



STERLITE VS THOOTHKUDI

SC mints expert panel on fate of plant in T.N.

STATES » PAGE 3

JANUARY'S POSITIVE NOTE

Wholesale inflation at three-month low of 0.27%

BUSINESS » PAGE 16



2022-23 NUMBERS

'BJP got 90% of all corporate donations'

NEWS » PAGE 12

GOVERNOR-GOVERNMENT DIVIDE

Rescuing grace from disgrace

With rising political polarisation, there could be a way out

EDITORIAL » PAGE 6



MILESTONE BECKONS

Ashwin one wicket away from No. 500

SPORT » PAGE 17

IN BRIEF



ED issues sixth summons to CM in excise case

NEW DELHI
The ED on Wednesday summoned Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal for the sixth time. He has been asked to appear before the ED for questioning in connection with the excise case on February 19, the day his government is supposed to present its budget. » Page 2

Sandeshkhali:
Governor seeks judicial probe

KOLKATA
West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Wednesday sought the arrest of local TMC leaders at Sandeshkhali against whom allegations of atrocities have been raised, including by women. He also suggested a judicial inquiry into the matter. » Page 4

Centre calls for talks yet again, but farmers seek 'positive' offer

Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal, Nitin Gadkari to lead talks

Protesters have been stopped at Haryana's boundary since Tuesday

Police use tear gas, water cannon to disperse agitating farmers

Vikas Vasudeva

CHANDIGARH



Farmers advancing towards Delhi en masse, at Shambhu Barrier in Punjab. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

As protesting farmers from Punjab continue to camp at different locations along the boundary with Haryana, farmer representatives and Union Ministers are preparing to hold another round of talks on Thursday. However, the farmers asserted that the meeting would be fruitful only if the government had something 'positive' to offer.

In Punjab's Rajpura, farmer leaders said the Centre invited them to Chandigarh for deliberations on their demands. The meeting would be held with Union Ministers Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nitin Gadkari. "We are camping peacefully on inter-State boundaries with Haryana. We conveyed to the Centre that we are not averse to the meeting, although we expect that the government should first create a positive atmosphere. On

the one hand, the government in Haryana is resorting to the use of tear gas and water cannon and on the other, they are speaking about talks. They have assured us that the situation would be normalised," Jagjit Singh Dallewal, a senior SKM(NP) leader, told *The Hindu*.

This would be the third meeting over their long list of demands, including a legal guarantee on Minimum Support Price. CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12 RELATED REPORTS ON » PAGE 4, 13

On Tuesday, scores of farmers from different parts of Punjab started their 'tractor-trolley' march to lay siege to Delhi to press for fulfilment of their demands. As farmers reached Haryana's Shamshabari village near Ambala and Khanauli-Jind, the boundary with Punjab, they were stopped from entering the State. The Haryana government had put in place elaborate security arrangements with multi-layer barricades; since then, the farmers have been camping near the boundary. Police resorted to the use of tear gas to disperse them on Wednesday.

T.N. passes resolution against 'One Nation, One Election' plan

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI



The Tamil Nadu Assembly on Wednesday 'unanimously' adopted two resolutions against the Union government's 'One nation, One Election' proposal and the proposed delimitation after 2026.

The resolution against the proposed delimitation reads, "This august House urges the Union government that the delimitation process, to be carried out after 2026 on the basis of Census, should not be implemented. Owing to unavoidable reasons, if the number of seats on the basis of population is to increase, it shall be maintained at the present ratio of the constituencies between the States in the Assemblies and both Houses of Parliament fixed on the basis of the population of 1971."

It further says, "This au-

gust House also urges that States like Tamil Nadu should not be penalised for implementing socio-economic development programmes and welfare schemes over the past 50 years." The resolution against 'One Nation, One Election' proposal reads, "This august House urges the Union government not to implement the 'One Nation, One Election' policy as the theory is against the basis of democracy; impractical; and not enshrined in the Constitution of India."

Chavan, Murugan in BJP's Rajya Sabha list

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



L. Murugan, Ashwini Vaishnaw

The BJP will nominate to the Rajya Sabha its national president J.P. Nadda from Gujarat, Union Ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and L. Murugan from Odisha and Madhya Pradesh respectively, and new entrant and former Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan from his home State, the party announced on Wednesday. The polls are scheduled for February 27.

The nomination of Mr. Murugan and Mr. Vaishnaw makes them the only two exceptions to the BJP high command's decision

Congress old-timers, loyalists in the fray

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Ajay Maken

Congress old-timers who have long been out of Parliament will soon make their way back in, thanks to the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls. On Wednesday, the party released its list of candidates for the 10 seats that it is expected to win in the biennial elections to the Upper House.

All India Congress Committee (AICC) treasurer Ajay Maken, who had narrowly lost the last round of Rajya Sabha elections from Haryana, has now been fielded from Karnataka. Known to be close to Rahul

Gandhi, he is said to have been accommodated from Karnataka despite Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's reservations about fielding "outsiders". Mr. Maken will be back in Parliament after a decade.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12

Kerala House requests Central govt. to amend wildlife Act to tackle human-animal conflict

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Mitigating conflict: A wild elephant attacking a grocery shop at Chokkanad in Idukki district of Kerala. FILE PHOTO

The Kerala Assembly on Wednesday adopted a unanimous resolution urging the Centre to suitably amend the Wildlife Protection Act to mitigate human-wildlife conflicts.

Forest Minister A.K. Saseendran tabled the resolution for discussion as per rule 118 of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business.

Members across the aisle supported the resolution aimed at eliminating wilful trespass on human habitations, imperilling the life and property of citizens, destroying crops and preying on livestock. UDF MLAs Manjilamkuzhi Ali, T. Siddique, Sunny Jo-

Subianto wins first round of elections in Indonesia

Agence France-Presse
JAKARTA

Indonesian Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto claimed victory in the first round of the archipelago's presidential election on Wednesday after preliminary results indicated that he was on course to be elected leader of Southeast Asia's biggest economy and the world's third largest democracy.

Official results are not due until next month but pollsters who collected a sample of votes at polling stations for previously reliable "quick counts" put Mr. Subianto on more than 55%, with most of the vote sample counted.

FULL REPORT » PAGE 15

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Nod to acquire land for Urban Extension Road-II by L-G

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved the acquisition of over two bighas of land in south-west Delhi's Bharthal village for completion of the Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II), a Raj Niwas official said on Wednesday.

The UER-II, a long-pending project proposed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) in its Master Plan for Delhi-2041, aims to serve as the city's third Ring Road.

The road will help decongest Daula Kuan and other sections of both Outer and Inner Ring Roads as well as create a bypass between north and south-west Delhi, the official added.

In April 2016, the DDA had made a request to acquire the land from the Delhi government.

However, the process was delayed due to several pending litigations.

ED summons Kejriwal again, picks budget day for grilling

Central probe agency issues sixth summons to the CM in connection with a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped excise policy; AAP chief had earlier termed summonses 'illegal'

Satvika Mahajan
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday summoned Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal in the Delhi excise policy case for the sixth time.

The probe agency asked Mr. Kejriwal to appear before it for questioning on February 19, the day the Delhi government is supposed to present its budget.

Finance Minister Atishi had said on Tuesday that this year's budget will focus on education, health, and roads – areas where the ruling AAP claims to have delivered.

A Rouse Avenue court had sought Mr. Kejriwal's presence on February 17 after he skipped five notices



CM Arvind Kejriwal (left) with Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena at a government event in Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

issued by the probe agency. The court's order came in response to a complaint by the ED on February 3, a day after he skipped the fifth summons issued by it in a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped policy.

The court had noted that Mr. Kejriwal was "legally bound" to comply with the summonses. The CM had earlier termed the ED summonses "illegal" and "politically motivated".

Reacting to the court order, the ruling party had said that they would seek legal advice.

The ED has arrested several persons, including senior AAP leaders Sanjay

Singh and Manish Sisodia, alleging that they played a key role in the formulation and implementation of the policy for 2021-22, which benefited certain liquor manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers for monetary considerations.

The agency has alleged that the money earned through the "scam" was diverted through "hawala" channels for the AAP's campaign in the 2022 Goa Assembly election.

'CM should cooperate'
AAP did not offer any comment on the fresh ED summonses.

However, Delhi BJP chief Narendra Sachdeva said he hoped that the CM would now cooperate with the agency. "He has not obtained any relief [from the court] on his plea against the ED summonses till date," Mr. Sachdeva said.

"In the times to come,

City adds 350 more e-buses; 3rd biggest fleet in world: govt.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



The Delhi government has planned to induct 8,000 e-buses by 2025. PTI

Centre's reply sought on the age limit for surrogacy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought the Centre's response within four weeks on a petition by a couple challenging the law that allows only women aged between 23 and 50 to go for surrogacy.

The couple, both aged around 51, contended that such a restriction is against their right to procreation.

While asking the Centre to file its reply, the court remarked that "no one can sit on judgment" in such cases.

The couple approached the court after the State medical board refused to issue them the required certificate for the procedure on the ground that the woman had "crossed the upper age limit" under the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021. The court asked the Central appellate authority to decide the couple's appeal against the rejection in four weeks.

Priority hearing for HIV-positive persons in HC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The High Court will take up and dispose of "on a priority basis" the legal proceedings involving HIV-positive persons.

The "practice direc-

tions" issued by the court stated that the anonymity of the HIV-positive person must be strictly maintained by substituting the name of such person with a pseudonym in the court records. The directions were issued on February 7

in compliance with an order passed by the Supreme Court in September last year. The apex court had asked all courts and quasi-judicial bodies to comply with provisions of the HIV (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017.

