healthcare journey. By re-imagining our healthcare model, we can position ourselves as the global destination for medical value travel, a powerhouse in AI-driven healthcare solutions, and a leader in combating non-communicable diseases. For this to be truly India's century, every individual and institution in the country should resolve to make India's progress their priority.

It is in the realm of healthcare that we find the foundation for a healthier, more resilient, and productive society

Advantage and challenge India's biggest advantage is its demographic dividend. With a population of over 1.4 billion, India is one of the youngest nations with a median age of 29 years. This is an enormous opportunity, likely to last till 2047. Using this dividend well, we can propel India into a Viksit Bharat. Having said that, if this population is not healthy, we are potentially looking at reduced productivity

A protest and a predicament

While the LDF is set to stage a protest in Delhi, the UDF finds itself in a tight spot

STATE OF PLAY

Tiki Rajwi
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In India, Centre-State relations have often been characterised by friction. Yet, it is not often that a State government decides to descend in full strength in New Delhi, alleging unfair treatment at the hands of the Union government. The decision by Kerala's Pinarayi Vijayan-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) government to take its running battle against the "crippling" policies of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government at the Centre and its "neglect" towards the State all the way to Jantar Mantar, a place in New Delhi often used for protests, is significant on several levels. The protest is being held just a few months before the Lok Sabha elections. Mr. Vijayan has announced that he will be leading his Cabinet colleagues and elected representatives in the high-profile protest. To add more firepower, the Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led LDF has also invited Chief Ministers and senior leaders of non-BJP States to join the event. While the impact of this strategy on the flagging INDIA alliance at the national level remains to be seen, the Congress-led Opposition in the State, the United Democratic Front (UDF), has refused to join the protest. Financial relations between the BJP-led Union government and the CPI(M)-led LDF regime in Kerala have been far from friendly in recent years. Kerala has repeatedly accused the Centre of being motivated by political considerations in punishing it where it hurts the most, namely, the the money

belt. It blames the Centre for cutting off crucial revenue inflow to a trickle, forcing the State to rely more and more on its own meagre resources. The Kerala Finance Minister, K.N. Balagopal, a vocal critic of Union fiscal policies, alleges that Kerala was deprived of ₹57,400 crore in Central transfers and loan approvals just this year. The LDF government had moved the Supreme Court last December, charging the Centre with interfering in its finances and trimming its borrowing limit. Politically, the CPI(M) hopes to cement its position as a prime mover in the anti-BJP alliance at the national level through the protest. On the fiscal front, the Left has singled out the BJP-led Union government as the source of Kerala's current worries. The LDF has built a narrative around the charge that the Centre has imposed a "financial embargo-like situation" on Kerala. While presenting the 2024-25 State Budget, Mr. Balagopal also mentioned a "Plan B" to preserve the momentum of developmental programmes while "retaining the values of the Kerala Model of development," if the "neglect" persists. But the UDF, while critical of New Delhi's policies, considers them to be only one part of the reason. It believes that Kerala's financial troubles primarily stem from mismanagement and wasteful spend-

Higher autonomy of panchayats leads to better health outcomes

Panchayats which have a better say over power, people, and money also feature high on health, nutrition and sanitation scores

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

The Data Point published on Monday had highlighted how panchayats earn only 1% of their income through taxes, with the rest being sourced from Central and State grants. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) study, based on which the report was written, had called for greater autonomy for panchayats and empowerment of local leaders. This Data Point aims to show that greater autonomy of panchayats results in better governance and leads to superior outcomes. Panchayats collaborate with health departments to maintain clinics and dispensaries in rural areas. By encouraging institutional deliveries and ensuring prenatal and postnatal check ups, they help reduce maternal and infant mortality rates (IMR). They also provide clean water and sanitation facilities. All these help improve health outcomes. The RBI study uses two datasets to show that panchayats which scored high on the health, nutrition, and sanitation parameters also had lower rural IMRs. **Chart 1** shows the State-wise average of panchayat-level health, nutrition, and sanitation scores calculated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) on the vertical axis. The scores of all the panchayats in a State were averaged to present the State's overall score on these parameters. On the horizontal axis, the IMR of the State is presented. Both data were for 2018-19. In general, as shown by the trend line, the higher the score on health, nutrition, and sanitation parameters, the lower the IMR. Major States including Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir (before it became a Union Territory), Karnataka, Maharashtra, and West Bengal all feature on the top left. That is, they have a high score and

a low IMR. Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh can be seen on the bottom right – they have a low score and a high IMR. Given that panchayats play a vital role in health management and as Chart 1 shows that some States outperform others, **Chart 2** checks whether these better-performing States also have greater autonomy at the panchayat level. For this, the RBI study uses the devolution index prepared by MoPR using independent agencies. The devolution index rates a State based on three parameters. First, the transfer of subjects, that is, how many functions including drinking water, rural housing, family welfare, and women and child development are under the control of panchayats. Second, transfer of functionaries, that is, how many positions were filled by panchayats on their own. Third, transfer of finances, that is, what share of funds are raised by panchayats on their own and what share can they spend based on their decisions. These three and some other categories are used to calculate the devolution index. **Chart 2** plots the States' devolution index on the horizontal axis. The States on the right – Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu – have higher devolution scores. The States on the left – Assam, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand – have lower devolution scores. Chart 1 and 2 when read together shows that panchayat autonomy plays a vital role in better health outcomes in rural areas. **Map 3** which shows the percentage shortfall of primary health facilities in rural areas also concurs with this conclusion as States which perform better on the index have a surplus, with a few exceptions. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal have very high levels of shortage. On the other hand, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Himachal have none.

More freedom at the grassroots

The charts are based on data collated from the RBI report titled, 'Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions'



Chart 1: The chart shows the State/UT-wise avg. of panchayat-level health, nutrition and sanitation scores (vertical axis) and infant mortality rate (horizontal axis)

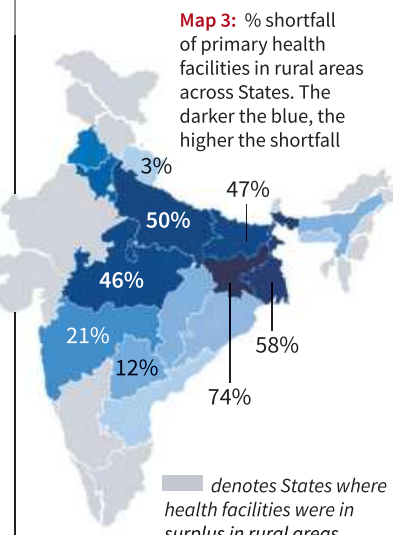
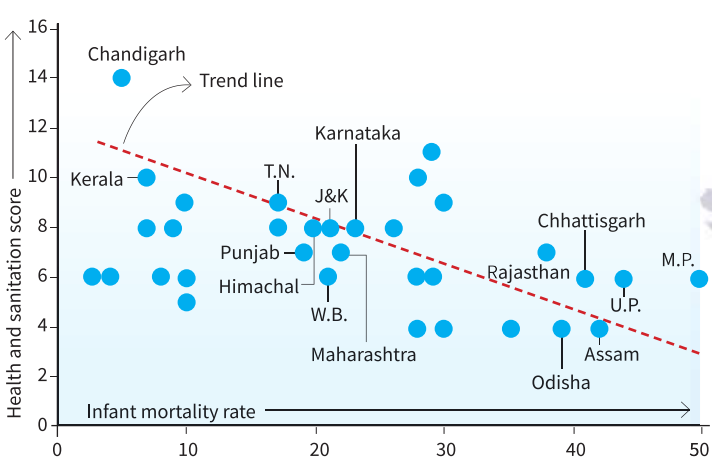
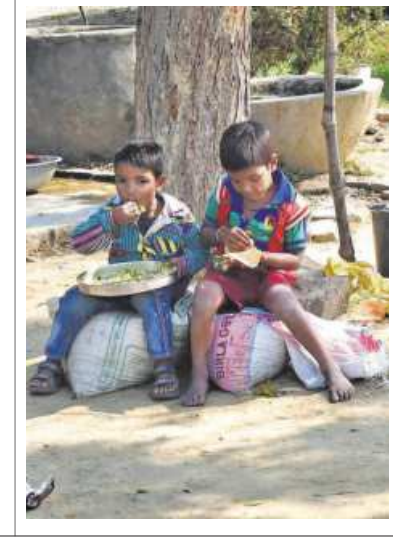
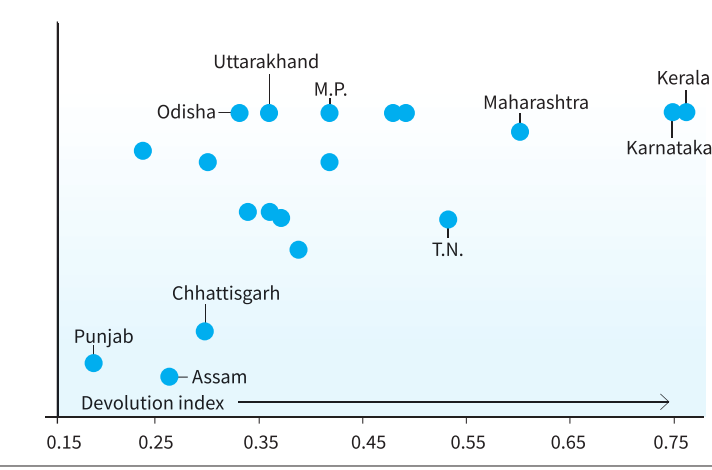


Chart 2: The chart shows the devolution index calculated by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, across States



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 6, 1974

U.K. court says Ugandans have no right of entry

London, Feb 5: Three Appeal Court judges ruled yesterday that Britain is not bound under international law to receive "British protected" persons expelled from Uganda, reports DPA. Lord Denning commented on the status of people from British Protectorates: "They were said to be British nationals, but they were not British subjects. They were not born here. They have never lived here. They live thousands of miles away in countries which had no connection with England except that they were once British Protectorates." Posing the question whether by international law everyone has the right, if expelled, to come into these small islands, Lord Denning said: "Surely not. This country would not have room for them for they came, not in single file, but in battalions." Lord Denning said that mass expulsions had never before come within the knowledge of international law. And he did not think there was any rule which affected the issue. The rules of international law, he said, only became part of English law in so far as these had been accepted and adopted by England. The court dismissed an appeal by Mr. Pravinlul Amanhi Thakrar against a decision of Queen's Bench Divisional Court last October that the Home Office had acted unfairly in banning him from entry to the U.K. Mr. Thakrar, who was born in Uganda of Indian parents, had been expelled among thousands by "the sword of General Amin." He had been detained since an immigration officer at the Heathrow Airport refused him admission.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 6, 1924

Bombay labour situation

Bombay, Feb 5: Mill strike situation today is practically unchanged. In pursuance of a notice extending the lock-out period to 15th instant which was put up last week all mills were closed this morning. Strikers today have been peaceful, thanks to the excellent security arrangements. Armed mounted police have been stationed today at Currey Road Bridge which was the storm centre yesterday. Local labour leaders are eagerly awaiting final decision of the Millowners Association.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The number of tax evasion cases from April-December 2023

14,597 GST officers are using data analytics and artificial intelligence tools to identify risky taxpayers suspected of availing fake input tax credits, Minister of State for Finance informed Parliament. PTI

The rise in mustard crop acreage in the Rabi season of 2023-24

5 in percentage. Mustard crop acreage is estimated to have risen to over 100 lakh hectares in the rabi season of the 2023-24 crop year, according to Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA). Last year, the acreage was estimated as 95.76 lakh hectares. PTI

The number of Asiatic lions that died in the last five years

555 The Union Minister of State for Environment Ashwini Kumar Choubey informed Parliament that 113 lions died in 2019, 124 in 2020, 105 in 2021, 110 in 2022 and 103 in 2023. Gujarat's Gir forest is the only natural habitat of the Asiatic lion. PTI

The number of antiquities returned to India since 2014

344 A total of 115 antiquities were returned to India in 2023, Union Minister of Culture G. Kishan Reddy said. In the last five years, 262 such items were repatriated from the U.S, 15 from the U.K., 35 from Australia and one from Italy. PTI

Amount collected as penalty for delay in PAN-Aadhaar linking

600 in ₹ crore. Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary informed that as on January 29, 2024, about 11.48 crore PAN cards are still not linked with Aadhaar. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Myanmar's civil war and India's interests

While security agencies will constantly evaluate the modalities of engaging with armed groups on India's borders, there is a need to scale up humanitarian and development assistance in coordination with a broader spectrum of ethnic organisations and local people to expedite Indian investments in the region

WORLD INSIGHT

Sanjay Pulipaka

In February 2021, when the Myanmar military leaders ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, they anticipated a resistance movement that would subside in a few months. Three years later, the opposition to military rule gains in strength. Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the People's Defence Forces control many towns in different parts of the country. A few weeks ago, the Arakan Army captured Paletwa in the Chin State which lies on Myanmar's western borders with Bangladesh and India.

A conflict within a conflict
The fall of the town of Paletwa has altered the dynamic between the Chin and the Arakan ethnic groups. A majority of Paletwa's residents belong to the Chin ethnic community, and they see their town as an integral part of their homeland. On the other hand, some in the Rakhine State, previously known as Arakan, contend that the township was historically part of the Arakan Hill Tracts during colonial rule and should have been part of their province. There have been instances, prior to the coup, when Chin ethnic organisations expressed displeasure with the Arakan Army's operations in Paletwa.

In the recent past, ever since the Chin armed groups and the Arakan army have been fighting the Myanmar military, they have refrained from forcefully ascertaining their respective views of provincial borders. Nonetheless, to maintain peace and order, it is imperative that the Chin and Arakan groups agree on an inclusive framework for the governance of Paletwa and adjoining areas. For an effective fight against the military, the EAOs need to improve inter-ethnic solidarity by creatively accommodating each other's perspectives on ethnic boundaries. Finding an inter-ethnic compromise on settlements such as Paletwa can be particularly challenging. Paletwa's location on the western border makes it a good launchpad for the Arakan Army to conduct its operations against the military. Paletwa is a commercial town on the Kaladan River, and therefore, any armed group with a significant presence in the town would benefit from the economic activity in the region.

India's stake

The developments in Paletwa will also impact the Indian government's Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTP) in Myanmar, which has already faced significant delays. The Kaladan project was aimed at addressing the geo-economic and geo-political challenges of northeast India. The partition of the subcontinent and the subsequent hardening of borders converted northeast India into a landlocked region. Transporting goods to and from northeast India via the narrow Siliguri corridor is an expensive affair, and in a worst-case scenario with China, there is a possibility of movement along the corridor being adversely affected. Therefore, the Kaladan project was conceptualised as an alternative route that gives northeast India access to the sea.

