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IN BRIEF

Sops galore in Bengal budget ahead of LS poll

KOLKATA

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election this year, the West Bengal government presented its budget for 2024-25 with a slew of policies for social welfare and sops for every sector. » Page 4

Assam: rift within INDIA bloc as AAP names candidates

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI
The rift within the INDIA bloc widened with AAP on Thursday unilaterally announcing candidates for three out of Assam's 14 Lok Sabha seats, stating that they were "tired of talks not yielding any results" even after months. » Page 4

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We saved economy from a crisis: govt.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lays a White Paper on economy; it says UPA's 10 years in office created 'an inheritance of loss' for country

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament on Thursday. ANI

As promised in her interim Budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman laid a White Paper on the economy in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, outlining that the Manmohan Singh-led United Progressive Alliance's (UPA) 10 years in office created "an inheritance of loss" for the country and the Narendra Modi-led NDA government "rescued the economy from a state of crisis, despair and paralysis".

Coming two days before the 17th Lok Sabha is adjourned for the last time, the 47-page paper with a few pages of data annexures, sought to make a case that the present government had rejuvenated the economy from the

UPA's policy stasis and misgovernance to infuse it with "dynamism and growth, and hope in the people".

The paper attributed the few UPA years of high growth to reforms undertaken by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led NDA government.

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Cong. releases 'Black Paper' on Modi govt.

NEW DELHI
Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday released a "Black Paper" to highlight the failures of the Narendra Modi government. Mr. Kharge described the last 10 years as a "period of injustice" (anyakaa).

» PAGE 15

Polling ends in Pakistan

Agence France-Presse
ISLAMABAD

Polling stations closed on Thursday after millions of Pakistanis voted in an election marred by rigging allegations, with authorities suspending mobile phone services. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz is expected to win the most seats.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 17

Lauding the legend



Former Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan receives the 'International Icon' award from veteran player Sunil Gavaskar and Jayen Mehta, Managing Director, Amul, in the presence of tennis veteran Leander Paes during the Sportstar ACES Awards 2024 in Mumbai. K.R. DEEPAK (FULL COVERAGE: PAGES 19 & 20)

Pinarayi leads protest against Centre

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Hoping to strengthen the unity of the Opposition parties ahead of the Lok Sabha election, leaders of various political outfits joined the protest organised by the Kerala government at Jantar Mantar here on Thursday against the alleged attacks on federalism by the Centre, especially the anomalies in devolu-

tion of resources.

The meeting turned out to be a gathering of Opposition-ruled States with three Chief Ministers, MPs, Ministers and MLAs attending it demanding justice for States. Besides Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who inaugurated the protest, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann joined the agitation. Karnataka Chief



Pinarayi Vijayan
Minister Siddaramaiah had held a similar protest on Wednesday.

In his inaugural address, Mr. Vijayan said when fed-

eralism was destroyed, it would cause losses to all the States. "On top of that are the politically motivated actions against non-BJP-run States. Efforts are on by certain sections to depict the genuine demands of States as an issue of North-South divide. It is totally untrue, unfounded and baseless," he said.

CONTINUED ON
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MYANMAR BORDER
Centre scraps Free Movement Regime

NEWS » PAGE 14



SCATHING ATTACK
Modi wasn't born in an OBC family, says Rahul in Odisha

NEWS » PAGE 16



STRAKER SCALPS SIX
Australia wins thriller against Pak. in Under-19 World Cup

SPORT » PAGE 20

Farmers call off stir after assurance to look into demands

Alisha Dutta
NEW DELHI

A protest march to Parliament by hundreds of farmers from Noida and Greater Noida in Uttar Pradesh was called off on Thursday evening after the police assured farmer union leaders that a panel will be formed to look into their demands.

The protest seeking increased compensation and developed plots in exchange for land acquired by local development authorities two decades ago for infrastructure projects started from Mahamaya



A scuffle breaks out between farmers and the police during a protest march in Noida on the outskirts of New Delhi on Thursday. REUTERS

flyover around 12 p.m., leading to traffic snarls in Noida, Greater Noida, and the national capital.

The stir was led by the

Bhartiya Kisan Parishad (BKP), All India Kisan Sabha, and Jai Jawan Jai Kisan Morcha against the development authorities in Noida and Greater Noida.

"The Noida Police Commissioner assured us that a high-powered committee will look into our demands and arrive at a decision within eight days. If we are still ignored, we will continue our fight and march to Delhi," said BKP leader Sukhbir Yadav 'Khalifa'.

A senior farmer leader told *The Hindu* that they have been holding protests for the past few months, but their demands have not yet been fulfilled. "The authorities promised to meet our demands multiple times over the past five

months, but never delivered," he said.

Police officers from Delhi and Noida confirmed that even though the farmers have called off their protest, their personnel will remain deployed at Chilla border to handle any law and order situation.

Ahead of the stir, the Gautam Buddha Nagar police had imposed prohibitory measures under CrPC Section 144 from Thursday morning. Delhi Police too was prepared with heavy-duty bulldozers, backhoe machines, riot control vehicles, and water cannons.

RLD likely to join NDA on Feb. 12: Rajbhar

Mayank Kumar
LUCKNOW

Adding fuel to speculation that the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) is likely to walk out of the INDIA bloc and join the BJP-led NDA, Suheldev

Bhartiya Samaj Party (SBSP) chief Om Prakash Rajbhar, the ruling alliance's partner in Uttar Pradesh, has now set a date.

"Discussions are almost final and, in all likelihood, the RLD will join the NDA

on February 12," he told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

February 12 is the birth anniversary of late Chaudhary Ajit Singh, RLD founder and father of the present party chief Chaudhary Jayant Singh.

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IN BRIEF

L-G inaugurates new skywalk, market hub at Nehru Place

Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena on Thursday inaugurated a six-metre-wide skywalk and the upgraded Nehru Place market hub here, officials said on Thursday. The entire project was completed in a span of four years at a cost of ₹75 crore by the Delhi Development Authority. The skywalk connects Nehru Place metro station to the plaza, and is equipped with a lift, escalator, and a ramp for persons with disabilities. A new footpath and toilet block has also been built. PTI

New Delhi World Book Fair to be inaugurated tomorrow

Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan will inaugurate the New Delhi World Book Fair at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, on Saturday, said the director of the National Book Trust of India, Yuvraj Malik. It will be open till February 18. A National Digital Library for children will be unveiled during the fair, aiming to make "quality books available across languages and genres".

Prof. Amitabh Mattoo made Dean of SIS, JNU

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Professor Amitabh Mattoo.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Jawaharlal Nehru University on Thursday appointed Professor Amitabh Mattoo as the new Dean of its School of International Studies (SIS). Before this, Mr. Mattoo was Chair of the Centre for International Politics, Organisation and Disarmament at the SIS. He is the only Padma Shri recipient currently on the rolls of the university.

Speaking to *The Hindu* after his appointment, Mr. Mattoo said that he will work towards the SIS "reasserting itself and reclaiming its place as Asia's finest centre of knowledge production on international relations".

MCD House clears ₹16,683 cr. budget amid pandemonium

BJP councillors accuse Mayor Shelly Oberoi of corruption, protest hike in her discretionary fund limit; ruling AAP dedicates its maiden budget to people, says focus on building infrastructure

Satvika Mahajan
NEW DELHI

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House on Thursday passed a budget with proposals for expenditure of ₹16,683 crore for 2024-25, amid a ruckus as Opposition BJP councillors accused Mayor Shelly Oberoi of corruption and protested the increase in her discretionary funds.

The estimates were passed without the Leader of the House, Mukesh Goel, completing his budget speech. AAP councillors guarded the Mayor's dais as BJP councillors raised slogans.

This was AAP's maiden budget in the civic body after it came to power in the MCD elections in December 2022.

Last year's budget was presented by a special officer as the party assumed charge only in late Febru-



Aam Aadmi Party councillors huddled around Mayor Shelly Oberoi during the MCD budget session on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ary due to the delay in the election of Mayor.

The budget was presented days after the MCD House passed a resolution, increasing the Mayor's discretionary spending limit to ₹500 crore from ₹10 crore, which was called "unconstitutional" by the BJP.

The move came in the absence of the MCD's Standing Committee, whose constitution has been pending for more than a year now, stalling several projects as the panel is the main financial decision-making arm of the civic body.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Goel dedicated the budget to people, saying it focuses on infrastructure building.

He said the MCD is expected to earn ₹15,686.99

crore next fiscal.

The Mayor said the MCD will be spending ₹1,000 crore for the maintenance of roads. She said ₹400 crore has been kept for garbage management in the national capital.

'L-G should intervene'

Later, BJP councillors led by the Leader of the Opposition in the MCD, Raja Iqbal Singh, submitted a memorandum to Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena, seeking his intervention over the hike in discretionary funds.

The BJP leaders said increasing the funds at the Mayor's disposal after slashing funding to ward committees was unconstitutional.

No one should be allowed to wield this much financial power, a BJP leader said. The party also accused AAP of "attempts to loot" the MCD through unfair means.



A portion of the boundary wall that collapsed at the Gokulpuri metro station in east Delhi on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

One killed, four hurt as Gokulpuri metro station wall collapses

Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

A 53-year-old man died after a portion of the boundary wall at Gokulpuri metro station on the Pink Line collapsed on them on Thursday.

The deceased has been identified as Vinod Kumar, a resident of Shaheed Bhagat Singh Colony in Karawal Nagar. He was on his scooter when he came under the debris of the collapsed wall of the elevated station platform. Four more people suffered injuries in the incident that took place at 11 a.m., the police said, add-

ing that the injured persons are undergoing treatment at GTB Hospital. Two motorcycles and two scooters were damaged in the accident.

DCP (North East) Joy Tirkey said a case under Sections 304-A (causing death by negligence) and 337 (causing hurt to any person by doing any act so rashly) of the IPC has been registered against contractors who had built the wall. Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot has directed Delhi Metro Rail Corporation to form a committee to probe the incident and submit a report within two weeks.

AAP-Congress alliance not working out, at most possible in Delhi

Iaideep Deo Bhani
Nikhil M Babu
NEW DELHI

The AAP-Congress alliance for the Lok Sabha poll is not working out and will at most be limited to seat sharing in Delhi, multiple leaders from both parties

told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

Both parties are part of the Opposition's INDIA bloc, which will be taking on the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. They had initiated talks last month but no discussion has been held after the last meeting on January 12.

"We have told Congress leaders during conference calls that we want an alliance in Delhi. They say they will talk with their top leadership and get back, but nothing is happening," a senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader said.

The leader said with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi busy with his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the seat-sharing discussions have been delayed. Another AAP leader said an alliance even in Delhi looks difficult. "See, we don't want to be the villain by

saying that the alliance is not working out. But there are no talks happening now even for Delhi," the leader said.

A Congress leader, who is part of the seat-sharing talks, said AAP was mainly responsible for the stalemate. "Both the Congress

and AAP want an alliance in Delhi, but it is held up because AAP is asking for seats in other States too," the leader said. The leader said the Congress is preparing to contest all seven seats and its selection committee has started screening candidates.

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THE HINDU

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Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister, Delhi

Guest of Honour

Atishi, Education Minister, Delhi



'Hate propaganda': JNU students slam Bastar maker, actors

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

burnt posters of the film as part of their protest, slammed the director for "spreading dangerous propaganda and inciting violence".

Action demanded

"We demand immediate action against Sudipto Sen, Adah Sharma, and Vipul Amrutl Shah for the open call for genocide of JNU students. All legal steps will be taken and we appeal to our alumni and V-C to take urgent action," said JNU Students' Union president Aishe Ghosh in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

Meanwhile, the Students Federation of India deemed the film a "dangerous manifestation of hatemongering and communal propaganda".

The Hindu reached out to the film's producer and the JNU administration, but neither offered a comment on the same.

DMs to be 'responsible sanitation authority'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena on Thursday approved a proposal to nominate District Magistrates (DMs) as the 'responsible sanitation authority' (RSA) in their respective jurisdictions, and establish emergency response sanitation units to ensure the complete elimination of manual scavenging from the city, Raj Niwas officials said.



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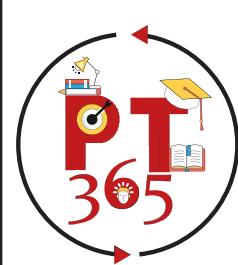
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IN BRIEF



Demand for debate in Parliament on stray dog bites

Representatives of some Resident Welfare Associations on Thursday held a protest led by former Union Minister Vijay Goel at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi demanding a parliamentary debate on the menace of stray dog bites. Addressing the protesters, Mr. Goel said all political parties should clarify their stance on the problem. "There should be a debate in Parliament on the problem of stray dog bites," he added. Mr. Goel claimed that nearly four crore people in the country suffer stray dog bites every year. PTI

No misuse of Raj Bhavan in Soren's arrest, says Governor

Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan on Thursday denied allegations that the Raj Bhavan was involved in former Chief Minister and JMM executive president Hemant Soren's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering scam. Mr. Soren was arrested on January 31 after a seven-hour grilling by the ED. He resigned as the Chief Minister before that. Addressing a press conference here, Mr. Radhakrishnan said, "There is no question of misuse of Raj Bhavan. Every democratic norm has been strictly followed by us". He claimed that the Raj Bhavan did not ask Mr. Soren to resign as Chief Minister but it was the CMO which said he was going to resign. PTI

SC denies bail to Khalistani separatist in UAPA case

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has refused bail to an alleged Khalistani separatist, who is purported to be a member of banned outfit 'Sikhs for Justice' (SFJ), saying materials on record prima facie indicated his complicity in preparation for a terrorist act.

HC order upheld

A Bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Aravind Kumar refused to interfere with the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order refusing bail to Gurwinder Singh alias Gurpreet Singh Gopi in the UAPA case probed by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Gurwinder Singh, along with several others including SFJ founder Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, was booked by the NIA in 2020 for various offences under the IPC, and the UAPA.

Sops galore in Bengal budget ahead of Lok Sabha poll, slew of policies for social sector

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Ahead of the Lok Sabha election later this year, the West Bengal government presented its budget for 2024-25 with a slew of policies for social welfare and sops for every sector.

Amid noisy scenes and with Opposition party members disrupting her of speech, Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya tabled a ₹3,66,166-crore budget in the Assembly on Thursday in which the monthly financial assistance under the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme has been doubled, the Dearness Allowance (DA) to government employees increased and the salaries of civic police volunteers raised.

"The Centre has imposed a financial blockade on West Bengal. But, we will not bow down. The State's dues from the Cen-



Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee with Finance Minister Chandrima Bhattacharya at the Assembly in Kolkata. DEBASISH BHADURI

tral government is nearly ₹1.18 lakh-crore," Ms. Bhattacharya said.

Financial assistance under the 'Lakshmir Bhandar' scheme for the general category has been increased from ₹500 to ₹1,000 per month and for SC/STs from ₹1,000 to ₹1,200 per month.

The State government has allocated ₹3,700 crore towards wages of 21 lakh

MGNREGA workers as announced by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on February 3. A sum of ₹900 crore has been allocated for providing tablets and smart phones to Class XI students.

Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari described the Budget as 'directionless' and said that the document was an attempt to hold on to power.

Rajasthan vote-on-account budget claims to fulfil BJP's Assembly election promises

Mohammed Iqbal
JAIPUR

The vote-on-account budget presented by Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari in the Rajasthan Assembly on Thursday claimed to have fulfilled the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's promises made in the 2023 election manifesto. The key announcements included enhancement in the social security pension amount and recruitments to fill up 70,000 posts of government service.

Ms. Kumari, who holds the Finance portfolio, announced a provision of ₹1,000 crore to establish and upgrade schools, colleges, hospitals and administrative buildings, ₹1,200 crore for creating water harvesting structures in 20,000 villages and ₹15,000 crore for supplying drinking water to 25 lakh rural families under



Deputy CM Diya Kumari arrives at the Assembly to present the interim budget in Jaipur. PTI

the Jal Jeevan Mission.

The Deputy CM said the State government would make an additional annual payout of ₹2,000 to farmers under the Prime Minister's Kisan Samman Nidhi Scheme, taking the total amount to ₹8,000 per annum, and increase the minimum support price for wheat - a major rabi crop in the State - by ₹25, taking it from ₹2,275 to ₹2,400

ED searches jailed Minister Senthilbalaji's house again

C. Jaisankar
KARUR

Officials of the Enforcement Directorate on Thursday conducted searches at the residence of Minister V. Senthilbalaji, who has been jailed in connection with a money-laundering case.

The searches on the premises at Rameswarapatti on the outskirts of Karur, where Mr. Senthilbalaji's father Velusamy and mother Rukmani live, began around 8 a.m. and concluded around 4 p.m.

'Parent's questioned' The team reportedly questioned the Minister's parents on the whereabouts of his brother, Ashok Kumar, who has been absconding for more than seven months. The officials also checked CCTV footage to ascertain whether he had visited the house recently.

Fear and fury grip M.P. village after firecracker factory blasts leave trail of destruction

Mehul Malpani
HARDA

Neha Chandel, 19, burst into tears as she asked government officials how she will take care of her two sisters and a brother, all minors, after their parents' death. Ms. Chandel, along with about a hundred angry locals, sat on a dharna on Wednesday, minutes after Chief Minister Mohan Yadav's visit to the site of the firecracker blasts in Harda, Madhya Pradesh. The accident on February 6 morning had killed 12, and injured 200, with doubts being cast on the 'official' numbers. Their home, a stone's throw away from the factory, crumbled under the impact of the explosion, and the children have been temporarily housed at a makeshift relief camp.

Now, Bairagarh village looks like a war-torn area. Local residents said the blasts that began around 11 a.m. felt like a "strong earthquake". Jagged bits of concrete, with dangerous iron rods protruding, lie up to 300 metres around the site while debris is scattered up to a kilometre around. Some homes in the vicinity are gutted and some have cracks in walls. According to villagers, the blasts continued for about an hour.

A large population, including women and teenagers, from Bairagarh and nearby worked at the factory. They were hired for daily wages of ₹300. Local residents said that at least 500-700 workers worked in the factory every day. Many had come from the tribal-dominated districts of



The tragic aftermath: Victims' kin protesting in Harda, Madhya Pradesh on Wednesday. A.M.FARUQUI

Khargone and Betul, and even from States like Bihar.

At the district hospital in Harda town, Shahrukh Khan, 29, has just received treatment for leg injuries from running through thorny bushes and falling. Mr. Khan, who filled explosive powder that would later be made into bombs, said, "I had just returned to my hall after taking a break when I heard the first blast. There

was so much smoke that we could not see anything. We knew something was wrong, so we just ran."

Counter theories State Congress president Jitu Patwari alleged that the ruling BJP government was "hiding the actual death toll" and termed the accident a "government-created crime". Kedar Sirohi, a Congress leader and a resi-

dent of Harda, said there are tin shanties made for workers from outside the area. They used to live there with their families. "Where are all of them?" he said.

A majority of the staff that mixed the chemicals to make the explosive powder, locals said, were tribals from nearby districts. They were called mama, as per the tribal tradition of addressing an elderly male. Mr. Khan said, "One mama, I know, told me that two of his fellow staff members had died in the blast, but their names have not been recorded."

Rohit Sissons, CEO, Jila Panchayat, Harda, who was given the charge of Collector after Rishi Garg was transferred on February 7, refuted the allegations. "Many officials and I were

present at the accident site throughout the operation that was undertaken by teams of NDRF [National Disaster Response Force] and SDRF [State Disaster Response Force]. We would have definitely found some human remains if there were any," said Mr. Sissons. On Thursday, Aditya Singh, an IAS officer of 2014 batch currently serving as the Deputy Secretary in the Science and Technology Department, was made the Collector. Abhinav Chokse, an IPS officer of 2018 batch cadre, will be the new Superintendent of Police of Harda, as per government orders.

Official efforts

The police arrested Rajesh Agrawal, Somesh Agrawal (both brothers and owners), and Rafiq (a supervi-

sor at the factory) on February 6 night. While Mr. Somesh and Mr. Rafiq have been given a 14-day police remand, Mr. Rajesh has been sent to jail directly due to a kidney condition.

The State government has formed a three-member committee to probe the incident and the police are also conducting its investigation. An official said that the Agrawal brothers have 12 licences for manufacturing, storing, and selling firecrackers under the names of various family members. While officials said that they were yet to make an estimate of how much explosive was stored at the Bairagarh factory, they were certain that it way exceeded the permitted limits. The district administration sealed all 12 factories of the Agrawal fa-

Rift widens within INDIA bloc as AAP announces three candidates in Assam

Party says it was 'tired of talks yielding no results', unilaterally announces candidates for three out of State's 14 Lok Sabha seats; nobody wants to sink with Congress, says Assam BJP MLA

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI



Last month, AAP had announced party MLA Chaitar Vasava as the candidate from Gujarat's Bharuch for the Lok Sabha poll. FILE PHOTO

The rift within the Indian National Development, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc widened with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday unilaterally announcing candidates for three out of Assam's 14 Lok Sabha seats, stating that they were "tired of talks not yielding any results" even after months.

"We are tired of talking. For how long will we keep talking? There's very little time for the Lok Sabha election. But there is no result from talks with the other alliance members of INDIA. I'm hopeful the INDIA bloc and the Congress will give three seats to AAP," AAP general secretary (organisation) Sandeep Pathak said at a press conference. Mr. Pathak also announced that in Punjab AAP and the Congress will be fighting the election separately and not as part of the INDIA bloc.

INDIA bloc", he added that talks for seat sharing in other States should be concluded soon. Until now AAP had maintained that the alliance talks were going well. Last month, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal had unilaterally announced party MLA Chaitar Vasava as the candidate from Gujarat's Bharuch seat for the Lok Sabha poll.

Oppn. bloc in Assam AAP's announcement has also exposed the cracks in the 15-party Opposition bloc in Assam. Out of the 14 constituencies, nine were won by the BJP in 2019. The Congress-led United Oppo-

sition Forum Assam (UOFA) was formed to make it tough for the ruling BJP to retain these seats or improve upon its performance five years ago.

AAP on Thursday announced the names of Manoj Dhanohar, Bhaben Choudhury, and Rishi Raj from the Dibrugarh, Guwahati, and Sonitpur constituencies, respectively. Party insiders said AAP's State leadership had been insisting on contesting these seats but the Congress was willing to leave only the Guwahati constituency for it.

The Congress reportedly wants Lurinjyoti Gogoi, the president of ally Assam Jati-

ya Parishad, to contest from Dibrugarh.

The BJP and the Badrudin Ajmal-led All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), which walked out of an earlier alliance with the Congress formed ahead of the 2021 Assam Assembly poll, said AAP's announcement was not surprising. "AAP knows the Congress did not get any support when Rahul Gandhi's yatra passed through non-Miya areas. Nobody wants to sink with the Congress," BJP legislator Manab Deka said. "Miya" is a pejorative word for Bengali Muslims in Assam, also viewed as 'Bangladeshis'. "I prefer to call the UOFA a club rather than a political alliance. The Congress opposed it when I had proposed a seat each for 14 parties in the Opposition with a chance to win," AIUDF leader Karim Uddin Barhuiya said.

AAP's decision to contest three Assam Lok Sabha seats followed that of the Trinamool Congress not to have a poll alliance with Congress in West Bengal.

Will remain with NDA permanently, reiterates Nitish

The Hindu Bureau

PATNA



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar reiterated on Thursday that he was firmly with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "I will not go anywhere and will remain here permanently," he told reporters on his return to Patna after meeting Prime Minister and other leaders of BJP in New Delhi on February 7.

Mr. Kumar, the longest-serving CM of the State, has been demanding central help like special category status and a special economic package for Bihar. Asked if he had received any assurances on his demands, Mr. Kumar, who is also the JD(U) president, said, "I have been working for Bihar's progress since 2005. There is no cause for worry. Everything has been discussed."

When asked whether he had any reason to be anxious ahead of the floor test in the Assembly on February 12, Mr. Kumar said, "All is okay, do not worry about the floor test."

The JD(U) has also called a meeting of its legislative party on February 11 at the residence of Parliamentary

Affairs Department Minister Vijay Choudhary.

Meanwhile, State Rural Development Minister Shrawan Kumar alleged that the Opposition was luring JD(U) MLAs. Without naming anyone, Mr. Kumar claimed that "contractors" were being sent to the houses of the MLAs. "Let me say this on record that JD(U) MLAs are united and we will prove majority on February 12," he said.

At another gathering of BJP workers in Patna, State unit president Samrat Choudhury said, "We honour whichever alliance we are a part of, but remember there is no going back on our pledge to form our own government in Bihar one day."

(With PTI inputs)

Sri Lankan Navy arrests 19 Indian fishermen

17 of them are from two Tamil Nadu districts; in a first, the other two are Odisha natives who were reportedly engaged as 'helpers'; PMK founder S. Ramadoss seeks a permanent solution

L. Srikrishna
RAMESWARA



In troubled waters: This was perhaps the first time that two persons from Odisha had been arrested along with fishermen from Rameswaram in the Palk Bay. REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE

A total of 19 fishermen were arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy on Thursday.

While 17 of them belonged to Rameswaram and Thangachimadam in Tamil Nadu, the other two were from Odisha.

Sources in the Marine Police and the Fisheries Department initially revealed the names of only 17 fishermen, saying the identities of the other two were unknown.

Around 11 a.m., when the Sri Lankan authorities stated that the 19 arrested fishermen included two from Odisha, Fisheries Department officials in Ramanathapuram conduct-

ed an inquiry. An officer in the rank of Assistant Director in the Fisheries Department said that a preliminary inquiry had revealed that the two boats impounded by the Sri Lankan authorities had 19 people (12+7). It was said that some fishermen

had taken the two persons from Odisha with them as "helpers", and that they were engaged in construction work in Rameswaram.

Though the Fisheries Department officials said that they had issued 492 tokens, many boats had

ventured into the sea without a token.

The official said the Fisheries Department had issued notices to all boat owners in Ramanathapuram district, asking them to ensure that only fishermen from Tamil Nadu ventured into the sea.

This was perhaps the first time that two persons from Odisha had been arrested along with fishermen from Rameswaram in the Palk Bay, though there had been instances of detention during deep-sea fishing, officials said.

Condemning the arrest, PMK founder S. Ramadoss said the Centre and the State government should take measures to find a permanent solution to the issue.

Anti-encroachment drive turns violent in Uttarakhand town; 30 injured

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

At least 30 people were injured in violent clashes between police and locals in Haldwani's Banbholpura area of Uttarakhand on Thursday when a team of district administration officials attempted to demolish an 'illegal' madrasa in the area. Miscreants surrounded the police station,

pelted stones at officials, torched vehicles and public property. Shoot-at-sight orders were issued and curfew was imposed.

A doctor at the Sushila Tiwari Medical College in the district told *The Hindu* that over 20 policemen and 10 civilians were brought to the hospital in critically injured condition. "One person with bullet injury was brought

dead," said a hospital staff member. The police denied any fatality till the time of filing this report.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said those responsible for the riots would not be spared. "Following court's orders, a team from the district administration had gone to conduct an anti-encroachment drive... This is when some miscreants entered

into a brawl with the police which left several policemen and officials injured. We have sent additional forces and I appeal to everyone to maintain peace," said Mr. Dhami.

Locals said that the owners of the madrasa had approached the Supreme Court against the demolition and the next hearing in the matter was scheduled for February 14.

Ministers meet farmer leaders in Punjab

Press Trust of India
CHANDIGARH

A three-member team of Union Ministers on Thursday met leaders of farmer organisations which plan 'Delhi Chalo' march to press for their demands, including enactment of a law to guarantee minimum support price for crops.

The team includes Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and Arjun Munda, Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher said before the meeting began here in the evening.

Mr. Pandher said Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann coordinated with them for arranging the meeting with the team.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha had announced 'Delhi Chalo' march by more than 200 farmers' unions on February 13 to press for accepting several demands, including enactment of a law to guarantee MSP for crops.

SKM (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal had earlier said three central ministers will hold a meeting with them in Chandigarh.

"We have come here. We do not run away from the meeting," said Mr. Dallewal.

The farmers are also demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, debt waiver, withdrawal of police cases and "justice" for victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri violence. In 2020, a large number of farmers from Punjab had gathered at the Shambhu border and broke police barriers to march towards Delhi.