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Main Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar, (U.P.) Website: www.noldaauthorityonline.in

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible firms/contractors for the following job 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.noldaauthorityonline.in & <http://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these website for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

| SL. No. | Job No. | Sale Start Date | Sale End Date | Tender Opening Date and Time |
|---------|---|-----------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | Job No.-17/E-TENDER/SPO/2023-24 Name of Work- Procurement of Manhole Covers with Frame for Jal Division-III, Estimates Rs. 50,40,000.00 | 14.02.2024 | 27.02.2024 upto 5:00 P.M. | 28.02.2024 11:00 A.M. |
| 2. | Job No.-18/E-TENDER/SPO/2023-24 Name of Work- Stitching of Summer Uniform for Contract Staff of Noida Authority, Estimated Rs. 62,38,380.00 | 14.02.2024 | 27.02.2024 upto 5:00 P.M. | 28.02.2024 11:00 A.M. |
| 3. | Job No.-19/E-TENDER/SPO/2023-24 Name of Work- Stitching of Winter Uniform of Contract Staff of Noida Authority, Estimated Rs. 69,80,550.00 | 14.02.2024 | 27.02.2024 upto 5:00 P.M. | 28.02.2024 11:00 A.M. |

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NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)

The Superintending Engineer, 10th Circle HPPWD, Bilaspur on behalf of Governor Himachal Pradesh invites the percentage rate bids in electronic tendering system for following work i.e., five year maintenance of roads under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana-III of 2023-24 in the District of Bilaspur as detailed in the Table below from the eligible contractors registered with HPPWD/State Govt./Central Govt. agencies.

| Job No. | Division | Name of the Road | Package Length (in Kms.) | Job Length (in Kms.) | Period of Completion (Months) | Estimated Cost Excluding GST (Rs Lakh) | Total Cost including GST (Rs Lacs) | Bid Security in lakh | Construc-tion Mainte-nance | |
|---------|-------------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| | | | | | | | | | Construc-tion | Mainte-nance |
| 1(CTB) | Bilaspur Divn.I | HP01168 T07-Dali to Bandiyan | 5.195 | | | | | | 1722.89 | 130.00 |
| | | HP01169 T03-Dhar Tatoch Drobar Saryan Ghati road. | 9.210 | | 21.575 | 18 months | 1722.89 | 130.00 | | |
| 2(CTB) | Bilaspur Divn.II | HP01170 T02-Panchayat Ghar Hamora to Bahut Kasol road | 7.170 | | | | | | 832.32 | 68.19 |
| | | HP01171 T09-Swarghat Shri Naina Devi Ji Bhakri to Kharaki | 5.000 | | 11.340 | 18 months | 832.32 | 68.19 | | |
| 3(CTB) | Bilaspur Divn.III | HP01175 T07-Toba Golthai to Dhart | 6.340 | | | | | | 900.51 | 18.01 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |

Last Date/ Time and place for receipt of bids through e-procurement:-
Bids can be submitted 2nd time online from 15.02.2024 at 10.00 Hours to 26.02.2024 at 10.00 Hours and will be opened on 26.02.2024 at 11.00 Hours in the office of Superintending Engineer, 10th Circle, HPPWD, Bilaspur.

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website: www.pmgstenders.gov.in

All terms and condition will be applicable as per approved/uploaded bidding documents.

The undersigned has right to extend or cancel the bids without declaring any reasons thereof.
Availability of Bid Document and mode of submission: The bid document is available online and bid should be submitted online on website www.pmgstenders.gov.in. The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of bids, the bidder is required to have valid Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities (CA). Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-tendering in PMGSY may obtain the same from the website: www.pmgstenders.gov.in. Digital signature is mandatory to participate in the e-tendering. Bidders already possessing the valid digital signature issued from authorized CAs can use the same in this tender.

The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance are indicated in the Bill of Quantities. Further, the payment for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.

The bids for the work shall remain valid for acceptance for a period not less than ninety days after the deadline date for bid submission.

Other details can be seen in the bidding documents. The Employer shall not be held liable for any delays due to system failure beyond its control. Even though the system will attempt to notify the bidders of any bid updates, the Employer shall not be liable for any information not received by the bidder. It is the bidders responsibility to verify the website for the latest information related to the tender.

* Non-registered bidders may submit their bids; however, the successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities of HPPWD before signing the contract.

Superintending Engineer 10th Circle, HPPWD, Bilaspur-174001

(For & on behalf of the Governor of Himachal Pradesh)

HIM SUCHNA AVAM JAN SAMPAK

HP / 5862/23-24

SC mints expert panel on reopening of Vedanta plant

Court says a 'middle ground' must be found; it adds that committee will evaluate environmental concerns and suggest additional conditions, if any, for reopening of Sterlite plant at Thoothukudi

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday proposed forming a "non-partisan" committee to objectively evaluate environmental concerns and to suggest additional conditions, if any, for reopening the Vedanta Sterlite's copper plant at Thoothukudi.

The copper smelting plant was permanently shut down on the orders of the Tamil Nadu government six years ago on grounds of pollution. The 2018 closure of the plant was preceded by nearly 30 years of local protests, which had even led to an incident of police firing.

"We have to find a way forward... We have to reach a win-win solution by which the concerns of the State as a custodian of the health of the people will be protected, your [Vedanta] concern as an invest-



The plant was permanently shut down on the orders of the Tamil Nadu government six years ago on grounds of pollution. FILE PHOTO

tor is protected and our concern that this is not a facility lost to the nation is taken care of," Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, observed.

The Bench said the committee could submit its report in a month. Vedanta has moved the court against the closure. Senior advocate Shyam Divan, for the company, said Vedanta was in "broad agreement" with the suggestion of the court to form

The Chief Justice said some sort of "middle ground" must be ironed out. Even if Vedanta sold up, some other player would have to ultimately invest on the site, the court reasoned. "We have to instead explore what should be the best modalities to subserve public interest. Ensure protection and reparation if the committee per se finds no reason to shut down the industry. This industry generates revenue for the nation and the State. Country should not lose this asset," the Chief Justice remarked.

The court said in case the panel recommends reopening, Vedanta cannot resume operations with the 2018 standards.

"The committee will dictate, you have to comply," it said.

It urged both the State and Vedanta to suggest modalities and domain experts for the panel by the next hearing on Thursday.

'Govt. taking steps to issue OBC certificates to eligible Marathas'

Press Trust of India

MUMBAI

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday told the Bombay High Court that it was taking "all necessary steps" to include eligible Marathas in the Other Backward Castes (OBC) category by granting them Kunbi caste certificates.

The statement came as Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil's hunger strike on the issue entered its fifth day.

Advocate-General Birenrao Saraf told a Division Bench that though it had not even been 20 days since the State government issued a draft notification stating that eligible Marathas as would be included in the OBC category, Mr. Jarange-Patil had "already launched a hunger strike".

The court was hearing a petition filed by activist Gunaratan Sadavarte over the disruption of law and order due to Mr. Jarange-Patil's ongoing agitation.

"The government is taking all steps to amend the



Maratha activists participate in a rally in Karad on Wednesday to press for reservation. PTI

rules to issue Kunbi caste certificates to eligible persons from the Maratha community," the advocate-general said.

"The last time people [Mr. Jarange-Patil and his followers] marched to Mumbai, the State took steps, including issuing a notification calling for objections to amend the rules. The law has a certain timeline. In situations like this, a continuous fast will lead to various situations which will become difficult," he added.

to file a reply.

The noted lawyer argued the case via video conferencing on behalf of the petitioner, Safiya Malik, who is the wife of Abdul Malik, the main accused in the Haldwani violence. Ms. Malik in her petition had asked the court to stop the demolition.

The court, however, had not intervened in the matter, and the demolition was executed on the grounds that the construction in question stood upon Nazul land, which is primarily owned by the government.

A single-judge Bench of Justice Manoj Kumar Tiwari questioned the petitioner as to how construction was carried out at the site when the property in question had been leased out by the government as agricultural land.

However, without going into the question of whether the lease was valid or not, the court called for a counter affidavit by the government, and posted the case for further hearing in the second week of May.

Banbholpura demolition not in accordance with law'

Press Trust of India

NAINITAL

Lawyer and Congress leader Salman Khurshid, arguing on behalf of a Banbholpura resident in the Uttarakhand High Court, said on Wednesday that his client should have been granted 15 days' time to file a reply in the court before demolition was carried out in the area.

Demolition of "illegal structures" had sparked violence in Banbholpura in Haldwani on February 8, claiming six lives and leaving over a 100 people injured, including police and journalists.

Mr. Khurshid argued that although no relief could be given to the petitioner since the demolition had already been carried out, it had not been done following due legal process.

The demolition, said Mr. Khurshid, was carried out only four days after a notice was served to the petitioner, even though, as per the process of law, a total of 15 days must be granted

Delhi Police posts memo on Valentine's Day

Alisha Dutta

NEW DELHI

In light of Valentine's Day, Delhi Police uploaded a post on social media asking people to "report" their ex-partners if suspected of being involved in illegal activity. The Instagram post was titled "Is your ex involved in illegal activities?", and added, "Your information could help them win a trip in a government vehicle, a night's stay in lock up, and photo shoots from various angles".

ACP Ranajay Atrishya said the humorous post was "purely for the purpose of public engagement". "We received hilarious comments, as was the intention. The post was not made to harbour complaints," he said, adding that indeed, no complaints were received on the helpline regarding the same.

Delhi HC issues notice on 100-yr-old mosque

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday issued a notice on a plea filed by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), which sought vacation of an earlier court order that forbade any action against a 100-year-old complex comprising a mosque, graveyard and school in Daula Kuan.

Justice Sachin Datta is

sued a notice on the DDA's application, and asked the petitioner – the managing committee of the Shahi Masjid and Qabristan Kangan Shah – to file a response within 10 days.

The DDA in its plea said the area comes under the Central Ridge forest, where residential and commercial activities are prohibited. In November, the court had told DDA not to take any "coercive action".