India and Myanmar signed the framework agreement on the Kaladan project in 2008. The operationalisation of the project was delayed because of rugged terrain, inadequate inter-departmental coordination, political instability and security challenges in



Across borders: A bullet, allegedly shot from Myanmar during fighting between Myanmar security forces and Arakan Army, in Bangladesh, on February 5. AP

Myanmar. While the Sittwe port and inland water terminal at Paletwa have been completed in the past few years, road construction is facing challenges due to the prevailing security situation in Myanmar. For expeditious implementation, the attitudes of the local ethnic organisations towards the Kaladan project should be factored in. The people of Mizoram and their co-ethnics across the border in Chin State are interested in the expedited completion of the Kaladan project, as it will spur economic activity in the region.

However, there is a perception in India that the Arakan Army is not favourably disposed to the Kaladan project. Prior to the coup, numerous reports indicated that India and Myanmar have launched coordinated operations against Arakan Army units that were operating close to India's borders near Mizoram and threatening the Kaladan project. In 2019, five Indian workers working on the project were kidnapped, reportedly by the Arakan Army. While all the workers were released, one Indian national died in the custody of kidnapers due to a cardiac arrest.

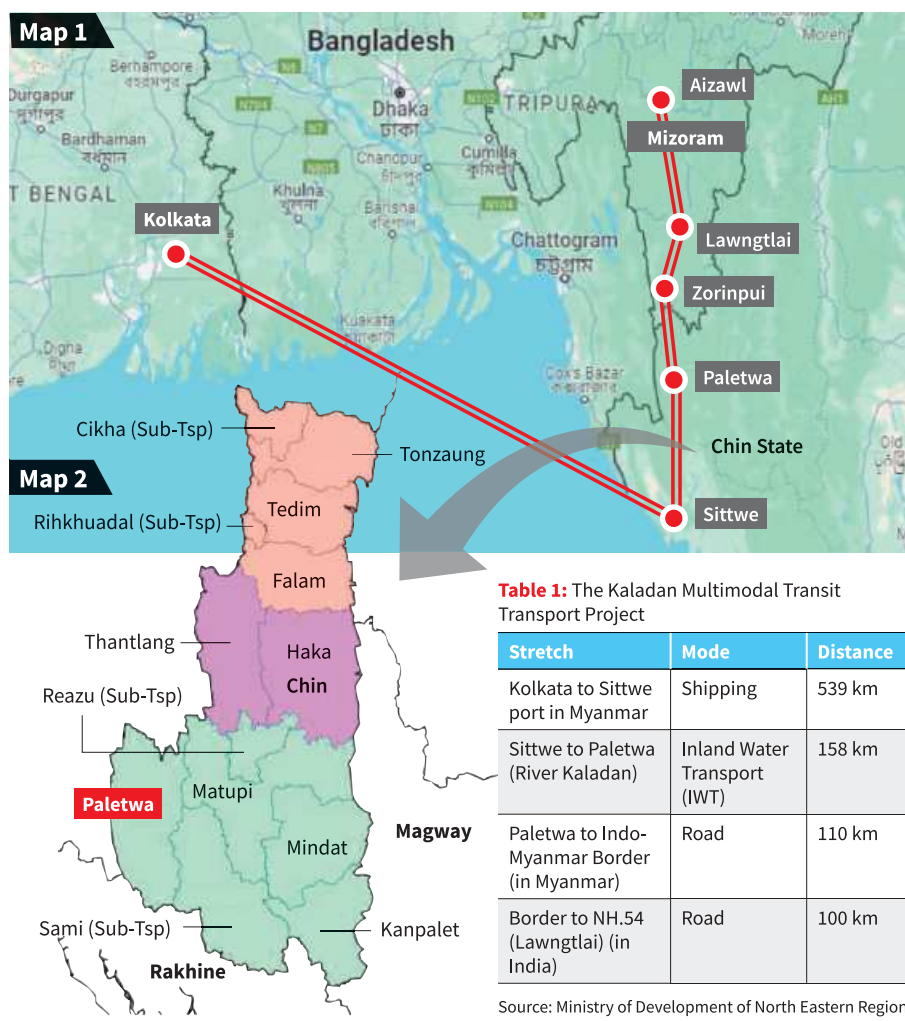
China's investments in the region
The Arakan Army, along with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, is part of the Three Brotherhood alliance, which some claim has China's support. The alliance has pledged to protect Chinese investments in Myanmar. There are reports which suggest that the Arakan Army receives considerable funding and military equipment from China. If such reports are true, there will be concerns in Delhi that Beijing is using armed groups to slow down India's connectivity projects in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, the Chinese economic presence along Myanmar's Bay of Bengal coast has substantially increased. Beijing has operationalised oil and natural gas pipelines from the Shwe gas fields near Kyaukpyu in the Rakhine State to Yunnan province in China. Two months ago, China signed supplementary agreements with the Myanmar military to operationalise the deep sea port and a special economic zone near Kyaukpyu. Reportedly, there were renewed efforts to construct a railway line from China's Yunnan to Kyaukpyu via Mandalay as part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).

Unlike India, China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, which prompts many state and non-state actors in need of international support to be relatively more

Myanmar's border State and India's strategic interests

Map 1 shows the route of India's proposed Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, with Map 2 showing Chin State where current tensions are playing out. Chin State abuts Mizoram and Manipur in India. Table 1 outlines details of the Kaladan project



accommodating of China's concerns. Consequently, China is in a position to extend political and military support to various ethnic armed groups as well as to the Myanmar military to protect its economic interests.

There are important takeaways from the progress of the Kaladan project. Since India is a liberal democracy, its external engagement will be closely monitored for its impact on sectarian/identity-based violence in its neighbourhood. While security agencies will constantly evaluate the modalities of engaging with armed groups on India's borders, there is a need to scale up humanitarian and development assistance in coordination with a broader spectrum of ethnic organisations and local people to expedite

projects such as Kaladan.

The successful completion of the Kaladan not only requires competent technical personnel but also experts who can diligently monitor the fluid Chin-Arakan ethnic relations, the changing contours of military-EAO contestation, sectarian violence in the Rakhine state, and the growing Chinese footprint in Myanmar, specifically in the Rakhine state. The Kaladan experience suggests that perhaps it is time to bring such experts under one roof to expedite the implementation of various other connectivity and development assistance projects in India's immediate neighbourhood.

Sanjay Pulipaka is the Chairperson of Politeia Research Foundation

THE GIST

Ethnic Armed Organisations and the People's Defence Forces control many towns in different parts of Myanmar. A few weeks ago, the Arakan Army captured Paletwa in the Chin State which lies on Myanmar's western borders with Bangladesh and India.

The developments in Paletwa will impact the Indian government's Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTP) in Myanmar, which has already faced significant delays. The Kaladan project was aimed at addressing the geo-economic and geo-political challenges of northeast India.

The Arakan Army, along with the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, is part of the Three Brotherhood alliance, which some claim has China's support.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Do exams throttle India's education system?

One big function of exams is to create an illusion of equal opportunity in an otherwise highly unequal society. It is in the exam that all children — no matter what their background is — face the same test of three hours

G. Ananthkrishnan

As exam season approaches, this interview by G. Ananthkrishnan, with Krishna Kumar and Rohit Dhankar, from June 14, 2019, talks about India's education system and how exams are not a benchmark of a student's potential. Edited excerpts:

The importance accorded to school-leaving examinations in India puts enormous pressure on students to score the highest possible marks. But how scientific is the examination system at determining the progress of students? In a conversation moderated by G. Ananthkrishnan, Krishna Kumar, former director, National Council of Educational Research and Training and Rohit Dhankar, Professor of Philosophy of Education at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, talk about the education system.

The school-leaving exam is a defining one in the life of a student. What outcomes do these exams actually achieve?

Krishna Kumar: This examination system is something that reminds us of the beginnings of the modern education system in India. The school-leaving examination was designed in the latter half of the 19th century as a way to determine who can be selected for further education, which was very scarce at that time, and also for lower-level jobs in offices. It was basically a means of elimination. And it has remained that all the way up to now. The Grade 10 exam, for instance, fails a large number of children and stops them from going any further. This is a kind of structural arrangement in a system in which secondary education is not very widespread and higher secondary education is even less so. Opportunities for further education at the undergraduate level or various kinds of technical education are also relatively scarce.

So, the exam system acts as a custodian which doesn't permit a vast number of children to go forward. It has acquired its legitimacy over the century, and therefore it is not questioned, but it has very little scientific basis, and it is not a system of any kind of valid assessment of the potential of a young person. Rather, it is a means of keeping out [children]. In what manner can you be stopped from going further? Grade 10 is the most draconian barrier. Grade 12 also fails a large number of children.

That is one function of the examination system. The other big function is to create an illusion of equal opportunity in an otherwise highly unequal society. It is in the exam that all children — no matter what their background is, or whether they study in a posh school or a poor school — face the same test of three hours. Their names are turned into roll numbers. The identity of paper-setters and evaluators is not revealed. Thus, confidentiality enhances the legitimacy of a situation where children from contrasting circumstances are given an equal-looking opportunity.

Rohit Dhankar: I agree. The problem is well-known for quite some time. The first mention of the educational system being throttled by exams was in 1904 in



GETTY IMAGES

the Indian Educational Policy, at the time formulated by the Governor General in Council. After that this was mentioned in every commission and report. They always try to say exams should be reformed and something should be done about it. As far as reliability of children's understanding, acquiring knowledge and ways of formulating knowledge are concerned, I don't think the examination system leaves much scope. Children do acquire snippets of information, but whether they construct that into knowledge remains seriously doubtful. I feel that this is also an outcome of intense competition in society. As long as the school structure and the structure of the curriculum remain as it is today, where every child has to finish certain kinds of learning in a given time, and at the same time the possibility of children exploring on their own is limited, it seems that the exam system cannot be changed.

If one changes these two things — the structure of the school and the curriculum — and somehow an alternative way is found which ameliorates the high competition in the parents' mind, there is a possibility of reforming the system in such a manner that it is more insightful

and less stressful.

How does India's exam system compare with the systems of other countries?

KK: Our system compares very poorly with the evaluation and assessment systems which are in place in other societies, including European and North American societies as well as China. These societies have reformed their evaluation systems from within by improving teachers' understanding of what they are looking for in a child right from the start. In our case, we don't equip our teachers with a deep understanding of how children learn and how to assess a child's growth. Our system right from the beginning becomes intensely competitive and stressful and starts promoting cramming as a way to move forward with high marks.

A recent attempt made in the Right to Education (RTE) Act to introduce Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) was an important step but this was not welcomed by a large number of schools and State authorities. And the idea that the RTE introduced — that we will not have a Board examination

up to Grade 8 — has now been amended by Parliament. States are now once again free to introduce a Board exam. Some have already moved towards that by reintroducing at Grade 5 and Grade 8 levels an exam that can classify children into pass and fail categories. This was the old system. This reversal of a progressive step that the RTE had taken also shows how accustomed our system is to this old and rigid practice of examining children one against the other.

In comparison, European systems, including the British system on which we were modelled originally, have moved on to far more holistic and humanistic ways of assessing each child's own growth trajectory right from the beginning. Even where there are public exams, they are taken with much greater care for objectivity and justice for every child.

In the draft National Education Policy 2019, there is an idea that we can shift to modular exams rather than one single exam. Is this actual reform?

KK: This idea has been given many times earlier. And the National Institute of Open Schooling does provide the facility for taking one subject at a time, when completing your examination process over three-four years if necessary. I don't think this idea is going to make any impact on this very highly competitive system.

In fact, the draft policy has ignored a number of very good reforms within the various Boards that have been recommended over the last 20-25 years. Many of the Boards don't have adequate staff, enough academic faculty to monitor their own procedures. Many of the State Boards are actually in very poor shape as far as their academic infrastructure is concerned. Even the CBSE and ICSE operate as bureaucratic, mechanical set-ups. Unfortunately, the policy draft doesn't even look at this phenomenon of improving the institutional functioning of the Boards.

RD: Exam reform doesn't come alone in the draft education policy; it comes along with the changes recommended in structure, curriculum, choice of subjects. A lot is written about curriculum reform. At this moment, in the first reading, it was somewhat confused, and talks of too many things simultaneously and repetitively. For example, if we give more flexibility to children at the secondary level [it proposes to do away with secondary-senior secondary distinction] with eight semesters and around 40 courses, for 24 courses students should take Board exams. With how much understanding I don't know, but they also say the exam will shift from testing rote memory to basic concepts and their relevance to life, situations and problem-solving. If the bulk of the recommendations are implemented, then there seems to be a possibility that we will get a kinder and better assessment system.

But I must point out that on the curricular reforms to the subjects, for example, there are 14 or 15 different kinds of courses and subjects for 6th to 8th standard students, but there doesn't seem to be that much room in the time table. So, at this moment it seems the situation is not very clear. However, as far as examinations are concerned, if the policy understands what they are writing, the emphasis is more on the fundamental concepts in subjects and more on understanding. Through a modular kind of Board exam, it might help. But then this comes along with a whole bunch of recommendations, and piecemeal implementation is not going to help.

Krishna Kumar is a former director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training. Rohit Dhankar is Professor of Philosophy of Education at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Mr. R. Balamurugan, Thillainagar, Thanjavur, wants to know the meaning of the prefix 'tele'."

"Tele' in Greek means 'distant'. 'Telephone' means 'distant sound'. 'Phone' means 'sound'. 'Telephone' is an instrument by means of which you can hear what is said at a distance. Some other words with the prefix 'tele' are television, telegraph, telemeter, telecommunication, telecast, teleprompter, teleprinter, telescope, telepathy..."

"Mr. N. R. Raghavan, Trustpakkam, Mandaveli, Madras, wants to know the meaning of 'customer-oriented'."

"'Oriented' means 'directed towards'. 'Customer-oriented' means 'directed towards customers'. A customer-oriented organisation is one that aims at satisfying its customers."

The course is a teacher-oriented one. 'Orientated' is also used and is acceptable.

This book seems to be teacher-oriented. I am interested in one that is learner-oriented.

"Ms. P. Sylvester Rex, St. Theresa's Girls Higher Secondary School, Thiruthuraiipoondi, wants to know which of the following is correct: (a) He is taller than me (b) He is taller than I."

"Both are correct. 'He is taller than me' is used in informal contexts. 'He is taller than I' is used in formal contexts. 'He is taller than I' is absolutely grammatical. The full form is 'He is older than I (am)'. But we omit the verb after 'I'. Who is it? It is me. Here also even though grammar demands the use of 'I', we don't say 'It is I'. But when 'It is' is followed by a clause, we can use 'I' or 'me' depending on the context. In formal contexts, we say 'I' and in informal contexts 'me'."

It was I who did it.
It was me who did it.

"Mr. T. Krishnarao, Palavancha, Khammam district, wants to know the meaning of the sentence 'He is a rogue of the first water'."

"'Of the first water' means 'of the finest quality or extreme degree'. This is an idiom. 'He is a rogue of the first water' means 'He is one of the worst rogues'. The idiom can be used with good and bad things."

These are pearls of the first water.

He is a violinist of the first water.

He committed a blunder of the first water.

She is a liar of the first water.
A fine diamond is a diamond of the first water. The colour or brightness of a diamond is called its water. From this, we get the expression 'of the first water'."