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
TOLL TAX DEPARTMENT
(E-TENDER NOTICE)

Notice Inviting Offer cum Request For Proposal (RFP)

NIT No: ADC/TT/HQ/MCD/2024/D-894 Dated 07.02.2024

ENGAGEMENT OF A CONTRACTOR BY MCD FOR TOLL & ENVIRONMENT COMPENSATION CHARGE (ECC) COLLECTION AT BORDER POINTS FROM SPECIFIED COMMERCIAL VEHICLES ENTERING DELHI

The MCD invites online technical and financial proposals through <https://etenders.gov.in> from interested developers/ Toll Plaza Operators to collect Toll Tax from specified commercial vehicles, upgrade/modify, operate, and maintain 154 toll plazas/posts/barriers locations bordering Delhi. In addition to toll collection, the contractor shall also separately collect ECC as per actual basis and deposit the same on weekly basis. The work shall be granted for a period of 3 years. Reserve Price (for Toll amount only): Rs. 847.00 crores annually. Tender Cost Rs.1.00 lakh & EMD = Rs.17.00 crores. Any Firm /Entity in the form of Proprietor/Partnership /Pvt. Ltd. /Ltd. and JV may submit their proposal.

Pre-bid conference – 16.02.2024 at 03:00 PM at Conference Hall at 23rd Floor, Dr. SPM Civic Centre, Minto Road, New Delhi. Submission of Technical and Financial Proposal/Bid through Online mode only available at <https://etenders.gov.in>

Last date of submission of Proposal 29.02.2024 or on or before 03.00 P.M. (IST) Date of opening of Technical Bid 01.03.2024 at 03.30 P.M. (IST)

For project background, Broad role of contractor, Eligibility Criteria, Selection Process and any other detailed information please refer NIT & RFP documents uploaded on website <https://etenders.gov.in>.

R.O. No.83/DPI/MCD/2023-24

For Commissioner, MCD

MUNICIPAL CORPORATION OF DELHI
DEPARTMENT OF VETERINARY SERVICES

17th Floor, Dr. SPM Civic Centre, J.L.N. Marg, New Delhi-110002
Phone No. 011-23226724, Email: ddvrcpmcd@gmail.com

PUBLIC NOTICE

Inviting applications from NGOs/Animal Welfare Board Organizations (AWOs) for sterilization & immunization of stray dogs under Animal Birth Control (ABC) Programme in MCD.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) invites applications for sterilization & immunization of stray dogs at Veterinary hospitals of GNTD, Prahaladpur from NGOs/AWOS registered with Animal Welfare Board of India having experience of the work of Dog Sterilization under Animal Birth Control Programme.

The eligibility criteria, detailed terms & conditions and application form alongwith the list of documents to be submitted by the NGOs/AWOS is available on the MCD website www.mcdonline.nic.in which may be downloaded from the website. The last date of submission of application through speed post or by hand is on 22.02.2024 by 04:00 PM. Sd/- RO. No. 81/DPI/MCD/2023-24

Dr. SPM International Institute of Information Technology - Naya Raipur (IIIT-NR)
Sector-24, Naya Raipur, Atal Nagar - 493661 (Chhattisgarh)

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Dr. SP Mukherjee IIIT-Naya Raipur invites application from eligible candidates for recruitment to the following post on Deputation basis:-

Name of Post	No. of Post	Pay Level (7 th CPC)
Registrar	01	14

For details and last date of application please visit the website of IIIT-Naya Raipur <https://www.iiitnr.ac.in/content/careers>

Director
IIIT-Naya Raipur

BANARAS LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, VARANASI - 221004

BID No. E-108/2023-24 E-TENDERS Date : 02.02.2024

E-Tenders are invited for & behalf of the President of India for the supply of following items. Only E-offer will be accepted for which vendors must have Class III Digital Signature and registration on IREPES. The details of tenders are in the following sequence :- S. No., Tender No., (Due Date), Description and Quantity. S. No. 01, 05231242 (22/02/24), Reversible Ratcheting Box PL No 72140150, 25 Nos. S. No. 02, 05231260 (22/02/24), Copper Coated Low carbon PL No. 76114053, 20000, Kgs. S. No. 03, 05231246 (01/03/24), (i) Adjustable Spanner Length "8" PL No. 72053689, 30, Nos. (ii) Adjustable Spanner Length "10" PL No. 72053677, 30, Nos. S. No. 04, 05235263/A (06/03/24), Circuit Breaker VL-250, 01 No. S. No. 05, 05235263/A (06/03/24), Steel Wire Rope Sing, 04 Nos. S. No. 06, 10231925A, (29/02/24), Developmental Tender for Clevis Assembly, to PL No. 16050186, 20 Nos. S. No. 07, 10231046, (25/03/2024), Developmental Tender for Pin Piston, PL No. 16144141, 480 Nos. S. No. 08, 10223517C, (14/03/2024), Cast Turbo Inlet Scroll Assembly (Machined), to PL No. 16081481, 80 Nos. S. No. 09, 10231303, (15/03/2024), Kit Hardware - Fork Road, to PL No. 16210542, 3054 Nos. S. No. 10, 02321748 (22/02/24), Hose Kit for Sander Application, PL No. 29176682, 532 set. S. No. 12, 03224488 (26/02/24), Raw Edge Cogger V-Belt, PL No-11272697, 06 Nos. S. No. 13, 03231461C (26/02/24), Elbow, PL No-11329750, 08 Nos. S. No. 14, Tender No : 04241017 Due Date : (22/02/24) Item : Safety Sling, PL No. 29142021, Quantity : 457 sets. S. No. 15, Tender No : 04231076D (RA, Double bid system) Due Date : (26/02/24) Item : Driver Seat to PL No. 29171131, Quantity : 2549 Nos. S. No. 16, 06231868 (28/02/2024), TERMINAL BAR 110V DC as per Spec. CLW/ES/03/046 to PL No. 29811004, Qty: 1051 Nos. S. No. 17, 06230002B (06/03/2024), MAIN CIRCUIT BREAKER (VCB) WITH ITS CONNECTOR & 05% extra flexible reinforced rubber 27" long air pipe I/D 5/16" with 3/8" BSP. Female coupling fitting at both end as manufacturing spares, specm. CLW/ES/C-47/I to PL No. 29711046 Qty:323 Sets. S. No. 18, 06231104A, (28/02/2024), MICROPROCESSOR BASED ELECTRONIC SPEED INDICATING, RECORDING SYSTEM and 01(ONE) EVALUATION SOFTWARE FOR EVERY 10(TEN) SETS OF PMP (WITHOUT MEMORY CARD READER UNIT & COMMUNICATION CABLE FOR MASTER TO SLAVE) FOR WAG-9 / WAP-7 & WAP-5 TYPE 3-PHASE LOCOMOTIVES, specm: ELRS/SPEC/SPM/0002 (Rev.4) to PL No. 29200040, Qty: 555 Set. S. No. 19, Bid No. E-Tender No : 07235469A Due Date : (11/03/24) PL No. : NON - STOCK. Description : Electric Hot Plate. Quantity : 4 Nos. S. No. 20, 0823116A, Open Tender, (06/03/2024) RING RETAINING, (PL No. 19340059) Qty: 309 Nos. The details of above tenders are available on <https://www.blw.indianrailways.gov.in> and <https://www.blw.indianrailways.gov.in>, CORRIGENDUM NOTICE : S. No. 21, Tender No : 0231086 Bid Inv. No. : E-98 Existing Due Date : (08/02/24) Revised Due Date : 02/02/2024 S. No. 22, Bid No. : E-92/2023-24 Tender No. : 04231899 Due Date : 31/01/24 Revision : 1 Details of Correction : 1) Due date : To be read as 15/02/2024 instead of 31/01/24. S. No. 23 Bid No. : E-92/2023-24 Due Date : 04/231900 Due Date : 31/01/24 Revision : 1 Details of Correction : 1) Due date : To be read as 15/02/2024 instead of 31/01/24. Note : All other terms and conditions of the tender will remain unchanged.

PR/BLW/S-115 Principal Chief Material Manager

Website: blw.indianrailways.gov.in

Rural Works Department										
Notice Inviting Re-Tender (No.-RWD/MMGSY(NDB)/HQ/ET/72(R)/2023-24)										
The Government of Bihar has a loan no. [18IN01] from New Development Bank (NDB) towards the cost of Rural Roads Project (Mukhya Mantri Gram Sampark Yojana) to cover eligible payments under the contracts for construction & maintenance of works as detailed in the Table-1 below. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the bidding document.										
Engineering-in-Chief, Rural Works Department, on behalf of Governor of Bihar invites, SBD based Percentage rate tender in electronic tendering system under Mukhya Mantri Gram Sampark Yojana (MMGSY) for each of the following works including their maintenance for five years from the eligible and approved Contractors registered with RWD/RCD/CPWD/MES/Railways/Other State/Central Govt. departments.										
Table-1										
Sl. No.	Package	Description of the Works [CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF ROADS (A) / BRIDGES (B)]	Length (KM)	Construction Amount (Lacs)	Maintenance Amount (Lacs)	Total Amount (Lacs)	Earnest Money Payable (Lacs)*	Amount Payable to Works Division		
1	2	From 3 To 4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
1	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-121-SUPAUL	S019 Bahuvra Sharma tola	1.215	90.390	4.706	95.096	6.040	Supaul		
		A2 Maroona Chandragadh PMGSY Road	Karahi	1.055	76.859	4.223			81.082	
		A3 T03 Islam pur	Ramchandrapur Aliwalli To Block Headquarter Pipariya MMGSY Road	1.710	118.988	6.833			125.821	
	TOTAL	3	3.980	286.237	15.762	301.999	6.040			
2	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-349-LAKHISARAI	A1 Ramchandrapur Ravidas Tola	0.430	25.016	4.408	29.424	0.588	Lakhisarai		
			1	0.430	25.016	4.408			29.424	
3	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-445-SAHSARA	A1 Mankhahi Middle School Road	0.358	40.946	2.811	43.757	9.735	Saharsa		
		A2 Pgmsy Road (To Barasher)	Paswan Tola	2.246	264.917	30.700			295.617	
		A3 Sh 59 Vishkarma Chowk	Chandpur Musahi	0.481	63.061	4.856			67.917	
		A4 Mmgsy Hanuman Nagar	Sakhua Ward No 12	0.696	70.964	8.504			79.467	
	TOTAL	4	3.781	439.888	46.871	486.				

NIA court to pronounce punishment for Riyas today

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Special Court for the National Investigation Agency (NIA) will pronounce on Friday the punishment for Riyas Aboobacker, who was found guilty of various offences under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Special Judge Mini S. Das had on Wednesday found Aboobacker, an alleged IS activist, guilty under Section 38 of the Act, which deals with the offence relating to the membership of a terrorist organisation, and Section 39 for support given to a terrorist organisation.

He was also found guilty under Section 120 B of the Indian Penal Code for the offence of criminal conspiracy. The charges against him included attempts to recruit youth to the IS, a proscribed organisation, and planning to carry out explosions in Kerala.

Requests leniency
The convict maintained that he had not committed the offence when the court sought his views on the punishment.

He requested the court to show leniency while deciding on the quantum of punishment considering his poor financial situation. The counsel for the convict canvassed for a less severe punishment for him considering the financial condition of his family. The convict had already been in prison for five years. He should be given the benefits of a lighter sentence, the counsel said.

However, counsel for the NIA sought maximum punishment as the offence committed by the convict was against society.

HC grants bail to A.P. man who attacked Jagan in 2018

The Hindu Bureau
VIJAYAWADA

A Division Bench of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, comprising Justices U. Durga Prasad Rao and Kiranmaya Mandava, on Thursday granted bail to Japali Srinivasa Rao in the Kodiki case.

It was alleged that Srinivasa Rao attacked Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, then Leader of the Opposition, with a knife used in rooster fights at the Visakhapatnam airport in October 2018.

The court said it was satisfied that the violence neither caused nor was likely to cause grievous hurt or death.

Naidu meets Shah and Nadda, stirring speculation about a possible alliance

TDP sources say allying with BJP is not a straightforward choice; Naidu is learnt to have shared concerns about a possible blowback if the two parties were to ally; BJP wants TDP to take a decision in next two weeks, before EC notifies elections

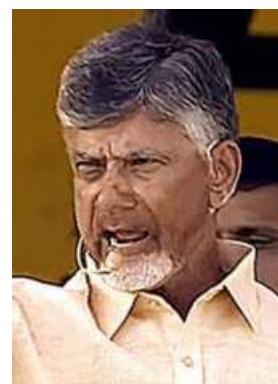
Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president N. Chandrababu Naidu met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda on Wednesday night stirring speculations that the two parties may join hands in Andhra Pradesh for the upcoming elections. However, as per sources in the TDP, it is not an easy choice for them and Mr. Naidu has shared his reservations about the alliance. Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously in the State.

Mr. Naidu did not speak to the media after the meeting. The BJP wants TDP to take a decision within the next two weeks, before the Election Commission of India notifies the elections. The ruling party wants to draw a contrast between the crumbling Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) and a fortified National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

If Mr. Naidu returns to the BJP-led NDA, he will be the second major regional leader to have done so after Janata Dal (United) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who snapped ties with the Opposition and joined its fold last month.

"There are both pros and cons to having an alliance with the BJP. We need to figure out if the pros outweigh the cons," a senior TDP leader said. The TDP is conscious of



Chandrababu Naidu

the fact that the BJP could return to power at the Centre and it will be helpful to have an ally in Delhi. It is equally cognisant of the fact that if they reject the BJP's overtures then their political rival YSRCP will be the obvious choice. At the same time, the TDP leadership is worried that

the BJP could prove to be a dead weight for them, especially in the Assembly election.

"There is sentiment that the retributive action taken against Mr. Naidu by the State government had the BJP's support. Also, in the last 10 years, the BJP has failed to keep the promises made to Andhra Pradesh as part of the Reorganisation Act," the leader added.

BJP vote share

A section of the TDP also feels that the BJP brings little to the table in Andhra Pradesh, considering their past performance.

The BJP's vote share was less than 1% in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in 2019.

"We are not against the

alliance, but the BJP will have to address our concerns and also together we will have to frame a convincing argument for the electorate," another senior TDP leader explained.

Both had fought the 2014 election together when Telangana was yet to be formally separated from Andhra Pradesh. The BJP had then fought in three of the 42 seats in the united State and won all three.

Following Telangana's creation, Andhra Pradesh has 25 seats and the BJP is keen to contest anywhere between six to eight seats, sources said.

The TDP had walked out of the NDA in 2018. In the 2019 results, the party could win only three Lok Sabha seats and lost the Assembly election too.

196 babies born, HC takes serious view of women in Bengal jails getting pregnant

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA



The matter will be placed before a Division Bench of the Calcutta HC hearing criminal cases next Monday. FILE PHOTO



The *amicus curiae* has suggested prohibition of entry of male employees of correctional homes into the enclosures of women prisoners

CALCUTTA HIGH COURT

also there in the correctional home.

The judges added that the *amicus curiae* placed his note on January 25, 2024, and submitted a copy in the office of the Advocate-General.

Highest number

The Prison Statistics of India report for 2022, compiled by the National Crime Records Bureau, pointed out that there were 1,537 women prisoners with 1,764 children as on December 31, 2022.

"Uttar Pradesh has reported the highest number of women with children [325 women with 365 children] followed by Bihar [300 and 331] and West Bengal [160 and 213] as on December 31, 2022," the report stated.

Modi thinks States are municipalities, says Stalin

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi neither liked the existence of States nor the Chief Ministers in the country, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said virtually addressing the protest led by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan against the Centre in Jantar Mantar in Delhi.

Mr. Stalin further said snatching the rights of States over finances was akin to stopping the oxygen and that the ruling BJP in the Centre was doing it.

Mr. Vijayan was staging a protest against the "crippling financial embargo" on Kerala.

Contending that "all the States have been facing massive crunch in finances

becoming the Prime Minister was to snatch the rights of the States. He snatched the education rights, language rights and rights in terms of law," Mr. Stalin said virtually addressing the protest led by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan against the Centre in Jantar Mantar in Delhi.

Mr. Stalin further said snatching the rights of States over finances was akin to stopping the oxygen and that the ruling BJP in the Centre was doing it.

Mr. Vijayan was staging a protest against the "crippling financial embargo" on Kerala.

Contending that "all the States have been facing massive crunch in finances

since the imposing of the GST regime," Mr. Stalin said the Union government should act to remove the financial crunch. "But, its functions have not been towards it. It is creating obstacles for the States from borrowing loans to implement development measures."

"Let us all in the INDIA bloc, unite and take over the Government of India to put a full stop to the fascist BJP. Let us create an India, which respects all the States equally."

"The BJP Chief Ministers should not think obstacles are happening to States that are ruled by the Oppo-

sition parties. I am warning you that this will be the fate of your States tomorrow," Mr. Stalin said.

Tamil Nadu has been strongly protesting against the "autocratic" functions of the BJP government and Mr. Vijayan too has been protesting against it, Mr. Stalin said.

Referring to his return from Spain on Wednesday for not being able to take part in the protest in Delhi, Mr. Stalin said he has deputed Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan and MPs to take part.

"It is regrettable that you, who is to serve the people in Kerala, had to come to Delhi to stage a protest," he told Mr. Vijayan.

NIA searches several places in Hyderabad

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

zine's editor, N. Venugopal, who is the nephew of Telugu poet Professor Varavara Rao.

Mr. Rao is on medical bail in the Elgar Parishad case. The search at the residence of Mr. Venugopal in Himayatnagar was in connection with him allegedly having links with Maoists.

देवी अहिल्या विश्वविद्यालय
विश्वविद्यालय भवन, आर.एन.टी. मार्ग, इन्दौर-452001
क्र. : भण्डार/उपकरण एवं स्टेनोग्राफ़ी क्रम-2024/163 दिनांक : 08.02.2024

ऑनलाइन ई-निविदा आमंत्रण

देवी अहिल्या विश्वविद्यालय, इन्दौर द्वारा निम्नलिखित उपकरण एवं स्टेनोग्राफ़ी क्रम करने हेतु ई-निविदा क्रमांक-1. GEM/2024/B/4552635, 2. GEM/2024/B/4552993, 3. GEM/2024/B/4552487, 4. GEM/2024/B/4553482 5. GEM/2023/B/4400700, 6. GEM/2024/B/4565967, 7. GEM/2024/B/4588322 Gem portal <https://gem.gov.in> पर आमंत्रित की जाती है।

म.प्र. मास्टर्स/113689/2024

कुलसंचित

MANGALORE ELECTRICITY SUPPLY COMPANY LIMITED
(Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
Corporate Office, MESCOM BHAVANA, Kavoor Cross Road, Bejai, Mangalore - 575 004.
Ph: 0824-2885795, CIN: U40109 KA 2002 SGC 030425
No. E-101303 Date: 08.02.2024

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION
(THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT PORTAL ONLY)

MESCOM invites Short Term tender for Manufacture & Supply of following materials:

Tender No.	Material Proposed to be Procured	Quantity
MESCOM/2023-24/IND0061	70 SQ MM LEAD WIRE	80,000 Mtrs
MESCOM/2023-24/IND0062	95 SQ MM LEAD WIRE	1,00,000 Mtrs
MESCOM/2023-24/IND0063	120 SQ MM LEAD WIRE	85,000 Mtrs
MESCOM/2023-24/IND0064	240 SQ MM LEAD WIRE	28,000 Mtrs

The interested eligible bidders may log on to www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in on or after **09.02.2024**

Sd/- Superintending Engineer (Ele.)/Proc.

For Power Related Complaints & Assistance Call Toll Free Number 1912

(REGD. OFFICE: PSEB HEAD OFFICE, THE MALL Patiala)
(O/O Superintendent Engineer / TL Circle Jalandhar)
Address: Office Room No. 310-311, 2nd Floor, Shakti Sadan, G. T. Road, Jalandhar, Contact No 96461-07248
Corporate Identification Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813

Tender Inquiry No. 36/TL Circle Jal/2023-24 Dated: 08.02.2024

Dy. Chief Engineer/TL, Circle, Punjab State Power Corporation Limited, Room No. 310, 2nd Floor, Shakti Sadan, Jalandhar, invites one No. E-Tender of:

- Laying of tower foundations, Erection of towers and stringing & sagging of conductor with earth wire for 66 KV line from 66KV Tibber to Ranjit Bagh/Purana Shalla upto Village Bhule Chakk SC on DC.

For detailed NIT and Tender specifications please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 09.02.2024 from 5.00 PM onwards.

Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

C - 102/24 76155/12/2686/2023/32196

No. PHE-45/MM/PB/2023-24/21367

NOTICE

"Open Interactive session on Implementation of Town Water Supply Schemes and Large Schemes under Public health Engineering Department, Govt. of Assam.

Venue : O/o the Chief Engineer (PHE), Water Hengrabari, Guwahati-36.
Date : 14th February, 2024
Time : 10:00 AM

All interest agencies related to the subject of discussion are invited to participate in the session for their valued feedback. No TA / DA shall be borne by the Department. Interested applicants are requested to register by scanning the QR code below. For more information visit the website jmassam.in



Chief Engineer (PHE) Water, Assam Cum Addl. Mission Director, JJM Assam Hengrabari, Guwahati-36

Janasanyog /D/17436/ 23/9-Feb-24

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida-201301 (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & <https://etender.up.nic.in> Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

(A)

S.No.	Job No/Work name	Amount (Rs.in Lacs)
1.	45/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2022-23, D/o Green Belt in sector-112 with two year maintenance.	Cost Rs. 71.30 Lacs
2.	47/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2022-23, D/o Park, Green Belt & RSP in sector- 40, 45 & 48 with two year maintenance.	Cost Rs. 80.02 Lacs
3.	55/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2023-24, M/o Green Belt (C/o broken boundary wall in B-12 Green Belt, fencing Concertina wire to parallel to Drain and Closing of Gate, Raising of Boundary wall & fencing Concertina coil back of Manas Hospital Sector-34) Noida.	Rs. 51.16 Lacs
4.	57/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2023-24, M/o Park (R/o boundary wall and footpath near plot No.- E-12 Royal Garden Estate sector-61 and Raising of boundary wall near Hoshiarpur and grit wash on boundary wall in park D-18 sector-51) Noida.	Rs. 53.28 Lacs
5.	95/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2023-24, M/o Green Belt With Two year Maintenance Sector-62 All Green Belt Noida	Rs. 43.60 Lacs
6.	100/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2023-24, M/o Park/Green belt with Two year Maintenance Sector-1, 2, 3, and 5 Under Ground Car parking Noida	Rs. 86.06 Lacs
7.	101/D(H)/DD(H)-II/2023-24, M/o RSP With Two year Maintenance M.P. list Road Rajni Gandhi Underpass to 12, 12 Red Light Trinagar and Central Verge Cycle Track both side and Vindhyachal marg Sector-22 and 24 Noida	Rs. 75.06 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date 22.02.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date 23.02.2024 at 11.00 AM.

(B)

S.No.	Job No/Work name	Amount (Rs.in Lacs)
1.	40/D(H)/GM/DD(H)-I/2023-24, D/o Park, (Sh: P/F Open gym) with Five Year Maintenance Sector-69 Transport Nagar Noida	Rs. 30.87 Lacs
2.	51/D(H)/DD(H)-I/2023-24, M/o RSP (Vertical Garden) in sector- 14, Shahdara Drain Bridge both side and sector-59, 61, 62 and sector-63 metro pillars with two year maintenance.Noida	Rs. 91.46 Lacs
3.	61/D(H)/DD(H)-I/2023-24, D/o Park (Subhead Open Zym) with five year maintenance in sector-70, Noida	Rs. 33.96 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date

SOUTHERN RAILWAY				
CORRIGENDUM-2 EXTENSION OF LAST DATE OF BID SUBMISSION				
With reference to notice inviting open tender No. NMRT/01/2024 published on 19.01.2024, and Corrigendum-1 issued on 25.01.2024, all prospective Bidders are hereby informed that the last date of bid submission has been extended as follows.				
Particulars	Original date	Revised date		
Bid submission closing date	09.02.2024	19.02.2024		
Deputy Chief Commercial Manager/Passenger Services E-mail: dyccmps@srs.railnet.gov.in Mobile No: 9003160980				
Follow us on: twitter.com/GMSRailway				

Bihar Museum, Patna

(An Autonomous Society under the Department of Art, Culture & Youth, Government of Bihar)

Nehru Path, Patna-800001

Notice Inviting Tender

Tenders (Price Bids) in a two-bid system are invited for the supply of the following items for the conservation lab at Bihar Museum, Patna from authorized OEM dealers /suppliers/contractors. The last date for submission of the bid is 01.03.2024 up to 3:00 pm. The bid will be opened the same day at 3:30 pm. The information can be obtained from the office of the Director General, Bihar Museum, Patna on any working day. Bid documents can be downloaded from the website <http://biharmuseum.org/www.state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar> <https://state.bihar.gov.in/yac>

Sl no	Description of item	Unit	Qty.	Estimated Cost in Rupees	EMD in Rupees	Cost of Bid in Rupees.	Time of Completion
1	Supply of tools, equipment and instruments for the conservation lab at Bihar Museum, Patna	As mentioned in the BOQ	As quoted by the bidders	02% of the total quoted amount	10000/-		Two month

For further details please visit : www.state.bihar.gov.in/prdbihar

PR- 016916 (Art & Culture) 2023-24

नये से बदले का है एक ही उपचार, दृढ़ संकल्प और परिवार से प्यार

Bhubaneswar Development Authority

Akash Shova Building, Sachivalaya Marg, Bhubaneswar, Odisha - 751001. Ph.+91-0674-2392801

INVITATION FOR BIDS (MODIFIED)

Memo No.237/EM/BDA Date: 08.02.2024

Engineer Member, BDA on behalf of Bhubaneswar Development Authority, Bhubaneswar invited item rate bid vide **Bid Identification No.221/EM/BDA dated 06.02.2024** in double cover system in **ONLINE MODE** from eligible bidders as mentioned below:

Sr.	Particulars	Details
1.	Name of Work	Selection of Consulting Firm for providing "Project Management Consultancy (PMC) services for Development and Implementation of nature-based water Treatment solutions at the lake Zone I and Zone IV of the natural drainage Channel No 10, Bhubaneswar
2.	Bid Identification No.	221/EM/BDA dated 06.02.2024
3.	Cost of Bid Documents	INR 10,00,000+18%GST = INR 11,80,000 (Online Mode)
4.	Earnest Money Deposit (EMD)	INR 4,00,000 (Online Mode)
5.	Availability of Tender	From 08.02.2024 to 02.00 PM of 22.02.2024
6.	Last date and time of submission of Tender	02.00 PM of 22.02.2024
7.	Date and time of opening of Tender	03.00 PM of 22.02.2024
8.	Place of opening of Tender	O/o - Engineer Member, BDA, Bhubaneswar.

Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>. Any addendum / Corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Engineer Member, BDA, Bhubaneswar.

OIPR-13033/11/0633/2324

CAD-4046:

**Rural Works Department****Notice Inviting Tender (No.-RWD/MMGSY(NDB)/HQ/ET/74/2023-24)**

The Government of Bihar has a **loan no. [18N01]** from New Development Bank (NDB) towards the cost of Rural Roads Project (Mukhya Mantri Gram Sampark Yojana) to cover eligible payments under the contracts for construction & maintenance of works as detailed in the Table-1 below. Bidding is open to all bidders from eligible source countries as defined in the bidding document.

Engineer-in-Chief, Rural Works Department, on behalf of Governor of Bihar invites, SBD based Percentage rate tender in electronic tendering system under **Mukhya Mantri Gram Sampark Yojana (MMGSY)** for each of the following works including their maintenance for five years from the eligible and approved Contractors registered with RWD/RCD/CPWD/MES/Railways/Other State/Central Govt. departments.