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| RISE 07:00 | SET 18:12 |
| RISE 11:06 | SET 00:14 |
| SATURDAY, FEB. 17 | |
| RISE 06:59 | SET 18:13 |
| RISE 11:49 | SET 01:19 |

Delhi Weather

max min
Delhi City 25 10
Safdarjung 25 10
Palam 23 11

Delhi Palam Today
23°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be cold with shallow fog and mist. The day will be pleasant. Night will be cold and hazy.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
24°C A dry weather to prevail. Morning will be cold with shallow fog and mist. Day will be pleasant with light cool breeze. Night also will be cold.

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THE HINDU

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9810000000

Farmers' march: police dig in their heels; parents of school students anxious

Samridhi Tewari
NEW DELHI

A day after the city's borders with Haryana and Uttar Pradesh were barricaded and fortified with concrete blocks, containers, and barbed wire, the police dug trenches on the streets and bylanes at the Singhu border to prevent the protesting farmers from entering Delhi.

With the help of earth-movers, the police also removed territorial signage at the Singhu border, which connects Delhi with Haryana. It was done to ensure that tear-gas shells fired by the police don't face any obstruction, a senior officer said.

The officer also said seven layers of barbed wire, spikes, concrete blocks, containers, and four to five layers of concrete barricades on both sides of the Singhu border flyover have been placed, adding that drones are being used to



Taking no chances: Seven layers of barbed wire, spikes, concrete blocks, containers, and four to five layers of concrete barricades were placed on both sides of the Singhu border, where trenches were also dug to prevent farmers from entering the city. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

monitor the situation.

The developments come a day after scuffles were reported between many protesters and personnel of the Haryana Police at various places along the Punjab border, following which the police resorted to the use of tear gas through drones and water

cannons to disperse the agitators.

Several farmer groups from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab, who have been demanding a law on minimum support price, had given a 'Dilli Chalo' call on Tuesday.

At the Tikri border, personnel of the police and paramilitary forces conducted mock drills. Mast lights and CCTV cameras were installed at various points along the border.

More containers and metal barricades were also placed on the border to prevent the farmers' march. The movement of vehicles was shut completely on the Singhu and Tikri borders with Haryana on Wednesday. All vehicles, including buses, were stopped near the borders, forcing people to walk on foot to reach Delhi and use other modes of transport, mostly autorickshaws and e-rickshaws, to reach their destinations.



ing the day.

Many commuters took to the Delhi Metro to avoid getting stuck in traffic snarls, causing the count of daily passenger journeys to climb to its highest-ever single-day count of 71.09 lakh.

Board exams

Many students living along the Delhi-Haryana border due to appear for their Board exams starting on Thursday were perturbed by the restrictions on vehicular movement.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday advised students in Delhi to leave their homes early to reach the examination centres in time. Over 5.8 lakh students are expected to take the exams at 877 centres in the city.

A Class 12 student and resident of Singhu village, Anuj, said, "I will leave for my exam centre at least four hours before time be-

cause we don't know how long it will take to reach the exam centre. If the protest continues, it will be difficult for me to reach the exam centre on time."

Suresh Rawat, a resident of Alipur who works at a factory in Narela, has a son who has to appear for his Class 10 board exams at a centre in Burari. "We will have to leave early to reach in time. All roads leading to my son's exam centre are blocked. We will try to reach Burari through lanes that have not been dug up yet," Mr. Rawat said.

"The police should understand that children are due to appear for their Board exams. They should make way for children," he added.

Shilpi Devi, who works as a cook in Kundli, said, "My daughter is in Class 12. We can't expect her to travel to Jahangirpur all by herself. So, I will have to go with her to the centre and miss the day's work."

IN BRIEF



'Corridor from Delhi to Noida airport to be ready soon'

A 60-km long highway corridor that will connect southern and eastern parts of Delhi to the upcoming Noida International Airport as well as the Mumbai Expressway will be ready by the end of the year, said Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari. The six-lane corridor is being developed at a cost of ₹4,463 crore, and will include eight elevated sections, 10 flyovers and six busways, Mr. Gadkari said during an inspection visit on Wednesday. The project is part of a ₹65,000 crore plan to decongest Delhi, the Minister said.

Two tribals beaten up in M.P., accused's house bulldozed

The police have so far arrested seven persons after two tribal men were allegedly beaten up in separate incidents in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district, while the local administration bulldozed the house of one of the accused. In one of the incidents which took place on November 15 last year, the victim was brought to Betul city by one of the accused under some pretext following a dispute over money. He was allegedly hung upside down in a room and beaten up, police said. In another incident, a tribal youth was allegedly beaten up by a group of persons on February 7 over an old enmity. PTI

U.P. court gives verdict 43 years after Behmai massacre

Four decades after the sensational Behmai massacre in which 20 people were shot dead in a Kanpur village by bandit Phoolan Devi and her gang, a court on Wednesday pronounced its verdict, handing life sentence to one of the two last surviving accused. The anti-robery court of Judge Amit Malviya found Shyam Babu guilty but acquitted Vishwanath due to lack of evidence, Kanpur Dehat district government advocate Raju Porwal said. He said a total of 35 people, including Phoolan Devi, were accused in the case and all of them except for Shyam Babu and Vishwanath have died. In the years following the massacre, Phoolan Devi surrendered and became an MP. PTI

Dalit groom assaulted for riding horse during wedding

Four persons have been arrested for allegedly attacking a Dalit bridegroom for riding a horse as part of his wedding procession in Gujarat's Gandhinagar district, police said. The groom, along with around 100 participants in the procession, was on way to the bride's house in the village when a man on a motorcycle intercepted and dragged him down from the horse and slapped him, said a complaint filed by the groom's cousin. Three more persons joined him and all the four abused and threatened the groom, the complainant stated in the FIR. PTI

Governor seeks arrests, judicial inquiry into Sandeshkhali charges

Ananda Bose submits 'report' on his Monday visit after allegations by women of atrocities by local Trinamool leaders; Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar hospitalised after scuffle with police

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Wednesday sought the arrest of local Trinamool Congress leaders at Sandeshkhali island in North 24 Parganas district against whom allegations of atrocities have been raised, including by women. The Governor also suggested a judicial inquiry into the matter as well as providing ex gratia to the victims.

The area continued to remain on the boil with West Bengal Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Sukanta Majumdar making another failed bid to go there. Stopped by the police at Taki in North 24 Parganas district en route to Sandeshkhali, he was injured in a scuffle and taken to a State-run hospital in Basirhat and later to a health facility in Kolkata.

"Arrest the gang leaders and his henchmen imme-

dately. Constitute a Special Task Force / SIT to investigate into alleged nexus of the criminal elements and to determine the depth and extent of the committed crimes and bring all the culprits before law," a "report for the people of West Bengal" by the Governor said. He also pointed out that there is a "precarious" situation where people are in a confusion as to who are the offenders and who are the protectors".

Mr. Bose had visited Sandeshkhali on Monday after locals, chiefly wo-

men, hit the streets earlier this month alleging atrocities against local Trinamool leaders including Shahjahan Sheikh, who is absconding, and set their properties on fire. The island made headlines on January 5, when a team of Enforcement Directorate officials was attacked by a mob when they went to conduct raids at the house of Mr. Sheikh in connection with PDS scam.

The BJP leaders present with Mr. Majumdar on Wednesday alleged that he was attacked, a claim backed by Leader of Oppo-

sition Suwendu Adhikari who said Mr. Majumdar was injured during a baton charge by the police.

Meanwhile, after the Calcutta High Court set aside the State Administration's decision to impose prohibitory orders under Section 144 of Cr.PC in Sandeshkhali, a fresh notification by the district administration imposed prohibitory orders in certain pockets of the block with containment zones.

Campaign based on lies' The Trinamool Congress said that the entire campaign of the Opposition was based on lies. "Even if one believes that the women of Sandeshkhali did not speak because of fear, what stopped CPI(M) and BJP leaders from making these allegations earlier?" said party spokesperson Kunal Ghosh. The Trinamool leadership has started reaching out to people and the party is likely to hold a rally in the region.



Soldiers patrol along the banks of Tiau River, a natural border between India and Myanmar.

"But we are astonished by the government of India's decision to scrap the FMR as well as its attempt to fence the border instead of maintaining and developing relations between the peoples living on both sides of the border," the committee said.

The constituents of the committee are the influential Central Young Mizo Association, the Mizo Upa Pawl (association of senior citizens), Mizo Hmeichhe Insuikhawm Pawl (women's federation), Mizo Zirlai Pawl, and Mizo Students' Union.

The committee said the FMR had been a crucial mechanism in maintaining ethnic and cultural linkages between the people belonging to the Zo ethnic group residing on both sides of the border.

2 Assam Cong. MLAs to support BJP govt. 'for the greater good'

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Two Congress MLAs in Assam have declared their support for the BJP-led government headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The development is similar to that of five Meghalaya Congress MLAs who issued a letter of support to Conrad K. Sangma's National People's Party (NPP)-led coalition government in February 2022.

Congress legislators Kamalakhy Dey Purkayastha and Basanta Das, who represent the North Karimganj and Mangaldoi Assembly constituencies, respectively, on Wednesday said they would remain loyal to the grand old party while supporting the government's positive ap-

proach for the "greater good" of the State.

Mr. Purkayastha resigned as the working president of the Pradesha Congress Committee but said he would remain a primary member of the party.

The development has come a fortnight after former Assam Youth Congress president Angkita Dutta and former Congress MLA Bismita Gogoi joined the BJP. The Congress has 23 MLAs in the 126-member Assam Assembly.