"Ms. S. S. Panigrahi, Berhampur, wants to know whether 'compare' can be used as a noun."

"'Compare' is used as a noun in literary language. It means 'comparison'. It is usually preceded by 'beyond' or 'without'."

It is beautiful beyond compare.

It means that it is extraordinarily beautiful; there is nothing like it."

Published in The Hindu on January 1, 1991.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Today marks the 48th death anniversary of one of India's well known film directors, Ritwik Ghatak. Here is a quiz on his works

Srinivasan Ramani

QUESTION 1

One of Ritwik Ghatak's most well known films, it inspired similar films in other languages, such as K. Balachander's *Arangetram* in Tamil. Name the film.

QUESTION 2

The film in question 1 was part of a trilogy that dealt with the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal and how the refugees coped with it. Name the other two films by Ghatak.

QUESTION 3

Name the well known film by

Ghatak that one will immediately associate the phrase, "pathetic fallacy" with. Also what does the phrase mean?

QUESTION 4

Officially produced by Habibur Rahman Khan from Bangladesh, the India-Bangladesh joint collaborative effort of a film is still listed among the best Bangladeshi films ever made, and Ghatak won the Best Director award from Bangladesh Cine Journalists' Association for the film. Name the film.

QUESTION 5

Name the Hindi film, scripted by Ghatak, which marked the directorial debut of another Hindi filmmaking legend Hrishikesh Mukherjee.



Visual question:

Name the two actors in this image taken from Ghatak's most well known film.

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

- Ronaldo was named after which famous world leader. **Ans: Ronald Reagan**
 - The nationality of Ronaldo and the club under which he made his professional debut in 2003. **Ans: Portugal and Sporting Clube de Portugal**
 - The common factor connecting Ronaldo, David Beckham, Eric Cantona, Bryan Robson, and George Best. **Ans: They have all sported the #7 shirt at Manchester United**
 - The two major tournament titles that Ronaldo won with the senior Portugal side. **Ans: UEFA European Championship in 2016 and the UEFA Nations League in 2019**
 - In 2009, Ronaldo moved to Real Madrid in a deal that had this much money involved. **Ans: €94 million**
 - The Bs in the striking trio nicknamed BBC at Real Madrid. **Ans: Bale and Benzema**
 - Ronaldo finished as second-best to this player for the Ballon d'Or in 2018. **Ans: Luka Modric**
- Visual: The nickname given to this famous celebration. **Ans: The 'Siuu' celebration**
- Early Birds:** Nikhil S.B. | K.N. Viswanathan | Akshat Tiwari | Vineet Giri | Vinod Chandra Raiguni

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

Word of the day

Gratuitous:

without cause; costing nothing; unnecessary and unwarranted

Synonyms: free, complimentary, costless, uncalled-for, needless

Usage: *That film has gratuitous violence.*

Pronunciation: bit.ly/gratuitouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /gəˈtʃuː.ti.əs/

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

KYIV

Zelenskyy signals shake-up of Ukraine's military leadership



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he is thinking about dismissing the country's top military officer Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi as part of a broader leadership shake-up, a possibility that has shocked the nation fighting a war to end Russia's invasion and also worried Ukraine's Western allies. AP

GAZA STRIP

UN agency says Israeli naval fire hit food convoy intended for Gaza



The United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees said on Monday that a Gaza food convoy was struck by the Israeli Navy, which controls the waters off the territory. "This morning a food convoy waiting to move into northern Gaza was hit by Israeli naval gunfire," UNRWA's Gaza chief Thomas White wrote on X. AFP

BEIRUT

Six Kurds killed in drone attack on Syrian base housing U.S. troops



A drone attack on a base housing U.S. troops in eastern Syria killed six allied Kurdish fighters late on Sunday, in the first significant attack in Syria or Iraq since the U.S. launched retaliatory strikes over the weekend against Iran-backed militias. The attack had hit a training ground at al-Omar base in Deir el-Zour. AP

TEHRAN

'Will not hesitate' to respond to U.S. attack on its territory, says Iran



Iran said on Monday it "will not hesitate" to respond in the event of U.S. attacks on its territory after the White House declined to say whether strikes on Iran were ruled out. White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said Sunday the U.S. will press on with its retaliation against Iran-backed groups in Iraq and Syria. AFP

Myanmar forces flee into Bangladesh after clashes

A Bangladesh official says 95 members of Myanmar's Border Guard Police have fled their posts; ethnic rebels, who launched an offensive in Oct., have gained strategic territory in the northeast

Associated Press
DHAKA

Nearly a hundred members of Myanmar's Border Guard Police have fled their posts and taken shelter in Bangladesh during fighting between Myanmar security forces and an ethnic minority army, an official of Bangladesh's border agency said Monday.

Shariful Islam, spokesperson for Border Guard Bangladesh, said by phone that the Myanmar forces entered Bangladesh over last two days to escape fighting with the Arakan Army in Myanmar's Rakhine state bordering Bangladesh.

They entered Bangladesh through the Tombru border in Bandarban dis-



Pit stop: Members of the Myanmar Border Guard Police, in civilian clothes, sit under trees in Ghumdhum in Bangladesh on Monday. AP

trict, the spokesperson said.

"In total 95, Myanmar troops are there now," he said. "They have been disarmed and taken to safe places."

Since Saturday, gunshots could be heard com-

ing from the Myanmar side of the border.

The Arakan Army is the well-trained military wing of the Rakhine ethnic minority seeking autonomy from the central government and has been attacking Army outposts in the

western state since mid-November.

It is part of an alliance of ethnic minority Armies that launched an offensive in late October, gaining strategic territory in the country's northeast bordering China.

Its success was widely seen as a major defeat for the military government, which seized power in February 2021 from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi and is now embroiled in a wide-ranging civil war.

The alliance, called the Three Brotherhood Alliance, said in a statement on Monday that the Arakan Army had attacked two border outposts in Maungdaw township in Rakhine state and captured one of them on Sunday.

Maldives President Muizzu vows to boost defences after telling Indian troops to leave

Agence France-Presse
MALÉ

The small but strategically placed Maldives will strengthen its military to defend its vast maritime territory, the new President vowed on Monday after ordering Indian troops to withdraw from the archipelago.

Mohamed Muizzu said in his first address to Parliament he would turn the modest Maldivian National Defence Force (MNDF) into a modern military capable of patrolling its seas, which straddle key global shipping lanes.

The leader reiterated that India will begin withdrawing its troops operating three maritime reconnaissance aircraft from March 10 and complete the process within two months.



Mohamed Muizzu

New Delhi considers the Indian Ocean archipelago to be within its sphere of influence.

However, the Maldives has shifted into the orbit of China - its largest external creditor - with September's election of Mr. Muizzu, who demanded the Indian troops leave.

"I believe that the modern military capability to defend the country by road, sea and air should be strengthened in the Mal-

dives," Mr. Muizzu said. "We have started to do that now."

He said the MNDF will soon be able to conduct surveillance of the country's 9,00,000 square-km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the clock.

Charges against India

The Maldives accused India's coastguard last week of entering the north of its EEZ and intimidating three Maldivian fishing vessels.

Mr. Muizzu said he had told India he would not extend a 2019 agreement to jointly carry out hydrographic surveying of the nation's 1,192 coral islands.

He did not identify India specifically but said he did not want to give "a foreign nation the power to measure and map the Maldivian oceans and coastlines".

Australian gets suspended death penalty in China

Associated Press
BEIJING

A Chinese court gave a suspended death sentence to a China-born Australian democracy blogger on Monday.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years.

"The Australian Government is appalled," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said.

Mr. Yang, a former Chinese diplomat who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained in 2019, when he arrived in Guangzhou from New York.

King Charles receiving treatment for cancer in U.K.

Associated Press
LONDON

King Charles III has been diagnosed with a form of cancer and has begun treatment, Buckingham Palace said on Monday.

Less than 18 months into his reign he will suspend public duties but will continue with state business, and won't be handing over his constitutional roles as head of state.

The Buckingham Palace said the cancer is not related to the king's recent treatment for a benign prostate condition. It did not say what form of cancer the 75-year-old monarch has.

Call for polls



Protesters in Senegal demonstrate after the police fired tear gas shells outside the General Assembly in Dakar on Sunday. Opposition members held a rally outside Parliament before the start of a contentious debate on postponing this month's presidential election. AFP

Taylor Swift wins album of the year at the Grammys for fourth time, sets record

Associated Press
LOS ANGELES

Taylor Swift won album of the year at the Grammy Awards for *Midnights*, breaking the record for most wins in the category with four.

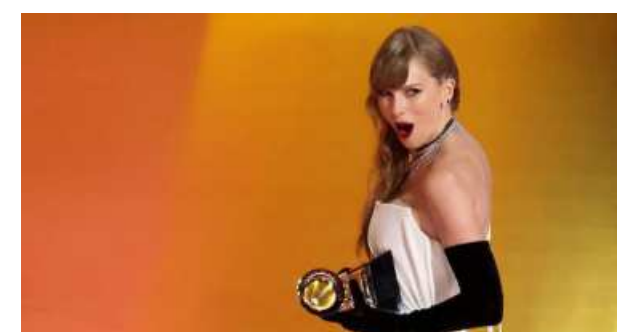
She began her speech by thanking her producer and friend Jack Antonoff and added, "I would love to tell you this is the happiest moment of my life," she told the crowd, but said she feels this happy when she creates music and plays shows.

Earlier in the night, Taylor Swift used her 13th Grammy win on Sunday to announce her new album, *The Tortured Poets Department*, will arrive April 19.

"I know that the way that the Recording Academy voted is a direct reflection of the passion of the fans," she said while accepting the best pop vocal album award. "So, I want to say thank you to the fans by telling you a secret that I've been keeping from you for the last two years."

One of the night's biggest awards, record of the year, went to Miley Cyrus for *Flowers*, her second-ever Grammy and second of the night. "This award is amazing. But I really hope that it does not change anything because my life was beautiful yesterday," she said in her speech.

Victoria Monét won best new artist. "Thank you to the champagne-servers tonight," Monét began her acceptance speech. "Thanks to my mom, a single mom raising this really



Crowning moment: Taylor Swift wins the award for Best Pop Vocal Album at the 66th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. REUTERS

bad girl." Then she started to cry, telling the room that this award was "15 years in the making."

Billie Eilish won song of the year for writing the *Barbie* hit, *What Was I Made For?* She thanked director Greta Gerwig for "making the best movie of the year."

It was just one of several standout moments from Sunday's show, hosted by Trevor Noah and broadcast live from Crypto.com Arena in downtown Los Angeles.

Karol G made Grammy history on Sunday by becoming the first female performer to win best música urbana album for her blockbuster *Mañana Será Bonito* record.

"This is my first time at the Grammys," she told the audience in English. "And this is my first time holding my own Grammy."

Multiple performances Performances were many. Olivia Rodrigo brought her bloodsucking ballad *vampire* - or in this case, bloodletting, as red liquid dripped from the walls behind her. Joni Mitchell, 80,

made Grammy history by performing *Both Sides Now* from her 1969 album *Clouds*; Travis Scott did a medley of *My Eyes, I Know?*, and *Fein*. Burna Boy was joined by Brandy and 21 Savage and did *On Form, City Boys, and Sittin' on Top of the World*.

In memoriam A long and touching In Memoriam segment celebrated many of the musical greats lost last year. Stevie Wonder performed *For Once in My Life* and *The Best Is Yet To Come* in honor of Tony Bennett;

Luke Combs' delivered a heartfelt rendition of "Fast Car" with Tracy Chapman - his cover of the Chapman classic has dominated country radio and won him song of the year at the 2023 CMAs. In 1989 the song won Chapman best female pop vocal performance.

Jay-Z was awarded the Dr. Dre Global Impact Award and used his speech to talk about the hip-hop greats that came before him - and heavily suggesting at the Grammys history of placing rap on the backburner.

Irish, U.K. leaders in Belfast to celebrate the end of Northern Ireland's political deadlock

Associated Press
LONDON

The leaders of the U.K. and Ireland went to Belfast on Monday to meet Northern Ireland's newly revived government and bask in a good-news moment after two years of political crisis.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Irish counterpart Leo Varadkar visited the new administration at Belfast's Stormont Castle as its ministers met for the first time. The Ministers wasted no time before pressing London for more money to patch up Northern Ireland's creaking public services.

Northern Ireland As-



Common ground: Rishi Sunak, right, shakes hands with Northern Ireland's First Minister Michelle O'Neill in Belfast on Monday. AP

sembly appointed a power-sharing government on Saturday after a two-year hiatus sparked when the main British unionist party walked out in February 2022.

The Democratic Unionist Party boycotted the administration to protest post-Brexit trading arrangements that it said undermined Northern Ireland's place in the U.K. The party

was coaxed into returning last week after the U.K. promised to eliminate most checks on goods moving to Northern Ireland.

Under power-sharing rules established as part of Northern Ireland's peace process, the administration in Belfast must include both British unionists and Irish nationalists. The U.K. and the Republic of Ireland both have roles as guarantors of the peace.

The new administration is led by First Minister Michelle O'Neill of Sinn Fein, the party allied with the Irish Republican Army during Northern Ireland's decades of violence known as

"The Troubles." Her appointment was historic, marking the first time an Irish nationalist, who aspires to take Northern Ireland out of the U.K. and unite it with the republic, has held the post.

Mr. Sunak said on Monday that "everyone's priority" was getting the government back up and running. "It is not constitutional change, it is delivering on the day-to-day things that matter to people," he said.

Mr. Varadkar, whose government in principle supports a united Ireland, also said the question of reunification was "not for today."



Fancy setup: A member of the teamLab during the reopening of their Borderless museum in Tokyo. REUTERS

Cascading light and 'wobbling' orbs at Tokyo art museum

Agence France-Presse
TOKYO

It's immersive, interactive and, of course, Instagrammable – and now the digital art of Japanese collective teamLab, a major tourist draw, has a new home in the country's tallest skyscraper.

A shifting vortex of spotlights and a mirror room filled with ethereal "wobbling" orbs are among the brand-new artworks at the "teamLab Borderless" permanent exhibition, which opens on Friday. They join dozens of other mesmerising displays, from waterfalls of light to birds leaving colourful trails as they dart by, in a labyrinthine display at the 330-metre Azabudai Hills building in central Tokyo.

"Our goal is to touch people, and to prompt them to reflect on life and the world in a more positive way," Toshiyuki Inoko, director of the internationally renowned teamLab collective, said. "Our work is the continuation of our past endeavours, but offers a whole new experience at the same time."

Visitors to the attraction at Azabudai Hills, which has towered over central Tokyo since its completion last year, are free to wander through the complex of artworks. Some displays move from room to room, and others react to visitors' movements, with petals scattering as they approach and fluid lights rippling at their feet. The exhibition has more than 50 artworks featuring a mix of natural and otherworldly motifs, from slow-blooming flowers to a vast room of cables through which digital light appears to rain down.