Table-1

Sl. No.	Package	Description of the Works [CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE OF ROADS (A) / BRIDGES (B)]		Length (KM)	Construction Amount (In Lacs)	Maintenance Amount (In Lacs)	Total Amount (In Lacs)	Earnest Money Payable* (In Lacs)	Amount Payable to Works Division	
		From	To							
1	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-674-AURANGABAD	A1	Deoriya primary school	End of village Suhi near godown	3.280	302.580	27.545	330.125	8.348	Aurangabad
		A2	Malhara pokhari	Chatti Sargawan path	0.820	82.281	5.001	87.282		
		TOTAL			4.100	384.861	32.546	417.407	8.348	Aurangabad
2	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-675-AURANGABAD	A1	Chintawant bigha	Jagritha bigha	1.550	157.105	14.799	171.904	9.034	Aurangabad
		A2	Pucca bandh	Ankupia	1.150	115.762	8.340	124.102		
		A3	Janeshwar bhuia house	Sanda dumri to iriyup	1.500	143.553	12.160	155.713		
TOTAL		3		4.200	416.420	35.299	451.719	9.034		
3	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-676-JAGDISHPUR	A1	T02 to Tenduni	Mathiya Tola	0.680	62.676	9.655	72.331	1.447	Jagdishpur
		TOTAL			0.680	62.676	9.655	72.331	1.447	
		4		4.091	428.820	44.442	473.262	9.465		
4	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-677-GAYA	A1	Amin road(karbal)	Darabchak	0.988	85.232	12.785	98.017	8.410	Gaya
		A2	Sataniya	Purnadih	2.086	178.858	28.745	207.603		
		A3	Amin road	Meherpur	1.009	102.242	12.631	114.873		
TOTAL		3		4.083	366.332	54.161	420.493	8.410		
5	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-678-GAYA	A1	Bandhua kariyadpur	Barsonna Bali dakhin	0.670	121.451	8.950	130.401	9.465	Gaya
		A2	Janibigha	Makhdumpur tola	1.223	117.425	14.992	132.417		
		A3	Tankuppa to Gunian (Bhawa)	Nawdiha	0.921	90.472	5.415	95.887		
TOTAL		4		4.091	428.820	44.442	473.262	9.465		
6	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-679-SHERGHATI	A1	Karmain Gurua road	Belbigha	1.500	106.043	15.922	121.965	5.644	Sherghati
		A2	Amas kasma road	Thekha	1.900	134.932	25.290	160.222		
		TOTAL		2	3.400	240.975	41.212	282.187	5.644	
7	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-680-TIKARI	A1	kurmaint to buknari punakala road	punakala bichala tola	0.900	68.455	10.716	79.171	1.583	Tikari
		TOTAL		1	0.900	68.455	10.716	79.171	1.583	
		8		4.217	356.972	47.996	404.968	8.099		
9	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-682-JEHANABAD	A1	Dhaval Bigha	Bhediya tola Tak	1.210	99.780	10.298	110.078	2.202	Jehanabad
		TOTAL		1	1.210	99.780	10.298	110.078	2.202	
		10		4.091	428.820	44.442	473.262	9.465		
11	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-684-BIHARSHARIF	A1	SH-78	Narsinghpur	1.120	102.837	14.472	117.309	2.346	BiharSharf
		TOTAL		1	1.120	102.837	14.472	117.309	2.346	
		12		4.091	428.820	44.442	473.262	9.465		
13	MMGSY-NDB-BRRP-685-HILSA	A1	House of arbind maito	High school narayan pur	0.650	68.65				

SPOTLIGHT



Inconsolable: Sunitha Kalyan Phatangade with a portrait of her son, Umesh, who died by suicide on July 31 last year, at Murgagaon in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. EMMANUEL YOGINI

Ploughing through the pain

State-level data show that in 2023, as many as 1,088 farmers ended their lives in eight districts of Marathwada, Maharashtra's most drought-affected region. **Abhimay Deshpande** reports on the people left to deal with grief, stigma, and debt, and the statistics that tell only a part of the tale

Trigger warning: the following article has references to suicide. Please avoid reading if you feel distressed by the subject.

Laxmibai Damu Nawale winnows wheat at the entrance of her home, her weathered hands working hard. Constructed with corrugated metal sheets, the structure that doubles as a cattle shed sits in a field of half an acre in Pali village, Beed district, Maharashtra. She talks about the pain of losing a son a decade ago, followed by a grandson last year. "They have left us behind, along with a deadly debt," says the 78-year-old matriarch. "I don't know why death is not taking me away."

In January 2014, Nawale's son Bapu Rao Damu, in his 40s, killed himself. He had seen many years of debt and failed crops, the expenses mounting with a sister's wedding.

In the following decade, Nawale's daughter-in-law Sangita and her two sons, Akshay and Balu, took charge of their farm. They sold half an acre to clear some of the debt, and worked for a meagre daily wage of ₹100 to ₹150. But in March 2023, Balu, 23, also took his life. He had borrowed ₹5 lakh from friends and relatives over the years to dig a well, and experiment with different crops. None of his efforts paid off, and the seeds withered on arid land.

Last year, 1,088 farmers ended their lives in eight districts of Marathwada region, and 1,439 in Vidarbha region, as per a report from the Relief and Rehabilitation Department. In Marathwada, Beed reported the highest deaths at 269, followed by 182 in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, 175 in Nanded, 171 in Dharashiv, and 103 in Parbhani. Jalna, Latur, and Hingoli reported 74, 72, and 42 deaths by suicide, respectively. While the overall figure of 2,851 shows a lower number of suicides compared to the previous year's 2,942, Marathwada has seen a rise by 65 from 2022. All the victims shared a common burden: debt. The survivors too now share the same burden, along with the grief of loss and the stigma of suicide.

After Balu's death, Sangita and Akshay have taken up the daunting task of repaying the loans. "Neither my husband nor my son told me about the debts. We may have to sell off the remaining half acre to pay them off," laments Sangita.

Data, debt, death

Veteran journalist and author P. Sainath, who runs the media website, People's Archive of Rural India, says the number of farmer suicides could be significantly understated. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data for the same year point at 4,248 reported cases of suicide by farmers and farmhands in Maharashtra, including 239 women. "NCRB is a census that touches every police station [in the country]," he says, adding that these figures have higher statistical value than the State-level data.

Maharashtra accounted for 38% of all suicides in the agricultural community, the highest in the country. Marathwada was

They [my son and grandson] have left us behind, along with a deadly debt. I don't know why death is not taking me away

LAXMIBAI DAMU NAWALE
Resident of Pali village, Beed district

the State's most drought-affected area. Last year, the State government declared 42 talukas as drought-hit, with 14 in this region. Some years though, like in 2021 and 2022, there is excessive or unseasonal rainfall, ruining crops.

Calling farmer suicides "the most tragic face of the crisis", Sainath also says they are the outcome of the agrarian crisis, not its origin. They are its context, not its content".

Last year, a 'classified' report compiled by Sunil Kendrekar, then Divisional Commissioner of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, found that about one lakh farmers in the Marathwada region were contemplating suicide because of pressures from mounting debt. Behind the debt was drought, crop loss, price crashes, lack of market value for produce, and medical and marriage expenses. Kendrekar took voluntary retirement after he submitted the report.

Changes to life and livelihood

A short distance from Pali, Shaikh Khadijah, 60, a woman with lines of hardship etched on her face, mourns the loss of her son Shaikh Latif, 30, a tenant farmer from Mochi Pimpalgaon, who took his life last month. Seated on a stack of urea bags outside her modest dwelling on a farm of 30 guntha (a little less than 1 acre), Khadijah says, "He was a cheerful person, but suddenly one day he chose to escape life."

"I had just made bajra (millet) roti and methi curry in the morning and went to wake him up," she recounts. The horror of seeing his lifeless body still haunts her. Luckily his wife and two children were visiting her parents at the time. "People are saying he was troubled by debt, but he didn't say anything about his financial struggles even to his wife," she says, crying.

The average landholding in Maharashtra is 1.34 hectares, about 3 acres, and farmers in the drought-prone region primarily cultivate cash crops such as cotton and soybean, and the water-guzzling sugarcane. "The region is facing serious problems of climate change, shrinking of water resources, and hardening of soil. Marathwada, like Rayalseema in Andhra Pradesh, once used to be the home of millets. In 1905, cot-

ton arrived, and the Marathwada and Nizam regions of Telangana went into cotton in a very big way, which they were not growing earlier. This changed everything," Sainath says. Soil exhaustion and pesticide overuse became common.

Marathwada falls in the rain shadow of the southwest monsoon, behind the Western Ghats. Sainath feels it is not all about topography though. "The topography of Rajasthan is much tougher compared to Marathwada, but farmer suicides are fewer there. Some districts in the country receive one-third of the rainfall of Marathwada," he says. His point is that farmers should grow crops suited to the land.

Udhav Alse, retired professor of agriculture and food science, Vasant Naik Marathwada Krishi Vidyapeeth, Parbhani, notes that with over 80% of the area being arid, the region lacks a viable permanent crop. Additionally, many marginal farmers rely on non-institutional sources for credit, mainly *sahukars* (moneylenders) as they offer quick loans. "They take instant loans at very high interest rates – 30% to 40% – for crops, marriages, and to repay previous loans. The cycle never ends," says Alse, adding that banks, including rural and cooperative ones, check farmers' credit score, which he says is "most ironic".

Hard days and nights

Located about 45 km north of Beed town, Dhondarai village in Georai tehsil has seen 14 suicides in the past three years. Amol Baban Rao Ranmare, 26, died by suicide on his farm in January last year, leaving behind a debt of ₹2 lakh. He was married and had a child. His wife then remarried, leaving their one-year-old daughter with her in-laws. Now, his parents have two responsibilities: to bring up a child and pay off a debt.

"He resorted to the extreme step under the influence of alcohol. It has become a major issue in our villages," says Dhondarai sarpanch Shital Sakhare. She says *desi daru* (country liquor) is a major problem. A doctor in a primary health centre in the region says it is hard for men to go to a deaddiction centre because they will lose out on daily wages or a day's labour. Many of them also engage in card games and *matka* (a game of dice), betting their hard-earned money away.

Across the region, many men in their 20s and 30s have taken their lives. Responsibilities of the extended family, like eldercare or the marriage of a sister, still seen as a man's duty, keep young men on marginal farms. Even those who migrate to cities like Aurangabad and Pune in pursuit of better opportunities, often find themselves compelled to come home for long durations, during the harvest season or following a family tragedy.

"The number of deaths has seen a sharp rise in the last couple of months, and a majority of the victims are young. The government gives ₹1 lakh as aid to the bereaved families, but why can't they come up with a solution to stop the suicides?" says Kailash Tawar, a resident of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and member of the Shetkari Sanghatana, a farmers' union. Input costs, including that of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, have doubled in recent years, he adds, questioning Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to doubling farmers' incomes by 2022.

The production cost of cotton, for instance, ranges between ₹6,500 and ₹7,000 per quintal, while the current market price hovers around ₹6,800, making it challenging for farmers to break even, Tawar explains, alleging that government schemes are failing to reach farmers.

Subsidising debt

Maharashtra Agriculture Minister Dhananjay Munde claims his government gives farmers a comprehensive safety net: ₹12,000 annually, with ₹6,000 from the Centre's Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, and ₹6,000 from the State's Namo Shetkari Mahasanman Nidhi. "We are giving crop loans at ₹1 premium, and National Disaster Response Force and State Disaster Response Force compensation for crop damage due to unseasonal rain," says Munde, who hails from Beed district. He does agree though that something more has to be done. In the rhetoric of a seasoned politician, he urges young people to view farming as a profitable sector. "We are going to forecast prices and advise farmers on specific crops based on market conditions," he says.

Meanwhile, in Murgagaon of Paithan taluka in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Sunitha Kalyan Phatangade tearfully contemplates a future where she works for ₹250 a day, three or four times a week, to clear the debt left by her son Umesh, 24. "He was my only hope, my pillar of strength. Now, I feel lifeless," she whispers, her voice carrying the weight of grief.

As she stares at a portrait of her son, Phatangade says Umesh left to spray pesticide on the cotton crop around 7 p.m. on July 31 last year. "He asked me to make his favourite dal-bati (grilled wheat balls). From there he called his sister, who lives in Ranjangaon Dandga, and said he wanted to end his life," she remembers. Between the time of the call and Phatangade rushing to the field, Umesh had died. "Now, I have to repay a loan of ₹4.5 lakh, which was taken to build our home and for crop investment," she says.

Back in Beed, Nawale says no woman should have to see the death of a man crushed in spirit.

If you are in distress, call these 24x7 helplines: KIRAN 1800-599-0019, Aasra 9820466726.



Coping with loss: Laxmibai Damu Nawale; (right) parents of deceased farmer Amol Ranmare. EMMANUEL YOGINI

Anuj Kumar
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We know actors are hungry for meaningful roles but Kriti Sanon has taken the hunt for substantial parts to a different level. After playing a surrogate mother in *Mimi* fetched her the National Award for Best Actress, Kriti will now be seen as a humanoid robot programmed to fall in love in the upcoming sci-fi romance drama, *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*, the Hindi film industry's Valentine's gift this season. She describes herself as an ambitious Delhi girl who has found her footing in Mumbai, the city that fulfills the dreams of those who are determined.

Edited excerpts:

Question: How challenging was it to play a humanoid character; did you question the plausibility of a love story with a robot?

Answer: There was no reference that I could look up to. We have seen robot characters that behave like robots. Even the desi ones like Chitti are more or less robotic. Here we are dealing with artificial intelligence. Sifra is so close to being a human being that humans don't realise it. The challenge was to convince myself. Sifra is almost human, but still not human. The biggest demand on the character is that you know that Sifra is a robot but she still generates a feeling for herself in the audience. I hope we have succeeded in taking the audience into a world of imagination. That is what cinema is. The way we are progressing, a love story with a robot could very well happen in the future. Fifteen years back we didn't have good Internet connectivity but today Sophia, the humanoid robot, has received permanent residency in Saudi Arabia.

Q: How did you build her?
A: There are certain things that humans do impulsively



New genre A still from *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*; (below) Kriti Sanon. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Tricky love

Kriti Sanon on playing a humanoid in *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*, co-starring Shahid Kapoor, and foraying into production

like hand gestures while talking. I had to eliminate them. Also, a robot processes things very fast. So I had to almost eliminate pauses from my thinking and expression. A lot was improvised on the sets, like a robot is not impulsive, doesn't have

emotional peaks, I had to keep her in between. Sometimes, it felt suffocating; It was like you had to act with your hands tied but overall it was fun.

Q: The film seems to be a comment on the changing idea of love. How do you see the emotion given that we are in the season of love?

A: Finding love stories is difficult these days because the emotion has become a bit frivolous and it is hard to find conflicts in romance these days. Earlier, the obstacles used to come from the family and villains. We are living in times when our heroes have become villains. Also, I feel, this generation has become so fast-moving that often we don't realise whether the emotion we are feeling is love or not. We crave it but we tend to touch it superficially and move on.

Q: What made you step into

production at such a young age with *Do Patti*?

A: It could be a coincidence. For me, it is more of a creative thing. It was not about a lack of content or opportunities. While doing *Mimi*, I felt if I like a script, I like to be involved with it at a deeper level. I felt if a writer is keen on taking a journey with me, why should I wait for other people to believe in the idea? I like learning and shifting gears in life. When I started, I didn't know how to act. I have learnt everything on the job.

Q: Has the National Award changed things around?

A: Maybe people in the industry see me as a credible actor and are coming up with more solid roles. The award has validated my talent and has given me the confidence to take more risks without the fear of constantly proving myself.



Shahid Kapoor in a still from *Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

serenades a humanoid played by Kriti Sanon. Edited excerpts:

Question: Your face seems to have been made to evoke the innocence of romance... How do you deal with that?

Answer: I have been working for two decades. Even during the first 12-13 years of my career, there was an actor inside me that wanted to break out of any kind of typecasting that people tend to put you in. It took me a lot of time to convince people to not worry about how I look; to have faith in me and allow me to transform. I went on to discover different spaces with *Kaminey*, *Haider* and *Udta Punjab*.

Q: Hindi cinema and its heroes were different when you started out...

A: When I started out in 2003, our mainstream films were very filmy. It was also the time when Aamir Khan had just begun breaking trends. He broke away from the typical choices that actors were making and he made them successful. I was inspired by it.

After *Jab We Met*, when people saw me in this very specific kind of image, Vishal (Bhardwaj) sir allowed me to break the mould. He enjoys changing actors' images. I had to work not just on my acting but also on changing the silhouette. I worked very hard to physically change myself from having a boyish face to a manly structure and raw look. Once that happened, it became easier for me to find performance-oriented films.

Q: It seems you resist the

trappings of stardom...

A: I believe I should be able to hold my own regardless of the tropes and that happens only if you have acting chops. My primary aim has always been to grow as an actor. I always feel that the actor in me makes me the star I am and not that the star in me provides me with acting opportunities.

Q: With *TBMAU*, you are returning to a space you freed yourself from...

A: I was trying to break away and this film popped up; I found the concept quirky. We have made what we set out to make. It is a sensible entertainer, a slice-of-life film that aims to take you a decade or two ahead of where we are today. You think that it can never happen but then that is life. It surprises you.

Q: Was there any challenge in playing the younger you?

A: I don't need to do much to do this! I asked myself whether I was repeating myself and if there was something new that I could offer in this space. I haven't done something like this for a few years. I did play a college boy in *Kabir Singh* and at that time, I asked my wife if should I play a college boy. She knew about the Telugu version and she wanted me to do the role; she had to tell me that medical college students are a bit older and that pushed me to go for it. But throughout the film's journey, I again realised that cinema has its own magic. It doesn't matter beyond the frame. What matters is, within the frame, are you buying the idea? Is it sucking you in? *Itna logic nahin hai*, it is about a lot of heart.

Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya releases in theatres today

A date with Meer

Remembering the legendary Urdu poet Meer Taqi Meer with the release of his complete autobiography

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Delhi is poised to rediscover its soul. For long obsessed with the luminosity of Ghalib, the city now has a date with the genius of Meer. Aptly titled *Meer ki Dilli, Shahjahanabad: The Evolving City*, a four-day event next week will bring together many who have lived there, and many others in whose hearts lives Shahjahanabad, a city founded by the Mughal emperor but often associated with the poets, defiant and delightful.

Everybody loves Delhi or Dehli, as it was then called. After all, did not the legendary poet laureate Zauq praise the city, with the words, 'Kauj jaye Zauq par Dilli ki galiyan chhad kar'? Zauq did not want to leave the lanes of Delhi. Here now is a rare opportunity when those lanes, redolent with history and poetry, come to India International Centre for a rendezvous, beginning February 15, with a tribute to Meer Taqi Meer.

All those familiar with his poetry, but not necessarily aware of the varied shades of his life and times, get a chance when his autobiography – initially published in a censored format in 1928 – is released in a complete form. Translated into Persian by Sadaf Fatima, it will have all that sent the society squirming

many years ago. Ather Farouqui, general secretary of the Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), says, "The first publication in Persian was censored. The Urdu translations which came out in 1957 and 1996 were based on the same edited text. The part which was omitted then was about a few wisecracks on the society at the time." Now, this complete Persian version will include all the missing satire. For the first time in 300 years, Anjuman is able to publish the entire autobiography of Meer.

Home of poets
The festival organised by Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind) is likely to bring the spotlight back on Delhi as the city of poets. After all, besides Meer, Delhi gave us Ghalib, Zauq and before that Amir Khurasrau. Fittingly across four days, February 15 to 18, there will be 30 sessions with over 40 speakers talking of Meer, Dehli's culture, Dehli's soul.

At a time when the city is in danger of losing its identity to a uniform line of multiplexes and shopping plazas, Anjuman is striving to retain its essence. "We thought let's celebrate Shahjahanabad," says Farouqui. And what better way to celebrate it than through the life story of its famous son, the one born in Agra but who found in the bosom of Dehli, Dilli or Delhi, love and warmth.



Rewind history A view of the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi, earlier known as Shahjahanabad, the seat of literary and cultural pursuits. THE HINDU ARCHIVES



Tsohil Bhatia's exhibition, This Fire That Warms You, is about the kitchen as a space for care, withdrawal and revolt

Sacred relationship Installation by Tsohil Bhatia. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

change among other things. Tsohil has created a kitchen like smoke with water from the Indian Ocean continuously heating in a rusted aluminium pan on one side of the room.

Close to a hundred pieces of dried fruits and vegetables, from dragon fruit and gooseberry, to baby corn and broccoli, are "left to do their own thing". On a constant lookout for the lost vignettes in the kitchen, Tsohil, an ardent homemaker, controls the conditions of this decay called 'carework'. "It is like taking care of a plant, the only difference being a care for life versus a care for death," Tsohil explains and adds, "At each stage in the process of decay, the fruits and vegetables reveal one of the many versions of themselves."

Tsohil's relationship with the kitchen has a lot to do with their mother. Seven trays, filled with flour, carry the impressions of the folds of their mother's hands in anticipation of the day when the mother would be gone. It also continues to represent the transience of their mother's existence.

Care work is a double-edged sword. Its presence is nurturing,

while its withdrawal causes discomfort. The artist feels the kitchen, a site for providing care holds this dual power. Considered to be a rather mundane, polite and invisible space, the kitchen holds the power to disrupt and that is what makes it visible.

Another showstopper exhibit, a wind chime that hangs in a corner represents the power of withdrawal. "The idea is to withdraw the power for it to manifest it," says Tsohil. When the tools collected from junk dealers, vessel shops and regular kitchens meet and strike each other, they create music, which can also be interpreted as an outcry to mobilise, decry, collect or protest.

The show is a comment on pace and time. Despite running parallel, everything has a time of its own. The ocean water simmering in the background with the salt creating doodles of its own and the decaying fruits and vegetables, take different times to perform their processes.

Tsohil enjoys the indiscipline, the cracks, spills, fungi, rot, that allow each other to become the truest version of itself. "They let each dance their own way and there is art in it."

At Blueprint Gallery, C-66 Anand Niketan; Till March 2; 11am to 6pm

Aanchal Poddar

From a table full of dried fruits and vegetables to a 150-kilogram chandelier made with pans, spoons and other kitchen tools hanging from a round iron frame, the exhibition of installations by US-based artist

Tsohil Bhatia (who goes by the pronouns they/them) honours the diligence of a homemaker.

This Fire that Warms You at the Blueprint 12 gallery takes the viewer closer to Tsohil's relationship with the kitchen; a space very sacred to the artist. It represents care, tradition, withdrawal, revolution, decay and

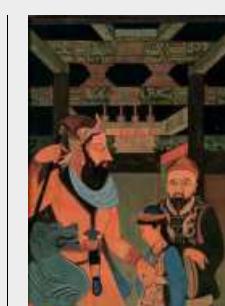
STEP OUT

Exploring knowledge
Berlin-based artist Alicja Kwade presents her first solo show in India titled Matter Moments with a series of four new sculptures using Encyclopedia Britannica volumes as the centrepiece of the exhibition. At Nature Morte Gallery, The Dhan Mill, Chattarpur Hills, Pocket D, Dr Ambedkar Colony, Chattarpur; Till March 3; 11am to 7pm.



Realms of emotion

Two different generations of artists, Rajendra Dhawan and Pandit Khairnar, uphold a vocabulary of abstraction through the elements of earth, space and colour. Curated by Tunty Chauhan, the exhibition is titled Anunada, a Sanskrit term for sound, that germinates from the space of silence or void. At Threshold Art Gallery, C-221 Sarvodaya Enclave; Till March 1 (Sundays closed); 11am to 7pm



Classic art
Galleria VSB celebrates its 20th anniversary with a group show titled Timeless Strokes: The Masters, showcasing works of 24 modern and contemporary masters FN Souza, SH Raza, MF Hussain, KH Ara, Manjit Bawa, KG Subramanyam, Jogen Chowdhury, and Chameli Ramachandra, among others. It is curated by Vandana Bhargava. At Galleria VSB, IIIrd Floor, Square One Mall Saket; Till February 15 (Sunday closed); Noon to 8pm



Towards uniformity

The concept of justice is paramount; uniformity is an offshoot of equality

A Uniform Civil Code (UCC) is a desirable and progressive goal for a secular country. However, mere uniformity without making reasonable allowances for diverse cultural and social practices among different social groups may not be ideal. The UCC adopted by the Uttarakhand Assembly aims to consolidate the laws relating to marriage, divorce and succession among all communities. The State has become the first since pre-Independence Goa to adopt a uniform code for civil matters. What is particularly violative of the Constitution is the bizarre portion in this UCC aiming to formalise live-in relationships through registration. This unwanted incursion into citizens' personal life is worsened by the prescription of a three-month prison term for non-registration. It will expose citizens to intrusive inquiries, social hostility and pointless deprivation of liberty. While it contains positive features such as conferring legitimacy on children born of live-in relations and mandating maintenance in the event of desertion, the very idea that people living together should submit themselves to registration and verification is repugnant to individual rights.

When the Constitution makers made the adoption of a UCC one of the directive principles, opinion was divided on whether a UCC will undermine minority rights or promote equal status for women in all religions. B.R. Ambedkar felt the UCC, if enacted, should be voluntary in the initial stages. The previous Law Commission had said a UCC is neither desirable nor necessary, and, instead, suggested that each body of personal law be reformed to eliminate discrimination or regressive practices. However, the present Law Commission has revived the idea and has started gathering views from the public. Much of the Uttarakhand Code seems to have been borrowed from existing laws on marriage and succession, but with significant omissions. For instance, the Code is the only avenue for dissolving a marriage and there is no waiting period to remarry after a divorce; nor is there any need for a woman to marry another person before she can re-marry her former husband. These provisions, which eliminate the concepts of *iddat*, *talaq* and *nikah halala*, are all progressive and further individual rights. Interestingly, it preserves the existing provision allowing custom and usage as an exception to the bar on marriage within prohibited degrees of relationship, but adds a rider that such custom cannot be against public policy or morality. An unfortunate fallout of all this is a polarising discourse taking shape in the run-up to the general election. The concept of justice should not be lost in the search for uniformity, which should be no more than an incidental consequence of equality.

Prosecuting Trump

Whether he wins or loses, his politics will shape the U.S.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit has ruled that former U.S. President Donald Trump does not enjoy immunity from prosecution for crimes that he might have committed during his term in office, in the context of charges against him relating to undermining the constitutional democracy of the country. The ruling by the court's federal appeals panel implies that Mr. Trump can be tried in the case against him relating to a conspiracy to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, in which he faces four counts including conspiring to defraud the U.S. and to obstruct an official proceeding. However, because a month has passed since the time that the court heard arguments on immunity and issued the latest ruling, a high-pressure situation has emerged in terms of scheduling and carrying out the conspiracy trial before the date of this year's election, November 5. The prosecuting team, led by Special Counsel Jack Smith, is concerned that if Mr. Trump appeals the immunity decision and uses other stalling tactics in the conspiracy case, the trial might extend past the election date. In such a scenario, there might be a real risk that should Mr. Trump win the presidency again, he could use his position as a sitting president to either get the case against himself dismissed or potentially issue a self-pardon.

While the Circuit Court has given Mr. Trump until February 12 to appeal its decision in the U.S. Supreme Court, it is unclear whether the Supreme Court justices will take on such a highly charged political case as the present one. Even if they do, it might well be weeks or months before a decision is made. Already, the Supreme Court is set to hear arguments on whether, under the Constitution's 14th Amendment, Mr. Trump's name can be deleted from State ballots – as States such as Colorado have sought to do – under its "insurrection clause". The bottom line is this: Mr. Trump will continue battling legal cases throughout this lopsided election season and will potentially continue doing so after the election too. What remains to be seen is whether his legal battles affect his reputation among voters, positively or negatively. In the former case, the scenario of a convicted President, even one who governs from prison, cannot be ruled out under the U.S. Constitution. If the cases diminish his overall popularity and he falls short of securing the presidency, his political career may be at an end, but Trumpism as a movement reflecting broad voter frustration with the policies and values of traditional Republican and Democratic politics will continue to shape the destiny of the United States.

The announcement in the interim Budget of a "high-powered committee to extensively consider the challenges arising from rapid population growth and demographic changes" is groundbreaking.

Given its multifaceted mandate, as it is to make "recommendations on how to address these challenges in line with the goal of 'Viksit Bharat'", the anticipation is that there will be a formulation of policies and strategies to manage population growth. This will mean addressing issues such as family planning, maternal and child health, education, employment, and socio-economic development. To do so, this population committee must adopt an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on expertise from fields such as demography, public health, economics, sociology, and governance.

Through rigorous research, data analysis, and a monitoring of demographic trends, the committee should identify emerging issues and evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions. Collaboration with various stakeholders, including government agencies, non-governmental organisations, civil society groups, academia, and the private sector, is essential to fostering partnerships and enabling collective action to carry out population-related policies and programmes at the national and grass-root levels. In addition to policy formulation and implementation, the committee should lay emphasis on public awareness and education campaigns. By empowering individuals and communities with accurate information and resources, it should promote responsible family planning practices and improve health outcomes. The population committee should also facilitate international collaboration and the exchange of best practices in population management.