Mr. Deo, who was the Union Tribal Affairs Minister in the Congress-led UPA-II government, had joined the TDP ahead of the 2019 Lok Sabha election after facing a crushing defeat in the Araku seat, which he held between 2009 and 2014, and lost. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Deo said that he joined the TDP at a time when the party had walked out of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) questioning the BJP's indifference to

Former Union Minister Deo set to quit TDP over Naidu 'cosying up to BJP'

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

Former Union Minister and Telugu Desam Party (TDP) leader Kishore Chandra Deo is all set to quit the party, which he joined in 2019. Confirming to *The Hindu* on Wednesday that he will tender his resignation in a day or two, Mr. Deo accused TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu of cosying up to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) even since he came out on bail. Mr. Naidu was arrested in September last year for alleged corruption in connection with the multi-crore Skill Development Corporation case.

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Kishore Chandra Deo

the 2014 poll which came just after the State's bifurcation into Telangana and the residuary Andhra Pradesh State. A six-term MP (five in the Lok Sabha and one in the Rajya Sabha) Mr. Deo fought the 2019 Lok Sabha poll on a TDP ticket from the Araku seat, which he held between 2009 and 2014, and lost. Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Deo said that he joined the TDP at a time when the party had walked out of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) questioning the BJP's indifference to

wards Andhra Pradesh. "I joined the TDP with the aim to work towards defeating the Narendra Modi-Amit Shah combine at the Centre. But that cause is losing ground, considering the TDP has backed all draconian laws brought by the Modi government in Parliament ever since the 2019 results. This shows that Naidu does not have any reservations about BJP's principles or ideology," Mr. Deo said.

The State electorate is clearly against the BJP despite the fact that the national party doesn't have any considerable presence in the State and has done nothing for Andhra in the last 10 years," Mr. Deo added.

"It is deeply unfortunate that the two main parties [the TDP and the YSRCP] are competing with each other to curry favour with the BJP despite the fact that the national party doesn't have any considerable presence in the State and has done nothing for Andhra in the last 10 years," Mr. Deo added.

About his next move, he said he would like to wait it out. "Politics is not just about winning or losing. I cannot, directly or indirectly, contribute to the Amit Shah-Narendra Modi regime," he said.



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Sri Amritsar Sahib



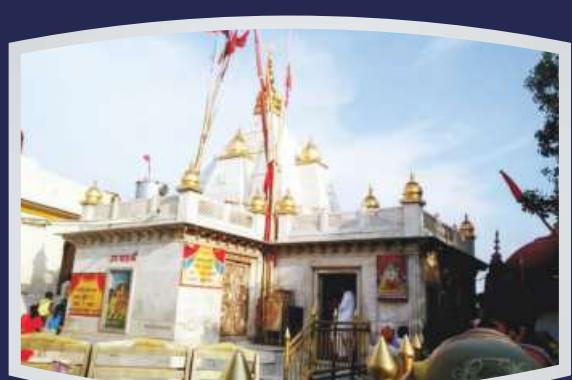
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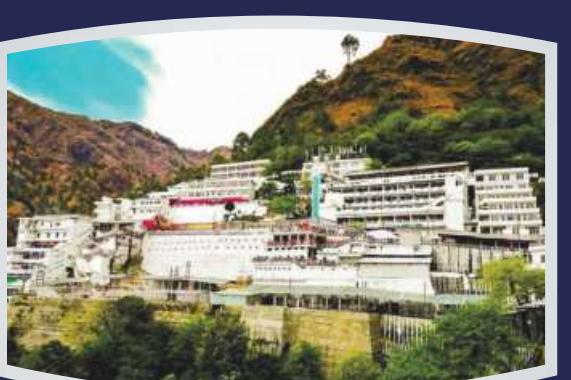
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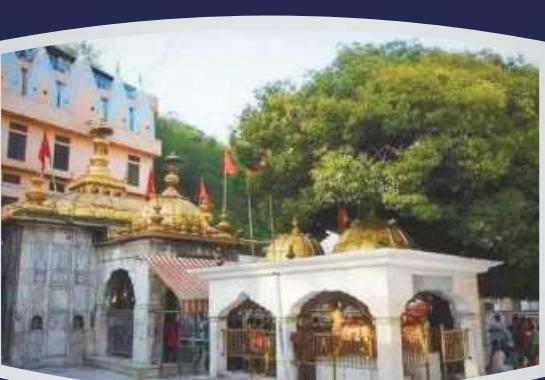
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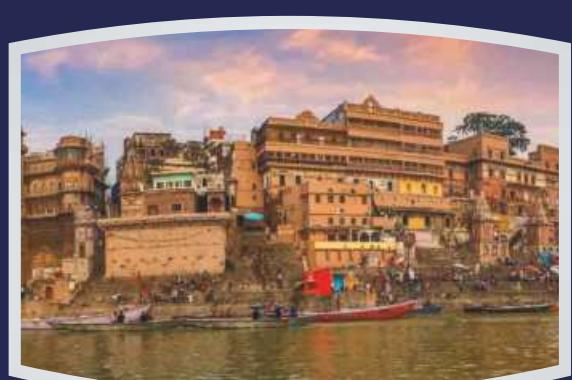
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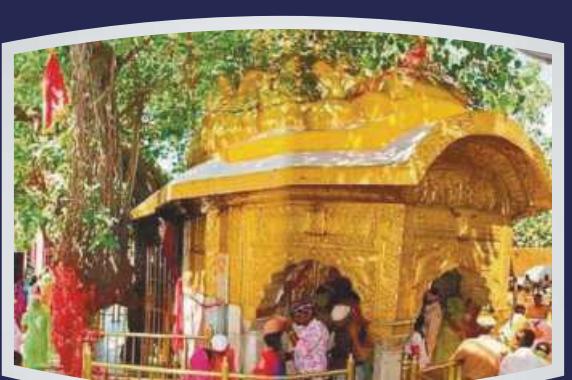
Mata Vaishno Devi Ji



Mata Jwala Ji



Varanasi



Mata Chintpurni Ji



Sri Khatu Shyam Ji, Sri Salasar Dham



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With the sincere efforts of

Son of Punjab

Bhagwant Singh Mann
Chief Minister

**Over 20,000 devotees
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Bhagwant Singh Mann
Chief Minister, Punjab



Department of Transport, Punjab



Farming consensus

The Centre must address grievances of farmers through talks

Farmers from Punjab, in their thousands, have assembled at three points along the border with Haryana, where they have been stopped from marching to Delhi. The protesters are demanding legally guaranteed MSP for crops, debt waiver, cancellation of international agreements impacting the agriculture sector, and a minimum pension of ₹5,000 for farmers and agriculture labour. Some of these demands were raised during their earlier protest in 2021-22, which was called off after the BJP-led central government withdrew three controversial laws that had sought to reform the agriculture sector. The protest now is spearheaded by the SKM (non-political), a splinter group of the body that had led the earlier protest. The split signifies fissures in the interest groups across Haryana, Punjab and western U.P. and Rajasthan. There are at least three other strands of protests gathering strength. Farmers in western U.P. affected by the Jawar airport project and Yamuna Expressway are up in arms. In Haryana's Sonipat, farmers are protesting land acquisition for power cables. The original SKM and several trade unions have called for a national rural and industrial strike on February 16, with overlapping and additional demands that include the repeal of four labour codes.

The government has opened talks with the Punjab farmers, but a legal guarantee of MSP appears unlikely. The police in Haryana and Delhi have stopped the farmers more than 200 km away from Delhi as they are resolute that the farmers will not be allowed near the border of the national capital where they had laid siege in 2021-22. The MSP-based procurement by the FCI has been the bedrock of food security, but the case for its reform is strong. Surplus producers of grain have benefited from the MSP scheme, but the scheme bypasses subsistence farmers in poorer regions. This uneven geographical spread of procurement has also led to unsustainable farm practices in some areas, while farmers in other regions of the country are always on the edge of penury. All this calls for a revamping of the public support for farming, which is essential for reasons that include national food security. This can be achieved better through wide political consultation and by encouraging the beneficiaries of the current system to diversify production and increase productivity. The political undertones of the protest on the eve of the Lok Sabha election also cannot be overlooked. The farm sector needs a new model of public support. It cannot be left to the mercy of the market. The government should lead the efforts to create a national consensus on this question.

Pension concerns

A hike in minimum pension will help the lower strata among the retired

The recommendation of the Central Board of Trustees of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) for a 0.1-percentage-point increase in provident fund (PF) deposits for 2023-24 should not be surprising, as it is in tune with what the EPFO did last year. However, the recommended rate of 8.25% is 0.4-percentage points lower than in 2018-19, a pre-election year like 2023-24. If cleared by the Union Finance Ministry, it will involve the transfer of a record ₹1,07,000 crore to EPF members. But the development has not pleased those with a long-standing demand for an increase in the minimum pension of ₹1,000. When in the opposition, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party had demanded that the pension be raised to ₹3,000 (the UPA government had proposed ₹1,000 a month). On coming to power in 2014, the BJP carried out faithfully, with effect from September 2014, what was finalised by its predecessor, benefitting approximately 20.5 lakh pensioners. Months ago, the Finance Ministry had rejected a proposal to double the minimum pension amount, citing a "huge rise" in the budgetary support needed under the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS), 1995. There is one more component in the budgetary support which refers to the Central government's contribution at 1.16% of wages up to an amount of ₹15,000 a month. For FY2024-25, the Ministry has projected ₹10,950 crore as budgetary support against the revised estimate of ₹9,760 crore for the current year. The Finance Ministry calculates that a 100% rise in the minimum pension would be more than the proportionate increase in the overall budgetary support as numerous pensioners had received much less than ₹1,000 as monthly pension till 2014.