Two sentences in U.S. Constitution that rose from obscurity to ensnare Trump

Before the attack on Capitol, Section 3 had not been used in court for over 100 years; on Thursday, the Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments over whether Trump can remain on the ballot in Colorado, whose highest court ruled that he had violated a constitutional provision

Agence France-Presse
DENVER

In the summer of 2020, Gerard Magliocca, like many during the coronavirus pandemic, found himself stuck inside with time on his hands.

A law professor at Indiana University, Magliocca figured he would research the history of two long-neglected sentences in the Constitution's 14th Amendment. Dating to the period just after the Civil War, they prohibit those who "engaged in insurrection or rebellion" from holding office.

On January 6, 2021, after then-President Donald Trump's supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol to try to block certification of his loss to Joe Biden, Mr. Magliocca watched as Republicans such as Sens. Mitch McConnell and Mitt Romney described the attack as an "insurrection."

That night, Mr. Magliocca composed a quick post on a legal blog: "Section Three of the Fourteenth Amendment," he wrote, "might apply to President Trump."

Just over four years later, the U.S. Supreme Court will have to determine whether it does. On Thursday, the nation's highest court is scheduled to hear arguments over whether Mr. Trump can remain on



Back in courtroom: Attorney Eric Olson, far right, argues before the Colorado Supreme Court for a lawsuit to keep former President Donald Trump off the state ballot in Denver. FILE PHOTO

the ballot in Colorado, where the state's Supreme Court ruled that he violated Section 3.

It's the first time the Supreme Court has heard a case on Section 3, which was used to keep former Confederates from holding government offices after the amendment's 1868 adoption. It fell into disuse after Congress granted an amnesty to most ex-rebels in 1872. Before the attack on the Capitol, even many constitutional lawyers rarely thought about Section 3. It hadn't been used in court for more than 100 years. Its revival is due to an unlikely combination of Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conser-

vatives, all rediscovering 111 words in the nation's foundational legal document that have now become a threat to the former president's attempt to return to office.

In the days after January 6, Section 3 started its slow emergence from obscurity.

Free Speech For People, a Massachusetts-based liberal nonprofit, sent letters to top election officials in all 50 states in June 2021, warning them not to place Mr. Trump on the ballot should he run again in 2024.

In January 2022, Free Speech For People filed a complaint in North Carolina to disqualify Republican Rep. Madison Cawthorn

under Section 3. That same month, the group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics, also known as CREW, decided to test Section 3 in court. "It wasn't just Trump we were focused on," chief counsel Donald Sherman said.

On September 6, 2022, a New Mexico judge ordered Couy Griffin, a rural New Mexico county commissioner convicted of illegally entering the Capitol on January 6, removed from his position after CREW filed against him. It was the first time in more than 100 years an official had been removed under Section 3.

Mr. Trump announced his campaign for president two months later.

Both Free Speech For People and CREW began scouring state ballot laws, looking for places that allowed the rapid contesting of a candidacy. CREW settled on Colorado.

Mr. Sherman and another CREW attorney, Nikhel Sus, contacted Martha Tierney, a veteran election lawyer who also served as general counsel of the state Democratic Party.

Ms. Tierney wasn't acting as the Democratic Party's lawyer, but CREW wanted to balance its team. Mr. Sherman contacted Mario Nicolais, a former Republican election lawyer who had left the party over Trump. Mr. Nicolais' first interaction with Sherman was a direct message about the case on X. Mr. Nicolais thought it could be from a crank.

On September 6, 2023 – one year from the disqualification of Griffin – their 105-page complaint was filed in district court in Denver.

Mr. Trump hired former Colorado Secretary of State Scott Gessler to represent him. The Denver judge who got CREW's complaint, Sarah Block Wallace, said she was obligated to hold a hearing under state election law.

During the five-day hearing, two officers who defended the Capitol testified, along with a Universi-

ty of California professor who was an expert in right-wing extremism, two Trump aides and several other witnesses. One was Mr. Magliocca.

Mr. Trump's attorneys were pessimistic, expecting Wallace, who had a history of donating to Democrats, to rule against them. Trump spokesman Jason Miller addressed presspersons outside court, complaining that the plaintiffs had intentionally filed in a liberal jurisdiction in a blue state.

Ms. Wallace issued her decision on November 17. She found that Mr. Trump had "engaged in insurrection" but ruled that it wasn't certain that the authors of the 14th Amendment meant it to apply to the President. Section 3 refers to "elector of President and Vice President," but not the office itself.

CREW was just a legal sliver away from victory. It just needed the Colorado Supreme Court to uphold all of Wallace's ruling besides the technicality of whether the president was covered.

On December 19, the court announced it would issue its decision that afternoon – ruling 4-3 that Trump was disqualified. The decision was put on hold, pending the outcome of the case that will be argued Thursday.

Opposition protest outside Senegal Parliament ahead of poll postponement debate

Agence France-Presse
DAKAR

Security forces used tear gas to disperse an Opposition rally outside Senegal's Parliament on Monday, shortly before the start of a contentious debate on postponing this month's presidential election.

Several dozen protesters could be heard chanting "Macky Sall dictator" referring to the incumbent President after being scattered by security forces.

Senegal has been grappling with a political crisis since President Macky Sall on Saturday announced a delay to the February 25 presidential poll, just hours before campaigning was set to officially begin.

Opposition leaders have denounced the move as a "constitutional coup", saying it is an assault on democracy.

It is the first time since independence that a presidential vote has been postponed in Senegal

Access to mobile internet was cut in several districts of the capital Dakar on Monday. The government also suspended mobile data last June amid high tensions in the country. The measure has become a common response to curb mobilisation and communication via social networks.

It comes a day after violent street protests shook Dakar, during which security forces also fired tear gas at demonstrators and at least one senior opposition figure was arrested.

The situation has sparked growing international concern, with the

United States, European Union and former colonial ruler France all appealing for the vote to be rescheduled as soon as possible.

From 11:00 am (1100 GMT), lawmakers are set to vote on a proposal to postpone the presidential poll for up to six months.

The text will need the support of three-fifths of the 165 deputies to pass and does not appear to be a done deal.

Opposition figures had called for a demonstration outside the National Assembly, which is heavily protected by dozens of police officers and security forces backed up by heavy vehicles.

It is the first time since independence in 1963 that a presidential vote has been postponed in Senegal, one of the few African countries never to have experienced a coup.

High notes



Crane melody: Swiss artist Alain Roche plays the piano hanging from a crane during a concert in Munich, Germany. REUTERS

State of emergency declared in S. California

Agence France-Presse
LOS ANGELES

Swaths of the U.S. state of California were flooded on Monday and hundreds of thousands of people were without power after a dangerous storm brought heavy rains and prompted a state of emergency.

"This is a serious storm with dangerous and potentially life-threatening impacts," said Governor Gavin Newsom as he declared the state of emergency for eight counties in Southern California.

Affected areas include Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego and Santa Barbara. Nearly 7,000,000 customers were without power early Monday morning, according to the electricity supply tracker PowerOutage.us. Dozens of flights in and out of Los Angeles airport were delayed or cancelled, according to flightaware.com.

The National Weather Service (NWS) had earlier issued a warning that a "strong Pacific storm system would bring impactful and dangerous flooding rains, heavy snow, strong winds, and high surf to California." "Heavy rainfall will bring the threat for life-threatening flash, urban, and river flooding."

The storm, packing gusts of 60 miles per hour or greater, is part of a "Pineapple Express", a weather phenomenon that grows in Hawaii from near where the tropical moisture is coming.

The NWS described it as "the largest storm of the season".

While wet weather is not unusual during California's winters, scientists say human-caused climate change is altering the planet's weather patterns.

The Pakistani women who are barred from voting by their husbands

Agence France-Presse
DHURNAL

Perched on her traditional charpai bed, Naem Kausir says she would like to vote in Pakistan's upcoming election – if only the men in her family would let her.

Like all the women in her town, the 60-year-old former headmistress and her seven daughters are forbidden from voting by their male elders.

"Whether by her husband, father, son or brother, a woman is forced. She lacks the autonomy to make decisions independently," said Ms. Kausir. "These men lack the courage to grant women their rights," the widow said.

Although voting is a constitutional right for all adults in Pakistan, some rural areas in the socially conservative country are still ruled by a patriarchal system of male village elders who wield significant influence in their communities.

'Myriad reasons'
In the village of Dhurnal in Punjab men profess myriad reasons for the ban of more than 50 years.

"Several years ago, during a period of low literacy rates, a council chairman decreed that if men went out to vote, and women followed suit, who would manage the household and childcare responsibilities?" said Malik Muhammad, a member of the village council. "This disruption, just for one vote, was deemed unnecessary," he concluded.



Societal hindrance: Robina Kausi in Dhurnal of Punjab province, ahead of the upcoming general elections. AFP

Muhammad Aslam, a shopkeeper, claims it is to protect women from "local hostilities" about politics, including a distant occasion that few seem to remember in the village when an argument broke out at a polling station.

Others said it was simply down to "tradition".

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has stressed that it has the authority to declare the process null and void in any constituency where women are barred from participating. In reality, progress has been slow.

In the mountainous region of Kohistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, religious clerics last month decreed it un-Islamic for women to take part in electoral campaigns.

Fatima Tu Zara Butt, a legal expert and a women's rights activist, said women are allowed to vote in Islam, but that religion is often exploited or misunderstood in Pakistan.

Pakistan famously elected the world's first Muslim woman leader in 1988 – Benazir Bhutto, who introduced policies that boosted education and access to money for women, and fought against religious extremism after military dictator Zia ul-Haq had introduced a new era of Islamisation that rolled back women's rights.

However, more than 30 years later, only 355 women are competing for national assembly seats in Thursday's election, compared to 6,094 men, the ECP has said.

Pakistan reserves 60 of the 342 National Assembly seats for women and 10 for religious minorities in the

Muslim-majority country, but political parties rarely allow women to contest outside of this quota.

Robina Kausir, a healthcare worker, said a growing number of women in Dhurnal want to exercise their right to vote but they fear backlash from the community if they do – particularly the looming threat of divorce, a matter of great shame in Pakistani culture.

Matter of fear
"These men instil fear in their women - many threaten their wives," she said.

Ms. Robina, backed by her husband, is one of the few prepared to take the risk.

IN BRIEF



LIC unveils Index Plus, offers life cover, savings for plan term

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) has introduced LIC Index Plus, a unit linked, regular premium, individual life cover policy. The product, available for purchase from February 6, offers life insurance and savings through the plan term. The policy features include guaranteed additions as a percentage of annualised premium to the unit fund on completion of a specific duration of policy years under an in-force policy which will be utilised to purchase units, LIC said.

Aurobindo Pharma U.S. arm to sell business assets for \$52 mn

Eugia US Manufacturing LLC, a wholly owned step-down subsidiary of Aurobindo Pharma, has entered into agreement with Empower Clinic Services New Jersey, LLC to dispose its business assets in a more than \$52-million deal. Under the asset purchase agreement, the company is disposing of business assets as a going concern, with related assets and liabilities and employees, since capacities and operations are being ramped up in other units of the company.

Anarock raises ₹200 cr. from 360 One Asset Management

Anarock, a real estate consultancy, has announced an investment of ₹200 crore from 360 ONE Asset Management Ltd. (earlier known as IIFL Asset Management) (360 ONE Asset). This investment will enable it to enhance its technology infrastructure, accelerate expansion, and introduce new innovations to bolster its leadership position in the Indian real estate services space, the company said in a statement issued on Monday.

Chola Financial Holdings Q3 net rises 43%

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Cholamandalam Financial Holdings Ltd., reported consolidated Q3 net profit and total income rose 43% to ₹1,027 crore and ₹6,842 crore respectively, the core investment company of the Murugappa group said in a statement.

Cholamandalam Investment & Finance Co. Ltd., disbursed ₹22,383 crore against ₹17,559 crore and net profit grew 28% to ₹876 crore. Assets under management grew 36% to ₹1,41,143 crore.

Cholamandalam MS General Insurance Co. Ltd., net profit rose 340%.

Bharti misses Q3 net estimate as costs rise

Reuters
BENGALURU

Bharti Airtel reported third-quarter profit below estimates on Monday, as flat tariffs and higher costs outweighed growth in subscribers.

The telecom operator reported a consolidated net profit of ₹24.42 billion for the quarter ended December 31, compared with analysts' estimate of ₹28.69 billion as per LSEG data.

Rival Reliance Jio's market share was at 39.49% as of November 30 and Bharti had a 32.91% share, while Vodafone Idea trailed with 19.44%, according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

Bharti said its 4G/5G

'States welcome private investors, but resist disinvestment'

DIPAM Secretary says States have a lukewarm response to disinvestment of PSUs while welcoming private investments through large summits

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

Some State governments tend to have a "duality" in their approach towards the strategic disinvestment of public sector enterprises even as they go all out to attract private investors by holding large investment summits with offers of land parcels and myriad sops, a top Finance Ministry official flagged on Monday.

The comments assume significance, coming a month after the Centre was compelled to drop a plan to privatise the Salem Steel Plant, a unit of SAIL, due to lack of bidder interest in the absence of co-operation from the Tamil Nadu government, which didn't even enable potential bidders to enter the plant and assess its worth.

"State governments, in general, have a very lukewarm response to strategic disinvestment," Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey told *The Hindu*. "I think we need to engage more proactively with them. In general, if we are really saying that we are encouraging private sector participation, I think to that extent, there is a little bit of duality in the process there," he added.

Differences in approach

Centre's nudge to States in 2020-21 to disinvest was discontinued as the idea did not find many takers, says DIPAM secretary

- Proposed divestment of SAIL's Salem unit was shelved after TN government failed to facilitate potential bidders' entry into plant
- He says disinvestment of some Central PSUs was delayed due to delays by States in notifying changes to the Indian Stamp Act
- This proved to be a "bottleneck" in the case of the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) and Air India building, he adds



Pointing to the several investment summits held by State governments, Mr. Pandey said that a lot of MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) are signed in those summits, primarily with the private sector.

Pushback

"But then when it comes to privatisation or strategic disinvestment (of public sector enterprises in these States), there is a pushback. So both these things don't gel," the Secretary emphasised. "To do such transactions, you need a lot of patience and perseverance, as well as co-operation from multiple stakeholders," he said.

While the Centre had incentivised State governments to undertake disinvestment of their public sector enterprises in the Union Budget of 2020-21, the nudge was discontinued in the next Budget as

the idea did not find many takers. In some States, the disinvestment of Central PSUs has got delayed due to delays in notifying changes to the Indian Stamp Act that were cleared by the Centre to facilitate demerger of assets.

This proved to be a "bottleneck" in the case of Shipping Corporation of India, where land assets are being hived off into a separate entity, and the Air India Building in Mumbai, which was demerged before the airline's sale to the Tata group.

"We have sorted out this issue recently with Maharashtra... The States have to take cognizance of the Stamp Act changes and notify it for their collectors to follow. So this, we have to pursue with different State governments, be it West Bengal or Tamil Nadu, wherever the assets are," Mr. Pandey said.