Past, present and future

India's demographic landscape has undergone significant shifts over the years. With women having fewer children, the working-age population increasing, and the elderly population rising steadily, there has been a decrease in the dependency ratio, leading to economic growth. However, navigating the opportunities and challenges presented by these demographic changes will significantly shape India's future economic and demographic landscape.

According to the latest projections by the United Nations, India's population is expected to reach 1.46 billion by 2030, comprising 17% of the world's projected population. While India experienced phenomenal population growth until the 1970s, growth rates have slowed since then, with fertility levels in steady decline. This decline, which is reflected in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), has been instrumental in shaping India's demographic trajectory. With the TFR projected to touch 1.73 in 2031-35 from 2.5 in 2009-11 to, India will witness a demographic transition characterised by a decreasing proportion of the child population and an increasing proportion of the working-age population.

C. Chandramouli
is a former Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India

The demographic dividend, resulting from a sustained drop in fertility rates and an increased concentration of the population in the working age group, presents an opportunity for accelerated economic growth per capita. However, realising this potential necessitates investments in health, education, and skill development to harness the demographic dividend effectively. Projections for life expectancy in India also show positive trends, with female and male life expectancies expected to rise. Moreover, the proportion of the working age population is projected to increase, giving India an opportunity to capitalise on its demographic advantage.

To maximise the benefits of a favourable age distribution, India must invest in greater development of its human capital. This includes initiatives to create new jobs, integrate the informal sector with the formal sector, and empower the female labour force to increase their participation rate. Additionally, efforts to address gender disparities, improve access to education and health care, and promote family planning practices are crucial in ensuring inclusive and sustainable development.

Health, education, employment challenges

One of the key challenges in India's demographic landscape is ensuring access to quality health care and education for every segment of the population. Public spending on health has remained around 1% of GDP, underscoring the need for policies that prioritise health promotion and allocate greater finances to health infrastructure. Initiatives to strengthen primary health care, particularly in the rural areas, have yielded results which include improved child and maternal health care and higher life expectancy rates. However, challenges persist, especially regarding nutritional deprivation among children, leading to hunger insecurity and impairing physical and cognitive development. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to ensure access to essential commodities, nutrition programmes targeting vulnerable populations, and interventions to improve water availability and sanitation.

Similarly, investments in education and skill development are crucial in order to realise India's demographic dividend. According to UNICEF, nearly 47% of Indian youth may lack the necessary education and skills for employment by 2030. The disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated these challenges, with over 250 million children forced out of school, causing significant setbacks in learning outcomes. To address these issues, increased investment in nutrition and early childhood education is crucial. It is suggested that pre-primary education is included in the Right to Education Act. Designing play-based flexible curricula, and engaging parents, communities, and stakeholders to generate demand for early childhood education are other measures to improve outcomes. Additionally, efforts to bridge the gap between existing skill development

initiatives and industry requirements are essential to reduce unemployment and increase productivity.

Evidence-based decision making

A critical challenge for evidence-based policy is the availability of accurate and timely data. India faces significant challenges regarding the non-availability of current and reliable data on its population, which hampers evidence-based policymaking. It is crucial that the population committee includes improvements in data collection methodologies, technology adoption, capacity building, and collaboration with stakeholders. To address this challenge, India needs to invest in modernising its data infrastructure, which includes establishing robust systems for data collection, management, and analysis. This involves upgrading data collection methods, adopting digital technologies for data processing, and ensuring data security and privacy. Regular and comprehensive national censuses and surveys are crucial for collecting demographic data. India should prioritise the timely and accurate execution of these initiatives, ensuring coverage of all population segments, including marginalised and hard-to-reach populations.

Implementing rigorous validation and quality assurance mechanisms is essential to ensure the reliability and accuracy of population data. Independent audits, data validation exercises, and peer review processes can help identify and rectify data errors and inconsistencies. It would be vital for the committee to explore the feasibility of including such quality assurance methods within the statistical system. Another promising area is the promotion of open data initiatives and transparency in data sharing, which can facilitate access to population data for researchers, policymakers, and the public. Making population data freely available in standardised formats promotes data reuse, transparency, and accountability.

Finally, collaboration with international organisations such as the United Nations Population Division, World Bank, and academic institutions can provide access to global best practices, technical expertise, and funding opportunities for population data collection and analysis.

India's demographic landscape presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's socio-economic development. By adopting a holistic approach to population management, prioritising investments in health, education, employment, and statistical systems; and promoting gender equality and social inclusion, India can realise its demographic potential and achieve inclusive and sustainable development. With strategic planning, effective implementation, and international collaboration, India can navigate its demographic transition to emerge as a global leader in inclusive and sustainable development.

The views expressed are personal

R&D spend – golden intervention or smoke and mirrors

The announcement by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in the interim Budget, that "A corpus of rupees one lakh crore will be established with fifty-year interest free [loans]" to provide "long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates [to] encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation significantly in sunrise domains", is worth examining.

The private sector's contribution to India's overall research and development expenditure as a fraction of GDP has been low. In 2020-21, the private sector industry contributed 36.4% of the national gross expenditure on R&D (GERD), with the Centre (43.7%), State governments (6.7%), higher education (8.8%), and public sector industry (4.4%) accounting for the rest. In the same year, the overall amount was ₹1.27 lakh crore, so 36.4% comes to about ₹46,366.66 crore.

Some experts have invoked these figures alongside comparisons to the case in the world's extant science 'superpowers', such as the Germany, South Korea, and the United States, where the private sector contribution as a percentage of the national GERDs is 67%, 79% and 75%, respectively.

There are questions worth asking here about why private sector contribution needs to lead its public sector counterpart and whether the split of the GERD contributions from government, private entities, and higher education in economically developed countries is some sort of benchmark. It is also notable that India's expenditure on R&D has been increasing in absolute terms, from more than ₹1 lakh crore in 2009-10 to ₹1.27 lakh crore in 2020-21, but as a fraction of GDP, it has been declining steadily in the same period, from an already sub-par 0.82% to around 0.64%. In the more technologically advanced countries, GERD accounts for at least 1% of GDP. Even Brazil (1.16%) and South Africa (0.83%) have a higher GERD-to-GDP ratio.



Vasudevan Mukunth

The government needs to spell out, among other things, how it plans to select the beneficiaries of its ₹1 lakh crore corpus for private sector research and innovation

The question of the virtue of hiking the public sector's R&D contribution is important because it is rooted in India's development model and the purpose of technological innovation in it. For example, the post-war U.S. famously adopted Vannevar Bush's "free play of free intellects" model in which fundamental research was expected to spur technological growth.

On the other hand, Japan, South Korea, and some other economies tread a "techno-nationalist" path from the late 20th century, focused "on building interconnectedness among universities, research institutes, companies and governments," as Mounta Koley and Ismael Rafols wrote in "National Research Foundation's chance to bridge India's science-society gap" (*The Hindu*, September 24, 2023).

Innovation's purpose has expanded
Today, the purpose of innovation has expanded from economic growth to include environmental justice and sustainability. Given widening income gaps, declining protections for environmental rights and resources, and increasing privatisation of education, health care, and other public goods, there need be no implicit virtue in private-sector contributions to R&D leading the way, especially in the absence of policy and regulatory guard rails that keep growth equitable. Innovation happens over decades and is risk-laden, both of which the state is designed to steward better.

In the same spirit, public sector R&D expenses need to increase especially at the State level, if only to improve the quality of research facilities at State universities that are in turn tied to the freedom researchers have to work on more locally relevant problems. Expenditure also needs to increase to the extent that, with suitable policies, it relieves the persistent bottleneck of research graduating from the lab bench to the factory floor. Innovation is of little value without

this flow, and will be restricted to low-quality advancements.

A catch

All this said, private sector contribution does need to increase considering the focus and incentives India has conferred on technological prowess in the last decade. And the availability of a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore and long-term low-interest loans is a lip-smacking prospect.

But there is a catch: the question of whom the funds are for is very important. Both private sector investment in R&D and its sluggish increase span multiple domains, including telecommunications, health care, finance, transport, and space flight. They will all be making plans for this money. Ms. Sitharaman maintained a focus on "sunrise sectors", and even they number a dozen. By virtue of being 'sunrise', almost all of them are resource-intensive, and we must also ask how much it will cost to keep them climate-friendly.

As such, ₹1 lakh crore – or a little over \$2 billion – is likely to be a pittance if innovation in any sunrise domain is to be meaningful beyond surpassing some fraction of the national GERD. For example, according to the Indian BioEconomy Report 2023, prepared by the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council, helping startups transition from bioeconomy research to biomanufacturing would require an infusion of \$2 billion.

With so many demands on the corpus, the government needs to define what it is expected to achieve, whether it will have domain-wise allocations and targets, and time frame; and how the government intends to select beneficiaries and whether the corpus will be replenished. It would be unfair to dismiss it at the outset, but the answers will mark the line between golden intervention and smoke and mirrors.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dilution of identities

It is painful to witness political brands, built painstakingly across several decades, being diluted for short-term political gains. Party names and symbols are treasures synonymous

with the founding leadership. When these treasures are handed over to breakaway factions, the voting public becomes confused and begins to reconsider their emotional association with the

'hijacked political party'. The breaking-up of the AIADMK, Shiv Sena and NCP would definitely weaken the voice of the people from the respective States. I see this dangerous trend of 'regional party hijack' as

a harbinger of the decline of federalism as we know it.

Bharath Rangarajan,
Chennai

Divisive line

It is unfortunate that the bogey of a 'North-South'

divide is being fomented (Page 1, "Opposition is creating a 'North-South' divide: PM", February 8). But to blame the Opposition squarely for this is vicious. Those responsible for the 'cause' lamenting the

'effect' is Orwellian 'Newspeak'. One hopes that no one shatters the cherished dream that 'India is one whole and not the sum of its parts'.

Ayyaseri Ravendranath,
Aranmula, Kerala

Should coaching be restricted to those above 16 years?

PARLEY**Vimala Ramachandran**

is a former Professor at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

**Arjun Mohan**
is India CEO of Byju's, one of India's largest players in the coaching and EdTech industry

Students leave a coaching centre after class in Kota, Rajasthan. R.V. MOORTHY

India's growing private coaching industry has long been plagued by student suicides, fire incidents, complaints of poor infrastructure and teaching, exorbitant fees, and false promises. The spate of student suicides in Kota, Rajasthan, has spurred the Ministry of Education to issue new guidelines, which state that coaching centres cannot enrol students below 16 years of age, make misleading promises, and guarantee rank or good marks. Should coaching be restricted to those above 16 years? Vimala Ramachandran and Arjun Mohan discuss the question and the guidelines in a conversation moderated by Priscilla Jebaraj. Edited excerpts:

The guidelines restrict coaching to those above 16 years. What will be the impact of this new rule?

Vimala Ramachandran: It is a good idea because there is [tremendous] pressure on young children. For children to start thinking about doing well in term exams or getting into a good course when [the burden] of their school curriculum is so enormous [is difficult], so this step to restore their childhood is a good step.

Arjun Mohan: I agree that the load on today's children is high. You really don't need to spend 18 hours of your day from Class 4 [on studying] to be successful in life. Typically, students who are interested in cracking the JEE and NEET do a foundation programme from Class 7 onwards. They learn their syllabus in school and then they learn application-level concepts and do workshops on the same, so that they think one notch higher. This is important because a student who wants to crack the JEE or NEET with top scores needs to start thinking at that application level early in life.

Isn't this kind of foundational teaching supposed to happen in school? Does the growing coaching industry signify a failure of our education system?

VR: There is a huge failure. First, what is taught in school is determined by what happens in the final exam. And our exam system is so rote-oriented that schools end up teaching exactly what's needed for the exam. As a result, not all schools and teachers actually help children conceptually understand issues. Second, if a child is going to medical college, the aspiration is not necessarily of the child's; it is the parent's aspiration. So, parents start putting pressure on the child from Class 6 or 7 and that

is a disturbing trend. It not only increases the tremendous stress levels of children, but also does not allow them to explore what they really want to do when they are in Class 10 or 11.

Is coaching supplanting the school system?

AM: Let's be honest about it. Coaching helps students crack ultra-competitive exams. That is the only objective. These exams have become harder because of more competition. So, coaching has become structured to help students get to that level.

Research shows that there are higher levels of tuition and coaching in States which have higher levels of government school systems.

VR: The school system itself is dysfunctional in the sense that schools and teachers only teach the curriculum. Teachers don't focus on whether the child is actually learning anything. The poorer the area, the more difficult the terrain, the worse the school system. Therefore, we have these coaching centres which cater not only to [those who wish to crack] competitive examinations, but to those who want to crack the 10th or 12th Board exam, or the civil services, or the Railways exam, or the bank exam. A large share of children attend coaching or tuition centres so that they are able to cope with the syllabus in school. This is what I call the shadow education system. The tip of the iceberg is the competitive exam preparation. But if you go deeper, coaching is happening at all levels.

How will these guidelines apply to online coaching?

AM: I would wait for some time for the guidelines to be more structured. The feedback we are getting is that they will evolve.

The existence of tuitions shows that parents



The education bureaucracy has not been able to supervise existing schools, let alone go and see what is happening in the shadow education system.

VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

do not find the school system to be effective enough. As an online company, we said, why should the access to good teachers be restricted only to metros? We use technology to get the best teachers to Tier III and smaller towns and give students everywhere access to the best quality education.

VR: The buck stops at the State government level. Education is in the Concurrent List. While the Union government can issue these guidelines, how effective they are going to be depends a great deal on how the State governments implement it. The education bureaucracy has not been able to supervise existing schools, let alone go and see what is happening in the shadow education system. I'm afraid it's just going to increase rent-seeking and corruption at all levels. Guidelines are only as effective as the government system.

AM: The guidelines talk about a competent authority where the coaching centres need to go and register. Is this a local municipality or is it the District Education Authority? These details are yet to come though the guidelines say registration is to be done within three months.

Will the mental health interventions mentioned in the guidelines help reduce the pressure on students?

VR: We need large-scale public education about the adverse impact of putting such pressure on children from an early age. Our media has to play an important role and so does the school system. It's important to have a dialogue with parents and communities. Even political parties should take it up. We need to make people more sensitive to what is required to support a child growing up, instead of putting too much pressure on them. We won't be able to change the system by bringing about guidelines alone, or even just by providing counsellors in schools.

AM: I would put the parent at the centre of the process. Parents should be more connected with their children to realise the kind of pressure they go through. Even today, many parents feel that if the child doesn't get into a top engineering college or medical college, they are doomed,

which is not true.

The media, society, and parents do play a role, but don't you think the coaching industry plays some role as well in creating this kind of pressure?

AM: The pressure is because of competition. Why do they pay to send their child to a coaching centre? They want their child to be successful in a particular exam. If you have signed up for a particular objective, there will be an extensive curriculum, workshops, exams, and mock papers. Where do you say, 'This is not something that the child likes; he should probably look at another profession?' These are questions which the coaching centre alone cannot answer. We can keep saying that there should be regulations, there should be no pressure, but finally the parent has also paid a lot of money and is betting on the child to bring into reality their dreams. We also have a commitment towards that parent. We are basically completing the service we got paid for.

The guidelines refer to 'false and misleading advertising' by the coaching industry. When institutes promise a high rank, would you say that they are creating pressure?

AM: We are basically talking about a few elements in the industry doing things like that. Misleading advertising happens in every industry. I don't believe that established large players which are focused on academics do things like that when they publish a rank.

The guidelines stipulate that if a student leaves a course halfway, their fees should be refunded on a pro rata basis.

AM: Education is a service industry. A contract is signed between the customer and the organisation. The refund policy should be part of the contract. Also, does this come under the ambit of the Central or State government? I would wait for clarity on these legal issues.

VR: The guidelines say that the coaching industry will come under the Consumer Protection Act. That is a welcome step. But I don't know how effective the Act is across the country and whether children in rural areas are even aware of the fact that they can go to demand the fees back.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

NOTEBOOK

The control of thought and speech

At no time in history have dominant groups acquired as much power as they have today, to control both thought and speech

Varghese K. George

U.S. journalist Tucker Carlson, who lost his job at the right-wing platform Fox News after he dialled up criticism of the country's foreign policy in the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, is making waves this week, by announcing his plans to interview Russian president Vladimir Putin, which no other U.S. platform would do. Mr. Carlson pointed out that endless interviews of Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky on multiple U.S. platforms were merely propaganda, "not journalism."

At the Jaipur Literature Festival recently, the 'Closing Debate' was on whether free speech will survive surveillance technology and privacy invasions. While reflecting on how old surveillance and speech control was, a bit from World War I history came in handy for me. Woodrow Wilson, often celebrated as a progressive president, tried to control information when he decided to take the U.S. to the war. He started a Committee on Public Information, headed by a muckraking journalist, George Creel. It deployed an army of volunteers, called 'four minute men', who would appear at any place with a small gathering of people and deliver a four-minute propaganda speech. Wilson also outlawed criticism of the government under espionage and sedition acts, and the Supreme Court upheld it. At least 1,500 people were arrested; 400 periodicals were disallowed from using the postal services, which was also authorised to intercept mails.

Before free speech, there has to be free thought. Without free thought there is no free speech. Dominant groups try to control both thought and speech in a society. Thought is controlled by propaganda and speech by censorship. Various forms of propaganda and censorship have existed throughout history. But at no time have dominant groups acquired as much power as they have today, to control both thought and speech.

In democracies, there is more thought control than speech control. The more autocratic a society, the higher the proportion of control. When thought control

becomes difficult, even democracies resort to speech control. If thought can be totally controlled, there is no reason to control speech. Everyone will amplify the values and thoughts that they share with everyone else. Antonio Gramsci theorised this relationship between the state, society, and institutions including the media, which creates a hegemony of groups and ideas. Coercion becomes less when hegemony is stronger. Digital media has upended this happy information ecosystem, and the U.S., like many other countries, is facing this crisis of hegemony. When argument loses power, power becomes the argument, and makers of alternative views are coerced out.

Mr. Carlson, supported by Elon Musk who has agreed to host Mr. Putin on X, is taking on the U.S. state, no less. This involves pushing back on propaganda and censorship. Make no mistake, what the Russian president would say is his own propaganda, but it will be a counter to the prevailing singular one. Mr. Musk's adventurism has enabled it a platform, circumventing the unstated censorship that exists for it in the U.S.

However, another milestone achieved by Mr. Musk's Neuralink raises a terrifying spectre for free speech. Neuralink has announced the successful development of a human brain extension that allows telepathic communication with a computer. It is being experimented in patients who lost limb mobility but have functioning brains. If technology can transmit thoughts in the brain to machines, it is possible that it can also carry thoughts from machines to the brain. At that point, the massive effort it takes to socialise people will become easier or unrequired.

Philosophers and science fiction creators have imagined such scenarios – for instance, in the Netflix series *Black Mirror*. Invasion of privacy in the future could be no longer about Peeping Toms, but implants that can farm thoughts. Pegasus might sound so stone age, soon. If we do end up in that future, speech will be totally free because thought will be totally controlled. Mr. Musk is apparently betting on both sides – absolute control and absolute free speech.

PICTURE OF THE WEEK**Finally, a fresh blanket of snow**

A view of a snow-covered houseboat in the Dal Lake, Srinagar. This week, snowfall ended a long dry spell in Kashmir bringing cheer among residents and tourists. The much-awaited snowfall followed the driest and warmest January in 43 years for most of the stations of Jammu and Kashmir. ANI

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 9, 1974

Strike in Bombay mills ends

Bombay, Feb. 8: Mr. S.A. Dange, Chairman of the Communist Party of India announced at a mass rally here to-day that the 41-day-old textile strike had been called off. He said that the Girni Kamgar Union had accepted the proposal made by the Chief Minister, Mr. V.P. Naik, to end the strike. He also announced the calling off of the proposed bandh on February 11.

Earlier, Mr. Naik announced that the strike had been settled, following an hour-long

discussion with Mr. Dange. The Labour Minister, Mr. N.M. Tidke, was also present at the talks.

Under the settlement, each worker will get an additional increment of Rs. 4 with effect from April 1. This is over and above the ones agreed to earlier.

An agreement reached between the Mill Owners' Association and the INTUC-led Rashtriya Mill Mazdoor Sangh, representative union of the textile workers in the city, earlier had been rejected by the CPI-led Girni Kamgar Union and five other unions.

The workers then went on an indefinite strike from December 30 last, demanding a 25 per cent wage increase.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 9, 1924

Britain and France

London, Feb. 7: It is understood that Anglo-French relations have not been so cordial for some time as now. M. Poincaré and Mr. Macdonald are on the friendliest terms. Though no meeting has yet been arranged between them, it is understood Mr. Macdonald is anxious that the meeting when held shall deal with definite propositions based on the reports of the two experts committees on the subject of reparations, which may be expected shortly. The view of the British Government is that, unless something new and unexpected occurs, the British policy now formulated will be acceptable in Paris.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

The equity mutual funds inflow for the month of January

21,780 in ₹ crore.

The inflow was the highest in nearly two years, propelled by the preference for small-cap funds and contributions from thematic funds. PTI

Number of Indian fishermen arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy

19 The Sri Lankan Navy has arrested Indian fishermen and two trawlers for illegally fishing in the island nation's waters near Delft Island in the northern Jaffna province, in the second such incident this month. PTI

The number of space launches expected in the next 14 months

30 India's space regulator IN-SPACE's space launches, including seven by private startups Skyrout and Agnikul, are scheduled in the fourth quarter of 2023-24 and FY25. PTI

Budget passed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi for 2024-25

16,683 in ₹ crore.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi House (MCD) passed the budget amid accusations of corruption against the Delhi mayor Shelly Oberoi. PTI

The Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes since the war began

27,840 According to Gaza's Health

Ministry, 67,317 have been wounded in Israeli strikes since October 7, 2023. AGENCIES COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The Paytm Payments Bank debacle

Why has the apex banking regulator penalised Paytm Payments Bank Ltd? How is it going to affect the services of the fintech company? What are the concerns regarding money laundering? How is Paytm planning to transition its services to another bank?

EXPLAINER

Saptaparno Ghosh

The story so far:

In a major blow to fintech services provider Paytm, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred its payments bank subsidiary, Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from obtaining further deposits and top-ups in its accounts or wallets from February 29. PPBL was barred from on-boarding new customers back in March 2022. The latest move was after an audit report had revealed "persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in the bank".

What has the RBI instructed?

The RBI has disallowed the Paytm subsidiary from accepting further deposits, top ups or credit transactions into its operated wallet or accounts from February 29. This also applies to its prepaid instruments for FASTags and National Common Mobility Cards (NCMC) cards. Present customers would, however, be allowed to use their existing balances to avail the services. The payments bank, according to Macquarie Capital, houses the parent company One97 Communication (OCL)'s more than 330 million wallet accounts. In other words, transactional money is held in the wallets of the payments bank.

Further, PPBL has been prohibited from carrying out any banking services (in the nature of services like AEPS, IMPS etc), bill payments and UPI. It has also been directed to "terminate at the earliest", or before February 29, nodal accounts of its parent company and Paytm Payments Services. Nodal accounts are a type of bank account opened by businesses (financial intermediaries) and are used for holding money from participating banks – from the consumer's side, and ultimately remitting to the specific merchant.

Lastly, the regulator has asked the



REUTERS

subsidiary to settle all pipeline and nodal accounts transactions by March 29. No further transactions shall be permitted thereafter. Equity researchers at Macquarie Capital believe the move may result in revenue and profitability implications in the medium to long term. "Given the severe restrictions imposed on PPBL, we believe it significantly hampers Paytm's ability to retain customers in its ecosystem, and accordingly restricts it from selling payment and loan products," its note read. More importantly, with no near-term solution in sight, the researchers opine the regulator is "indirectly revoking the PPI (prepaid instrument) license of Paytm". The parent company expects the latest action would have a "worst case impact" of ₹300 to ₹500 crore on its annual EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation).

How is Paytm looking to transition? The company informed that it would now be working with other banks and not with PPBL. It further intends to expand third-party bank partnerships for merchant acquiring services (providing essential infrastructure for acquiring merchants for helping them access payments) with other banks. As enumerated by the President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) Bhavesh Gupta, the migration is to unfold in three stages. The first of it would entail finding an interested partner bank to integrate with the necessary Paytm ecosystem. Second, assessing the ensuing commercial viability and finally, facilitating the account-to-account migration which could be time-consuming given, as he stated, "the time is short".

The other option would be a one-time migration.

What are the concerns?

The first set of concerns relates to its licensing. RBI guidelines for licensing of payments banks stipulate that entities cannot undertake lending activities. PPBL does not lend directly. Instead, it provides credit-dispensing products from third parties. The other issue relates to its governance structure and related party-transactions. For perspective, Paytm owns 49% of PPBL. The remainder is held by founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma. OCL in its initial response put forth that, adhering to banking regulations, PPBL is "run independently" by its management and board. It further argued against having exerted any influence on the subsidiary's operations other than as a minority board member or shareholder. It further communicated having "reconfirmed" with founder that he has not taken any margin loans or pledged any shares - directly or indirectly owned by him. Researchers at Macquarie observed the bigger issue arose with the company not being in the good books of the regulator. In fact, on Thursday, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said regulated entities are initially nudged to take corrective action and are given sufficient time. However, when that does not work, "effective action" is taken, such as "imposing supervisory or business restrictions". Furthermore, as learnt from sources, Mr. Sharma also met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently. Therein too, he was told "in no uncertain terms" to comply with the directives and regulations. Going forward, it held, their lending partners could potentially re-look the relationships. Earlier, the RBI had penalised the subsidiary ₹5.39 crore for flouting KYC norms. Furthermore, news publication NDTV Profit recently learnt that over 1,000 accounts were found to be linked with the same PAN to their accounts. Thus, creating concerns about money laundering. Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra told Reuters that should any fresh charges of money laundering emerge against Paytm from the RBI, they would be investigated by the ED.

THE GIST

▼ The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) barred its payments bank subsidiary, Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) from obtaining further deposits and top-ups in its accounts or wallets from February 29.

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▼ Paytm informed that it would now be working with other banks and not with PPBL.

What are the regulations with respect to rice prices?

What are the measures the government is taking to bring down the increasing price of rice?

M. Soundariya Preetha

The story so far:

The Indian government recently made it mandatory for all traders, wholesalers, retailers, and millers to declare their respective rice stocks. The government has also announced the launch of "Bharat rice" to bring down rice prices in the market. However, millers and traders feel these are not enough to control prices.

What about paddy production?

In the year 2022-2023, India produced 135 million tonnes of rice, which is 62.84 lakh tonnes higher than the previous year. However, the year 2023-2024 is seeing multiple estimates coming in. The southern States, which are also the major rice consuming States, are said to have suffered a drop in paddy production because of inadequate rainfall. In Tamil Nadu, the production may drop by almost 30% and in Karnataka, there is almost 25% decline, claim traders and farmers.

However, in the north, trade sources say, rice production (basmati and non-basmati) is up 15%. The Union government said that there are ample stocks with the Food Corporation of India and that Kharif crop is good. For the Rabi crop, area under paddy as of February 2, is 39.29 lakh hectares compared to the 40.37 lakh hectares last year.

What about rice prices?

The retail price of rice has increased by 14.51% in the last one year. While Basmati rice prices are said to have dropped 15% in the last one month, paddy prices are up in the southern States. The prices of some varieties increased by more than ₹10 a kg between November 2022 and November 2023. Of the nearly 430 varieties of rice produced in the country, the rice inflation is high in the varieties that is largely preferred by consumers. In States such as Tamil Nadu, farmers who have the capacity to hold stocks and sell to private traders, are expecting better prices this year.

What are the measures taken so far?

The government has asked traders, wholesalers, retailers, chain retailers and millers to report the stocks online in the categories of broken rice, non-basmati white rice, par-boiled rice, basmati rice, and paddy. It has also launched the retail sale of 'Bharat Rice' to general consumers at ₹29 per kg. Moreover, in September 2022, the export of broken rice was banned, and a 20% duty was imposed on par-boiled rice. Non-basmati white rice exports was also put under the prohibited category from July 2023. The government has procured 600 lakh tonnes of paddy during the current Kharif marketing season, starting October 1, 2023. With this, the central pool has 525 lakh tonnes of rice as against the annual requirement of almost 400 lakh tonnes for welfare schemes. Till the end of January this year, the government has sold 1.66 lakh tonnes of rice in the open market.