Describing the EPS as a "Defined Contribution-Defined Benefit" social security scheme, the government said in the Rajya Sabha that all benefits were paid out of accumulations through contributions, and as per the fund's valuation as on March 31, 2019, there was "an actuarial deficit." However, this argument has been virtually demolished in the EPFO's annual report (2022-23). Notwithstanding its reasons not to hike the minimum pension, the government must note that the difference between the minimum and original pension was about ₹970 crore for 2022-23. So, the doubling of minimum pension is no strain. There are other key issues too such as equating the amount of spouse pension on a par with what a member-pensioner gets. In the case of higher PF pension, the rules have been framed after the 2022 Supreme Court judgment wherein most of the pre-2014 retirees would not be covered; there are around four lakh such applications for higher pension. A more expansive approach to PF pension matters will help senior citizens.

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India being the land of largely unquestioned custom, ceremonial and rituals, these addresses of the Head of State have also become part of the life of our polity. The President of India and Governor arrive with 'due' fanfare, perform the ceremony of which the officiating 'priest' is the Speaker or Chairman, and depart feeling greatly relieved that it is over.

The speeches or addresses of the Head of State for these occasions, following British practice, are drafted by the government of the day. They are not written by the President of India or Governor, but only read out by them. The drafts for these are received in their offices generally very close to the event and require them to be gone through against a tight time frame. This in itself makes the suggesting of changes by them difficult.

A thought that was worth pursuing
R. Venkataraman, the President of India from 1987 to 1992, was fond of saying, with his characteristic smile, to staff (I was his Joint Secretary), "When I am asked to read these Addresses, I feel like saying 'Rashtrapati Bhavan' and sitting down!" He went through the drafts of the Addresses he got from the Government of the day line by line and word by word. And he – not so much we on his staff – would mark out those he felt needed modification. I do not recall a single occasion when his responses were not accepted *in toto*. But there was one 'move' of his which did not go through.

He asked us, shortly after he assumed office, to contact the Indian High Commission in London to find out what the form of Her Majesty's 'Throne Speech', delivered at the opening of the sessions of the two Houses each year or immediately after a general election, was like. It was his distinct impression, he said, that the speech prepared by Her Majesty's Government is very brief, merely outlining the outer contours of policy and the legislative business proposed for the session ahead – and nothing more. That, he said, is how it should ideally be with the opening of Parliament in India, in place of the long speech that is read out *in extenso* to a progressively tired gathering of Hon'ble Members of Parliament, followed by an equally long translation into Hindi or English as the case may be. President Venkataraman's chief concern was the saving of time and the avoiding of tedium. But he was also aware of the gain from such a reform in terms of the avoiding of interruptions and the other phenomenon which has come so unfortunately to be associated with legislatures' opening ceremonies – tension between the writer and



Gopalkrishna Gandhi

is a former Governor

reader of the speech.

The High Commission was 'duly' approached and specimens of Her Majesty's speeches obtained, all of which went to show President Venkataraman's memory to have been spot on. But, sadly, the suggestion made to the government of the day that the British practice be considered for adoption in New Delhi was not heard.

President K.R. Narayanan, in office from 1997-2002, was no less painstaking with the drafts. We on his team (I was Secretary to the President) would marvel at his being able to spot phrases with subtle connotations which would be best rectified. It gave me no small happiness to see officers of the government acknowledge the pertinence and propriety of changes that 'KRN' directed us to convey. Needless to say, the changes suggested were so patently un-biased and good that they were accepted not just without demur, but gratefully.

A cameo from Kolkata

In Kolkata, as Governor of West Bengal (2004-2009), it was my privilege to suggest, on a few occasions, some changes to draft Addresses to the Hon'ble Legislative Assembly and Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee invariably accepted them. On the first such occasion, when he had accepted the suggestion at once, there was a slip. On the night before the ceremony, I noticed, to my dismay, that the printed text which had just come to me, had not carried out the change. The matter was important enough for me to bring it to *Buddhababu*'s attention over the telephone. He said to me, "I am to blame. Let me see what I can do but rest assured it will be done." Was there enough time to re-print hundreds of copies of the Address? There was not. The Chief Minister did the next best thing. He had a piece of paper pasted over the paragraph concerned, on each and every copy, overnight.

This, of course, drew more attention to the paragraph than its appearance in print would have done and Opposition Members of the Legislative Assembly found cause to explode. *Buddhababu* told me later that day, "If the matter comes up formally in the House I will say frankly that you had suggested an important change, that I had agreed to it, but due entirely to my oversight it could not be carried out in time and the next best thing was done... I will lay the facts on the table." This was political civility.

Occasion arose for me to officiate as the Governor of Bihar (January to June 2006). Exactly as now, Nitish Kumar was Chief Minister, heading a coalition of the Janata Dal (United) and the Bharatiya Janata Party, with Rabri Devi being Leader of the Opposition. The draft for the Governor's Address was unexceptionable and written in flawless Hindi which was, for me, a pleasure to read out. There was not one

interruption (which I was expecting) and I noticed throughout when I looked in her direction that Rabri Devi was listening attentively and with the greatest dignity. After the ceremony was over, *Nitishbabu* said to me that it was the first time in his experience that a Governor's Address to the Assembly had gone off without a single interruption, and he thanked me for it. "Why are you thanking me?" I said to him. "The speech was not mine, it was yours." I will not detain the reader with his rather overwhelming reply.

To conclude: turbulence in the House is not new. Unseemliness has been seen in them for decades. But controversy over Governors' addresses in Assemblies are now rising in frequency and velocity, with Governors, whose dignity is inseparable from that of the edifice of the state and the government bartering accusations and counter-accusations.

Where the problem lies

The root of the problem lies in the foundational dichotomy of one agency writing the speech and another reading it. Professor A.R. Venkatachalapathy published not long ago a fine book, *Who Owns That Song?* – about the rights to Subramania Bharati's 'nationalised' works. One may, following that, ask of the Governor's Address 'Who Owns that Speech?' The one who writes it or the one who reads it out? Subject to correction by constitutional experts, I believe that the Address of the Head of State to the Legislature is an ornament of convention, not a condition precedent for Bills becoming law. If it was, then the business of a House that has not had the Governor's Address read out in full, or in tokenistic part, would become invalid. That is not the case. Address or no Address, the Legislature continues its work.

Since political polarisation between the Centre which appoints Governors and the State which elects the Chief Minister is, to all appearances, set to accelerate in the visualisable future, a way out has to be found. I believe President Venkatachalapathy's suggested solution gives us that way out. If all concerned agree that the Head of State need read out just the bare outline of the legislative business ahead, the Address will then belong to neither its drafter nor its reader but to its rightful owner-listener, namely, the collective body of Legislators. Presidents and Governors will, I think, be relieved with such a rearrangement.

But what of the governments? Will they be ready to forego the chance to air their accomplishments and plans? They would need convincing that the Motion of Thanks that follows the address is where that airing is best done – as it is, in British Parliament.

It will take an innovative and self-denying Chief Minister to start the reform to rescue a custom, ceremony and ritual of grace from disgrace.

Rescuing grace from disgrace

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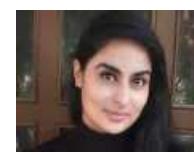
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With political polarisation between the Centre which appoints Governors and the State which elects the Chief Minister set to accelerate, there could be a way out

A demand that could hamper gender equality



Damini Chopra

is an actor and humanitarian

menstruation to be 'impure'.

The most recent National Family Health Survey (NFHS) report has highlighted how approximately 50% of women between the ages of 15 to 24 in India continue to rely on the use of cloth for menstrual protection. Experts caution that reusing cloth can increase the risk of contracting multiple infections, attributing this practice to a combination of insufficient awareness and societal taboo around menstruation. Girls are often compelled to leave school or face social exclusion during their menstrual cycles.

Arguments in favour of paid leave for menstruation will claim that granting special status to menstruation would aim to create subject awareness. But this would only magnify it. It could turn out to be another well-meaning step, but one that ends up widening the gender gap inadvertently.

The case of Japan

There are countries such as Japan that provide leave for painful menstruation but it is mostly unpaid, and unused. Women claim that they are reluctant to avail this leave and 'broadcast' that they are on their period, for the fear of sexual harassment. This is the situation (today), even though this policy was introduced in Japan more than seven decades ago. Data show(s) that a mere 0.9% of women in the workforce avail menstrual leave days in Japan. As per the World Economic Forum's ranking in 2019, Japan ranked 121 out of 153 in terms of gender equality. It has slipped to the 125th position in 2023. It is interesting to note that though young women in Japan have higher education levels than men, it is in the workforce

that disparities creep in. Women in Japan are less likely to be employed (even with the same credentials) than men, and are often paid lesser.

Let us assume that we have in place paid leave for periods. Now comes the implementation. Who is to say when such leave would be taken rightfully, and when they would be misused? Further, who is to say which enforcement methods would be acceptable, when used by the employer? In 2020, 66 girl students in an institute in Bhuj in Kutch, Gujarat, were forced to strip to check who was menstruating. This mirrors an incident in 2017 in Muzzaffarnagar, where 70 girls in a residential school were compelled to undress by staff to check for menstruation.

A fight that continues

In the recent past, women have fought to be on the front line in a war. The Supreme Court of India even urged the government to enable equal evaluation of women, and to have them undergo the same standards of testing as men. In response, the government argued that women are not suitable for ground combat roles. Women in corporate organisations are fighting for pay that is the equivalent to that drawn by their male counterparts.

As a woman, I understand the issue and am empathetic towards period pain and symptoms. But I am averse to terming it a blanket biological disadvantage. Recognising the diverse nature of menstrual experiences is essential. Tailoring support and being accommodative on a case-by-case basis promotes inclusivity, while also addressing the individual needs of those navigating their (difficult) periods.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protest and response

Drones being used to fire teargas shells onto the protesting farmers and the placing of formidable barricades to impede their progress are extreme steps. Farmers are not criminals. The Government should, on priority, listen to the woes of farmers in all sincerity and seriousness. Let the 'feeders of the nation' be heard. There have been many unfortunate instances of farmer suicides in the recent past. Let the Government not hide under the pretext of saying that

the agitation is politically motivated.