FM seeks ₹78,673 cr. added funds for FY24

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Monday sought Parliament's nod for a net additional spending of ₹78,673 crore in the current financial year, including a sum of ₹10,798 crore in expenditure towards MGNREGA.

Second batch of supplementary demands for grants for 2023-24, tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also provides for additional spending of ₹9,231 crore and ₹3,000 crore towards food and fertiliser subsidies, respectively.

Demands for grants include gross additional

Supplementary demands for grants include ₹10,798 crore in expenditure towards MGNREGA

spending of more than ₹2 lakh crore, to be matched by savings of over ₹1.21 lakh crore.

The proposal involves net cash outgo aggregating ₹78,672.92 crore, the Centre said in Parliament.

The Interim Budget for 2024-25 pegged govt.'s total expenditure in the current fiscal at ₹44.90 lakh crore, up 7.1% from FY23.

Other spending include ₹9,162 crore for defence.

Hyundai said to mull \$3 billion India IPO

Reuters
MUMBAI

South Korea's Hyundai Motor is exploring an initial public offering (IPO) for its Indian unit to raise at least \$3 billion, two sources familiar with the matter said.

Hyundai Motor India Limited (HML) is in early stage talks for an IPO later this year that could value it at \$25 billion-\$30 billion, the sources said.

While Hyundai's plan for an IPO later this year is not finalised, it could potentially be the country's biggest stock market offering, the sources said.

The company is exploring "value unlocking for its



India business" through the IPO, the sources said.

A spokesperson at Hyundai's India unit declined to comment. Hyundai, India's second-largest carmaker by sales, has said it plans to invest \$2.45 billion in the country for its electrification push with plans to introduce new EVs, charging stations and a battery pack assembly unit.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	MONDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	71,731	-0.49
US Dollar	83.03	-0.06
Gold	63,350	-0.47
Brent oil	76.78	---

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	3173.45	16.00
Adani Ports	1258.55	-2.90
Apollo Hosp.	6234.50	-86.05
Asian Paints	2917.35	-18.95
Axis Bank	1061.50	-5.55
Bajaj Auto	7658.25	-79.95
Bajaj Finserv	1614.90	-36.60
Bajaj Finance	6608.20	-240.10
Bharti Airtel	1113.55	-37.25
BPL	574.75	16.40
Britannia Ind.	5124.50	-24.35
Cipla	1433.90	41.25
Coal India	440.25	20.45
Divis Lab	3699.50	0.10
Dr Reddys Lab	6094.45	54.95
Eicher Motors	3889.95	64.40
Grasim Ind.	2089.75	-49.70
HCL Tech	1555.35	-24.30
HDFC Bank	1444.85	-1.80
HDFC Life	563.35	-15.45
Hero MotoCorp	4746.65	29.35
Hindalco	579.90	-3.60
Hind Unilever	2419.50	-33.10
ICI Bank	1023.50	-4.50
IndusInd Bank	1537.80	-4.05
Infosys	1687.20	-6.15
ITC	438.05	-2.05
JSW Steel	814.65	-8.90
Kotak Bank	1808.35	-14.60
L&T	3341.75	-34.30
LTIMindtree Ltd.	5438.45	-47.40
M&M	1703.55	42.80
Maruti Suzuki	10428.55	-226.90
Nestle India	2462.70	-18.70
NTPC	336.10	3.60
ONGC	262.95	5.70
PowerGrid Corp.	282.90	5.80
Reliance Ind.	2878.05	-37.35
SBI Life	1419.85	-15.60
State Bank	642.95	-6.70
Sun Pharma	1463.80	-47.15
TataConsumerProduct	1150.75	-12.00
Tata Motors	926.80	48.05
Tata Steel	141.55	2.85
TCS	3973.30	-7.00
Tech Mahindra	1332.75	-5.35
Titan	3552.05	-60.35
UltraTech Cement	9916.35	-182.20
UPL	474.00	-59.65
Wipro	482.35	-0.80

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on February 05

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.86	83.18
Euro	89.08	89.43
British Pound	104.28	104.69
Japanese Yen (100)	55.78	56.00
Chinese Yuan	11.51	11.56
Swiss Franc	95.24	95.63
Singapore Dollar	61.56	61.80
Canadian Dollar	61.42	61.67
Malaysian Ringgit	17.42	17.51
Australian Dollar	53.85	54.06

Source: Indian Bank

Chola Financial Holdings Q3 net rises 43%

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Cholamandalam Financial Holdings Ltd., reported consolidated Q3 net profit and total income rose 43% to ₹1,027 crore and ₹6,842 crore respectively, the core investment company of the Murugappa group said in a statement.

Cholamandalam Investment & Finance Co. Ltd., disbursed ₹22,383 crore against ₹17,559 crore and net profit grew 28% to ₹876 crore. Assets under management grew 36% to ₹1,41,143 crore.

Cholamandalam MS General Insurance Co. Ltd., net profit rose 340%.

Bharti misses Q3 net estimate as costs rise

Reuters
BENGALURU

Bharti Airtel reported third-quarter profit below estimates on Monday, as flat tariffs and higher costs outweighed growth in subscribers.

The telecom operator reported a consolidated net profit of ₹24.42 billion for the quarter ended December 31, compared with analysts' estimate of ₹28.69 billion as per LSEG data.

Rival Reliance Jio's market share was at 39.49% as of November 30 and Bharti had a 32.91% share, while Vodafone Idea trailed with 19.44%, according to the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

Bharti said its 4G/5G



subscriber base rose to 244.9 million users, an increase of 13% from a year earlier and 3.1% in the preceding quarter.

Average revenue per user (ARPU), a key financial metric where Bharti leads its rivals by a wide margin, rose to ₹208, from ₹193 a year earlier and ₹203 in the last quarter. ARPU was in the range of analysts' estimates of ₹205 to ₹208.

LVB-DBS case hearing nears conclusion in Madras HC

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The final hearing that has been taking place for the past few months on a batch of pleas opposing the merger of Lakshmi Vilas Bank (LVB) with DBS Bank India in 2020, is nearing completion before the Madras High Court. The Supreme Court had, in 2022, transferred all cases filed against the merger before various High Courts, to the Madras High Court.

Senior Counsel Vijay Narayan for the RBI concluded arguments before Chief Justice Sanjay V. Gangapurwala and Justice D. Bhattacharjee.

Track, trace system roll out for drug exports delayed



Inordinate delay: The system has been in the offing for 9 years, with the DGFT in August setting a Feb. 1 target. GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

N. Ravi Kumar
HYDERABAD

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has agreed to yet another plea from drugmakers for more time to implement the Track and Trace system for export of drug formulations.

"The date for implementation of the Track and Trace system for export of drug formulations with respect to maintaining the parent-child relationship in packaging levels and its uploading on Central portal has been extended up to February 1, 2025 for both SSI and non-SSI manufactured drugs," the DGFT said in a notification recently extending the deadline by one more year.

Conceived as a mechanism to rein in the counterfeit menace and address the challenges associated with product recall, the system has been in the offing for at least nine years with DGFT in August, in the previous extension notification, setting a February 1, 2024 deadline.

The latest extension comes on the heels of a representation from the

Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India to the Commerce Department on the difficulties expressed by its member exporters with regard to implementation of track and trace and requested for extension of timelines. Pharmexcil Director General Ravi Uday Bhaskar told *The Hindu* that the request for more time was made in the light of issues with the software during a pilot project for uploading secondary and tertiary packaging data. The glitches have also been taken to the notice of C-DAC, the software developer, he said.

Lagging behind

Towards facilitating the roll out, the government has a scheme under which it provides ₹25 lakh grant, for the barcode machinery, to SSI units.

The delay in implementation continues even as drug regulators in several countries such as Uzbekistan and Nigeria either have already mandated measures or are proposing norms on the lines of the Track and Trace system for those from whom they import.

About 2.15 lakh cases pending before DRTs, says Minister Karad

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

About 2.15 lakh cases are pending before Debt Recovery Tribunals (DRTs) as on January 24, Parliament was informed on Monday.

Out of 2,15,431 cases, the Original Applications (OAs) filed under Section 19 of the Recovery of Debts and Bankruptcy Act (RDB Act), 1993, is 1,62,317 and Securitization Applications (SAs) filed under Section 17 of Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act (SARFAESI Act), 2002, is 53,114, Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat K. Karad said in a written reply to Lok Sabha.

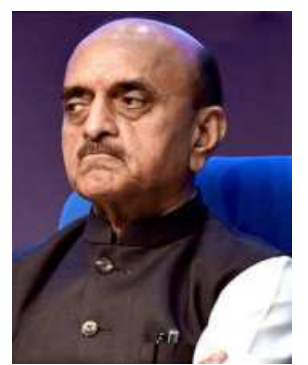
As per the Recovery of Debts and Bankruptcy (RDB) Act, cases should be dealt expeditiously and every possible effort should be made to complete the proceedings in two hearings and to dispose of the application finally within 180 days from the date of receipt of the application.

As on January 24, 2024, he said, the total number of cases which are pending for more than 180 days before the DRTs is 1,85,076.

Out of these pending cases, 1,42,187 cases are OAs and 42,889 cases are SAs, he added.

Non-compliance

Pendency of cases is analysed from time to time, he said, adding pendency of cases has been mainly on account of the strategy of litigants in the form of non-compliance with the summons issued by the DRTs, seeking intervention of the High Courts in DRT proceedings, choosing not to



Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad

appear before the Tribunal and then challenging the ex-parte orders passed against them etc. Pendency is also caused sometimes by the absence of lawyers either of one side or both sides or requesting adjournments, he said.

To reduce pendency, the government has taken a number of steps, he said.

Vacancies filled up

All vacancies of Presiding Officers (POs) except one are filled up and steps are underway to fill the said vacancy and other anticipated vacancies occurring up to September 30, 2024.

All possible steps for facilitating easy access to DRTs for litigants and advocates are also being taken such as providing video conferencing facilities for case hearings.

Replying to another question, he said ₹36.26 crore loss was recorded in the first half of 2023-24 due to financial frauds.

To help customers recover loss on account of fraudulent transactions, the Minister said the Reserve Bank of India has issued instructions on limiting the liability of customers in cases of unauthorised electronic banking transactions.

ALL Q3 net jumps 60% to ₹580 crore

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Ashok Leyland Ltd. (ALL) on Monday reported standalone third-quarter net profit jumped 60% year-on-year to ₹580 crore.

Revenue from operations rose to ₹9,273 crore from ₹9,030 crore, while costs of materials shrank to ₹6,555 crore from ₹7,203 crore. The commercial vehicle manufacturer said in a statement that despite global headwinds, it achieved export volume of 3,128 units (2,936 units). Debt was at ₹1,747 crore with debt-equity at 0.2 times (0.3 times).

In the first nine months, ALL achieved commercial vehicle sales of 1,38,416 units. In Q3, it invested ₹662



Dheeraj Hinduja

crore into Optare PLC/Switch as prospects for eLCVs and eBuses continue to strengthen.

"The present favourable market conditions are expected to hold in the foreseeable future," said Executive Chairman Dheeraj Hinduja. He added that a suite of new propulsion technologies was slated for introduction by ALL.

SFL Q3 net profit rises 24% to ₹300 cr.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Sundaram Finance Ltd. (SFL) on Monday reported third-quarter standalone net profit rose 24% year-on-year to ₹300 crore, 'despite lower-than-expected economic activity'.

Total revenue from operations increased to ₹1,346 crore, from ₹1,009 crore. Disbursements grew 15% to ₹6,524 crore. Net interest income rose 17%. Assets under management grew by 26% to ₹42,172 crore, the NBFC said.



Harsha Vijji

"Our Group companies in asset management, general insurance and home finance have continued their trajectory from FY23 and recorded strong results," said executive vice chairman, Harsha Vijji.

SFL MD Rajiv Lochan said, "Q3 activity in the automotive space was well below expectations of the festival period."

Vanguard cuts Ola's valuation '74%' to \$1.8 bn



Sliver of hope: In FY23, ANI Technologies narrowed its standalone loss by 65% to ₹1,082 crore. REUTERS

Iyoti Banthia
BENGALURU

U.S.-based asset management company (AMC) Vanguard has marked down the value of ANI Technologies, the parent company of ride-hailing platform Ola, to \$1.88 billion which is 74% lower from its peak valuation of \$7.3 billion, as per regulatory filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

Vanguard has slashed Ola's valuation for the third time in a row. In May last year, Vanguard said the company was valued at \$4.8 billion and then, again lowered Ola's valuation in August to \$3.5 billion in August 2023. The AMC lowered Ola's valuation in 2020 and 2021 too.

The Bhavish Aggarwal-led company had last raised \$139 million in December 2021 in a funding round led by Edelweiss PE that valued Ola at \$7.3 billion. In addition, several Indian consumer Internet companies have seen valuations being revised by U.S. investors in recent weeks. Funds managed by financial services giant Fidelity reduced the valuation of Meesho and Pine Labs last month.

Loss narrows

Recently, ANI Technologies narrowed its standalone loss by 65% to ₹1,082 crore in fiscal 2023. The ride-hailing platform's sales jumped 63% to ₹1,987 crore from ₹1,220 crore.

Meanwhile, Ola Electric has filed a draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) to raise up to ₹5,500 crore through a fresh issue, apart from an offer-for-sale of 95.2 million shares.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Trump adds to Nippon-U.S. Steel deal woes in major blow for Japan Inc.

The trouble in the planned purchase of the storied American firm underlines the limits of 'friendshoring', a term coined by U.S. officials to describe deeper economic cooperation between allies; Trump's pledge could pause acquisitions and force firms to be more risk averse when sizing up deals

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
TOKYO

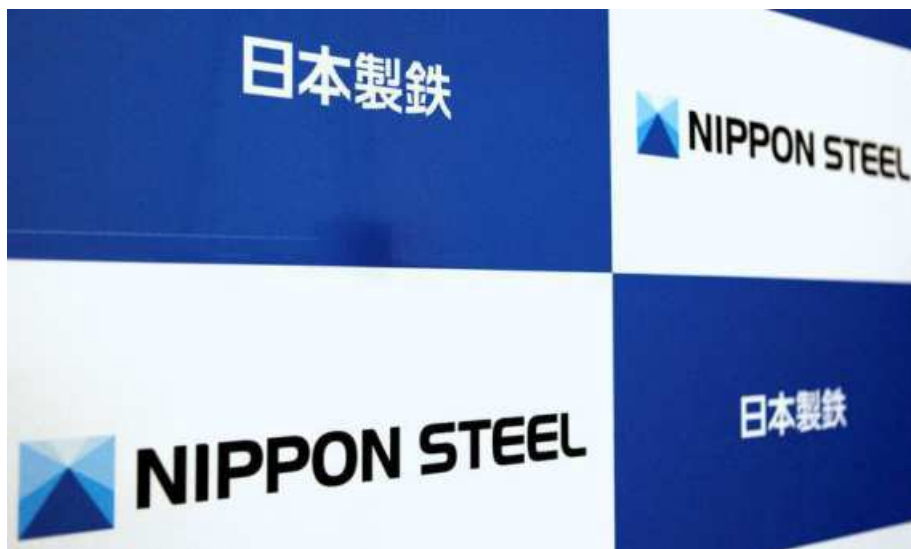
Donald Trump's pledge to block Nippon Steel's planned purchase of U.S. Steel if he retakes the White House compounds political troubles for the \$15 billion deal whose failure could reverberate across Japan Inc.