Why are prices increasing?

Traders and millers cite several reasons

for the higher retail rice prices. The Minimum Support Price for rice has gone up in the last five years and the cost of transport, storage, etc. are also escalating. In rice consuming States, the varieties consumed in large quantities have seen a drop in production this year. Further, despite government measures, export of non-basmati rice has seen a multi-fold jump during the last three years compared to the previous years.

Non-basmati rice exports were 5.1 million tonnes in 2019-2020 which increased to 13.1 million tonnes in 2020-2021, 17.3 million tonnes in 2021-2022, and 16.1 million tonnes in 2022-2023. In April-May 2023-2024, it was 2.8 million tonnes compared to the 2.7 million tonnes for the same period a year earlier. The export duty levied by the government is neutralised by the high international prices, say the traders. Furthermore, the rice consumed in the retail market is of the stock of last season and with a shortfall in arrivals, the prices may go up even more in the coming months.

What should the government do? According to the millers in the northern States, there is a demand for rice for consumption, ethanol production, and cattle feed. The government should prioritise sale for consumption. The stock data collected by the government is expected to give an indication of the stock levels. It should look at capturing data for the most consumed varieties too before deciding the future course of action.

THE GIST

▼ The Indian government recently made it mandatory for all traders, wholesalers, retailers, and millers to declare their respective rice stocks.

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▼ Traders and millers cite several reasons for the higher retail rice prices. The Minimum Support Price for rice has gone up in the last five years and the cost of transport, storage, etc. are also escalating.

IN THE LIMELIGHT



A still from Olive Kitteridge.

From page to screen: film adaptations that surpassed their source material

Novels have always been a source of inspiration and fodder for movies. The author takes a deep dive into the world of films adapted from novels and how, rarely, screen adaptations have surpassed their book source in transporting us to their worlds.

Preetha Jayaraman

Olive Kitteridge, an adaptation by director Lisa Cholodenko of the eponymous novel by Elizabeth Strout, is a gentle, profound mini-series about a dysfunctional family set in a beautiful, idyllic seaside town in Maine. Frances McDormand plays Olive, a stern school teacher married to cheerful pharmacist Henry (Richard Jenkins) and the pair are like two peas wrongly squashed into a pod. The dinner table conversations at the Kitteridge residence are clipped, while Henry tries to keep it light for his teen son; Olive doesn't hesitate to speak about depression that runs rampant in the family and how her father shot himself in the head. There are deaths, tulips, boats, sunsets, suicides and Henry and Olive in the midst of it all growing old together.

The show begins with Olive getting ready to kill herself, a deviation from the book's opening and ends with her looking out at the ocean and seagulls, 'It baffles me, this world. I don't want to leave it yet,' she says, which are also her last words in the book. The show is exquisite, and McDormand has swallowed the character of Olive whole; it's impossible to find the real Olive on paper again.

Going beyond the page

This gets one wondering about screen adaptations that have surpassed their book sources, and how rarely that magic happens. In our favourite books, the author has all the words in the world to tell us a story. Our imaginations drive the visuals, their words mesh with our minds to create symbiotic universes. With screen adaptations, however, the interpretation becomes the auteur's; the story is told in their visual and cinematic style, and they have limited time to tell it. Many a time, that's why when the lights come on, 'the book is better than the movie,' is a common critique. Is this because of a sense of proprietorship and resentment when a favourite story is tweaked and beginnings or endings changed? Is it like taking a core memory and trying to replace it, like meeting your imaginary friend and not liking them?

It's a daunting walk on fire for directors to try to adapt a popular book, yet from the inception of cinema, novels have been a source of inspiration and fodder for movies. Charles Dickens, who died 25 years before motion pictures came into existence, is credited with inventing the parallel montage (intertwining between two stories) in his writing, and he is also

said to have inspired the track shoot and zoom technique through his way of storytelling.

Then there's Agatha Christie, Jane Austen, Stephen King, and John Grisham whose books have been repeatedly adapted; the list of authors and adaptations in the history of cinema is long and contentious.

Closer home, there are a few Indian-authored books that would make terrific films. Vikas Swarup's *Q & A* which became a film of the same name on Netflix, *The Story of My Assassins* by Tarun Tejpal which the show on Prime Video *Paatal Lok* is loosely based upon, and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* to mention a few.

The beauty of adaptation

The Namesake remains an all-time favourite adaptation; Mira Nair elevated Lahiri's story of immigration, exile and generational discord with her impeccable casting, nuanced performances, minimal dialogues, and a visual style which takes your breath away. The intercut between Queensboro Bridge and Howrah Bridge, showing the two worlds of Ashima played

by Tabu; the transition from New York through a train window to lush paddy fields in West Bengal through the bars of another train's window; the floating orange garland in the Ganges after her husband's ashes are immersed to the lone orange tree outside their home in the suburbs of NY where she is back now without him... all these images stay stronger than words.

The film is filled with effective cinematic storytelling and simple juxtaposition of shots which elicit emotions without music or dialogue. The shot of Ashima trying Ashoke's (played by Irrfan Khan) shoes before their first meeting is filled with cadence. It's easy for a film to dumb down a metaphor and make it too concrete, cheapen its essence with dialogue or drama, but it is finesse in the technique that makes the medium rise above the pages of a book and its excels at this.

With the current generation watching more than reading, hope a reverse exodus happens where they seek out the book that inspired their favourite film.

The writer is a cinematographer who works in the Indian film industry



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Mr. R.Thangarajan, Chidambaram, wants to know the meaning of 'nepotism'."

"Nepotism' means 'undue favour in appointing one's own relatives to office.'

The minister is charged with nepotism.

'Nepotism' is from Latin 'nepos', nephew. Both in Latin and earlier English, the word meant 'grandchild or descendant'. In the Authorised version of the Bible, 'nephew' is used in the sense of 'grandchild'. If any widow have children or nephews' (I Timothy, v, 4). The practice of giving one's relatives unfair advantages when one has power, especially by giving them good jobs' is called nepotism. Nepotism is as common in India as mosquitoes and as beneficial."

"Mr. Bala Viswanathan, Jawahar nagar, Tirunelveli, wants to know why 'purpresture' is not as widely used as 'encroachment' when they mean the same."

"'Purpresture' is a legal term. It is from Latin 'praehendere', to take. It means 'the wrongful enclosure of or intrusion upon lands, waters or other property rightfully belonging to the public at large'. Even in courts, this word is not used often. 'Encroachment' is a simpler word conveying the same meaning. 'Purpresture' is recorded only in a couple of dictionaries."

"Mr. Q.R. Varadarajan, Villivakkam, Madras, wants to know whether the following sentence is correct: 'He is leaving to the States for higher studies.'"

"You leave one place for another.

Today he is leaving Madras for Calcutta.

I am leaving for London tomorrow.

You go to a place.

I am going to Calcutta tomorrow.

She went to Delhi yesterday.

You leave for a place.

She is leaving for Nagpur today.

She left for Baroda yesterday.

He will be leaving for Bombay tomorrow.

"Mr. S. Srikanth, BH Road, Tumkur, wants to know whether the following sentence is correct: 'He cannot be able to climb the mountain.'"

"It is incorrect. 'Can' in this context means 'be able.' Say 'He cannot climb the mountain' or 'He is not able to climb the mountain.' 'Can' and 'able' don't go together. I can come. I will be able to come. Don't say 'I can be able to come.'

He can do. He will be able to do it.

I can walk. I am able to work.

"Mr. C. Ranganjan, Lakshmiapuram, Karaikudi, wants to know how to use 'upstage.'"

"Literally, it means 'on or towards the back of the stage.'

Can you see the actor moving upstage?

The opposite of 'upstage' is 'downstage.' Figuratively, it means (a) to divert attention from someone important to oneself (b) snobbish, haughty.

The President of the meeting upstaged the principal speaker by his superb speech.

What irritates everyone is her upstage behaviour.

I don't like him. He is uppish, upstage.

Published in The Hindu on January 22, 1991.

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

It's been 65 years since the dawn of intercontinental ballistic missiles. A quiz on the same

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

On February 9, 1959, the world's first intercontinental ballistic missile entered service for the Soviet Union. The country's defence ministry's index for it was 8K71. The missile part of it was called R-7. What was its launcher called? It delivered the Sputnik satellite to orbit in 1957.

QUESTION 2

In the following list, identify the three countries that don't have operational ICBMs and name two countries not in the list that do have them: Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the U.S.

QUESTION 3

Name the military doctrine that is the

foundation of nuclear peace — the idea that if two nuclear powers are armed with nuclear weapons and have both first- and second-strike capabilities, they don't have an incentive to attack each other nor to disarm.

QUESTION 4

Name the 1972 treaty under which the U.S. and the Soviet Union agreed to not develop anymore new ICBMs after the treaty date, unless an equal number of such missiles (land-based or sea-based) were dismantled first.

QUESTION 5

Agni V is India's land-based ICBM and has a range of 7,000-10,000 km. Its next iteration is called Agni VI, which will also have an MIRV feature. MIRV missiles confuse anti-ballistic-missile protection systems by releasing multiple warheads, some of which may be dummies, with different targets. What does MIRV stand for?



Visual question:

Name this ICBM developed by North Korea, first successfully tested in March or November 2022. It has a range of about 15,000 km and is possibly MRV-capable. AFP

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Singer Tyla got the Grammy under this category. Ans: Best African Music Performance

2. Meryl Streep and Michelle Obama were all nominated for a Grammy under this category. Ans: Best Audio Book, Narration, and Storytelling Recording

3. This R&B artist was nominated for seven Grammys and won three awards. Ans: Victoria Monét

4. Olivia Rodrigo won a Grammy for Best New Artist this year for her hit album 'Guts'. True or false? Ans: False. She won it last year for her album 'Sour'.

5. This comedian hosted the Grammys this year. This comedian won a Grammy. Ans: Trevor Noah; Dave Chappelle

6. All the songs in this category, except one, were from this movie. Ans: Barbie

Visual: This artist won the most awards at Grammys 2024 with this band. Ans: Boygenius

Early Bird: Prashant Nain

Word of the day

Prognosticate:

make a prediction about; tell in advance; indicate, as with a sign or an omen

Synonyms: promise, anticipate, predict, forebode, foretell, forecast, prefigure, omen, portend, foreshadow

Usage: I won't prognosticate and say this will lead to other roles.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/prognosticatepro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pjɒg'nɒstɪkeɪt/

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

From Page One**We saved economy from a crisis: govt.**

The paper blamed the Manmohan Singh regime not only for being fiscally profligate and opting for "quick fixes" like farm loan waivers but also for failing to deliver on reforms such as Aadhaar and the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

"When the NDA government took over the reins in 2014, the economy was in bad shape, nay, crisis. We faced the hydra-headed challenge of fixing an economy mismanaged for a decade, and restoring its fundamentals to sound health," the paper noted, listing out improvements in various macro-economic and infrastructure indicators such as inflation, forex reserves and highway building pace.

"Our government refrained from bringing out a White Paper on the poor state of affairs then. That would have given a negative narrative and shaken the confidence of all, including investors," the paper said. One of the objectives of bringing out this paper now, the Ministry said, was to "generate a wider, more informed debate on the paramountcy of national interest and fiscal responsibility in matters of governance over political expediency".

"Then, we were among the 'fragile five' economies; now, we are among the 'top five' economies, making the third highest contribution to global growth every year," the paper said, stressing that the economic policy focus has been to undo "the damage of the previous decade".

"Now that we have stabilised the economy and set it on a recovery and growth path, it is necessary to place in the public domain the seemingly insurmountable challenges - left behind as a legacy by the UPA government," the paper stated.

Foreign exchange crunch

Alleging that the UPA created a foreign exchange crunch that "reeked of a re-run of 1991 when India had to approach the IMF for assistance during a Balance of Payments crisis", the paper said by the end of September 2013, forex reserves were just enough to finance little over 6 months of imports, down from 17 months at the end of March 2004. As of January 2024, reserves were sufficient for 10.6 months of imports, it said.

While the paper listed out some of the structural reforms undertaken by what it refers to as "our government", such as the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, liberalisation of foreign direct investment (FDI) norms and GST, it makes no mention of the demonetisation of high-value currency notes in 2016 that was aimed at denting corruption and weeding out black money. However, it does state that "We continue to undertake measures to unearth black money and to discourage recourse to it".

Alleging "pervasive corruption" under UPA's watch that had "shaken people's confidence", the paper shares the "current status" of 15 "high-profile" "scams".

The paper is silent on the current status of the procurement corruption allegations pertaining to Augusta Westland Helicopter and Pilatus Basic Trainer Aircraft.

"Our government, unlike its predecessor, invested in the foundations of the economy along with building a sturdy superstructure. Looking back at the last 10 years, we can say with humility and satisfaction that we have successfully overcome the challenges left behind by the previous government. That said, we are not resting on our laurels. There are miles to go and mountains to scale before we sleep," the paper concluded.

Pinarayi leads protest against Centre

Mr. Vijayan added, "Ours is a democratic protest against the undoing of federal structure and the sheer discrimination against the States irrespective of north-south considerations. However, taking into account the interests of our people and our State, we cannot be quiet."

Kejriwal's demand

Mr. Kejriwal said the situation had become such that the States had to come to Jantar Mantar to protest demanding their rights. "Mr. Vijayan is not here to ask some money for his family. He is here to get the allocations due to Kerala," said Mr. Kejriwal, adding that other than denying resources, the Centre was using Governors and Lieutenant Governors to create impediments to the Opposition-ruled governments.

He referred to the arrests of Opposition leaders and said it was "a tactic" used by the BJP to silence the Opposition. "We, the Opposition parties, represent 70 crore people of this country. Are you considering these States as your enemies?" Mr. Kejriwal asked, seeking PM Narendra Modi's explanation on the "attacks on federal rights."

Mr. Mann said the Centre had denied shares of revenues to Punjab too. He said the BJP was "busy communalising" the country and that Punjab needed no lessons from the Sangh Parivar on patriotism. He said the Punjab Governor was even not willing to hold the Assembly session and was trying to deny the democratic rights of the State.

Senior political leaders such as CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI General Secretary D. Raja, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Rajya Sabha member and lawyer Kapil Sibal, Tamil Nadu Minister and DMK leader Palanivel Thiagarajan and several Ministers, MPs and MLAs belonging to the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) in Kerala too attended the gathering. Tamil Nadu CM M.K. Stalin sent a video message and Mizoram CM Lalduhoma sent a message expressing solidarity to the gathering.

Centre to scrap Free Movement Regime with Myanmar, says Shah

Home Ministry recommends immediate suspension of FMR, which allows people residing close to India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other's territory; Shah says move will protect demographic structure of the northeastern States

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Union government has decided to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border for the sake of the country's internal security and to maintain the demographics of northeastern States, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday.

The Home Ministry has recommended the immediate suspension of the regime, which allowed tribal people living along the border on both sides to cross with few restrictions.

"It is Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji's resolve to secure our borders. Since the Ministry of External Affairs is currently in the process of scrapping it, MHA has recommended the immediate suspension of the FMR," Mr. Shah posted on X.

Under the FMR, any member of a hill tribe, who is a citizen of either India or Myanmar, and who resides within 16 km of the border on either side, can cross on the production of a border pass, usually valid for a year, and can stay up



Secure zone: Indian soldiers patrol along the banks of the Tiau River, a natural border between India and Myanmar. AFP

to two weeks per visit.

India and Myanmar share an unfenced 1,643-km-long border. A 1968 government notification limited the free movement of people up to 40 km on either side of the border, which was further reduced to 16 km in 2004. The FMR's provisions were last revised in 2016.

In its 2011-12 annual report, the Home Ministry observed that the FMR makes the international border extremely porous,

and the hilly and inhospitable terrain provides cover to the activities of various Indian Insurgent Groups (IIGs).

The India-Myanmar border passes through the

States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).

The Union government had initially planned to fence a 10 km stretch along the border at Moreh in Manipur in 2010 and 4.07 km of fencing had been put up till 2013-14 while the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government was in power. The Home Ministry's latest annual report for 2022-23 says that 6.81 km of fencing has been completed, which means that the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has added less than three km of fencing over a

nine-year period. Out of 1,643 km, the demarcation of 1,472 km has been completed.

On February 6, Mr. Shah had announced that a fence would be constructed along the entire 1,643-km border with Myanmar.

"Out of the total border length, a 10-km stretch in Moreh, Manipur, has already been fenced. Furthermore, two pilot projects of fencing through a Hybrid Surveillance System (HSS) are under execution. They will fence a stretch of 1 km each in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur. Additionally, fence works covering approximately 20 km in Manipur have also been approved, and the work will start soon," he added.

Several drawbacks

Officials pointed out that the FMR had several drawbacks. "There is no standard document or border pass recognised by both the countries. Though Assam Rifles, a Central force, is deployed along the Myanmar border, the implementation of FMR through border passes is done by the State government officials. At other international borders, such

as those with Bangladesh and Pakistan, the border check posts are manned by Bureau of Immigration officials under the MHA," one official said.

The official added that though the FMR allows each cross-border visit to last only two weeks, there is no mechanism to check when a person entered the country. "There are people who live in Myanmar but work in India during the day," the official added. Another official said that in some places, one part of the terrain was such that, in some places, one part of a house falls in Myanmar and the other in India.

The official added that the issue of streamlining the FMR has been discussed with Myanmar on several occasions, but that the neighbouring country showed no urgency on the issue.

Mr. Shah's announcement on the FMR comes soon after his February 3 meeting with Manipur CM N. Biren Singh in Delhi. The CM has often blamed the FMR for the ongoing ethnic violence in the State, though in fact, Manipur had suspended the regime in 2020 itself due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suspension of FMR is crucial for internal security: Biren

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Thursday welcomed the Centre's decision to scrap India's Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement.

His counterparts in other northeastern States also hailed the announcement by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, which miffed political parties and NGOs in Mizoram and Nagaland.

The agreement was implemented in 2018 to encourage people-to-people contact under the Modi government's Act East policy.

"The decision to scrap FMR is crucial for the internal security and demographic integrity of the northeastern States. The historic decision to fence the border will help curb illegal immigration and strengthen internal security," Mr. Singh said.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the border fence would also go a long way in checking the cross-boundary movement of extremists in the northeast.

However, groups such as the Young Mizo Association in Mizoram, the Zo United in Manipur and the Naga Students' Federation in Nagaland opposed the Centre's decision.

On the draw

Govt. rejects Canada's accusation of Indian interference in polls

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India has termed Ottawa's allegation of Indian interference in the Canadian election process as "baseless". At a press briefing on Thursday, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal flipped the allegation around, claiming that it was Canada that has been meddling in India's internal affairs.

"We have seen media reports of Canadian Commission inquiring into foreign interferences... It is not the Government of India's policy to interfere in the democratic process of other countries. In fact, quite on the reverse, it is Canada which has been interfering in our internal affairs," Mr. Jaiswal said. "We have

India's relationship with Canada has been in a nosedive since last September

been raising this issue regularly with them and we continue to call on Canada to take effective measures to address our core concerns," he added.

India's relationship with Canada has been in a nosedive since last September when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused Indian agents of being involved in the murder of a pro-Khalistan figure in the province of British Columbia. Mr. Trudeau had set up an independent commission last year to look into instances of Indian interference in previous Canadian elections.

'UNLF cadres are used as proxy army by Manipur CM'

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Chief Minister of Manipur is using cadres of the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) as his proxy army and the signing of a peace accord with a faction of the militant outfit in November 2023 has had a serious impact on the ongoing ethnic conflict in the State, a delegation of Kuki-Zomi-Hmar leaders from Manipur said on Thursday, a day after meeting officials of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

The leaders also stated their opposition to the removal of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Indo-Myanmar border. But just as the presser was under way, Union Home Minister announced the decision to remove FMR.

India's Kaladan project in Myanmar in limbo as rebels control key town'

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

One of India's flagship connectivity projects that was aimed at enhancing road and maritime connection with Southeast Asia has faced a definite setback after an important town in Myanmar was captured recently by a rebel group, a senior figure of Myanmar's Opposition has stated.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, the source said that the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Project (KMTP) has "almost died" after the rebel Arakan Army (AA) captured the Paletwa township near Mizoram border in January.

"There is no way that any connectivity project can take place in Rakhine almost all the major towns and supply routes. As a result, the Kaladan project too has almost died as Paletwa is essential for this project and Paletwa is no longer in control of the military junta," said the senior Opposition figure from Myanmar.

KMTP was aimed at connecting the port of Kolkata with the port of Sittwe in Rakhine or Arakan State which would then be connected to Mizoram by road and the Kaladan river which flows by Paletwa. But the restive province has witnessed serious clashes between the Myan-

mar military and the rebel AA. The source said the AA has established control over Maung-U, Kyauktaw, Minbya, Thandwe, and major roads connecting these towns. AA has also captured Ann township which has Myanmar Army's Western Command headquarters.

\$500-million project The fight between the AA and the junta's forces took a crucial turn on January 15 when the rebel forces captured Paletwa. This move has also roused concern of a tripartite conflict involving the junta's forces, the AA, and rebels of the Chin State as Paletwa has been traditionally a Chin-majority township.

The Myanmar source said that the AA is in an advantageous position and it is a matter of time before they establish control over the entire State of Rakhine, an unprecedented situation. "They are now aiming for capturing the Sittwe port, which is one of the oldest ports and airports of Myanmar and they can do that as early as summer of this year," said the source who requested anonymity.

RLJP chief Pashupati Paras meets Nadda

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

BJP president J.P. Nadda on Thursday met Union Minister and Rashtriya Lok Jan-Shakti Party (RLJP) chief Pashupati Kumar Paras, to sort out what has become a potentially problematic

seat-sharing arrangement in Bihar.

After the death of Ram Vilas Paswan in 2020, his RLJP remained with the National Democratic Alliance, along with three of the six MPs of the united RLJP.

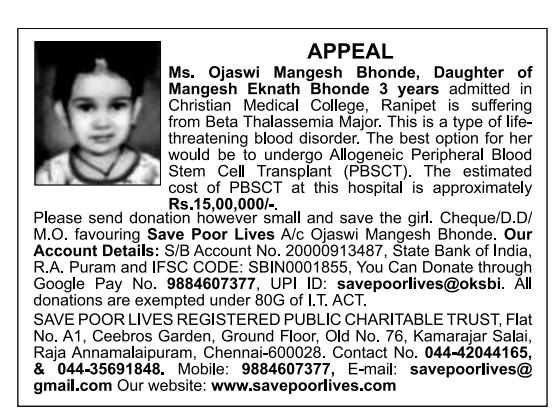
At the NDA's meeting last year, however, Mr. Chirag Paswan re-entered the alliance, raising a question

mark on how seat-sharing arrangements would be concluded between the warring factions.

Mr. Chirag Paswan has stressed that his party would like to contest six seats in the 2024 Parliamentary election, as it had in 2019.



Workers during the construction of a port in Sittwe in Rakhine State of Myanmar. REUTERS



APPEAL
Ms. Ojaswi Mangesh Bhonde, Daughter of Mangesh Eknath Bhonde 3 years admitted in Christian Medical College, Ranipet is suffering from Beta Thalassemia Major. This is a type of life-threatening blood disorder. The best option for her would be to undergo Allogeneic Peripheral Blood Stem Cell Transplant (PBSCT). The estimated cost of PBSCT at this hospital is approximately Rs.15,00,000/-

Please send donation however small and save the girl. Cheque/D.D/M.O. favouring Save Poor Lives A/c Ojaswi Mangesh Bhonde. Our Account Details: S/B Account No. 20009134367, State Bank of India, R.A. Puram and IFSC CODE: SBIN001855. You can Donate through Google Pay. No. 9884607377, UPI ID: savepoorlives@oksbi. All donations are exempted under 80G of I.T. ACT.

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IN BRIEF



Union Cabinet approves six multi-track rail projects

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Thursday approved six Railway projects at an estimated cost of ₹12,343 crore to be fully funded by the government. The sections selected for track doubling are: Ajmer-Chanderiya (178 km) in Rajasthan at a cost of ₹1,813 crore; Jaipur-Sawai Madhopur (131 km) for ₹1,268 crore; Luni-Samdr-Bhildi (271 km) for ₹3,530 crore; and Assam's Agorhi-Kamakhya (7 km), which includes a new rail-cum-road bridge pegged at ₹1,650 crore; Lumpang-Furkating (140 km) at ₹2,333 crore; and Telengana and Andhra Pradesh's Motumari-Vishnupuram (88 km) for ₹1,746 crore.

ED searches 17 places in cases involving Harak Singh Rawat

The Enforcement Directorate has conducted searches at 17 locations in Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Haryana in two cases allegedly involving former Uttarakhand Forest Minister Harak Singh Rawat and others. The ED had initiated the probe based on a first information report (FIR) registered by the police against Birendra Singh Kandari, a close associate of Mr. Rawat, and others, it said on Thursday. According to the agency, Mr. Kandari and one Narendra Kumar hatched a criminal conspiracy with Mr. Rawat and registered two powers of attorney for a land parcel for which a court had cancelled the sale deed.

Ex-Maharashtra Minister Baba Siddique quits Congress

Former Maharashtra Minister Baba Siddique resigned from the Congress party on Thursday. A prominent figure in the Mumbai Congress and a Minister during the Congress-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) coalition's tenure, Mr. Siddique shared his decision on X, stating, "I resign from the primary membership of the Indian National Congress Party @INCIndia with immediate effect," expressing gratitude for the 48-year journey in the party which he joined as a teenager. "There's a lot I would have liked to express but as they say some things are better left unsaid. I thank everyone who has been a part of this journey," he said.

LS panel pulls up Centre over Samagra Shiksha accounts

The Lok Sabha pulled up the Ministry of Education for delay in submitting the annual reports and audited accounts in the House of the Samagra Shiksha scheme from Himachal Pradesh from 2013-14 to 2021-22. A report by Girish Chandra, Chairperson of the Lok Sabha Committee on Papers Laid On The Table, cited that the Ministry of Education has defaulted in submitting the documents. The committee noted that the Ministry took more than two years, 13 months, 14 months, and 16 months for the years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20, respectively, to submit documents after receiving them from the Samagra Shiksha department.

Modi not OBC by birth, he will not allow caste census: Rahul

PM was born in Teli caste in Gujarat, which the BJP govt included in the OBC category in 2000, says Congress leader; he accuses PM of destroying small businesses and helping big industrialists

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of lying that he was born in an Other Backward Class (OBC) family.

"Your Prime Minister was not born in an OBC family. He was born in general caste [family]. He was born in Teli caste in Gujarat. The Bharatiya Janata Party government included his caste in the OBC category in 2000. He keeps lying everywhere that he was born in an OBC family," Mr. Gandhi said at a public meeting at Jharsuguda in Odisha as part of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

"How do I know that he was not born OBC? I don't require a birth certificate to ascertain the fact. He does not embrace any OBC person. He does not hold the hands of farmers and labourers. He only holds hand of Adanji," he said.

'PM is lying'
"In his lifetime, he (Mr. Modi) will not allow the caste census to be conducted be-



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi addresses a gathering in Odisha on Thursday during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. ANI

cause the PM is lying to the country that he was born in an OBC family," Mr. Gandhi said.

"The caste census can only be undertaken by the Congress party and Rahul Gandhi. When I raised the issue of caste census and social justice, Mr. Modi delivered a speech saying there are only two castes – one rich and another poor. If there are two castes which caste do you (PM) belong to? You cannot be poor. You wear suits that cost in crores. If there are two castes, how come you are an OBC," he said.

"He [Mr. Modi] wears one thing in the morning and it is subsequently changed during noon and evening. His attires keep changing every day. And he lies that he belongs to the OBC community. Mr. Modi is from Modh-Ghanachi caste. He was made PM to fool all backward class communities," he said.

"When it comes to economic justice, your PM is destroying small businesses. He has implemented GST and demonetisation to help Adanji. In the country, including Odisha, youth cannot get employ-

NCBC chief condemns Rahul's remarks

NEW DELHI

Hansraj Gangaram Ahir, Chairperson of the National Commission for Backward Classes, on Thursday condemned Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's remarks on the OBC status of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked him to apologise to the OBC community of the country.

ment. Big industrialists are selling products made in China helping youth of China make money. People in India are only spending," Mr. Gandhi said.