Balasubramanian Pavani, Secunderabad

Animal crossing
Wild elephants have begun entering residential areas in Mananthavady, Kerala, leading to dangerous man-animal conflict situations. The Forest Department and politicians should realise that human life is more important or more precious on earth than anything else. As the Bishop of Mananthavady has said, mere

compensation or placement is quite insufficient. Instead, a permanent remedy has to be found. The attempts of forest officials to catch/capture an elephant in the area, despite being equipped with sophisticated equipment, have gone in vain.

J.K. John, Mumbai

More and more attacks by wild elephants are taking place in villages and towns adjoining forests. Tranquillising and capturing rogue elephants at one

place and releasing them in another is no solution. It is a question of time before such translocated animals resume their activities. We have swung from one extreme, of mindless destruction of wild animals, to the other extreme, of stretching the concept of conservation.

It is easy for those in arm chairs in urban surroundings to wax eloquent in defence of rogue elephants and man eaters.

For helpless poor people who eke out a living in

terrain near jungles, it is a matter of life and death.

M.R. Anand, Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

I recently came across a documentary on YouTube, by Planet Wild, which describes a natural way of preventing human-elephant conflict. Based on a project implemented in Tanzania to protect the majestic creatures, it highlights how "elephants are afraid of bees". Even though elephants have a thick skin, they have weak spots (mouth, ears and trunk)

which hurt a lot if stung by a bee.

In a project implemented in an elephant corridor, a team built a fence made of beehives and connected to a wire. If an elephant tries to cross, it touches the wire, which disturbs the bees. This project helps protect crops, safeguards residential areas and also results in higher incomes in terms of honey processing and distribution.

States in India need to study this project in earnest.

Shafna Basri K., Chennai

Does trust in national government matter?

Globally, there are many countries where low levels of trust coexist with stable democracies and several others where distrust is so pervasive that democracy barely survives or simply dies. India as the world's largest democracy faces a trust deficit but opinion is divided on the survival of democracy. We argue that the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) may damage democracy in India.

Under NDA rule, persistent questioning of the survival of democracy has dominated the political discourse in recent years. Specifically, with the aggressive pursuit of Hindutva, unprovoked brutality against minorities, especially Muslims and Dalits, and heavy-handed suppression of the freedom of speech and press have undermined the trustworthiness of democracy. A related question is whether the loss of trust has reduced well-being. A third is whether these inferences are valid and whether India's democracy is at risk. With the national election looming in the horizon, these questions have high priority.

Transformation of the state
In a succinct exposition of how the Indian state has been transformed, Milan Vaishnav and Madhav Khosla (2021) focused on three manifestations: the ethnic state, the absolute state, and the opaque state. Although familiar individually, these add up to a robust critique of the NDA rule.

In 2019, an amendment of the Citizenship Act, 1955, declared that Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, and Parsis, who arrived in India from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh before 2014, could receive an expedited pathway to Indian citizenship. Muslims, however, were excluded. A serious failure of this Act is that it is limited to religious identity but not whether a person has suffered persecution. This violates the constitutional principle of secularism. Violent protesters

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were gunned down. A more compelling manifestation is the absolute state. An example is the dilution of Article 370 in August 2019 and the bifurcation of the State of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) into two Union Territories – J&K and Ladakh – largely under the Central government's jurisdiction. This violated the constitutional requirement that the Centre consult an affected State before redrawing its boundaries or changing its constitutional status. Data show that the number of militant deaths after 2019 in J&K is nearly double that of the relatively calmer years of 2011 to 2015. The number of forced Internet shutdowns peaked in 2020. Ironically, the Supreme Court upheld the dilution of Article 370.

The opacity of the state is instrumented by controlling the media, suppressing dissent, and withdrawing national surveys that raise concerns about rising economic distress and cast doubts on the exaggerated achievements of the government. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-5 was one such survey. Soon after its findings were published, the Director of the International Institute of Population Studies, the nodal agency to provide coordination and technical guidance to the NFHS, was suspended, and subsequently resigned. Similarly, the results of the National Sample Survey on consumption expenditure in 2017-18 were scrapped as leaked data revealed that the real monthly per capita expenditure had actually fallen.

Other shocks
Equally worrying are the shocks to democratic functioning of Parliament. In December, 146 MPs were suspended from Parliament after they demanded that the government, specifically the Home Minister, speak about the security breach in the Lok Sabha. Without these MPs, three draconian criminal Bills were passed.

Although these manifestations

Unless repressive and autocratic policies are reversed, the survival of democracy seems bleak

could be curbed by an independent judiciary, this has not happened, as was seen in the Supreme Court's ruling on Ayodhya and its rejection of a probe by a Special Investigation Team or the Central Bureau of Investigation of Adani's acts of malfeasance, in favour of the SEBI probe moving at a snail's pace.

Another critique points to damage of the economy and polity by the NDA, but also measures that partly offset the negative impact and likely impart short-term legitimacy. These include new welfare schemes for the poor – of which the Ujjwala scheme and the Swachh Bharat Mission have had the most significant impact – as well as continuing the most popular schemes of the Manmohan Singh-led governments for food distribution, rural employment, and affordable housing. Whether short-term legitimacy was accomplished is not self-evident as there were glaring shortfalls.

Life evaluation
None of these studies, however, focus on trust as the mediator between autocratic policies and survival of democracy. Trust in the NDA is high, presumably because of an overwhelming majority of Hindus in India, but declined between 2018 and 2021. Besides, our analysis, based on the Gallup World Poll Survey for India covering 2018-21, shows that the decline in trust reduced life evaluation. Specifically, a unit reduction in trust is associated with a 0.77 reduction in life evaluation. As income growth decelerated and food prices and unemployment rose, the political crisis deepened – a case in point is the failure to resolve the political crisis in Manipur. While some scholars are adamant that Indian democracy is already dead or dying, and others are cautious or uncertain, we believe that, unless these repressive and autocratic policies are reversed – a daunting challenge – the survival of democracy seems bleak.

A scheme that is bleeding hospitals dry

The Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhati has become a burden for the government

STATE OF PLAY

C. Maya

Public hospitals in Kerala are paying a heavy price for the State government's administrative inefficiency in running Ayushman Bharat-Karunya Arogya Suraksha Padhati (KASP), the health insurance scheme covering nearly 42 lakh families.

The scheme that wins Kerala laurels from the Union Health Ministry every year for providing free medical treatment to the maximum number of people is draining the State's coffers and leaving public hospitals severely short of funds. According to a statement by the government in the Assembly last week, it owes private and public hospitals ₹1,128.69 crore as reimbursement for free treatment given to KASP beneficiaries.

The State's finances have been in the red for several months now. Public hospitals have been experiencing an acute shortage of drugs, consumables, and implants such as stents, as pending payments running into hundreds of crores have forced pharma companies to stop all supplies to public hospitals. Private hospitals are exiting the scheme in the face of mounting bills that the government is yet to reimburse.

Earlier, public hospitals could tide over such exigencies by utilising a hospital development society's funds for the local purchase of drugs. But now, due to the fiscal crisis in the State and the overdues from the government under KASP, hospitals have no funds to purchase drugs or for development activities.

Superintendents of hospitals say they are helpless as patients are forced to buy medi-



cines from private outlets. Even the government's Karunya fair price medical shops do not have adequate stock.

According to the latest edition of National Health Accounts (2019-20), Kerala has the highest per capita out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPE) in the country at ₹7,206 despite being one of the States with the highest per capita government expenditure on health. KASP, a scheme meant to free people from the burden of healthcare expenditure, is now an indirect cause of increased OOPE in Kerala primarily because the government has not paid due diligence to the model of health financing it adopted. It also did little to ensure that the State Health Agency (SHA) had the necessary technical expertise to run KASP, or that there were adequate checks and balances.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's recent audit report on Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) pointed out that KASP was being run by SHA without proper medical, death, or claim audits and no financial discipline, resulting in huge cost overruns and a high rate of overdue claims.

Kerala had been efficiently running its own health financing schemes, inclusive of good tertiary care packages too, in the insurance mode since 2008 through its own agency, the Comprehensive Health In-

surance Agency of Kerala. AB-PMJAY was launched by the Centre in 2018. When the State chose to re-launch KASP in alignment with AB-PMJAY in 2019, there was concern that given the low share of the Centre, Kerala would end up paying a huge premium, especially because of its high morbidity burden and strong health-seeking behaviour.

Kerala's troubles with KASP began in 2020 when the government agreed to SHA's proposal to move the scheme from the insurance mode to the trust/assurance mode.

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Public health experts point out that the problem is not with KASP as such, but the unprofessional manner in which SHA is running the scheme. A robust claims monitoring mechanism, a high level of technical expertise, and financial discipline are necessary to run any health insurance scheme in a sustainable manner.

Kerala had been efficiently running its own health financing schemes, inclusive of good tertiary care packages too, in the insurance mode since 2008 through its own agency, the Comprehensive Health In-

Confidence in the economy just shy of pre-pandemic levels

Over 40% feel the economic situation is worse, with a similar share pessimistic about employment scenario

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

The share of urban consumers who were pessimistic about the Indian economy continued to decline in January 2024, with less than half of them saying the economic situation has worsened compared to a year ago.

Chart 1A shows the responses from a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) survey conducted across 19 major cities between January 2 and 11. When asked to comment on their current perception about the economic situation, 40.2% said it has worsened. This is the lowest share since the pandemic outbreak. The share was mostly similar to the 37.5% who said the economic situation has improved (not plotted on the graph). These levels are much closer to the figures before the pandemic.