For Japan, the biggest foreign investor in the U.S., a collapse of the deal could give companies pause about acquisitions in other strategic sectors and force them to be more risk averse when sizing up deals, say former officials, lawyers, analysts and executives.

The planned purchase by the world's fourth-largest steelmaker of the storied American firm underlines the limits of "friendshoring", a term coined by U.S. officials to describe deeper economic cooperation between allies, an effort partly aimed at de-risking supply chains from rival power China.

Nippon Steel's acquisition already faces high hurdles, drawing criticism from Democratic and Republican lawmakers and the powerful United Steelworkers union.

Failure could be "a warning sign to some segments of Japanese investors", said Kenichiro Sasae, who was Japan's ambassador to the U.S. at the start of Trump's 2017-2021 term as president.



Uncertain deal: Nippon Steel said the purchase would benefit U.S. steel industry, consumers. REUTERS

While the fallout might be limited to specific sensitive industries, it would show that even with more focus on economic cooperation between allies, countries will always decide based on their own core interests, said Mr. Sasae, president of the Japan Institute of International Affairs think tank.

Opposition to the deal appears at odds with U.S. efforts in recent years to encourage Japanese companies to boost their presence there. It is reminiscent of the 1980s, when Japanese acquisitions of trophy assets like Rockefeller Center ignited sharp

criticism from the American public.



Failure to strike a deal has the potential to damage investment ties and set back friendshoring initiatives -

STEFAN ANGRICK
Senior Economist
Moody's Analytics

criticism from the American public.

Higher costs

In 2015, U.S. regulators, citing competition concerns, scuttled a merger between Japan's Tokyo Electron and U.S.-based Applied Materials, two of the world's largest manufacturers of semiconductor-making machinery.

Mr. Trump, whose protectionist "America First" policies were a hallmark of his tenure, said on Wednesday he would "instantaneously" block the deal if he wins the Nov. 5 vote.

The Republican is set for a likely rematch with President Joe Biden, a Democrat.

Nippon Steel responded that the purchase would provide great benefit to U.S. Steel, the U.S. steel industry, its customers, employees, local communities and the U.S. more broadly.

"Failure to strike a deal has the potential to damage investment ties and set back friendshoring initiatives," said Stefan Angrick, senior economist at Moody's Analytics in Tokyo.

"The long-term consequences would be higher costs for businesses and

consumers," said Mr. Angrick, who expects the deal to pass eventually.

Japan's direct investment in the U.S. hit 27 trillion yen (\$180 billion) in 2022, according to the latest finance ministry data, compared with just 1.4 trillion yen (\$10 billion) in Japan's other top trading partner, China.

Hard to approve

Concerns over Nippon Steel's attempt to buy a company that helped build the Empire State Building and arm allied forces in World War Two have arisen since its December announcement.

Mr. Biden's White House says the deal deserves "serious scrutiny" given its potential impact on national security and supply chain reliability. It said it supported a review of the transaction by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., a process that could take months.

Japan's industry minister declined to comment on Trump's remark about the deal on Friday but said the U.S.-Japan alliance was stronger than ever.

Chuck Rocha, a Democratic strategist and former political director for the steelworkers' union, said it would be hard for the Biden administration to approve the deal.

"I think there's certain core industries that you just don't outsource," said

Mr. Rocha. "It's not called ABC Steel. It ain't called Your Mama's Steel. It's called U.S. Steel."

The steelworkers, criticising both companies for not consulting with them on the acquisition, have urged regulators to scrutinise whether the deal benefits workers.

Mr. Biden and Mr. Trump have been competing to win the support of unions, which could prove crucial in the battleground states expected to decide the election.

Nick Wall, a Tokyo-based partner at law firm Allen & Overy who advises on M&A deals, said the blowback from the Nippon-U.S. Steel deal shows Japanese firms will have to be more thorough when examining transactions, especially in unionised industries.

"You'd spend a lot more time thinking through other stakeholders—how they're going to respond, what engagement you should have with them before you announce the deal, bringing along PR experts to help you refine and polish the message," he said.

A former senior Japanese government official who now works for a Japanese conglomerate said the deal was a stark reminder that firms must be more mindful about studying the political implications of deals in the United States.

Honey, where are the bees?



Not to be: A beekeeper walks past beehives as beekeepers gather at Place Bellecour, in Lyon, central France to raise people's awareness on the difficulties faced by them from foreign honey imports and excessive bee mortality on account of environmental degradation. AFP

Indian village fair gives new lease of life to electronic scrap

Reuters
MATHURAPUR, INDIA

Thousands of villagers in West Bengal flock every year to a winter e-waste fair, hoping to buy used phones, laptops and household electronic goods for a bargain.

Samar Halder, a 63-year-old farmer, bought a used phone for ₹1,700 for his grandson from the "Bhanga Mela", as the fair is called, in Mathurapur, about 65 km south of the state capital of Kolkata.

"He will use it to study," Mr. Halder said. "I just sold crops worth ₹1,750, came with it and bought this phone to give him as a gift ... I hope it will work."

India's society is under-



Scraping the tech: Access to technology remains out of the reach of people in large parts of rural areas where a majority live. REUTERS

going rapid digital transformation but the benefits are not equally shared. Access to technology remains out of the reach of people in large parts of rural areas, where a majority of the world's most populous country lives. The fair offers

a range of used gadgets and household goods at far reduced costs to new ones and provides an avenue for abandoned items to be reused and recycled.

On average, the price of a new smartphone in India is nearly ₹25,000 up from

₹16,000-17,000 before the pandemic, said Navkendar Singh, analyst, IDC.

In comparison, used phones at the fair cost between ₹1,500 and ₹5,000. Mr. Singh expects the market for used smartphones to only get bigger as new phone prices rise. Sellers at the fair usually collect electronic gadgets and goods from scrap dealers, repair and sell them.

"I cannot guarantee if all the phones you are seeing here will work, but the ones I guarantee will definitely work (and) cost more," seller Sirajul Laskar said, adding people even buy ones he cannot promise will work. It's a chance many poor buyers seem willing to take.

China's tumbling prices push some exporters to the brink

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
BEIJING/HONG KONG

When Kris Lin, who owns a lighting factory in China, received this year's first order from a close overseas client, he faced a distressing choice: take it at a loss, or tell workers not to come back after the Lunar New Year.

"It was impossible for me to lose this order," said Mr. Lin, who plans to restart his factory in the eastern city of Taizhou at around half its capacity after the February 10-17 holiday break.

"I could have lost this client forever, and it would have endangered livelihoods for so many people.

If we delay resuming production, people might start doubting our business. If rumours spread, it affects the decisions of our suppliers."

Threat of deflation

Prolonged factory deflation is threatening the survival of smaller Chinese exporters who are locked in relentless price wars for shrinking business as higher interest rates abroad and rising trade protectionism squeeze demand.

Producer prices have been falling for 15 straight months, crushing profit margins to the point where industrial output and jobs are now at risk and compounding China's economic woes, which include a property crisis and debt crunch.



Livelihoods at risk: About 180 million people work in export-related jobs. AFP

About 180 million people work in export-related jobs, Commerce Ministry data from 2022 shows.

Raymond Yeung, chief China economist at ANZ, says fixing deflation should

be a higher policy priority than reaching the expected growth target of around 5% for this year.

"Companies cut product prices, then staff salaries. Then consumers

won't buy — this could be a vicious cycle," he said.

Profits at China's industrial firms fell 2.3% last year, adding to the 4% drop in COVID-hit 2022. An official survey showed manu-

facturing activity contracting for a fourth straight month in January, while export orders shrank for a 10th month.

For Mr. Lin, that has meant the \$1.5 million order his client placed was 25% below a similar one last year. It was 10% below production cost.

Sluggish exports mean policymakers need to pull other levers to reach growth target, raising the urgency of stimulating household consumption, analysts say.

"The more 'rebalanced' growth is, the faster that downward pressure on prices and margins will dissipate," said Louis Kuijs, Asia-Pacific chief economist at S&P Global.

China has been funneling financial resources into

the manufacturing sector, rather than consumers, exacerbating overcapacity and deflation concerns, even in booming higher-end sectors, such as electric vehicles.

Rat race

An executive at an automotive moulds factory from the eastern Zhejiang province, who asked not to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter, expects the firm's output and exports to rise, but earnings to fall, describing the intensifying competition in the industry as a "rat race."

As China's central bank unleashes liquidity into the financial system to spur growth, banks are chasing factories with cheap loan offers. But squeezed out by bigger rivals, smaller firms

are unwilling to take on loans to finance new business, in what economists see as a broken link in China's increasingly inefficient monetary policy.

Investment by private companies, which according to State officials provide 80% of urban jobs, slid 0.4% last year, while state investment rose 6.4%.

"Many bank managers call me and they sound very anxious when they can't lend money," said Miao Yujie, an e-commerce clothing exporter. Even after halving his workforce to about 20 people last year, he cannot turn a profit as bigger firms elbow him out of the market. "But you only need to borrow when you want to expand," said Mr. Miao, adding he mulls closing his business.

ANOTHER HIGH

Ashwin is India's top wicket-taker in Tests against England



K.R. DEEPAK

He may be stranded on 499 Test wickets, but R. Ashwin set another record during India's win against England in the second Test. Ashwin is now India's leading Test wicket-taker against England. He has 97 wickets, two more than B.S. Chandrasekhar. Ashwin dismissed three of England's main batters — Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope and Joe Root.

HANDING IT BACK

Shreyas returns favour to Stokes with a direct-hit run out



K.R. DEEPAK

Ben Stokes' running catch to dismiss Shreyas Iyer in the second innings was a stunner. Stokes had understandably celebrated that dismissal and it had come at a crucial juncture. Shreyas returned the favour a day later as he ran the England skipper out with a brilliant direct hit. Much had depended on Stokes in a tall chase.

METHOD TO MADNESS

'There's more to what England is playing than just attacking cricket'



K.R. DEEPAK

Rahul Dravid is impressed by the cricket played by England — dubbed Bazball — in the series so far. "They are playing really good cricket," the Indian coach said. "It is not like wild slogging. I think there is more to it than just attacking cricket. I have seen at times they know when to pull back, they know when to attack."

BACK THERE

India reclaims the second spot in World Test C'ships rankings



K.R. DEEPAK

India jumped four places to second in the World Test Championships standings after its series-levelling 106-run win over England in the second Test in Visakhapatnam on Monday. Following a remarkable victory, India reclaimed the second position and closed down the gap with table-topper Australia in the ICC WTC 2023-25 standings.

Bumrah and Ashwin ensure there is no twist in the tale

The senior bowlers strike crucial blows to pick up three wickets apiece as the home team secures a 106-run victory to draw level 1-1 in the five-match series; Crawley keeps England in the hunt for better part of the chase while top-scoring with 73

ENGLAND IN INDIA

P.K. Ajith Kumar
VISAKHAPATNAM

No history was rewritten. No new height was scaled by Bazball. No stopping India wrapping up the second Test on the fourth day, grounding the high-flying England.

India won by 106 runs on Monday to square the five-match series 1-1. Chasing 399, England was bowled out for 292.

India's winning moment came in the first over after the second session was extended at the Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy Stadium, with the host needing just one wicket.

That wicket was fittingly taken by Jasprit Bumrah. His sensational spell of reverse swing — six for 45 — on the second day had turned the match decisively in India's favour. He added three second-innings wickets to his tally. R. Ashwin, the other senior bowler in the Indian attack, also took three.

One more would have taken the champion off-spinner to that rare milestone of 500 Test wickets. But he won't be minding that, having helped India score what must be a very satisfying victory, after having to play without the injured duo of K.L. Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, not to mention Virat Kohli, who had pulled out of the first two Tests because of personal reasons.

Earlier, England resumed at 67 for one and Rehan Ahmed, the night-



It's all over: Hartley's off-stump goes cartwheeling off a Bumrah special. K.R. DEEPAK

watchman, made the visitors' intention clear, hitting Axar Patel for successive boundaries. The left-arm spinner, however, had the last laugh, trapping Rehan lbw, as the batter was beaten while trying to flick.

The other overnight batter Zak Crawley (73, 132b, 8x4, 1x6) was always going to be a worry for India and the tall opener was stroking handsomely. Ollie Pope, whose 196 helped England win the first Test at Hyderabad, was another man India would not have wanted to see too much of.

Pope had hit five fours during his brief stay when he was snapped up superbly by Rohit Sharma at slip off Ashwin. It was an excellent reflex catch the Indian captain took towards his left with both hands.

Joe Root, who had damaged his finger while fielding on the previous day, had seemed a man in a hurry. He started by reverse-sweeping Ashwin for a couple of fours and also stepped out to hit Axar over long-off for a six.

Root didn't last long, though. He came down the

track against Ashwin, only to give a top-edge to backward-point.

Crawley was now joined by Jonny Bairstow and it was a partnership England needed to click. The stand was worth 40 when India's review against Crawley yielded success. The DRS found him lbw to Kuldeep Yadav, and the Indian fielders erupted in joy: they knew how important that wicket was.

Then Bumrah brought one in sharply to beat the defensive bat of Bairstow, who was adjudged lbw; the DRS didn't help.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA — 1ST INNINGS
396 in 112 overs
ENGLAND — 1ST INNINGS
253 in 55.5 overs
INDIA — 2ND INNINGS
255 in 78.3 overs
ENGLAND — 2ND INNINGS
Zak Crawley lbw b Kuldeep 73 (132b, 8x4, 1x6), Ben Duckett c Bharat b Ashwin 28 (27b, 6x4), Rehan Ahmed lbw b Axar 23 (31b, 5x4), Ollie Pope c Rohit b Ashwin 23 (21b, 5x4), Joe Root c Axar b Ashwin 16 (10b, 2x4, 1x6), Jonny Bairstow lbw b Bumrah 26 (36b, 5x4), Ben Stokes run out 11 (29b, 1x4), Ben Foakes c & b Bumrah 36 (69b, 4x4, 1x6), Tom Hartley b Bumrah 36 (47b, 5x4, 1x6), Shoaib Bashir c Bharat b Mukesh 0 (8b), James Anderson (not out) 5 (8b, 1x4); Extras (b-8, lb-5, nb-2): 15; Total (in 69.2 overs): 292.

FALL OF WICKETS
1-50 (Duckett, 10.5 overs), 2-95 (Rehan, 21.5), 3-132 (Pope, 28.2), 4-154 (Root, 30.6), 5-194 (Crawley, 41.6), 6-194 (Bairstow, 42.4), 7-220 (Stokes, 52.4), 8-275 (Foakes, 64.6), 9-281 (Bashir, 67.3).