Insulting remarks'

Gujarat BJP leader Purnesh Modi said the remarks were "insulting to OBCs". "It is a lie that the Teli community was included in the OBC category in 2000... They were included in 1994 during the Congress rule... When PM Modi was the CM of Gujarat, he had nothing to do with including the Teli community in OBC," Mr. Modi, said.

Low Budget outlay hurting MGNREGS, says House panel

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

A reduced budget at the outset of the financial year for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at ground level, shortage of funds is a big obstacle." In the Union Budget for 2024-25, an allocation of ₹86,000 crore has been made, which is at par with the Revised Estimate for the programme in the 2023-24 financial year. But actual expenditures till February 1 have already reached ₹88,000 crore.

The committee, in its 100-page report, pointed out several other shortcomings on the implementation of the programme, including the necessity to increase wages.

Delay allowance

The committee also flagged the delay in dispensing the wages, which is supposed to be compensated by a delay allowance as prescribed by the Act.

The committee found that in 2022-23, the approved delay allowance amount was ₹93 lakh. However, only ₹59 lakh was paid. While 24 lakh had been approved till November 21 in the current financial year, only ₹2.5 lakh has been paid so far.

'Minor' water pollution offences to be decriminalised

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday passed the Water Amendment (Pollution and Prevention) Bill, 2024.

The Bill makes important changes to the Water (Pollution and Prevention) Act, 1974, such as decriminalising certain violations deemed "minor" and replaces for the most part the penalties of imprisonment with fines ranging from ₹10,000 to ₹15 lakh.

The amended version would apply to Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and the Union Territories.

It also empowers the Centre to frame rules to select the chairpersons of State pollution control boards and frame guidelines that States can follow for the grant, refusal or cancellation of consent by any State Board for establishing industries and new operating processes.

Preferential treatment of most backward is not tinkering with Presidential list: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the decision by individual States to provide preferential allotment of reservation benefits to the most backward groups or "the untouchables among the untouchables" will not amount to tinkering with the power of Parliament to include or exclude Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes from the Presidential list.

Articles 341 and 342 empower the President to draw up a list of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, respectively. The inclusion or exclusion of any caste, race, or tribe from the Presidential list is done by Parliament through legislation.

"In the list there are blacksmiths and scavengers... Did they face the same degree of discrimination when they were included in the list? Were the scavengers not the un-



Scheduled Castes would lead to the "Balkanisation of the list".

Homogenous group

Senior advocate Manoj Swarup, appearing for parties objecting to the sub-classification of backward groups by States, argued that the Scheduled Castes (SC) were a homogenous group. Their different birthmarks and caste-marks were erased the moment the communities found a place in the Presidential list. Preferential treatment to select groups within the SC would exclude others within the same category. Such special treatment to some sub-castes amounted to the practice of inequality by the State, he argued.

"A Scheduled Caste person whose child is studying in the best schools of Delhi and another whose child is studying in a gram panchayat school in a village. The first person's family has got the benefit of reser-

vation for the past 75 years through generations. Will the child in the village be able to compete with this man's child? Should that child in the village live in conditions of perpetual inequality?" Justice Gavai questioned.

Justice Vikram Nath said the idea behind sub-classification by States was to give them equality.

Justice Gavai said it was not that the remaining sub-castes, who had been taking the advantage of reservation, would be deprived of anything merely because first preference was given to a group found to be more backward.

"It should not be like the general compartment of a train, where once you get in, you will not permit others less fortunate to get in," he Justice Gavai observed.

Mr. Swarup further argued that certain States could use the power to sub-classify backward groups for political appeasement.

Launch next phase of Smart Cities Mission: panel

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

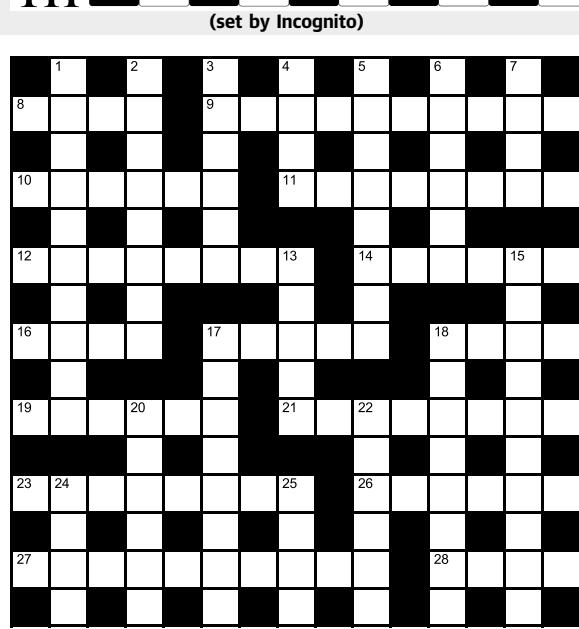
A parliamentary committee has emphasised the need to launch the next phase of the Centre's flagship Smart Cities Mission with a thrust on Tier-2 cities located within 100 km of State capitals.

The Standing Committee on Housing and Urban Affairs also cautioned that digital infrastructure created under the mission could be misused and hence there was a need to ensure right to privacy and securing of digital platforms from cyber attacks.

The report on "Smart Cities Mission: An Evaluation" was presented in the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

In its report, it said that the experience and expertise gained by Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) in urban development initiatives must be leveraged for the purpose.

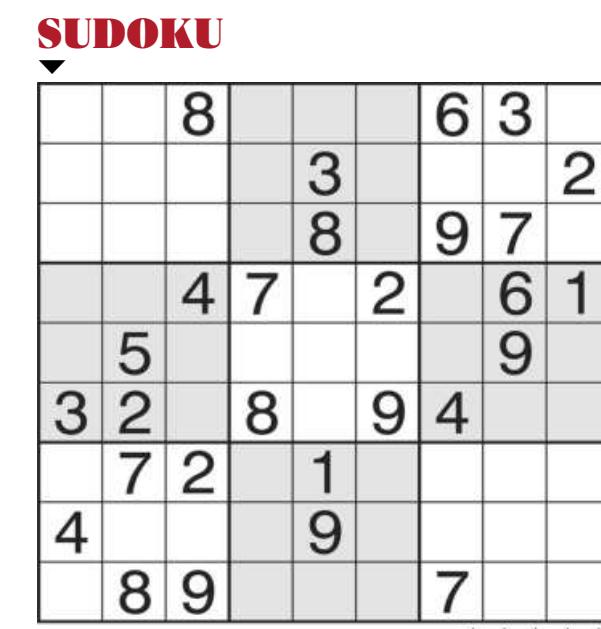
TH CROSSWORD + 14093



Across
8 Love, kiss and nurse animals (4)
9 Old dog is returned on Sunday and trips (10)
10 Lord Edward looked (6)
11 Comes down and refuses (8)
12 Virginia and John have Indian curry dish (8)
13 Swallow string bean cooked in absence of bran (6)

- Down**
- Former soldiers carrying ripe squash start to taste and try (10)
 - Nudist runs around mid-afternoon carrying sweetheart and trespasses (8)
 - Father of genetics led men astray (6)
 - Type of test from a police department (4)
 - Slightly salty ash brick is manufactured (8)
 - Top class fish is sick (6)
 - Wager insect has energy (4)
 - Chose operation by Theodore (5)
 - Setter is confused! Los Angeles representative gives roadside illumination? (6,4)
 - Father stole and was terrified (8)
 - Husband finished gin cocktail... is floating in air! (8)
 - Shooting star came across pulverised ore (6)
 - English signal standard (6)
 - Marine feature seen in Murree forest (4)
 - Millionaire gives shelter to animal (4)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to previous puzzle

Y	I	S	P	I	S	M		
X	M	E	N	O	W	I	G	R
C	S	M	R	N	T	O		
S	A	M	O	S	A	D	O	P
F	E	N	D	I	H	A	C	R
I	E	N	D	I	H	A	C	R
E	N	D	I	H	A	C	R	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Lord's role as protector

The celestials appealed to Lord Narayana for help in vanquishing Ravana, who had been tormenting them. The Lord decided to take the Rama avatar, the primary purpose of which was to save the devas. Since saving the devas required the slaying of Ravana, this also happened. But if we look at the reason for the Rama avatar, it was the Lord's intention to save the devas, that led to the avatar, said M.A. Venkatakrishnan in a discourse. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Lord says that His avatars have three purposes – to save the good, to destroy the wicked and to establish dharma. But why does He have to speak of three purposes, when all three seem to mean the same? Wouldn't it be enough to say that He takes avatars to kill the wicked? Then it follows from this that the good are protected and so is dharma. It is to show His concern for the righteous, that He places His role as a saviour, as a protector at the top of the list of reasons for His avatars, and this is true of all His avatars, not just the 10 avatars which are widely known.

Even so, why does He have to come in person to save people? Since He can achieve things through His sankalpa, can He not just wish for the death of an asura, instead of taking an avatar? He can, but He wants to reveal His qualities of saulabhya and sauseela to His devotees.



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MOSCOW

Russia blocks remaining anti-Putin campaigner Nadezhdin from poll



Russia's election commission on Thursday blocked pro-peace politician Boris Nadezhdin from next month's presidential election, ending his surprise bid to oust President Vladimir Putin from the Kremlin. Only three other candidates — all from ceremonial Opposition parties backed by the Kremlin — will take part. AFP

ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia names intelligence chief Temesgen as new deputy PM



Ethiopian lawmakers on Thursday approved the appointment of intelligence chief Temesgen Tiruneh as deputy to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, in a shake-up that followed the ouster of Demek Mekonnen. Mr. Abiy's office described the Cabinet changes as a "step towards strengthening the nation's leadership". AFP

BAGHDAD

U.S. air strike kills pro-Iran commander in Baghdad



An American air strike in the Iraqi capital on Wednesday killed a senior commander from a pro-Iran armed group who was involved in attacks on Washington's troops in the region, the U.S. military said. Kataeb Hezbollah confirmed that a commander was killed and identified him as Abu Baqr al-Saadi. AFP

GRINDAVIK

Volcano in Iceland erupts for the third time since December



A volcano in southwestern Iceland erupted on Thursday for the third time since December, sending jets of lava into the sky and triggering evacuation of the Blue Lagoon spa, a major tourist attraction. The Meteorological Office said that lava was flowing to the west and there was no immediate threat to Grindavik. AP

Pakistan votes as militant attacks surge and Imran's party cries foul

Tens of thousands of security forces were deployed at polling stations; authorities suspended mobile phone services across the country to prevent disruptions and flash protests; there were multiple attacks on security personnel in various places

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Pakistanis braved cold winter weather and sporadic violence to vote for a new Parliament on Thursday, a day after twin bombings claimed at least 30 lives in the worst election-related violence ahead of the balloting.

Tens of thousands of security forces were deployed at polling stations and authorities suspended mobile phone services across the country to prevent disruptions and flash protests. Pakistan's Interior Ministry said the decision was made to maintain



Next step: Polling staff counting votes as polls end during country's national elections in Karachi on Thursday. AFP

law and order. It did not say when the suspension would be lifted.

There were a handful of attacks that appeared aimed at disrupting the vote. In the northwestern

district of Dera Ismail Khan, gunmen set off a bomb and then opened fire at a police van, killing five officers and wounding two others, local police officials said. The officers

were assigned to security duty during the elections.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack but the area is a former stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban who often target police forces.

Attack on troops

Also in the northwest, gunmen fired on troops in the town of Kot Azam, killing a soldier, a police official said. Again, no one immediately claimed responsibility for that attack.

Unidentified assailants threw hand grenades at two polling stations in restive southwestern Baluchistan province, where twin bombings hit separate

election offices on Wednesday, killing at least 30 people.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for both bombings.

The election has also been marred by allegations from the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party of imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan that its candidates were denied a fair chance at campaigning.

Mr. Khan's party called the suspension of the mobile phone services "a severe assault on democracy" and a "cowardly attempt by those in power to stifle dissent, manipulate the election's outcome, and infringe upon the rights of the Pakistani people."

Ukraine Army commander Zaluzhny ousted from post

Agence France-Presse
KYIV

Ukraine's top commander Valery Zaluzhny was on Thursday removed from his post, in the biggest shake-up of Kyiv's military leadership since Russia's invasion almost two years ago.

The popular general had led the Ukrainian Army since the start of the war, pushing back a vastly more powerful invading force in the first months of the conflict.

But the failure of a much-vaunted counter-offensive last summer and public disagreement with Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky tarnished his reputation in the President's office.

"Today we had a frank discussion about what



Valery Zaluzhny

needs to change in the Army," Mr. Zelensky said in a statement on social media. "I have offered General Zaluzhny to continue to be part of the team of the Ukrainian state. I would be grateful for his consent," Mr. Zelensky wrote.

Those comments came as Ukraine's defence minister ended days of speculation over Mr. Zaluzhny's future by announcing that he was being replaced.

Referendum on Irish unity in this decade, says Sinn Fein leadership

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Northern Ireland will conduct a referendum on uniting with the Republic of Ireland in this decade, the leadership of Sinn Fein, the party that heads the government of Northern Ireland, said on Thursday.

"We believe that we will have polls, referendums on the question of unity in this decade," Sinn Fein President Mary Lou McDonald told journalists at a Foreign Press Association briefing in London. Earlier in the day, Ms. McDonald had clarified to Sky News that by "this decade", she meant before 2030.

The conversation around the referendum would need to be "inclus-



Future plans: Michelle O'Neill and Mary Lou McDonald taking part in a press conference, in London on Thursday. GETTY IMAGES

sive" and "planned, orderly, peaceful, democratic constitutional", she said, adding that multiple identities could be accommodated within the national framework and this would involve working with the U.K., on the rights of Brit-

ish citizens living in Ireland.

However, Northern Ireland faces other pressing challenges. Its First Minister Michelle O'Neill, who also addressed journalists at the briefing, said "a huge amount of work" needed

to be done, identifying areas such as public services, child care and education.

A functioning government based on a power-sharing agreement between the Republican (i.e., pro Irish) Sinn Fein and Unionist DUP returned to Belfast earlier this week after a gap of two years following a DUP walkout. Belfast was being "starved" by the British government, Ms O'Neill had said earlier this week.

Ireland's Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Leo Varadkar had indicated last year that while Ireland was on the way to unification, it was not ready for a referendum because it would be divisive and likely defeated at this stage.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE**DEATH ANNIVERSARIES**

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10-05-1943 09-02-2005
Professor of Forensic Medicine (Retd)
Madras Medical College & Thanjavur Medical College.

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Russia storms Ukraine's Avdiivka

Agence France-Presse

KYIV

Large numbers of Russian forces are storming the frontline Ukrainian town of Avdiivka, its Ukrainian mayor said on Thursday, escalating a months-long effort to capture the industrial hub.

Moscow launched a costly bid in October to seize the town, which has been caught up in fighting since 2014, when it briefly fell to Moscow-backed separatists.

The capture of Avdiivka would provide a much-needed victory for Russia, in the run-up to its much-awaited presidential election in March.

Bolsonaro targeted as Brazil police probe 'coup attempt'

Agence France-Presse

BRASÍLIA

Brazilian police launched dozens of raids on Thursday targeting ex-President Jair Bolsonaro, who was ordered to surrender his passport, and his inner circle over allegations of orchestrating an invasion of the seat of power last year.

Federal police said they were carrying out 33 search and seizure operations and executing four arrest warrants in an investigation of a "criminal organisation involved in the attempted coup" — a reference to Mr. Bolsonaro supporters' invasion of the presidential palace, Congress and Supreme Court

Bolsonaro, who was ordered to surrender his passport, called it a case of 'relentless persecution'

on January 8, 2023.

The raids were authorised by Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes, who also ordered that multiple suspects be suspended from public duties and surrender their passports within 24 hours.

That included Mr. Bolsonaro, whose lawyer and adviser Fabio Wajngarten confirmed in a statement on X, that the far-right ex-Army captain would comply with the order.

Mr. Bolsonaro called himself the victim of "relentless persecution." The former President, who was in the United States at the time of the riots, has repeatedly denied responsibility.

Three people have been arrested so far in the operation, according to Brazilian media reports — two Army officers and a former international affairs adviser to Bolsonaro, Filipe Martins.

The riots came a week after President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's inauguration following a narrow election win in October 2022 over Mr. Bolsonaro, who served as President from 2019 to 2022.

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Dated: 08.02.2024

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION**INVITATION FOR TENDER (IFT)**

(Through Government of Karnataka Procurement Portal only)
(Two Cover System & Single Cover System)

Tenders on item rate basis are invited by the undersigned for the work mentioned below from the registered contractors of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike or equivalent registration with CPWD / KPWD / Railways / MES or any State Government Organizations.

Sl. No.	Name of the work	Estimate Amount (Rs. in Lakhs)	EMD (In Rs.)	Eligible class of contractor
TWO COVER WORKS (OTHERS)				
1	Providing CC roads Asphaltim improvements to Drains and Other Allied Works in Himalaya Slum, Lakshmanpur RK Puram VV Giri Colony of Block No. 25.1, 25.2, 26, 28, 21, 20, 24, 22.1, 27, 41.1, 25 Ward No. 123 Gandhinagar Ward	50.00	1,00,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
2	Providing CC roads Asphaltim improvements to Drains and Other Allied Works Arundathi Nagar Okalipuram of Block No. 6, 50, 51, 52, 53 in Ward No. 125 Okalipuram Ward	60.00	1,20,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
3	Providing CC roads Asphaltim improvements to Drains and Other Allied Works in Binypet of Block No. 5.2, 59 Ward No. 126 Binypet Ward.	20.00	50,000/-	Class-II civil contractor
4	Providing CC roads Asphaltim improvements to Drains and Other Allied Works in Keshavanager Nalabhandavadi Nagamma Nagar of Block No. 3.1, 76, 40.1, 41, 42, 5, 4 Ward No. 127 Cottontop Ward	70.00	1,40,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
5	Construction of Multipurpose Buildings in Ward No. 122 Dattatreya Temple	100.00	2,00,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
6	Improvements to R Gundurao Indoor Stadium and Playground in Ward No. 123 Gandhinagar	100.00	2,00,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
TWO COVER WORKS RESERVED FOR SC				
7	Construction of Retaining Wall, Public Toilets and Improvements to drain in Ward No. 124 Subhashnagar	100.00	1,00,000/-	Class-I civil contractor
8	Construction of Samudhaya			

HONoured

I am speechless and it's truly inspiring to be here: Vaishali



EMMANUEL YOGINI

"I thank The Hindu group and Sportstar for recognising my efforts. I feel truly honoured to be here. I am speechless... it's truly inspiring to be here," said R. Vaishali, who has qualified for the Candidates 2024. She was conferred with the Sportswoman of the year (individual) honour.

FOR A CAUSE

We have come a long way in creating an ecosystem: Anshul



RITU RAJ KONWAR

We started our journey in 2016 with the inauguration of the stadium by the PM. We have come a long way in putting up state-of-the-art infrastructure and a sports ecosystem... we now have residential facilities for our athletes — Anshul Garg, CEO, Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, after winning the Sport for Social Good award.

DREAM COME TRUE

To be awarded by Sportstar is a pretty huge deal: relay team



EMMANUEL YOGINI

"It's really cool to be here. We've always reached out to Sportstar in our libraries as the first magazine. And to be awarded by them is a pretty huge deal for us because we are sitting among the greats India has seen. None of us ever imagined that we would be winning the award," said Nihal Joel William, a member of the team.

SURREAL

This will remain a core memory of mine, says archer Prathamesh



K.R. DEEPAK

"This will forever remain a core memory of mine. Being in the same room with all these heroes, and legends of the sporting world, I feel like I am standing in between tall, tall mountains, and I feel really tiny. But at the same time, it motivates me, and gives me the vision to create my own legacy," said Prathamesh Jawkar.

Shami, Bopanna and Sheetal headline Aces Awards

The sixth chapter of the Sportstar annual honours is a star-studded affair with achievers from across the spectrum of Indian able-bodied and para sports among those present



Ashwin Achal
MUMBAI

India cricketer Mohammed Shami won the Sportsman of the year (Team Sports) honour at the Sportstar Aces Awards 2024 held at the Taj Mahal Palace here on Thursday.

Rohan Bopanna won the Ace of Aces award while Sheetal Devi took home two honours: Sportstar of the year (female) and the Moment of the year accolade.

Shami bagged 24 wickets to emerge as the top wicket-taker of the ODI World Cup 2023.

"I am from a place which has no facilities. My journey has hinged on luck, effort, and support from my family and friends. I am grateful for everything — even a person who has contributed one per cent to my success," Shami said.

India cricket team head coach Rahul Dravid was named 'Coach of the year'. Under Dravid's watch, India reached the final of the ODI men's Cricket World Cup 2023, and won the Asia Cup.

In a video message, Dravid said, "I am truly honoured to receive the award. As a coach, I don't score runs, I don't take catches or wickets.

"Basically, I'm relying on other people to make me look good. So I'd like to accept this award on behalf of the captain and the players who I have been privileged to work with over the last year."

Sunil Gavaskar, the Aces Awards jury chair, paid tribute to all the winners.

"With the kind of performances that we keep seeing in Indian sports, it gets



Recognition: Shami had bagged 24 wickets to emerge as the top wicket-taker of the ODI World Cup 2023. K.R. DEEPAK

more and more difficult to pick the award winners every year.

"Looking at videos and reading about the nominees give the jurors so much joy. It is like you are floating in air. I am sure that these incredible feats will serve as an inspiration for young sportspersons," Gavaskar said.

N. Ram, Director (*The Hindu* Group Publishing Private Limited), Nirmala Lakshman, Chairperson (*The Hindu* Group Publishing Private Limited), and N. Murali, Director (*The Hindu* Group Publishing Private Limited) presented awards to winners.

The Sportstar Aces Awards is presented by Amul, powered by IDFC First Bank in association with Indian Oil.

lour partner Nippon Paint and education partner Christ University.

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And the Aces awards winners are...

- Sportsman of the Year (Track and Field): Men's Relay Team
- Sportswoman of the Year (Track and Field): Parul Chaudhary
- Sportsman of the Year (Team Sports): Hardik Singh, Mohammed Shami
- Sportswoman of the Year (Team Sports): Vandana Katariya
- Sportsman of the Year (Individual): Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, Chirag Shetty
- Sportswoman of the Year (Individual): Rameshbabu Vaishali, Sift Kaur Samra
- Sportsman of the Year (Parasports): Sumit Antil
- Sportswoman of the Year (Parasports): Thulasimathi Murugesan
- Coach of the Year: Rahul Dravid
- Young Achiever of the Year (Male): Prathamesh Samadhan Jawkar
- Young Achiever of the Year (Female): Tilottama Sen
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Chandu Borse, Karnam Malleswari
- Sportstar of the Year (Male): Neeraj Chopra
- Sportstar of the Year (Female): Sheetal Devi
- National Team of the Year: India Men's Cricket Team
- Club/State Team of the Year: Saurashtra Cricket Team
- Moment of the Year: Sheetal Devi hits the bull's-eye
- International Icon: Muttiah Muralitharan
- Best State for the Promotion of Sport: Tamil Nadu
- Best PSU for the Promotion of Sport: NTPC Ltd
- Best Corporate for the Promotion of Sport: Tata Steel Ltd.
- Best University for the Promotion of Sport: SRM Institute of Science and Technology
- Sport for Social Good: Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board
- Ace of Aces Award: Rohan Bopanna

Double delight for para archer Sheetal Devi as she shines the brightest on a night of stars

P.K. Ajith Kumar
MUMBAI

Sheetal Devi caught the imagination of a country with her incredible show at the Asian Para Games last year. The 17-year-old archer hitting the bull's-eye with her feet at Hangzhou was undoubtedly one of the most unforgettable moments for Indian sport.

Not surprisingly, it won the Sportstar Aces Award for the Moment of the Year. She also took home the Sportstar of the Year (Female) Award.

Even among the galaxy of stars, including five-time World chess champion Viswanathan Anand, cricketers Sunil Gavaskar, Mo-



Inspiring journey: Sheetal's coach Abhilasha narrates her ward's incredible story as Anand, right, Paes and Sportstar Editor Ayon Sengupta listen avidly. K.R. DEEPAK

hammed Shami, Chandu Borse and Pravin Amre, former track queen P.T.

Usha, tennis aces Leander Paes and Rohan Bopanna, at the ball room of Taj Ma-

hal hotel, Sheetal shone brightly. When she received the awards on the

stage, she got some of the loudest cheers of the night.

Sheetal, who was born without upper limbs, recalled her inspiring journey after she grew up in a village in Jammu.

"I loved to go to school and I learnt to write with my legs," she said. "For me, my legs are my hands."

After receiving the International Icon Award, Sri Lankan cricket legend Muttiah Muralitharan also spoke about how inspiring she is.

Sheetal also got a pleasant surprise when she was presented with a painting of her by Anand's son Akhil. "You have inspired many people and Akhil was one of them," Anand said.

Borde and Malleswari honoured with Lifetime Achievement Award

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

Champion weightlifter Karnam Malleswari and former India cricketer Chandu Borse won the IDFC First Bank Lifetime Achievement Award at the Sportstar Aces Awards 2024 held at the Taj Mahal Palace here on Thursday.

Malleswari brought home a bronze medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. "I would like to dedicate this award to my husband (Rajesh Tyagi). In 1998, I had a back injury for six months after marriage. I thought my career was over. But my husband had a lot of belief in me. He said that I would recover and start performing again. At that time, I was at home, and there was no gym anywhere nearby. If I had ordered a set of barbells from Kolkata, that would have also taken a month to come."

"He went himself and got a 180-kg barbell set after travelling by train and taxi. I trained in the living area of our one-bedroom house for six months," Malleswari said.

"I like it when young sportspeople are inspired by my story and performances. I would like to congratulate all those going to the Paris Olympics and wish them best of luck. Bring back lots of me-



Distinguished careers: Borse and Malleswari receive their award from N. Ram and N. Murali of *The Hindu* group.

EMMANUEL YOGINI

Momentous occasion



Basking in the limelight: N. Ram felicitates Leander Paes for making it to the Tennis Hall of Fame. (Right): The jury members with Nirmala Lakshman and Ayon Sengupta.



dals," Malleswari said. Borse made 55 Test appearances and had a double of over 3,000 runs and 50 wickets. "This takes me back to when I was associated with a lot of great cricketers — Polly Umrigar, Sanjay Manjrekar, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Kapil Dev, Nawab of Pataudi..." Borse, 89, said.

Legendary actor Amitabh Bachchan, in a video message, paid an eloquent tribute to Borse while reminiscing about watching the stalwart play at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi.

"When we selected the 1983 World Cup team, the

selectors thought of players who could contribute more to the team. That is why we selected more all-rounders," Borse said.

Amitabh Bachchan, in a video message, paid an eloquent tribute to Borse while reminiscing about watching the stalwart play at the Ferozeshah Kotla in New Delhi.

'After years of sacrifice, I've realised my dream'

It is very humbling for me to reach these heights from the beautiful land of Coorg, says tennis stalwart Bopanna, the recipient of the Ace of Aces honour

ACES AWARDS

Ashwin Achal

MUMBAI

Australian Open men's doubles champion Rohan Bopanna won the Ace of Aces accolade at the Sportstar Aces Awards 2024 held at the Taj Mahal Palace here on Thursday.

Bopanna received the award from fellow tennis legend and Grand Slam champion Leander Paes.

"I always wished I could play doubles with Bopanna," Paes said.

Bopanna recently became the oldest player, aged 43, to achieve the World No. 1 ranking in men's doubles.

Wonderful athletes

"We are constantly travelling and playing tournaments, so it feels great to come here and meet all these wonderful athletes that India has produced."

"My goal was to win a men's doubles Grand Slam and to reach the World No. 1 ranking. After years and



Great feeling: Bopanna receives the award from Viren Rasquinha, right, and L.V. Navaneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group, as Leander Paes applauds. K.R. DEEPAK

years of sacrifice, I have finally realised my dream," Bopanna said.

"It is very humbling for me to reach these heights from the beautiful land of Coorg. It was my parents who insisted that I train in an individual sport. That is when my tennis journey started, in Coorg. And now I have gone all the way

across the world to win a Grand Slam in Melbourne," Bopanna said.

He explained that his focus on adequate recovery changed the path of his career. "I started to focus on recovery at the end of 2019. My cartilages in the knee had fully worn out. I took around two or three painkillers a day. Doctor told me

to try platelet-rich plasma injections. But just injections will not work; I had to do strengthening exercises. That's when I discovered Iyengar Yoga.