Chart 1B shows that 41.3% of the respondents were pessimistic about their current employment scenario. Notably, since November 2022 the share has remained below the 50% mark. Due to the economic slowdown in 2019 and the pandemic that followed, a majority had remained pessimistic since July 2019, but that has changed.

Chart 1C shows that 22.1% of the respondents were pessimistic about their current income levels. This is the lowest share since the pandemic outbreak, and is only marginally higher than the pre-pandemic levels.

Worryingly, over 90% of the respondents continued to say that the price levels of commodities have increased (**Chart 1D**). This share has remained above the 90% mark for three years now.

Optimism among consumers is now almost touching pre-pandemic levels as the degree of pessimism about the economy, jobs, and income levels has declined. High prices, though, are still a sore point.

Chart 2 shows the growth in

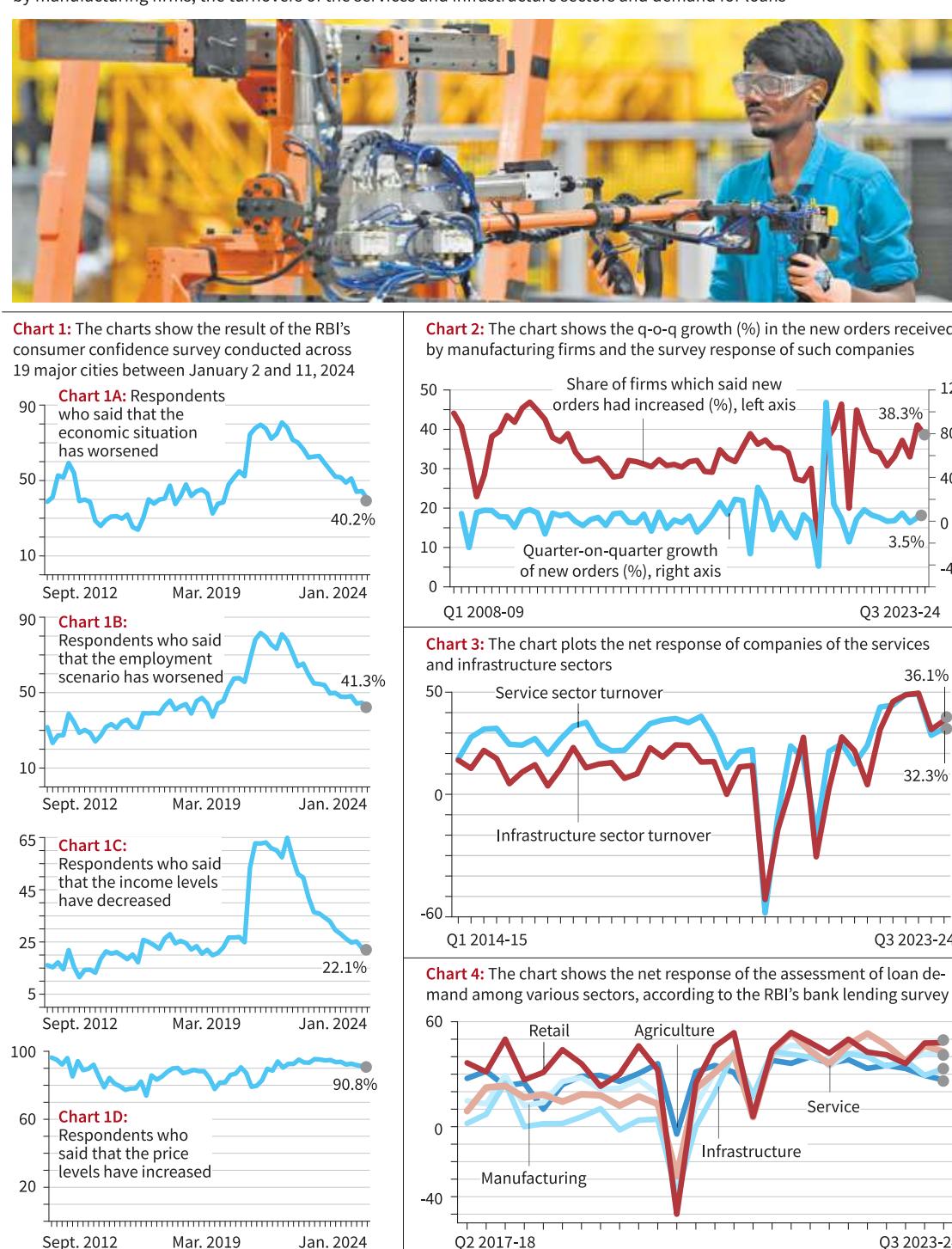
new orders received by 803 manufacturing companies surveyed by the RBI. The quarter-on-quarter growth of new orders received turned positive in Q2FY24 (July-September 2023) after being in the negative in Q2FY23. Chart 2 also shows the response of a survey conducted in 1,040 manufacturing firms about their order books. It shows the share who said new orders increased. Close to 38% of companies said their order books increased in the latest quarter.

Chart 3 shows the results of the RBI's survey that captures the growth in the services and infrastructure sectors. The latest data are for October-December 2023. In the survey, 528 companies were asked to comment on their turnover. The chart plots the net response – the difference between those who said it increased and those who said it decreased. A positive number points to a higher share of companies recording an increase in turnover and vice-versa. In the latest period, 48.2% of service sector companies reported that their turnovers increased, 35.9% reported that there was no change, and 15.9% said their turnovers decreased. So, the net response was +32.3% points. The chart hints at a recovery in the turnover of both the service and infrastructure sectors after a decline in July to September 2023. However, if compared to the year-ago period (October-December 2022), the numbers are inferior.

Chart 4 plots the results of the RBI's quarterly bank lending survey. Senior loan officers were asked to assess loan demand. The latest data are for October-December 2023. The chart shows the net response. The demand for loans in agriculture continued its downturn, while demand in the infrastructure sector was also poor. As has been the case for a while now, demand for retail loans continued to grow at a faster pace, while demand for loans in the manufacturing and service sectors were middling.

Recovery tracker

The charts are based on data collated from various surveys conducted by the RBI on consumer confidence, orders received by manufacturing firms, the turnovers of the services and infrastructure sectors and demand for loans



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 15, 1974

U.S., U.K. offer to Solzhenitsyn

Washington, Feb. 14: The U.S. Secretary of State, Dr. Henry Kissinger, told newsmen yesterday that the Soviet writer, Mr. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was deported to West Germany, would be welcome in the United States if he wished to take up residence.

Dr. Kissinger said he was afraid American reactions to the expulsion of the writer could affect the U.S. Government's freedom to carry out detente policies with the Soviet Union.

The British Prime Minister, Mr. Edward Heath, yesterday invited Mr. Solzhenitsyn to come to Britain if he wanted.

Meanwhile, Mr. Solzhenitsyn said last night that he was held in a Moscow prison before being deported to West Germany. In a brief statement to reporters after his arrival at the week-end retreat of the German Nobel Prize winner, Mr. Heinrich Boell, Mr. Solzhenitsyn said he had no previous information that he would be taken to West Germany.

After making his statement to more than 100 reporters and television cameramen, he smiled broadly and waved both his hands, clasped together, like a prize-winning boxer.

Police then put barriers across the gateway leading to the yard of Mr. Boell's 19th century farm house.

Mrs. Solzhenitsyn said in Moscow to-day that she had still not received any official word of the action against her husband and could not speak of her plans. She said yesterday that her intention was to be with her husband but did not say how or when it would be accomplished.

The official announcement had said that Mr. Solzhenitsyn's family could join him. - Reuter.

UPI reports: The German writer, Mr. Boell told newsmen to-day that Mr. Solzhenitsyn would probably set off somewhere other than West Germany but had yet to decide where to go.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 15, 1924

Water power in Bombay

Bombay, Feb. 14: According to the recommendations of the Indian Industrial Commission, the water power possibilities of the Bombay Presidency were surveyed by Mr. P.L. Bowers whose report just issued shows there are eighteen schemes worth detailed investigations.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Defence Ministry signs deal with firm for remote control guns

1,752 in ₹ crore. The Ministry of Defence signed a contract with Advanced Weapon Equipment India Limited, Kanpur for the manufacturing and supply of 463 indigenously built 12.7 mm stabilised remote control guns. PTI

Wholesale price index-based inflation eases in January

0.27 in percentage. The wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation eased to a three-month low in January, due to the moderation of food prices. In January 2023, it was at 4.8%. and in December 2023 it was 0.73%. PTI

The MPs to get a Rajya Sabha renomination from the BJP

4 There are 28 outgoing BJP Members of Parliament (MPs) from the Rajya Sabha. Many BJP leaders, including seven Union ministers such as Bhupender Yadav, have not been renominated amid strong indications that many may contest the Lok Sabha elections. PTI

Number of children born in West Bengal jail in last four years

62 Most of the women inmates who gave birth were pregnant when brought to prison, the Supreme Court has been informed. The apex court had taken note of the allegation about women prisoners in West Bengal getting pregnant while in custody. PTI

The number of Indians deported by the Maldives

43 The Maldives has deported 186 foreigners in total, after accusing them of crimes like visa violations and drug offences, according to Male-based news outlet Adhadhu. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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The illusion of change in Pakistan

While the election results may favour Imran Khan and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, the Establishment will have its way again, holding the turf and encouraging the formation and functioning of a unified government

WORLD INSIGHT

D. Suba Chandran

The story so far:

Pakistan's recent election was considered a crucial one that would lead to a stable government with a clear mandate, end political instability, and start a process of political healing at the national level, especially in Punjab. The Establishment (the military-dominated deep state) expected the elections would end the Imran revolt and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) experiment. People expected the election process, polling and the final announcement to be free, fair and transparent. The 2024 elections were anything but the above.