INDIA BOWLING
Bumrah 17.2-4-46-3, Mukesh 5-1-26-1, Kuldeep 15-0-60-1, Ashwin 18-2-72-3, Axar 14-1-75-1.
Pol: Bumrah.
India won by 106 runs to level the five-match series 1-1.
Third Test: February 15 to 19, Rajkot.

England went to lunch, with a mountain to climb.

It needed another miracle from Stokes, but he was run out by a brilliant direct-hit from Shreyas Iyer. Ben Foakes (36, 69b, 4x4, 1x6) and Tom Hartley (36, 47b, 5x4, 1x6) put up a fight. Both were dismissed by Bumrah, who finished with a match-haul of nine for 91. He was the Player-of-the-Match.

Team effort got us over the line: Dravid



Outsmarted: Bumrah cannot hide his joy on sending back Foakes caught and bowled after working him over. K.R. DEEPAK

P.K. Ajith Kumar
VISAKHAPATNAM

India on Monday scored one of its finest wins in recent times, against a quality opposition that prides on its fearless brand of cricket. That too, after losing the first Test despite taking a first-innings lead of 190.

Not surprisingly, Rahul Dravid is a happy man. "We are happy we could bounce back," said India's coach after the 106-run victory against England in the second Test. "But we recognise it is going to be a fantastic series and some tough cricket will be played over the next three games."

He said India, despite being put under pressure, was kept in the game by two fine individual performances. "Yashasvi's brilliant innings and then Bumrah's spell kept us in the game in the first two days and put us ahead by 143 runs. Then we needed a bit more of a team performance to get us over the line. So it was quite pleasing, after going down in the last Test match and then losing a few players."

Dravid is also pleased with Shubman Gill's hundred in the second innings. "He came into the

Ishan Kishan requested a break and we were happy to give him that. I didn't say he has to play domestic cricket. I said whenever he is ready, he needs to play some cricket and come back. We are not forcing him to do anything

DRIVID
on Kishan

Test match under pressure externally, but we have a lot of confidence in Shubman," he said. "We know his class and his ability. As a young player from whom a lot is expected, I think he did feel the pressure. So I am really happy with the way he played that innings, which required him to soak in a lot of pressure at various times."

When asked about Virat's Kohli's return to the squad — he wasn't available for the first two Tests due to personal reasons — Dravid said: "I think it's best to ask the selectors once the team is selected for the next three Tests. I am sure they are the best people to answer that."



Kuldeep is gung-ho after trapping Crawley. K.R. DEEPAK

Crawley dismissal: technology got it wrong, says Stokes

Sports Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

The turning point on the fourth day of the second Test was perhaps the dismissal of Zak Crawley. The England opener was batting on 73 when the umpire turned down Kuldeep Yadav's appeal for lbw, but India reviewed the decision and the DRS ruled him out.

England captain Ben Stokes believes the technology got it wrong. "Technology in the games is obviously there and there is an understanding that it can never be 100% correct," he said. "So that's why we have got the umpire's call and everything. I don't think it's unfair for someone to ever say that. I think technology has got it wrong on this occasion. That's my personal opinion."

It is learnt that Ollie Pope, Ben Foakes and Tom Hartley were not feeling well. "A couple of players woke up this morning not feeling great, and when everyone had the same symptoms you know there is something going around. There's a bit of a virus going around, it's not an excuse for the result because it's a game full of ifs, buts and maybes," Stokes said.

Rampant India takes on SA in semifinal



Let's do it! India will be keen to produce another clinical show as it looks to book a berth in the summit clash. ICC

Press Trust of India
BENONI

Red-hot India will be the favourite when it takes on host South Africa in the semifinal of the Under-19 World Cup here on Tuesday.

Defending champion India has marched into the last-four stage on the back of five consecutive wins.

With two centuries and a fifty, the 18-year-old Musheer Khan has lit up the tournament as he sits atop the batters' list with 334 runs in five outings at an average of 83.50.

India skipper Uday Saharan has raked up 304 runs with two fifties and a ton while averaging 61.60. (Match starts at 1.30 p.m. IST).

IN BRIEF

Rachin puts NZ on top

Rachin Ravindra struck a majestic double century before South Africa's top order collapsed on Monday, leaving New Zealand in command of the first Test in Mount Maunganui. Rachin crafted a career-best 240 as the home side was dismissed for 511, before the tourist was reduced to 80 for four.

The scores: New Zealand 511 in 144 overs (Rachin 240, Williamson 118, Brand 6/119) vs South Africa 80/4 in 28 overs.

SL wins by 10 wkts.

Sri Lanka won the one-off Test match against Afghanistan by 10 wickets, chasing down an easy target of 56 in Colombo on Monday.

The scores: Afghanistan 198 & 296 in 112.3 overs (Ibrahim Zadran 114, Rahmat 54, Jayasuriya 5/107) lost to Sri Lanka 439 & 56/0 in 7.2 overs.

It's Sahaja's Day as she knocks out top seed



Stunning win: Sahaja exults after pulling it off in the decider. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

TENNIS

Kamesh Srinivasan
MUMBAI

Wild card entrant Sahaja Yamalapati competed brilliantly against the top seed Kayla Day of USA to keep the sparse crowd thoroughly entertained and pulled off a 6-4, 1-6, 6-4 victory in the first round of the L&T Mumbai Open WTA tennis tournament at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) on Monday.

"It was the biggest match of my career. I have no words. Thank you everyone for coming and cheering," said the 23-year-old Sahaja, who was remarkably consistent with her explosive strokeplay.

Pitted against a top-100 player, Sahaja was able to show her strong game with precision hitting in sus-

tained long spells. She emphasised her all court game, as she spanked winners on both flanks with the backhand cross court emerging as a stand out weapon.

The American left-hander was patient in the long rallies, especially after losing the first set, and fought better in pocketing the second. But that score did not say the intensity of the contest as Sahaja fought every point.

In the decider, Sahaja hung on and broke serve in the ninth game. She did miss two match-points, but converted the third much to her relief and jubilation of the fans who stood up to applaud a brave show of high quality entertainment.

Vaishnavi Adkar gave a good account of herself, but could not capitalise on her strong game when pitted against lucky-loser So-

hyun Park of Korea. Vaishnavi was scheduled to meet qualifier Himeno Sakatsume of Japan, but the latter withdrew.

The Indian duo of Ankita Raina and Rutuja Bhosale played well but their opponents Naiktha Bains and Fanny Stollar pulled through 10-8 in the super tie-break.

The results: First round: Sahaja Yamalapati bt Kayla Day (USA) 6-4, 1-6, 6-4; Darja Semenistaja (Lat) bt Panna Udvardy (Hun) 7-5, 3-6, 6-2; Arianne Hartono (Ned) bt Irina Jara (Rou) 6-4, 6-4; Sohyun Park (Kor) bt Vaishnavi Adkar 6-2, 2-6, 6-1; Laura Pigossi (Bra) bt Ekaterina Makarova 6-1, 3-0 (retired); Alina Korneeva bt Chloe Paquet (Fra) 6-1, 6-3.

Doubles: Zhibek Kulambayeva (Kaz) & Sohyun Park (Kor) bt Angelica Moratelli & Camilla Rosatello (Ita) 7-6(4), 6-2; Naiktha Bains (GBR) & Fanny Stollar (Hun) bt Rutuja Bhosale & Ankita Raina 3-6, 6-2, [10-8].

IN BRIEF



Patna Pirates overcomes Jaipur Pink Panthers

Patna Pirates edged past Jaipur Pink Panthers 36-33 in a closely fought match of the Pro Kabaddi League Season 10 at the Thyagaraj Indoor Stadium in Delhi on Monday. Arjun Deshwal of Pink Panthers and M. Sudhakar of Pirates earned Super 10s, but it was Patna Pirates which worked its way back to continue its unbeaten run to six matches.

New York to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup final

Agence France-Presse MIAMI

The 2026 World Cup final will be held at MetLife Stadium in New York/New Jersey, organisers FIFA announced on Sunday. The New York bid held off a strong challenge from Dallas to secure the July 19 game, the culmination of the expanded 48-team tournament being co-hosted by the USA, Canada and Mexico.

Opening game

The competition will kick-off with the opening game at Mexico City's iconic Azteca Stadium on June 11. Atlanta and Dallas

will host the semifinals while the third-place game will take place in Miami.

The decisions were announced on a live television broadcast in North America which featured FIFA president Gianni Infantino alongside comedian and actor Kevin Hart, rapper Drake and celebrity Kim Kardashian.

The 82,500-seat MetLife Stadium, across the Hudson river in East Rutherford, New Jersey, is the home of the NFL's New York Giants and New York Jets but has held a number of international football games including the 2016 Copa America final.

Lokeshwar, Pradosh help TN cruise home

The two add 96-runs for the second-wicket as the hosts register their third consecutive outright win and retain the top spot in Group-C

RANJI TROPHY

S. Prasanna Venkatesan PORVORIM

Debutant S. Lokeshwar struck his maiden half-century (52, 129b, 6x4) and Pradosh Ranjan Paul followed up his 71 with another fine knock (65, 125b, 6x4) as Tamil Nadu, chasing 137, cruised to a seven-wicket win over Goa on day four of the elite Group-C Ranji Trophy match here on Monday.

This is Tamil Nadu's third consecutive win and it retains the top spot in Group-C with 21 points and superior run-quotient over Karnataka, which also has 21.

Vijay Shankar hit the winning shot, a six off medium-pacer Suyash Prabhudessai over the long-off boundary.

Earlier, Lokeshwar was dropped on his overnight score of 34 by Manthan Khutkar at silly-point off left-arm spinner Darshan Misal to the second ball of the day.

Misal later had him leg-before. The diminutive opener's best stroke was a scoop of off-spinner Mohit Redkar to the fine leg-boundary.

Pradosh hit three consecutive fours off medium-pacer Deepraj Gaonkar. He charged and lofted the ball to the cow corner, sent one to the fine-leg fence and then flicked off his pads to the square boundary. He edged a drive and was



Nice gesture: Pradosh was chosen Player-of-the-Match but gave it away to debutant Lokeshwar. S. PRASANNA VENKATESAN

caught by Misal at first slip off Prabhudessai.

Pradosh and Lokeshwar added 96 for the second-wicket partnership.

Pradosh was adjudged the Player-of-the-Match for his two fifties (71 and 65) and two wickets (two for 18). In a nice gesture, he gave away his award to Lokeshwar.

The scores: Goa — 1st innings: 241.

Tamil Nadu — 1st innings: 273.

Goa — 2nd innings: 168.

Tamil Nadu — 2nd innings: S. Lokeshwar lbw b Misal 52, N. Jagadeesan b Misal 4, Pradosh Ranjan Paul c Misal b Prabhudessai 65, B. Indrajith (not out) 7, Vijay Shankar (not out) 13; Extras (b-1): 1; Total (for three wkts. in 49.5 overs): 142.

Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-109, 3-128.

Goa bowling: Misal 24-6-51-2, Tendulkar 2-0-5-0, Redkar 20-2-55-0, Gaonkar 1-0-14-0, Prabhudessai 2-5-0-16-1.

RANJI TROPHY SCORES ROUND 5, DAY 4

Elite: Group A: At Jamshedpur: Manipur 170 & 232 in 93.3 overs (Ronald Longjam 41, L.M. Keishangbam 88) lost to Jharkhand 504/5 decl. **Jharkhand** 7(10), **Manipur** 0. **Jaipur:** Rajasthan 432 drew with Vidarbha 391 in 125.3 overs (Yash Rathod 81, Karun Nair 112, Mohit Kale 48, Akshay Wadkar 59, Manav Suthar 5/133). **Rajasthan** 3(19), **Vidarbha** 1(20). **Group B: Patna:** Bihar 182 & 124 in 51.1 overs (Lalith Mohan 4/35) lost to Andhra 463. **Andhra** 7(22), **Bihar** 0(5). **Raipur:** Kerala 350 & 251/5 decl. in 52.2 overs (Sachin Baby 94, Mohammed Azharudeen 50 n.o.)

drew with Chattisgarh 312 & 79/1 in 22 overs. **Kerala** 3(8), **Chattisgarh** 1(12). **Kanpur:** UP 548/8 decl. drew with Assam 316/2 in 113 overs. (No play). **UP** 1(12), **Assam** 1(2). **Group C: Chandigarh:** Punjab 477/2 drew with Chandigarh. (No play). **Punjab** 1(9), **Chandigarh** 1(4). **Porvorum:** Goa 241 & 168 lost to Tamil Nadu 273 & 142/3 in 49.5 overs (S. Lokeshwar 52, Pradosh Ranjan Paul 65). **Tamil Nadu** 6(21), **Goa** 0(4). **Group D: Cuttack:** Odisha 322 & 201 in 68 overs (Govinda Poddar 46, Sagar Udeshi 4/45) drew with Pondicherry 284 in 86.2 overs (K.B.

Arun Karthik 110, Krishna Pandey 42) & 175/8 in 56 overs (Paras Ratnaparkhe 72, Arun Karthik 58 n.o.). **Odisha** 3(12), **Pondicherry** 1(13). **Delhi:** Baroda 435/9 decl. drew with Delhi 177 in 56.2 overs (Jonty Sidhu 40, Ayush Badoni 44) & 68/1 in 34 overs. **Baroda** 3(23), **Delhi** 1(8). **Dharamshala:** Himachal 169 & 42/5 in 23 overs (Anubhav Agarwal 4/6) drew with MP 217 in 71.4 overs (Venkatesh Iyer 72, Rishabh Chouhan 57, Vaibhav Arora 4/83). **MP** 3(19), **Himachal** 1(4). **Jammu:** J&K 168/2 in 39 overs drew with Uttarakhand. (No Play). **J&K** 1(12), **Uttarakhand** 1(8).

Atletico holds rival Real in a thriller; Inter pips Juve



Impact! Llorente's header in the 93rd minute snatched the draw. AP

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse MADRID

Marcos Llorente headed home in the 93rd minute to snatch Atletico Madrid a 1-1 draw at LaLiga leader and bitter rival Real Madrid on Sunday.

The Spain midfielder rescued Atletico a point to keep its faint title hopes alive and stop Los Blancos opening up a wider lead on second-placed Girona.

Brahim Diaz, who replaced the hurt Vinicius Junior at late notice before the game, opened the scoring for Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Llorente's leveller means Madrid is two points clear of Girona, which drew against Real Sociedad on Saturday, and 10 points above Atletico, fourth.

Crunch match

Catalan minnows Girona visit Real Madrid next weekend in a crunch title showdown made even juicier by Llorente's vital contribution.

"We worked so hard during the whole game and at the end took this prize, a point, and stopped them from getting more, just one," Llorente said.

In Serie A, Inter Milan took firm control of the title race by winning the

highly-anticipated clash with Juventus 1-0 and moving four points clear of its closest rival for the Scudetto.

Tense clash

Simone Inzaghi's side prevailed in a tense but eventful clash at the San Siro thanks to Federico Gatti's own goal eight minutes before half-time.