"I was in extreme pain, so I gave it a try. Because of Iyengar Yoga, I can now play tennis without pain. I never thought this day will come," Bopanna said.

Shining stars



One for posterity: (Clockwise from top left) Thulasimathi won the Sportswoman (Para sports) award while Tilottama received the Young achiever (female) honour. Parul bagged the Sportswoman (track and field) award and Jaydev Shah accepted the Club/State team of the Year award on behalf of the Saurashtra cricket team. RITU RAJ KONWAR, K.R. DEEPAK, EMMANUEL YOGINI

Aussies pip Pakistan to enter title clash

Press Trust of India

BENONI

Tom Straker's six-wicket haul and Harry Dixon's half-century inspired Australia to a tense one-wicket victory over brave Pakistan in the semifinal here on Thursday, setting up their ICC Under-19 World Cup final against defending champions India.

The summit clash will be played at the same venue on Sunday.

Pakistan made a below par 179, built around two half-centuries by Arafat Minhas (52) and Azan Awais (52) as it struggled against pacer Straker (six for 24).

Despite having their own struggles against spirited the Pakistan bowlers, the Aussies managed to reach 181 for nine in 49.1 overs to seal the final berth with Dixon (50, 75b, 5x4) and Oliver Peake (49, 75b, 3x4) leading the chase before Raf MacMillan (19 not out) and Callum Vidler (3 not out) dragged their team past the line in the final over.

While India will be playing its ninth title match, the Aussies are appearing in their sixth final.



MacMillan... having the last laugh. GETTY IMAGES

Kudermetova wards off Sahaja's challenge

MUMBAI OPEN

Kamesh Srinivasan

MUMBAI

Polina Kudermetova produced a sharp game midway through the third set to beat Sahaja Yamalapalli 1-6, 6-3, 7-5 in the pre-quarterfinals of the L&T Mumbai Open WTA tennis tournament at the CCI on Thursday.

The 20-year-old Russian played a high quality game to turn the match on its head.

Down 2-5 in the third set, Kudermetova stepped it up and went on a higher gear. Sahaja had beaten the top seed Kayla Day in the first round and had the confidence. Sahaja could not put a foot wrong in that first set, but her level dipped marginally in the second which was good enough for the wiry Russian to grab her chance.

Earlier in the evening, Rutuja Bhosale fought hard despite ankle injury to stretch eighth seed Katie Volynets of USA to three sets. Rutuja missed set points in the first set but came back strong in the second. However, the American, who had beaten Anki-



Uping the ante: Kudermetova went on a higher gear after losing in the first set. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

ta Raina in straight sets in the first round, had the match in control in the decider, for a 7-6(8), 2-6, 6-1 victory.

Rutuja converted eight of 22 break points, and Katie converted eight of 16 break-points.

The 16-year-old Russian sensation withdrew from her quarterfinal match owing to ill-health, letting Storm Hunter of Australia move ahead with a walkover.

In doubles quarterfinals, Prarthana Thombare

First-ever International Icon honour goes to spin wizard Muralitharan

P.K. Ajith Kumar

MUMBAI

There they were, together on the stage. Sunil Gavaskar, Leander Paes and Muttiah Muralitharan indeed presented a picture of sporting excellence.

Muralitharan was presented with the first-ever International Icon award at the Sportstar Aces Awards 2024 here on Thursday. There could not have been a more deserving star than the Sri Lankan spin legend, who took a stunning 800 Test wickets, for such an award.

"I am lucky to get the first award in this category, and I would like to thank *The Hindu* and *Sportstar* as well as the jury comprising legends," he said. "The first-ever match I got to see featured the legends Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev."

Muralitharan narrated how much cricket meant for a country that was facing so many problems. "Sports was one thing that



One icon to another: Gavaskar recalled how Muralitharan used to pronounce Sehwag and Shoib, leaving everyone in splits. RITU RAJ KONWAR

gave joy to all youngsters, and it made us forget other things," he said. "That inspired me to take up sport and that is why I am here."

Paes, the tennis great who shone in his role as a presenter, asked Muralitharan to name the toughest three batters he bowled to.

"Virender Sehwag was the toughest," he said.

"The way he played was different; he didn't care. He just wanted to hit the ball. He wasn't scared of getting out. That was why he was very dangerous. In Test cricket, when I started out, Brian Lara was the ultimate. Then there was Sachin Tendulkar. It took me about six years to take his wicket."

Muralitharan also spoke highly of Sunil Gavaskar who took on the most fearsome fast bowlers without wearing helmets. "Gavaskar scored those hundreds in the West Indies in tough conditions against all those fast bowlers," he said.

Also on the stage was Jayen Mehta, Managing Director, Amul.

Tamil Nadu claims Best State for the promotion of sport award

Sports Bureau

MUMBAI

Tamil Nadu won the 'Best State for the promotion of sport' honour at the Sportstar ACES Awards 2024 held at the Taj Mahal Palace here on Thursday.

Tamil Nadu Minister of Youth Welfare and Sports Development, Udhayanidhi Stalin, accepted the award.

"I extend my sincere thanks to *The Hindu* and *Sportstar* for this prestigious award. I also thank the awards jury led by the esteemed Sunil Gavaskar for taking note of the various national and international sports tournaments hosted by Tamil Nadu."

"None of this would be possible without the efforts of our Chief Minister M.K. Stalin who believes that



Proud moment: Udhayanidhi Stalin, along with IAS officers J. Meghanatha Reddy and Atulya Misra, collected the award from Somaya. RITU RAJ KONWAR

sports is an integral part of our curriculum," Udhayanidhi said.

With a sports budget of over ₹770 crore, Tamil Nadu invested heavily in national as well as international competitions in 2023. Some of the matches of the ICC ODI Men's World Cup 2023, including India's opener against Australia,

were played at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai.

International hockey returned to Chennai after 2007 when it hosted the Men's Asian Champions Trophy in August 2023.

India was crowned the champion after beating Malaysia in the final.

Mukund rallies to battle past Echargui

CHENNAI OPEN

Nihit Sachdeva

CHENNAI

S. Mukund overcame a slow start to beat Moez Echargui 7-6(4), 6-3 to reach the quarterfinals of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger at the SDAT Stadium here on Thursday.

Mukund, a local wildcard, became the second Indian to reach the last-eight stage after Sumit Nagal, seeded second, won his round of 16 match earlier on Wednesday.

World No. 292 Echargui initially got a lot of free points courtesy of big first serves down the T. He took the early lead as Mukund dropped his serve in the third game of the opening set, netting a cross-court backhand.

However, the 31-year-old Tunisian also made numerous unforced errors, mainly from the forehand. That kept Mukund at a touching distance. The world No. 486 went on a run of 10 straight points, which included breaking Echargui's serve in the eighth game.

Echargui managed to save a set point with an ace up the T and took the open-



Stretched: India's Mukund fought hard to beat Tunisia's Echargui 7-6(4), 6-3. R. RAVINDRAN

er to tie-break. He began with a 4-1 lead before a pair of double faults started a series of Mukund winning the next six points to bag the opener.

Mukund broke Echargui in the first game of the set and kept his advantage despite being dragged into two long deuce games.

With the hopes of a comeback fading, Echargui dropped serve again in the ninth game to end the clash which lasted an hour and 51 minutes.

Mukund, 27, played 17 tournaments on the Challenger Tour last season but reached the quarterfinals only once. "It's not that I felt low but I just wasn't playing tennis at that level and I had doubts whether I could ever come back to being the best I could be."

The results:
Singles (Round of 16): [WC] S. Mukund bt. Moez Echargui (TUN) 7-6(4), 6-3; [3] Dalibor Svcrina (CZE) bt. Evgeny Donskoy (RUS) 6-2, 6-2, 6-2; Chun-Hsin Tseng (TPE) bt. [4] Ugo Blanchet (FRA) 6-0, 4-6, 6-2; Enrico Dalla Valle (ITA) bt. [6] Oriol Roca Batalla (ESP) 6-4, 7-6(2).

Newcastle boss Howe seeks breathing space in search of redemption

The axe is hanging over the manager's head from his Saudi bosses as he struggles with injuries and clampdowns in transfer windows ahead of the game against Forest

PREMIER LEAGUE

Associated Press

LONDON

S

Newcastle's first full season following the controversial takeover by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund in 2021 saw a recently relegation-threatened club soar, first reaching a cup final and then surpassing expectations by finishing fourth in the Premier League last May to qualify for the lucrative Champions League.

The club's recruitment appeared shrewd. The manager hired in the first weeks of the new era – Eddie Howe – was proving to be a hit. Newcastle's passionate fans fell back in love with the team, creating a raucous atmosphere at their St. James' Park home.

Now, a reality check. For the club with the world's richest owners has been struck by blow after blow in a turbulent and increasingly disappointing season. First there was the 10-month suspension handed to its star off-season signing, Sandro Tonali,



The clock is ticking down: Howe desperately wants to arrest the string of losses with time running out.

REUTERS

for gambling. Howe was soon hit by an extraordinary injury list that, at one stage, reached 11 members of the first-team squad.

Then there was the setback of failing to advance from the Champions League group stage, despite a 4-1 home win over Paris Saint-Germain, and, indeed, getting knocked

out of Europe completely because of a last-place finish.

Adding to that is a slump in form that has dropped Newcastle to ninth place in the 20-team Premier League, on the back of a nine-game streak containing two wins, six losses and most recently a draw, 4-4 at home to lowly Luton on

Saturday.

Don't expect any sympathy to be heading Newcastle's way, especially from those critics who believe the Saudi takeover shouldn't have been allowed in the first place because of the kingdom's human rights record.

What happens next is a hard question to answer,

because it's tough to know what the PIF is thinking.

Howe has done a fine job and is well respected, but might be running out of time considering Newcastle is 13 points off the top four. Even if England gets five spots in next season's expanded Champions League, fifth-placed Aston Villa still has 11 points more than Newcastle with 15 games remaining.

Newcastle heads to Forest on Saturday eager to avenge that surprise result at St. James' on Dec. 26.

Howe has to hope that a calmer fixture schedule, owing to Newcastle being out of Europe, allows his team to get back its intensity and work on more things on the training ground. While the absence of Joelinon – perhaps for the rest of the season – is a huge blow, the injured players are slowly coming back.

There's still time for Newcastle to secure a respectable league finish and even reach another cup final, this time in the FA Cup where it is scheduled to play second-tier Blackburn away in the last 16 on Feb. 27.

Even that might not save Howe, though, if PIF shows a ruthless side.

Title aspirations on the line as Girona takes on Madrid

LALIGA

Associated Press

BARCELONA



Crucial tie: Ancelotti's Madrid will be hoping to extend its lead in the table. AFP

Little importance was given to Girona's away game at Real Madrid when the Spanish league published its calendar.

But six months and 23 rounds later and Saturday's game at the Santiago Bernabeu promises to decide which side will be in pole position to win the title. It is a clash of the league's most trophied club against a minnow that is enjoying a historic season. Both teams have lost only once in the league, and Madrid is just two points ahead of second-placed Girona.

Girona's stunning campaign has drawn it comparisons to Leicester City defying all the odds to win the English Premier League in 2016.

For now, Girona coach Michel Sanchez has repeatedly said he hopes his team can keep up its strong play long enough to finish in the top four, which would earn it a Champions League berth. "When there are 10 rounds left, we will see," Michel said.

This Girona, however, does not sit back in its area and grind out wins. It goes

after rivals, regardless of reputation. It has pulled off comebacks and leads the league with 52 goals, four more than Madrid. Girona's only loss came at the hands of Madrid when Jude Bellingham scored once and set up another for a 3-0 result in September. All this points to an entertaining clash between the two in-form teams.

Ishwari ousts second seed Sahira, makes final

Sports Bureau

title in partnership with Ruma Gaikwari.

6-3; Arjun Rathi bt Aditya Mor 6-0, 6-2.

Doubles (final): Aditya Mor & Paramveer Bajwa bt Atharva Sharma & Jagmeet Singh 7-6(6), 7-5.

Women (semifinals): Anjali Rathi bt Mahika Khanna 6-2, 6-2; Ishwari Matere bt Sahira Singh 7-6(3), 6-3.

Doubles (final): Ishwari Matere & Ruma Gaikwari bt Minalini Sharma & Anjali Rathi 6-2, 6-3.

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TAMILNADU MINERALS LIMITED
NOTICE INVITING TENDER FOR FORWARD BIDDING
No.33, Kamatchi Salai, Opposite Office of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, Chennai - 600009
Tender No. & Date : 1480EX-1/2023, Dated: 27.01.2024 & 08.02.2024
Tender ID :
1. 2024 TNMIN_419895_1 2. 2024 TNMIN_419896_1
3. 2024 TNMIN_419897_1 4. 2024 TNMIN_419898_1
5. 2024 TNMIN_419899_1 6. 2024 TNMIN_419900_1
7. 2024 TNMIN_419901_1 8. 2024 TNMIN_419921_1
9. 2024 TNMIN_419922_1 10. 2024 TNMIN_419940_1
11. 2024 TNMIN_419970_1 12. 2024 TNMIN_420165_1
3 Bid submission End Date : 08.03.2024 up to 1600 hrs.
4 Technical Bid Opening Date : 11.03.2024 at 1600 hrs.
5 Tender form Fee & EMD : Rs.1,000/- (Rupees one thousand only) or Rs.5,00,000/- (Rupees five lakh ninety thousand only) or equivalent USD 7200
Note: For further details please visit Tamlindu e-tendering portal: <https://tntenders.gov.in> GENERAL MANAGER(FINANCE)
DIPR/12/TENDER/2024

Telangana State Industrial Development Corporation Limited
(A State Government Undertaking)
Regd. Office: 5-9-68/1, Floor: Parikrama Bhavanam, Basheerbagh,
Hyderabad - 500 004, Telangana State, India, Phone No: (040)-23298791
Cell No: 9581229642 & 9848111536, Email: tsidcltd@gmail.com
Sale of Prime Assets on "as is where basis" u/s.29 of SFC's Act., 1951.
Name of Unit: M/s. SLT Power & Infrastructure Projects (P) Limited: Sy.No.542 at Bhoodan Pochampally (V&M), Yadadri Bhuvanagiri District, Telangana State
Brief description of Assets: (a) Land Ac.6-10 Gunta Buildings: Built up area 8,500 Sq.Ft
Start Price: Rs.101,00 Lakhs EDM: Rs.101,60 Lakhs e-auction Date: 21.02.2024
The Prospective bidders may inspect the property on any working day from 11 AM to 4:00 PM till 20.02.2024. The Auction (bidding) will be conducted by M/s. MSTC (Selling Agency) through e-auction
For details of terms and conditions of the above sale, please refer <https://www.mstcecommerce.com/auctionhome/indexnew.jsp> and <https://www.mstcindia.co.in>Contact No.040-23301039>
Date : 01.02.2024 Vice Chairman & Managing Director
Sd/-
DIPR No. 918-PP/CL-AGENCY/ADVT./1/2023-24

Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Science University, Jabalpur, M.P.-482004

No. 129/D/NDVSU/2024

Dated: 07/02/2024

ADMISSION NOTICE

The online counseling for admission in Post Graduate Degree Programmes - M.V.Sc. / M.F.Sc. and Ph.D. (University seats) for the session 2023-24 is scheduled from 12.02.2024. The detail information is available on www.ndvsu.org / www.crisponlineservices.com

Director of Instruction

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LEGAL NOTICE

LEGAL NOTICE

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDANT (order 5 Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

In the Court of Honourable Justice P. Mohan, Additional District Judge-4, District, Shahdara, Room No. 306, 3rd Floor, New Building, Karkardooma Courts, Delhi Registration No. CS-5/10/2020

Sanjay Bansal & ANR.

VS
Paninder Kaur & ORS.

(1) Smt. Paninder Kaur
W/o Late Sh. Gurcharanjeet Singh

(2) Sh. Karan Singh

(3) Sh. S.J. Singh

Both Sons of late Sh. Gurcharanjeet Singh At Rd. No.47, Brij Vihar, Near Surya Nagar, Chander Nagar, Ghazipur, U.P. 201010

Also at:

72, Gali No.8, Near Hanuman Mandir, Shankar Nagar, Delhi-51.

The Defendants above name

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 11.03.2024 at 10.00 a.m. or before the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the seal of the court this 05.02.2024.

District Judge (Commercial Court-02)

Shahdara Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

LEGAL NOTICE

PROCLAMATION REQUIRING ATTENDANCE OF DEFENDENT (order 5 Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure)

IN THE COURT OF MR. MS. KIRAN BANSAL LD. DJ COMM. SHARDARA, KARKARDOOMA COURTS, DELHI CS (COMM) NO. 164/23

Sidhant Fashion Versus

Sh. Arjun Kumar Maurya

S/o Sh. Sudama

Proprietor of Nalini Enterprises, R/o 1-A/2, Matiyana Road, Alipbagh, Allahabad, U.P. 211006

Also at:

Digital Design Studio

118, Sector 86, Kader Bazar, Tehsil Handiya, District Prayagraj, Mobile No. 7080412220, 9621587777, Email

Whereas you are intentionally evading service of summons it is hereby notified that if you shall not defend the case on the 11.03.2024 at 10.00 a.m. or before the final disposal, it will be heard and determined ex parte.

Given under my hand and the seal of the court this 05.02.2024.

Note: for the present summons

District Judge (Commercial Court-02)

Shahdara Karkardooma Courts, Delhi

GENERAL

CAREER

SITUATION VACANT

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike

Office of the Executive Engineer
Road Infrastructure- Traffic Engineering Cell,
N.R. Square, Bengaluru-560002

No: EE/RI-TEC/TEND/12/2023-2024 Dated: 08.02.2024

INVITATION FOR TENDER (IFT)

(Short Term Tender Notification)

(Through GoK KPP Portal <https://kpp.karnataka.gov.in> only)

The Executive Engineer Road Infrastructure-TEC Division invites tenders on behalf of the Chief Commissioner, BBMP, Bengaluru from eligible Tenderers for the works detailed in the table below.

Sl. No.	Name of the Work
1	Lane Disciplinary Measures and Road Safety Measures for reducing Traffic Congestion at critical locations/junctions and to reduce the emissions Appx. Amount put to tender (Rs in Lakhs): 756.00 EMD (Rs in Lakhs): 11.50 lakhs (Rs one lakh through e-payment & remaining as specified in bid document)

Calendar of Events : 1) Availability of Tender Document in KPPP portal form : 09.02.2024 onwards. 2) Last date for submission of pre-bid queries : 16.02.2024 up to 15.30 hrs.

3) Pre-bid Meeting : 16.02.2024 at 16.30 hrs. 4) Last date for submission of Tenders : 22.02.2024 up to 16.00 hrs. 5) Date of opening of Technical Bid : 23.02.2024 at 16.30 hrs. 6) Date of opening of Financial Bid : Will be intimated to Tenderers.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, RI-Traffic Engineering Cell

इन नोटिस द्वारा इसका समय के लिए सूची दिया गया है कि जिस प्रकार आपको यह सूची में दर्शाया जाता है। यह सूची आपको यह सूची में दर्शाया जाता है। यह सूची आपको यह सूची में दर्शाया जाता है। यह सूची आपको यह सूची में दर्शाया जाता है। यह सूची आपको यह सूची में द

IN BRIEF



Former Manchester United star Lingard joins FC Seoul

Former Manchester United and England midfielder Jesse Lingard said he wanted to "enjoy playing football again" after signing up for South Korea's FC Seoul on Thursday. The 31-year-old has been without a club since leaving Nottingham Forest at the end of his contract last summer. Lingard, who spent 22 years at United before leaving Old Trafford in 2022, said joining Seoul was a new challenge and he was "ready to accept it". "It's a new beginning for me, a new chapter in my career," he said.

TN, Punjab girls finish league stage with perfect records

Tamil Nadu and Punjab girls topped their groups with perfect records (4-0) as the league stage concluded in the 73rd junior National basketball championships in Bhubaneswar on Thursday. In the boys' category, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan were the group toppers, winning all their four matches.

The results:

Boys: Uttar Pradesh 58 (Harsh Dagar 22, Kunal Kumar Singh 12, Kushal Singh 13, Muhammad Kaif 11) bt Punjab 64 (Bhanu Pratap Sood 19, Japsanjam Singh 11, Sahibjit Singh 11); Chandigarh 86 (Sanju Gajbhiye 23, Vipul 22, Himanshu Hooda 18) bt Tamil Nadu 81 (Prahaldanand 36, Deepak 20); Rajasthan 115 (Akshit Hooda 36, Lokesh Kumar 20, Ishan Muhammad 15, Banti Choudhari 10) bt Andhra Pradesh 46 (Dwarkantha Reddy 14).

Girls: Uttar Pradesh 58 (Himanshi Kumari 13, Nancy Gupta 11, Anushika Chouhan 10) bt Haryana 56 (Anjali Suresh Kumar 23, Manu Rajbir 13, Kafi Satpal 11); Maharashtra 82 (Sanika Phule 24, Ananya Bhavasar 19, Mansi Nimalkar 13) bt Kerala 50 (Alka 12); Tamil Nadu 73 (Sona Resalin 12, Sadhna Veronica 10, Juana Chrisolin 10) bt Chandigarh 54.



Shanaka left out of Sri Lanka's one-day squad

Former skipper Dasun Shanaka has been left out of Sri Lanka's 16-member ODI squad for its upcoming Afghanistan series. Along with Shanaka, batter Nuwanidu Fernando and leg-spinner Jeffrey Vandersay have also been left out of the squad.

The squad: Kusal Mendis (capt.), Charith Asalanka, Pathum Nissanka, Avishka Fernando, Sadeera Samarakkrama, Sahana Arachchige, Shevon Daniel, Janith Liyanage, Chamika Karunarathne, Maheesh Theekshan, Dilshan Madushanka, Dushmantha Chameera, Dunith Wellalage, Pramod Madushan, Akila Dananjaya and Wanindu Hasaranga.

Mitchell hopes to be fit for Australia Tests

Black Caps batter Daryl Mitchell will sit out the second Test with South Africa next week to be fit for the looming home series against Australia. The 32-year-old will also miss all three T20 games against Australia this month ahead of the home two-Test series starting February 29.

RANJIT TROPHY SCHEDULE

Elite: Group A: Jharkhand vs. Haryana (Jamshedpur); Rajasthan vs. Saurashtra (Jaipur); Maharashtra vs. Vidarbha (Pune); Manipur vs. Services (Ahmedabad).

Group B: Assam vs. Bihar (Guwahati); Chhattisgarh vs. Mumbai (Raipur); Kerala vs. Bengal (Thumbar); Andhra vs. Uttar Pradesh (Vizianagram).

Group C: Tamil Nadu vs. Karnataka (Chennai); Punjab vs. Gujarat (Mohali); Railways vs. Goa (Surat); Chandigarh vs. Tripura (Chandigarh).

Group D: Odisha vs. Uttarakhand (Cuttack); Madhya Pradesh vs. Baroda (Indore); Himachal Pradesh vs. Delhi (Dharamshala); Pondicherry vs. Jammu & Kashmir (Puducherry).

Plate (semifinals): Hyderabad vs. Nagaland (Hyderabad); Meghalaya vs. Mizoram (Mangaldoi).

LIVE TELECAST

Ranji Trophy: Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.

Australia vs West Indies: 1st T20I, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1.30 p.m.

Sri Lanka vs Afghanistan: 1st ODI, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 2.30 p.m.

ISL: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.

PKL: Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8 p.m.

Bundesliga: Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LIV, 1 a.m. (Saturday)

Serie A: Jio Cinema App, 1.15 a.m. (Saturday)

LaLiga: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 1.30 a.m. (Saturday)

It is a crucial IPL for everyone, reckons Deepak Chahar

Having worked on his fitness during downtime, the CSK quick wants to be in the race for the T20 World Cup later this year

CRICKET

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Indian pacer Deepak Chahar is raring to go in the upcoming Indian Premier League, knowing it could help him get in contention for the T20 World Cup later in the year in the USA and the West Indies.

The 31-year-old played only one T20 International last year and had to skip the South Africa white-ball tour for personal reasons.

"I took some time out because of my father's illness. After that, I started practising. The next six months are crucial with the IPL and World Cup," said Chahar on the sidelines of an event in the city to announce Etihad Airways' partnership with Chennai Super Kings.



Grand launch: Arik De, Chief Revenue Commercial Officer at Etihad Airways with Rakesh Singh, Director of CSKCL with players Deepak, Hangargekar, Mukesh and Simarjeet at the event. R. RAGU

"It is an important IPL because everyone knows the Indian team will be picked based on the per-

formances in the IPL. Otherwise, most of the time you have the set-up, and you know already these are

the players we are going to look for. But this IPL, whoever performs well will get the chance," he ad-

ded. Despite missing out on national duty, Chahar saw the bright side of things in that he could

train while being fully fit.

"I have not got the time to be fit and do training. In the last two and a half years, I was either playing or doing rehab. You need to train when you are fully fit. That is when you can gain strength, which will help in increasing pace."

When asked if he is worried about going down in the pecking order after missing crucial series like the one in South Africa, the Super Kings pacer said, "I know I bring value to them with bat and ball whenever I play for any side. You need that confidence if you want to make a comeback.

"Thinking about others going ahead is extra pressure I don't want to take. I know if I am 100% fit and playing matches, I will do better than others."

"That's how I think. If I am fit and available for selection, I think I will be selected."

Varun to pull out from Pro League hockey to seek legal recourse

Uthra Ganesan
BHUBANESWAR

Defender Varun Kumar has sought permission to withdraw from the FIH Pro League following the police complaint against him in Bengaluru.

The India player, who was with the national team here till a day before, has left the team hotel with his whereabouts uncertain. He had not trained with the rest of the squad for the past two days, ever since news broke of a 22-year old woman accusing him of sexually abusing her multiple times over the last few years on the pretext of marriage.

The 28-year old Tokyo Olympics bronze medallist has been charged under the stringent POCSO Act with the woman claiming she was 17 at the time.



Varun.
FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

Team members and officials have stayed away from the media so far, concentrating on their training instead.

But, it is learnt that Varun had gathered the team and staff on Tuesday to inform them about the case

and his decision to withdraw from the squad for the time being. He left soon after without sharing any details.

"Through media reports I got to know that a false and frivolous case has been filed against me by a girl with whom I was in a relationship previously and the said case has culminated in a FIR in Bengaluru though I have not been contacted by any police official in this regard.

Misuse of power

"The girl comes from a very well-connected police background. She is misusing the State machinery to extort money out of me and to tarnish my reputation and image," the letter, sent to Hockey India president, chief coach Craig Fulton and HI secretary Bhola Nath Singh, states.

"Therefore in order to avail my legal remedies I would require urgent leave from the academy and furthermore given the circumstances, I will unfortunately not be in a position to participate in the Pro League," the letter, delivered through his legal counsels, adds.

Turkey is currently in Rourkela and Bholanath in Ranchi.

Federation officials here have refused to comment on the issue claiming it was a "personal matter" out of competition and hence out of HI's purview.

While the identity of the girl has been kept secret, sources say the victim is a former volleyball player and was at the National Centre of Excellence in SAI, Bengaluru, where the Indian team holds its camps.

120 wrestlers named for National camps

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

As many as 120 wrestlers – 40 each in men's freestyle, Greco Roman and women sections – have been selected to be part of the National coaching camps in the run-up to the Olympics.

The Asian Olympic qualifier will be held from April 19 to 21, while the World Olympic qualifier will be from May 9 to 12.

New dates announced

The postponed National under-15 and under-20 championships would be held at the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports, Patiala, from February 28 to March 5. The event was postponed following the state units' request to give them more time to prepare for the championships. According to the ad-hoc panel's estimate, 1200 to 1400 wrestlers are expected to participate.

I feel on top of the world, says Neeraj



Recognition: Neeraj was honoured with a plaque by Switzerland Tourism. PTI

Press Trust of India
LAUSANNE

India's Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra has been honoured with a plaque at the famous Ice Palace at Jungfraujoch, known as the 'Top of Europe', in Switzerland.

Neeraj said: "I am humbled by the love and appreciation I have received in this country. To have a plaque installed here in this stunning Ice Palace was beyond my wildest dreams, yet here I am. I feel on top of the world, as I stand at the Top of Europe."