The results:

LaLiga: Real Madrid 1 (Diaz 20) drew with Atletico Madrid 1 (Llorente 90+3).

Serie A: Inter Milan 1 (Gatti 37-og) bt Juventus 0.

Napoli 2 (Ngongne 79, Kvaratskhelia 87) bt Verona 1 (Coppola 72).

Lakshya focused on Olympic qualification

BADMINTON

N. Sudarshan BENGALURU

The last two years have been bittersweet for Lakshya Sen. In 2022, he was the toast of the nation, after winning gold medals at Thomas Cup, Commonwealth Games and India Open, and reaching the final at the prestigious All England. In contrast, 2023 was a near-washout, with the only successes being the title at the Canadian Open and the historic team silver at the Asian Games.

One month into the 2024 season, the 22-year-old is hoping that his capricious fortune finally settles. Recently, at the Indonesia Masters, he won his first competitive match since beating the current World No.2 Shi Yu Qi at the Asian Games (September 2023).

Relief

"It was a relief," Lakshya told *The Hindu*, during an interview arranged by *Red Bull*, about snapping the six-match losing streak.

"It was a close match against a tough opponent (Weng Hong Yang).

"I felt more confident to play the next round as well.

"I played a good match against [Anders] Andriassen and later on he went on to win the tournament. It was just a matter of two, three points. So lots of positives to take," he added.

After breaking out of the rut, Lakshya's eyes are now firmly set on the Paris Olympics.

With the qualification window set to end on April



Getting ready: Lakshya Sen during a training session. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



It's my first Olympic qualification experience. I too made mistakes and I'm still learning

28, he has just a handful of tournaments to secure his place.

In the 'Race to Paris' rankings, he is 19th; only the top 16 will qualify.

"There has been a lot of pressure but as an athlete you have to face it," Lakshya said.

"It's my first Olympic qualification experience. I too made mistakes and I'm still learning.

"Now, I see it as a challenge. When people are not expecting that much,

you can play freely but at the same time, a lot is at stake. I have to be really focused and sharp for the next three months."

Inspiration

For inspiration, he needs to look no further than P.V. Sindhu, who has moved to the Padukone-Draavid Centre for Sports Excellence here to train under the legendary Prakash Padukone and former National champion Vimal Kumar, also Lakshya's coach. "Something to learn from her is how focused and how passionate she is even after two Olympic medals.

"She is going out there [on to the court] even harder to get the third one. It's really motivating."

Deepthi on the prowl as TN beats Maharashtra

BHUBANESWAR: Deepthi (37 points) powered Tamil Nadu to a 93-84 win over Maharashtra in the Junior National basketball on Monday.

The results: Men: MP 69 bt Kerala 67; Andhra Pradesh 76 bt Karnataka 74; Rajasthan 87 bt Chandigarh 64. **Women:** Karnataka 80 bt Chandigarh 79. TN 93 bt Maharashtra 86.

Napolitano and Fonio emerge victorious

CHENNAI OPEN

K. Keerthivasan CHENNAI

Kaichi Uchida was nowhere close to his best.

The 29-year-old Japanese, who had reached the semifinals of two Challengers last year and was ranked in the world's top 150 last year, hardly put a foot right as Italy's Stefano Napolitano, the fifth seed, scripted a convincing 6-1, 6-2 win in the first round of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger tennis championship here on Monday.

Later, on the outside courts, Giovanni Fonio of Italy overcame a tough challenge to defeat Maxime Janvier of France 6-4, 3-6, 7-5.

Uchida was way below par as the latter dominated completely. Napolitano's first serves (82%) were superior to Uchida's 57. There weren't many long rallies as the Japanese continued to make numerous unforced errors making the Italian's job much easier.

Napolitano broke Uchida's serve in all the games barring the first. In the second set, Uchida produced a couple of good backhand winners, but those were few and far between.

In fact, The Japanese received a code violation in the second game of the second set. At 30-40 on his serve, he threw the ball out of the court after missing a forehand shot.

In contrast, the match between Fonio and Janvier

was intense with long rallies.

The crucial break for the Italian came in the 12th game of the third set. Janvier began his serve with a double fault and ended with another to gift the match to Fonio. Napolitano said he expected a tough match.

S.D. Prajwal Dev of India qualified for the main draw with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Vadym Ustru of Ukraine, thereby making him the lone Indian among 11 from the qualifiers.

The results (first round):

Stefano Napolitano (Ita) bt Kaichi Uchida (Jpn) 6-1, 6-2; Giovanni Fonio (Ita) bt Maxime Janvier (Fra) 6-4, 3-6, 7-5.

Dominik Palan (Cze) bt Arthur Weber (Fra) 6-1, 6-4; Dan Added (Fra) bt Akira Santillan (Aus) 2-6, 6-4, 4-1 (retd.).

Dahiya clinches the 61kg National wrestling crown

Y.B. Sarangi JAIPUR

Promising wrestler Akash Dahiya gave a commanding performance to emerge as the freestyle 61kg champion on the concluding day of the National wrestling championships at the Railway Stadium here on Monday.

Dahiya of Services outsmarted Sahil Kundu of Ha-

ryana 11-0 by technical superiority in the final.

The 23-year-old dominated the title clash to notch up six points and gained further when Kundu challenged a decision unsuccessfully and conceded one more point at the stroke of the first period. Dahiya, who competed in the elite World championships last year, launched a quick attack

early in the second period for a takedown. He added two more points to win comfortably.

There was chaos over accepting entries from various units, including several non-affiliated units of the 'suspended' Wrestling Federation of India (WFI), in the run-up to the freestyle competitions. A big number entries (325 in total instead of a figure bet-

ween 250 and 300) - including an unusual 32 apiece in the heavier weights such as 97kg and 125kg - from 34 units, also comprising Services and Railways, resulted in a delayed start of more than two hours. Members from 25 units, excluding two Government departments, were eligible for voting in the WFI elections.

Even as several affiliated

state units did not send their teams, one could witness representation from some non-traditional States and UT, amid claims that several Haryana wrestlers competed from different units.

The medallists:

Freestyle: 61kg: 1. Akash Dahiya (SSCB), 2. Sahil Kundu (Har), 3. Ramesh Rao (Mah), Naveen Rathi (WB).

'Son' rises for South Korea with hopes of ending 64-year-old drought in AFC Asian Cup

Son Heung Min, the talisman who had left Qatar as a boy in 2011, is proving to be the country's main man in 2024, steering it to the semifinals



AFP

Neeladri Bhattacharjee

South Korea has drawn 2-2 with Japan in the AFC Asian Cup semifinal. An air of tense trepidation surrounds Qatar as both sides take spot-kicks. Japan scores thrice in its four attempts while Korea fails to convert a single opportunity.

In a few moments, the game is done and dusted. The Taeguk Warriors sink to the ground, with an 18-year-old weeping profusely at the Thani bin Jassim Stadium. His and the country's continental dreams are shattered. Korea is out.

Thirteen years later, on a cold Friday night in the same country, that youngster, now a Premier League star with the captain's armband on him, stood with the score 1-1 in a quarterfinal. Korea - playing 30 kilometres off that field where Japan knocked it out - had got a free-kick against Australia just outside the penalty box.

He placed the ball, looked up and then lashed in a right-footed curler which rattled the net after a touch off Mathew Ryan. Australia one, South Korea two.

When the full-time whistle blew, he dropped to the ground again - his eyes, full of tears. But this time, he stood on the other side of the cruel game, known otherwise as football.

Son Heung Min, the talisman who left Qatar as a boy in 2011, proved to be the man in 2024, to rescue his side and steer it to the semifinals.

He earned a penalty, three minutes into

the second half injury time, which was converted by Hwang Hee-Chan and then netted the winner.

"He was having difficulty in keeping his opponent's movements in check initially (in the tournament). Perhaps due to the pressure on him, he has not been able to leave a solid impact like Tottenham matches," Do-Yong Kim, a Korean journalist from Doha, told *Sportstar*.

"But tonight, he proved to be an ace by playing a decisive role in the match. Now I can see why he is attracting a lot of fans' attention at this tournament."

The goal was iconic in a number of ways. In the 2015 Asian Cup final, Son forced the match into extra-time with a stoppage-time equaliser and his team went on to lose the match 1-2 in extra-time. The opponent - Australia. Its coach? Ange Postecoglou, his current club manager.

Like Father like Son

Son's winner in the last moment brought flashes of a rather low-profile game played 40 years ago between Myongji University and Sangmu FC (now known as Gimcheon Sangmu FC) at the President's Cup National Football Tournament.

Trailing 0-2 at one point, Myongji made a comeback, winning the match 3-2. The scorer of the winning goal - Son Woong-Jung, the father of the current Tottenham and Korean skipper.

Though Woong-Jung could play only till the second team of South Korea, it was under his tutelage that Son grew up to

arguably become the best player in Asia.

"When I was 10 or 12, he came in to coach my school team and we were training, 15 or 20 players. The programme was for us all to keep the balls up for 40 minutes," Son told *The Guardian*.

"When someone dropped the ball, my father would not say anything. But as soon as I dropped it, he made us all start over from the beginning. The players understood, because I was his son and, yeah, it was tough. But when you think about it now, this was the right way."

Son went on to shine at the 2009 FIFA U-17 World Cup, scoring three goals and taking his side to the quarterfinals. Eventually, Europe came calling.

The forward moved to Hamburg, honing his attacking skills with Dutch great Ruud Van Nistelrooy.

But it was at Tottenham Hotspur that he became a star - a figure beyond the stature of Cha Bum-kun and Park Ji-Sung, both being legends in their own right.

In over eight years, he has become the highest Asian goalscorer in the Premier League and the Champions League, has won the Premier League Golden Boot as the only Asian footballer and has more assists than any Tottenham player in the club's history.

Tottenham became 'Son's team' in Korea and not the other way around. "He is like David Beckham. Men and women of all ages like him," Do-Yong said, "Thanks to Son, Tottenham has become a popular club in Korea. Expectations are

high always for him in the national team games."

Despite individual accolades, Son's quest for success with the national team remains a fly in the ointment. His three World Cup appearances yielded only a single Round-of-16 berth in 2022.

The Asian Cup hasn't been much kinder, with the closest achievement being a runners-up finish in 2015 when the Socceroos sealed the title.

But at 31, with the next Asian Cup potentially marking his twilight, this edition carries immense weight.

It's the perfect opportunity for the gifted forward to clinch the title which has eluded his country for over six decades.

Inspired by Lionel Messi's World Cup triumph in Qatar, Son, with three goals scored, two penalties earned and eight chances created, looks to try his luck on the same promised land to get his hands on the AFC Asian Cup.

And he, like Messi, has the whole team fired up with the same agenda.

"Everyone in the locker room and people back home are waiting for us to win this tournament. We have not won it for the last 64 years," Lee Kang-In said.

"We are hungry and motivated for the tournament. All of us, the coach, the players and the entire staff."

The 'Son' has risen beyond South Korea. And the Asian Cup, with his worldies, is now shining brighter in his light.

THE GIST

▼ Son forced the 2015 Asian Cup final into extra-time with a stoppage-time equaliser and his team went on to lose the match 1-2 in extra-time against Australia

▼ The opposition was coached by Ange Postecoglou, his current club manager

▼ He has become the highest Asian goalscorer in the Premier League and the Champions League, has won the Premier League Golden Boot as the only Asian footballer and has more assists than any Tottenham player in the club's history

Sunil targets Asian qualifying event

Y. B. Sarangi
JAIPUR

Asian Games bronze medallist Greco Roman wrestler Sunil Kumar has been consistently winning medals at the continental level and is eager to make his mark in the Paris Olympics.

Sunil, who has won a gold and silver apiece and two bronze medals in the Asian championships in the last few years and earned a podium finish in the Hangzhou Asian Games to end the country's 13-year-old medal drought, asserted his supremacy once again at the domestic level by claiming the 87kg title in the National wrestling championships at the Railway Stadium here.

Now, Sunil wants to shift gears for the upcoming Asian qualifying event for the Olympics in April. "My target is to qualify (for the Olympics) in the Asian qualifying event. To prepare for that, I will travel with a training partner to Azerbaijan to train there for 25 days. The Sports Authority of India (SAI) is supporting me in this," Sunil told *The Hindu*.

"In our country, it is hard to find



Sunil Kumar. Y.B. SARANGI

good sparring partners. In Greco Roman wrestling, ground wrestling is important. It is easier to find good sparring partners in Azerbaijan. They conduct camps in which wrestlers from various countries participate. I keep in touch with the coaches over there and one such interaction helped me find this opportunity," said Sunil, who would leave for his overseas camp on Thursday.

Following a memorable 2023, in which he won an Asian Games medal and bagged the prestigious Arjuna award, the 25-year-old Sunil is motivated to raise his performance. "I was delighted that I could win an Asian Games medal for the country after 13 years. This will inspire other wrestlers to work hard and bring laurels. I will also try to win more medals for the country in upcoming major events."

Nurturing a winner's attitude has also boosted Sunil. "Before a bout, I tell myself that when the bout ends my hand should go up. The scores can be up and down during a fight, but I focus on winning the bout. I begin slowly and don't get aggressive from the very start. My stamina is my strength."

Sharing his success mantra which has enabled him to be consistent, Sunil said, "An athlete has to set his own targets and do a lot of sacrifices and work with dedication in order to achieve something significant. I keep on doing that. The countrymen's love and goodwill also inspire me," said Sunil.

'Opportunity for youngsters to get familiar with style of best teams'

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

Captain Harmanpreet Singh wants the young Indian hockey players to get familiar with the playing styles of the best teams in the world during the FIH Pro League, and hoped the country would seal a direct qualification for the 2026 World Cup with a title-winning run here.

The Indian men's hockey team arrived on Monday to participate in the Pro League scheduled at the Kalinga Hockey Stadium from February 10 to 16 and Birsamunda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela from February 19 to 25.

India narrowly missed out on a podium finish in the previous season, finishing fourth behind the Netherlands, Great Britain, and Belgium.

"We have just come back from a successful tour in South Africa where we played against France, South Africa, and the Netherlands to begin the Pro League in the best shape possible," Harmanpreet said in a Hockey



Harmanpreet. FILE PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

India (HI) release.

"A few young players have been included in the squad this time and this

will be a great opportunity for them to familiarise themselves with the play style of some of the best teams in the world."

Five national teams - Ireland, the Netherlands, India, Spain and Australia - will participate in the India leg of the Pro League, facing each other once in Bhubaneswar and once in Rourkela.

"We are taking the Pro League very seriously as winning it would not only mean direct qualification for the FIH Hockey World Cup 2026 but these games will also be crucial in the build-up to the Paris 2024 Olympics," Harmanpreet said.

India will take on Spain in their first match of the season on February 10, followed by a clash with the best-ranked team in the world, the Netherlands, on February 11.

After a brief break, the hosts will take on Australia on February 15, before they face Ireland in the last match of the Bhubaneswar leg on February 16.