Acknowledging Neeraj's remarkable accomplishments, Jungfraujoch welcomed the sports icon to unveil the commemorative plaque, Switzerland Tourism said in statement.

Neeraj donated one of his javelins and it has been

placed alongside the plaque. He joins stars such as Roger Federer, and golfer Rory McIlroy, who also have such commemorative plaques at the Ice Palace.

Neeraj said: "I am humbled by the love and appreciation I have received in this country. To have a plaque installed here in this stunning Ice Palace was beyond my wildest dreams, yet here I am. I feel on top of the world, as I stand at the Top of Europe."

He withdrew after 36 holes at Riviera with the flu in 2006 and did not return until 2018. A year ago, he was tied for 45th. He next played the Masters, making the cut and then withdrawing, had ankle surgery and did not return to golf until December.

Tiger Woods to take part in Genesis Invitational

Associated Press
LOS ANGELES

Tiger Woods confirmed on Wednesday that he will make his first PGA Tour start since the Masters at the Genesis Invitational next week at Riviera, a tournament he hosts.

Woods posted on social media that he was "excited to be a playing host" when the PGA Tour's next signature event with a \$20 million purse starts on February 15. Woods also teased Monday of new apparel now that he has ended a relationship with Nike that dated to 1996 when he turned pro. "The vision remains the same," he wrote.

Riviera is the course Woods has played the most times – 12 as a pro – without winning.

He withdrew after 36 holes at Riviera with the flu in 2006 and did not return until 2018. A year ago, he was tied for 45th. He next played the Masters, making the cut and then withdrawing, had ankle surgery and did not return to golf until December.

Djokovic to return to Indian Wells after five years; Nadal to be back, too

TENNIS

Associated Press
INDIAN WELLS

Novak Djokovic is returning to the BNP Paribas Open for the first time in five years in pursuit of a record sixth title in the Southern California desert.

The world's top-ranked male player last competed at Indian Wells in 2019, when he lost in the third round. Djokovic didn't play here the last four years because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19. The U.S. required noncitizen visitors to be vaccinated through last spring.

Djokovic won the tournament in 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Three-time winner Rafael Nadal will return after missing last year's event because of injury. He missed the Australian Open in January because of injury as well.

The tournament featuring the combined ATP and WTA tours runs March 3-17.

Iga Swiatek, the world's top-ranked woman, will be back. She won the title in 2022 and reached the semifinals last year.



Let's go! Djokovic didn't play here the last four years because he wasn't vaccinated against COVID-19. GETTY IMAGES

Defending champions Carlos Alcaraz and Elena Rybakina will return. Alcaraz, ranked No. 2, became the first man to win at Indian Wells without dropping a set since Roger Federer in 2017.

Also in the event are Australian Open champions Jannik Sinner and Aryna Sabalenka, who lost in last year's final in the desert.

Other top men's players include 2022 winner Taylor Fritz, 2023 runner-up Daniil Medvedev, Andrey Rublev, Alexander Zverev and Andy Murray.

Among the top women are Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula, Naomi Osaka, Australian Open finalist Qinwen Zheng, Maria Sakkarai, Ons Jabeur, Marketa Vondrousova and Karolina Muchova.

Shrivalli opens a new chapter in her tennis career

I am really proud with the way the tournament went for me; coming in, I had zero expectations, I beat the second seed in qualification, and the second seed in the main draw, says the 22-year-old with a sense of contentment and the determination to put in the hard yards for better results

Kamesh Srinivasan

The biggest and most decisive revelation of Indian women's tennis in the ongoing WTA Mumbai Open has been that the home players have stopped being overawed by the big stage or getting intimidated by the world-class opponents.

There is a conviction in a bunch of players about their ability to match anyone on the court and play their best.

Long ago, the former World No. 1 and multiple Grand Slam champion Mahesh Bhupathi had said, "If you don't believe that you have a chance to win, why bother stepping on court."

Shrivalli Bhamidipaty, Sahaja Yamalapalli and Rutuja Bhosale exemplify that mantra. They have the faith to match the best, and the tools to compete hard.

The 22-year-old Shrivalli always had the big game, and she capitalised on the big stage, to showcase her class.

"I am really proud with the way the tournament went for me. Coming in, I had zero expectations. I beat the second seed in qualification, and I beat the second seed in the main draw. I think it was a good show", said Shrivalli, as she put things in perspective, after losing a robust fight against 16-year-old Russian sensation, Alina Korneeva in the pre-quarterfinals of the WTA event.

"Today also, I played against one of the top juniors. Alina is a wonderful player. She has been playing so many tournaments on the Tour. She is a little more experienced than me. She handled herself better. I have a lot to learn from this match. I was happy with the way I could play and match her. I can see myself up there right now. After this match, I trust myself more," said Shrivalli.

Korneeva had all the credentials. She was world No.1 junior last year, having won the Australian Open and French Open junior singles titles. She was a semifinalist in Wimbledon. She could thrive on all surfaces and conditions, against the best in business. This year, she qualified for women's event at the Australian Open and played the second round. She has already won three women's singles titles, including one \$100,000 event in which she blanked her opponent in the final.

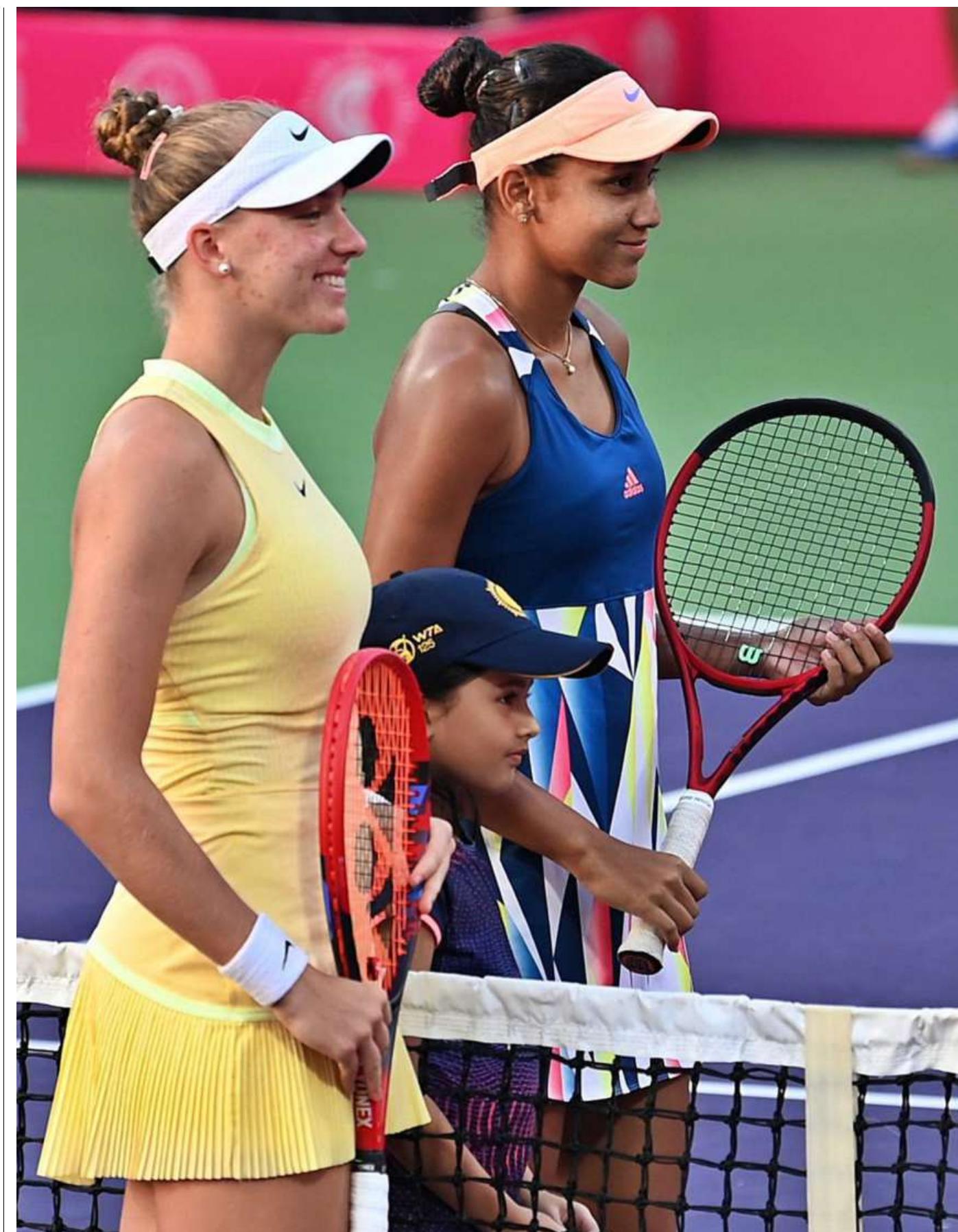
There was no difference between Shrivalli and Korneeva for the most part of the match that lasted two hours and 30 minutes. What made the difference was Korneeva's ability to deliver the decisive blows, with her serve and strokes at the crunch in the third set. She had won many matches against strong opponents, and thus had the experience to find her way to victory.

The statistics was of course in favour of Korneeva. The Russian teenager had eight aces and six double-faults, compared to five aces and 14 double-faults of Shrivalli. Korneeva converted seven of 19 break points, while Shrivalli converted six of 14 break-points.

The former Davis Cupper and captain of the Billie Jean King Cup team, Vishal Uppal, who mentors Shrivalli, was on hand to watch the match and gave his thoughts.

"It was a good match. I was happy with the way Shrivalli played. There is improvement in her mentality. Lot of learning from the match. If she keeps growing like this, she will be at the WTA level soon. Tennis is a game of fine margins. Korneeva won 116 points and Shrivalli, 114," said Uppal.

Shrivalli was unfazed by the number of



double-faults. She has learnt to stay focused on the point ahead.

"One thing I have learnt from all my matches is not to mess up my head with the previous point. Just focus on the point ahead. Yes, I will go back and work on my serve and make it much better. Even though I made so many double faults, it did not bother me in the match. I was trying to play the best level. My serve was a little off today, but I still managed to pull the match long," said Shrivalli.

There was more to her maturity as she handled the questions from the media with assurance, especially about the windy conditions.

"When you are in a sport like tennis, the conditions are different every day. They are same for both players. Only thing you can do is accept and move forward. Not break your head over it. If you focus on what you have to do, you

will adapt pretty quick," she said.

Despite the odds against her and she not being at her best, Shrivalli was happy to have competed in the best possible way.

"I didn't give up on the last point, even though I was two match points down. I made her play two extra games. When she was serving 5-4, I still saved one match point. I did learn a lot about what I have to do. I am going to be better next time," Shrivalli stressed.

It may sound strange that the 16-year-old has more experience than the 22-year-old, but that is a fact. Korneeva is indeed accustomed to competing in the higher echelons of the game. Shrivalli is getting to learn the ropes by competing in the lower league which is a lot hard and less rewarding.

"All I want to do is keep playing a lot of tournaments. Keep focusing on



All I want to do is keep playing a lot of tournaments. Keep focusing on competing harder. I have the belief that I am up there. But I will not let it get to my head! I will keep working hard, and probably much harder

competing harder. I have the belief that I am up there. But I will not let it get to my head! I will keep working hard, and probably much harder," she assured.

With her parents backing her heartily by arranging all the expert support, Shrivalli is determined to climb up the ladder and show her game to a larger audience. She does have a delightful game which the tennis world is likely to admire soon.

Paris Olympics will be challenging and I need to be smarter: Sindhu

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Set to return after an injury break, two-time Olympic medallist P.V. Sindhu is aware that the road to Paris will be "challenging" and she needs to be "smarter" in her pursuit of the coveted gold in the French capital.

Former World champion Sindhu has been enduring a lean patch. She suffered injury setbacks and a dip in form in the last 18 months.

She had a stress fracture on her left ankle during the successful 2022 CWG campaign and later sustained another injury on the left knee during the French Open in October 2023, forcing her out for three months.

"I would say this Olympics is going to be a different experience because the 2016 and 2020 Games were very

different. Paris will be more challenging but at the same time, I have much more experience and I will have to be much smarter this time," Sindhu said. "In the women's circuit, players in the top 10-15 are tough. It is important to be focused and have a strategy so that you can switch to Plan B if Plan A doesn't work. It is important to stay calm as you can go blank sometimes. It is important to have a strong mindset."

Desperate to find her form back after a series of low results, Sindhu part-ed ways with Korean coach Park Tae-sang early last year.

She trained with SAI's Vidhi Chaudhary and then Malaysia's former All-England champion Muhammad Hafiz Hashim in July but success continued to elude her. Then former All England champion Prakash Padukone reached



I would say this Olympics is going to be a different experience than the 2016 and 2020 Games. It will be more challenging

out to her and soon she shifted base to Bengaluru. She is currently training under Indonesia's Agus Santoso at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA), which operates out of the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence.

"I have a new trainer, physio, nutritionist, coach, and mentor. Everything is new and I am happy how they have been supporting and helping me from where I am and where I should be in the next couple of months," Sindhu, who will return to action at the Bad-

minton Asia team championships in Malaysia from February 13 to 18, said.

"I am fortunate to work with Pra-kash sir because he is a legend and his mentoring helps. His training methods and ideas are superb. As for Agus, I have known him for a long time when he was training our men's players. We will have to see how I do, it has been just a month. So things will be good moving forward. I am back to my full fitness and I am looking forward to the Asian team championships."

Sindhu said: "Yes. After the injury, it is important to focus on physical, mental, and technical aspects as well on the skills. I have not played tournaments in the last three months, so I will come to know where I am after I start playing tournaments. It has been pretty good so far."



Saharan... leading from the front. GETTY IMAGES

'Team bonding has worked wonders'

Press Trust of India
BENONI

The camaraderie in the dressing room has played a significant role in Indian team's dominant run in the Under-19 World Cup, skipper Uday Saharan said on Thursday and vowed to bring the trophy back home.

Defending champion India has not lost a single match in the tournament. It had registered big wins and was not tested till it bumped into host South Africa in the semifinals in which they scored a narrow two-wicket win.

India has been a force to reckon with in the Under-19 World Cup, reaching the title clash seven times in last nine editions.

"It is a dream for all of us to win this tournament. Everyone gets only one Under-19 World Cup and we want to repeat the history. We also want to register our names in history. We are focused on giving our best," Saharan said.

"I would like to tell the countrymen to continue supporting us like this. We promise to give everything to bring the Cup back." India's power-packed performance in the tournament was highlighted by three 200-plus run margin wins.

"The secret to our team's good performance is team bonding. The atmosphere in the dressing room is very friendly. Everyone trusts each other and is ready to help each other. That is why the performance graph has been consistently good," said Saharan, who spent his early days in Sri Ganganagar before shifting to the border town of Fazila in Punjab.

"We are not focusing on rival team, we are concentrating on our own game. We have made a match-by-match strategy and are taking every match seriously," Saharan, who has scored 389 runs in six matches so far, said.

Asked if the Indian colt would have revenge on their minds if they play against Australia since the senior team had lost to them in the ODI World Cup final last year, Saharan said, "I am not thinking anything like that. We are focusing on our game and we have to give our best. We are playing according to the match conditions. Every match is important because it is the World Cup and all the teams are good." A lot of stalwarts in the senior national team have emerged from the Under-19 World Cup like Mohammad Kaif, Virat Kohli, Shubman Gill and Ravindra Jadeja.

Saharan refused comparisons with these stars, saying he won't take pressure of legacy.

"I never think about it. I don't think about the past. I just think about how I can give my best for the team and how to get the best out of the team." Chasing a target of 245 runs in the semi-final against South Africa, Saharan pulled the team out of trouble after it had lost four wickets for just 32 runs.

SCIENCE

With CRISPR poised to revolutionise therapy, a pause to consider ethics

The CRISPR system in bacteria serves as a warehouse for past infections by storing a part of the viral genetic material and incorporating it into its own, so the next time it is attacked, the bacteria is capable of recognising the virus and destroying it

Soujanya Padikkal

We will each write a ghost story", said Lord Byron; and his proposition was acceded to. And so on a cold and rainy supposedly summer night in 1816, four friends inspired by German ghost stories, gathered to write one. Among them, a young Mary Shelley, consumed by the idea of creating a story that would "curdle the blood" of her readers, ended up with a novel titled *Frankenstein*.

With *Frankenstein* 200 years in the past, the possibility of creating such life is a reality. With the first gene editing technology securing approval for the treatment of sickle cell anemia and beta-thalassemia, we transcend into a new revolutionary phase. The possibilities are endless.

Casgevy and Lyfgenia, the two cell-based gene therapies approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for sickle cell anemia treatment and beta-thalassemia utilise the Nobel-winning CRISPR/Cas 9 genome editing technology.

Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR), a feature of the bacterial immune system, forms the basis for this technology. In a nutshell, the system in bacteria serves as a warehouse for past infections by storing a part of the viral genetic material and incorporating it into its own, so the next time it is attacked, the bacteria is capable of recognising the virus and destroying it. The bacteria, in short, is immunised when it employs the CRISPR system. The CRISPR-Cas system is effective and easy to manipulate.

Researchers have adapted it as a tool to cut, delete, or add DNA sequences at precise locations, opening different windows to treat genetic disorders, develop drought-resistant plants, modify food crops, or experiment with de-extinction projects involving the woolly mammoth and the dodo.

Sickle-cell anemia (SCA) is an inherited disorder where red blood cells contort to a sickle or crescent shape because of defective hemoglobin, restricting its ability to carry oxygen. According to an article published in the *Indian Journal of Medical Research* over 20 million people live with SCA in India and it is predominantly seen in the scheduled tribes (ST) and scheduled caste (SC) populations where the majority are economically backward.

Casgevy costs \$2.2 million per patient to treat sickle-cell anemia. Indian researchers are working on indigenous treatment involving CRISPR genome editing to reduce the cost. "For India, the issue of pricing is a very important consideration, since it impacts equitable distribution. It is little early to determine now, if production costs can be reduced, or there can be alternative pricing models, or coverage through healthcare, insurance, negotiations with pharma sector, policies around commercialisation for sustainable and affordable solutions", explained Roli Mathur, Head, Bioethics Unit, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) over mail.



Gene editing technology is a revolution in treatment of disease. GETTY IMAGES

For many people living with the disease accessing even hydroxyurea, a medicine used as a first-line therapy for SCD, is a challenge in India. While researchers are doing their best to find a cost-effective treatment, there are chances of it still being beyond reach for most of them. "When you have such a blockbuster therapy, you also have to think about how you can make it accessible and many people around the world including us are working along those lines", said Debojoyti Chakraborty, Principal Scientist at CSIR Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB).

The tribal population which is affected the most has limited healthcare access for various reasons: one being that they live in remote areas where there is a scarcity of healthcare professionals. "There is a need to provide primary care to deal with this debilitating disease that the community is suffering from. If you don't do primary care then how are you going to do tertiary care?" asked Amar Jesani, a medical doctor, independent researcher, and teacher of bioethics and public health.

The Sickle Cell Anemia Elimination Mission launched in India on 1st July 2023 aims to strengthen the existing healthcare system and improve primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare teams. "Equitability is a factor which has to be accessed both at the local and global level. The government has a lot of power and we have seen how they can actually make things accessible to everyone like they did for vaccines. A similar modality would have to be put into place where you have partners from scientists, governments, and industries come together to see how you can get these kinds of therapies out", said Dr. Chakraborty.

Indian regulation

The decision-making process for CRISPR research is governed by the existing legal and regulatory framework. The New Drugs and Clinical Trials Rules (2019) classify Gene Therapy Products (GTPs), including those developed through CRISPR, as new drugs, subjecting them to a thorough



Casgevy costs \$2.2 million per patient to treat sickle-cell anemia. Indian researchers are working on treatment involving CRISPR genome editing to reduce the cost

approval process by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO). Additional requirements will be determined following the ICMR-DBT National guidelines for GTPs and oversight by bodies such as the Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM) and the Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) as applicable. Moreover, all biomedical and health research in India must adhere to the ICMR National Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical and Health Research Involving Human Participants, 2017.

Germline editing and CRISPR

Apart from the health equity and disparities associated with CRISPR, one of the biggest controversies has been about germline editing. Most of the scientific community supports the use of CRISPR to treat monogenic diseases. Germline editing is heritable and more complex and begs the question if it is even moral to subject an individual to heritable changes, even if it is to treat debilitating genetic conditions.

As of now, genome editing is restricted to somatic cells and there is a moratorium on germline editing. But when the advantages surpass the drawbacks, where will science draw the line with genome editing?

Chinese scientist He Jiankui took the scientific world by storm when he announced that he had edited healthy embryos in an attempt to minimise girls' predisposition to HIV infection. This was in 2018 despite having guidelines against germline editing and at a time when studies had no clear-cut answers to the

outcome of such an intervention. We still fully do not understand the long-term effects of CRISPR editing.

"It's not a technology which is absolutely 100% full-fledged understood. [Germline editing] can come slowly, progressively once we have totally understood the pros and cons of the gene editing technology", explained Dr. Chakraborty.

Guidelines, laws, and dialogues around ethical, societal, and safety issues need to evolve parallelly as technology evolves. "Most countries including India have forbidden genome editing in human embryos through legal instruments or through guidelines. In India every institution involved in biomedical research is required to follow ICMR National Ethical Guidelines and register with the ethics committee which monitors research (including around gene editing)", said Dr. Mathur.

The gene editing technology has also raised concerns regarding it becoming a commodity that wealthy parents will exploit to improve the fate of their children not only for therapeutic purposes but for genetic enhancement. "There is a chance that if we do not have a way to distribute these therapies to different parts of the world where it is needed through whatever mechanism, then you would have a division in the world because the therapy is there but the affordability isn't there", Dr. Chakraborty added.

Public engagement

Also given our incomplete knowledge about the long-term effects of CRISPR, researchers and policy-makers are considering real-world implications in the long run. The method is here to stay and the media and public need to engage in open dialogues to prevent the spread of misinformation. "Institutions undertaking cutting-edge research must also come up with best practices in community engagement, education, and timely and truthful communication to build trust among all stakeholders with a special focus on communities", according to Dr. Mathur.

Written in an era before DNA was discovered, *Frankenstein* became an inspiration for science fiction and was one of the first novels to question the outcome of interfering with nature. It served as a reminder for scientists to proceed with caution and explore the moral consequences of scientific innovation. We have come a long way since then. Unlike the scientist in the novel, scientists today are aware of the power they hold with a technology that can change the genetic code and the societal implications for it, while also holding accountability for violating guidelines as seen in 2018.

At the end of the day, CRISPR is a tool whose endgame is determined by how humans utilise it. "Unless ethics is at the fore, even if there is scientific success, societal acceptance cannot be guaranteed. There needs to be enough commitment to integrate ethics in research work for the technology to have a positive impact", explained Dr. Mathur.

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Monkeys can get infected and a dead monkey signals an outbreak. GETTY IMAGES

Kyasanur Forest Disease: the assault of the tick

Sathish G. T.

Since January 1 this year, two people have died due to Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD), a viral infection, in Karnataka. The number of deaths reported due to the disease since 1956, when it was noticed in the forests of Shivamogga district, is above 560. The number of cases in Malnad's districts – Shivamogga, Uttara Kannada and Chikmagaluru – has been increasing, forcing the Health and Family Welfare Department to take measures to contain its spread. Since January 1, the Department of Health and Family Welfare has conducted 2,567 tests and 68 people have been found positive.

What is KFD? The disease was first noticed in the Kysanur Forest area of Sorab Taluk in Shivamogga district in 1956, and was named after the region. It is

The disease spreads through ticks. Primates that come in contact with infected ticks contract the disease. Human beings who visit the same forest area can contract the disease

also known as monkey fever, as monkeys also get infected. In fact, the death of a monkey serves as a warning of a KFD outbreak. The scientists concluded that the virus must have been present in the forests of Malnad region. It became active due to ecological changes.

The disease spreads through ticks. Primates that come in contact with infective ticks contract the disease. Human beings who visit the same forest area can contract the disease. Normally, the transmission begins from late November to June. It peaks between December and March, according to studies. A blood test is done to identify if someone has KFD.

Symptoms start to appear three to eight days after the bite of an infective tick. Fever, redness of the eyes, severe headache, and body pain are common symptoms. Three-four days after the onset of initial symptoms, the patient may have gastro-intestinal symptoms. In severe cases, bleeding from the nose is noted. There is no specific treatment, doctors handle the symptoms, and monitor the vitals daily. An attempt to use a vaccine was given up after studies showed it to be ineffective. The ICMR is said to be in consultation with Indian Immunologists for development of a vaccine.

For nearly 15 years (up to 1971), the disease was confined to Shivamogga district. It was noticed in Uttara Kannada district in 1972. In 1980, cases were reported in Koppa, Chikmagaluru. Two years later it was found in Dakshina Kannada. Cases were late reported in Chamarajanagar (2012), Belagavi district (2016), Gadag (2017), Mysuru, and Hassan (2019). The virus has been found in other states too. It was detected in dead monkeys in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu in 2012. Six human cases were reported in Wayanad and Malappuram, Kerala in 2013-14. An outbreak was reported in North Goa district in 2015-16. Maharashtra reported cases in 2016.

The forest department is distributing DEPA oil, a tick repellent, to families who have to go into the forest. The State Government has also decided to provide free treatment to patients

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Self-reporting of mental disorders in India 'lower than burden'

Afshan Yasmeen

Social determinants play a vital role in access to healthcare and financial protection among individuals with mental disorders in India. Studies have shown that India needs to address gaps in access and financial protection for individuals with mental disorders to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Highlighting concerning trends regarding the reporting of mental disorders in India, a recent study by researchers from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Jodhpur, revealed that self-reporting rates for mental health problems were notably low. The study - based on the 75th Round National Sample Survey (NSS) 2017-2018 - revealed that the self-reporting of mental illness was less than 1% in India.

The NSS completely relied on self-reporting by individuals. The data was collected from 5,55,115 in-



A survey by NIMHANS indicated that around 150 million individuals had mental issues needing treatment. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

dividuals (3,25,232 from rural areas and 2,29,232 from urban areas), in 8,077 villages and 6,181 urban areas. These were randomly selected. It also included 283 outpatient and 374 hospitalisation cases involving mental disorders in India.

Published in the *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, the study has been co-authored by Alok Ranjan, Assistant Professor, School of Liberal Arts (SoLA), IIT Jodhpur

and Jewel Crasta, School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA.

The 2017 National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) by NIMHANS indicated that around 150 million individuals had mental illness that required treatment, in India.

The NMHS – conducted on a nationally representative sample of 34,802 individuals, sampled from 12 States of India – used a

structured diagnostic instrument which is equivalent to clinical assessment.

Significant expenses

The IIT-Jodhpur study threw light on the significant out-of-pocket expenses incurred by individuals seeking mental health services. This is largely due to reliance on the private sector. The study was based on logistic regression models.

The findings revealed that individuals with higher incomes were 1.73 times more inclined to report health problems compared to those with lower incomes, uncovering a socioeconomic divide.

The average out-of-pocket expenditures for both hospitalisation and outpatient care were significantly higher in the private sector than in the public sector, the study pointed out.

Economic burden
Girish N. Rao, professor of

Epidemiology at NIMHANS, who was one of the co-Principal Investigators of the NMHS-2017, said the economic burden of mental disorders in India is huge.

In the absence of State or insurance coverage for most families, a large proportion of payments for treatment are out-of-pocket, he said.

"The NMHS revealed that the economic burden was reportedly higher in middle aged individuals, where disability due to mental illness significantly affected their productivity resulting in a sizeable economic impact in a cumulative manner, on the country. Poverty and disability catalysed by poor access to care and treatment significantly affects the quality of life of persons with mental illness as well as their families. The survey showed that families had to spend nearly Rs 1,000 - Rs 1,500 a month mainly for treatment and travel to access

care. The hidden and intangible costs are difficult to monetise and add to this burden," Dr. Girish Rao said.

Pointing out that low levels of education and income are closely linked to mental disorders, which in turn contribute to impoverishment, Dr. Rao said: "Data from the NMHS revealed that mental disorders were significantly higher in households with lower income, poor education and limited employment. It is evident that these individuals have a greater vulnerability to mental disorder."

Low self-reporting
The study by IIT- Jodhpur revealed that self-reporting of mental disorders in India is considerably lower than the actual burden of the disease. This disparity suggests a significant gap in identifying and addressing mental health issues.

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For feedback and suggestions

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