According to the results of the National Assembly, the PTI-backed independent candidates have won 93 seats, followed by the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) (75), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) (54), the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)-P (17) and the rest by smaller parties and independents. The PML-N, PPP and MQM-P may gain a few more reserved seats (60 for women and 10 for minorities) depending on the seats they have won. Unfortunately for the PTI, it would not get that share, as its candidates contested as independents. What do the above numbers mean for the Parliament and national politics?

The vote belongs to Imran Khan
The first key takeaway from the elections is that the vote belongs to the PTI and Mr. Khan, even though the party did not have a level playing field. Mr. Khan has been arrested and charged with numerous cases and just before the elections, two court verdicts barred him from contesting in elections. The Establishment, pursuing methods to discipline Mr. Khan for the May 9 riots in 2023, forced most of the second-rung PTI leaders to leave the party. In Punjab, Jahangir Tareen launched the Istehtam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) to dent the PTI's presence in Pakistan's largest province. Similarly, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) region, Pervez Khattak, another confidant of Mr. Khan and PTI's former defence minister, formed a faction. In a final blow, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) debarred the PTI from contesting as a party (on the pretext of the party's failure to hold intra-party elections), and removed the "bat" symbol. With most of his trusted lieutenants leaving, multiple cases charged against him, and he himself incarcerated, it was an arduous task for Mr. Khan to find candidates to contest, keep up morale and ask his cadres to vote.

Despite all the above odds, the PTI-backed candidates won 93 seats for the National Assembly, 18 more than the PML-N. The PTI has secured over half of these seats from Punjab (around 50), supposedly the PML-N's home ground. In KP also, the PTI has swept, with other political parties securing seats in single digits. Though the PTI may not form the government, the 2024 election clearly belongs to Mr. Khan and the party.

What the Establishment wants, it gets
The election results should see the Establishment's best-laid plans crashing. The mandate is clearly against what it wanted. Many in Pakistan consider the pro-Imran vote as that against the Establishment. The Establishment would have wanted the PML-N to win, especially in Punjab, and expected its pre-election political engineering to dent the widespread support for Mr. Khan and the



In limbo: A banner with a picture of the former Prime Minister Imran Khan outside the party office of PTI, in Lahore, Pakistan, on February 9. REUTERS

PTI. However, both these things have not happened.

This brings us to the second factor of these elections – that the Establishment will still call the shots. Ironically, it should still be happy that the PML-N has no absolute majority and has to work on a coalition to form the government in Islamabad and Lahore. An element of political instability will work in the Establishment's favour. Whether the vote is what is wanted, or against its plan, the Establishment will continue its political engineering. And political parties will fall in line; those who refuse, will face the wall and the jails, as Mr. Khan's case shows us.

Nawaz's diminishing returns
The third aspect of the elections is the Nawaz factor, or rather the lack of it. Nawaz Sharif came back to Pakistan on the Establishment's approval. The plan was that Mr. Sharif's return would increase the PML-N's chances and dent PTI's, especially in Punjab. However, the return of Mr. Sharif has not catapulted the PML-N back into the driver's seat – either at the national level or in Punjab. Except for a few seats in Balochistan and KP, most of the seats won by the PML-N come from Punjab. Even in Punjab, the PTI has won almost equal seats for the national and provincial assemblies. The PML-N will be unable to form a government in Punjab without the others' support. At the national level, discounting the reserved seats, the PML-N had won only ten more seats in 2024, vis-à-vis the 2018 elections.

While one could understand the PML-N's performance in the 2018 elections with Mr. Sharif exiled and the Establishment favouring Mr. Khan then, its 2024 performance, especially in Punjab, needs introspection. Compare it with the PTI and PPP, both of which have their home turfs – the KP and Sindh –

intact and are likely to form a government independently in these two provinces.

Continuing political instability

The fourth takeaway is that the political instability of 2023 will continue into 2024. During 2021-22, the PML-N and PPP came together with a few other parties to form the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to overthrow the PTI government. Eventually, the coalition overthrew Mr. Khan's government in April 2022, resulting in Shehbaz Sharif becoming the Prime Minister, with support from the PPM and others. The PTI took to the streets against the PDM, creating political instability in Pakistan.

However, the situation hasn't changed much. Now the PPP and PML-N have agreed to form a government at the national level, along with other political parties minus the PTI. The outcome of this deal, looks more like PDM 2.0. The PTI, the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and a few other regional parties have already announced filing cases in courts, renouncing the results, and taking to the streets.

Eventually, the Courts will have to interfere in cases on the election results.

With the PML-N and PPP in government, PTI in the streets, cases in the courts, and the Establishment to decide a unified government, it is not just PDM 2.0, it will be 2023 2.0, a continuation of the political instability of 2023.

The fifth factor is regarding provinces. In KP and Sindh, there is clarity in verdict. People have voted for Mr. Khan and the PTI in KP. Similarly, in Sindh, the PPP has swept the province for national and provincial assembly seats, while MQM-P has retained its stronghold in Karachi. Balochistan, as usual, has seen mixed results, with no single party having substantial numbers – both for the national and provincial assemblies. For

the provincial assembly, the PPP and JUI-F have secured 11 seats each, followed by the PML-N (10), PTI-backed independents (6) and others (13). Regional parties have been protesting against the results on charges of rigging.

Regional parties losing relevance

Sixth is the curious case of regional and religious political parties in the 2024 elections. At the national level, except for the MQM-P (14 seats for the national assembly and 28 for the Sindh provincial assembly), no other regional party from the Sindh, Balochistan and KP have made an impact. The Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan National Party (BNP), and others from the three provinces have made little or no impact. The PML-Q from Punjab could win only three for the national assembly.

Equally important is the case of religious political parties – JI, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and the newly formed Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). The JI could not win a single seat for the national assembly; its emir – Sairajul Haq, taking responsibility has announced his resignation. The JUI-F has survived with a few seats for the national assembly (03), and a few for the provincial assemblies of KP and Balochistan. The TLP could secure only one seat – that too for the provincial assembly from Punjab. Therefore, for the time being, both regional and religious parties (perhaps except the MQM), are likely to remain provincial.

To conclude, the Establishment will hold the turf. Despite the PTI-backed candidates gaining more seats, a cursory overview of the elections will reveal the same at both the national and provincial level.

D. Suba Chandran is a Professor and Dean at the National Institute of Advanced Studies at Bengaluru and coordinates "Pakistan Reader" at NIAS.

THE GIST

The first key takeaway from the Pakistan elections is that the vote belongs to the PTI and Mr. Khan, even though the party did not have a level playing field.

Despite the odds, the PTI-backed candidates won 93 seats for the National Assembly, 18 more than the PML-N. The PTI has secured over half of these seats from Punjab (around 50), supposedly the PML-N's home ground.

However, whether the vote is against its plan or not, the Establishment will continue its political engineering. And political parties will fall in line; those who refuse, will face the wall and the jails, as Mr. Khan's case shows us.

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Clamping down: People protest against the arrest of NewsClick's editor-in-chief Prabir Purkayastha and Amit Chakravarty on October 5, 2023 in Bengaluru, India. GETTY IMAGES



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian

"Ms. A. Swarnalatha, Bhopal, wants to know the difference between 'emergence' and 'emergency'."

"'Emerge' means 'to come out or appear from inside or from being hidden'.

From the enquiry, it emerged that he was the murderer.

He emerged as a great novelist at the age of 20.

'Emergence' means 'action of emerging'.

His emergence as a leader was totally unexpected.

'Emergency' means 'an unexpected and dangerous happening which must be dealt with at once'.

You must take the patient to the emergency ward.

In case of fire, you must all leave through the emergency exit.

When there was breakdown in law and order, the government declared a state of emergency.

'Emergent' means 'in the early state of existence or development'.

A lot of assistance must be given to the emergent nations of Africa.

"Mr. T. Balakrishnan wants to know the meaning of 'have the last laugh'."

"To have the last laugh" means "to win an argument after earlier defeats". Others may laugh at a person when he fails once or several times. He will laugh when he finally succeeds. This phrase became popularised in 1937 with the publication of the song 'They All Laughed' by George and Ira Gershwin:

They all laughed at us and how!

But Ho. Ho, Ho!

Who's got the last laugh now?

Similar expressions are: He who laughs last laughs best. He laughs best that laughs last."

"Ms Sumathi Prasanth, TM Maistry Street, Tiruvannamalai, Madras, wants to know the meaning of 'baker's dozen'."

"A baker's dozen is thirteen. When heavy penalty was levied against bakers who cheated their customers by selling lightweight bread, bakers gave one loaf extra to avoid heavy fines. This was in the 17th century England. An extra loaf was given to be on the safe side. 'To give one a baker's dozen' is an idiom which means 'to give one a sound thrashing, to give one all the thrashing he deserves and one stroke more'.

He was mad at his behaviour and gave him a baker's dozen.

This idiom is rarely used these days."

"Ms Sunita Nandalan and Ms Savita Nandalan, Manikpur, Thane district, want to know the difference between 'compel' and 'impel'."

"'Compel' means 'to make a person or thing do something by force, on oral persuasion, or orders that must be obeyed'.

He was compelled to do it.

"'Impel' means '(especially of an idea, feeling, etc.) to drive someone to take action. 'Impel' has generally the connotation of inner compulsion'.

I was impelled to go and seek his advice.

Nobody compelled me to do it.

I was impelled to do it.

Published in The Hindu on February 12, 1991.

Emergency, then and now: the long reach of unbridled power

As is clear in the case of Prabir Purkayastha, Fahad Shah, Aala Fazili and scores of others, mere acts of dissent are leading to arrest under stringent laws. India may not be under a declared Emergency now, but it feels like 1975 all over again

Srinivasan Ramani

It has been more than 126 years since the famous "open letter" titled, "J'accuse" by journalist and writer Emile Zola was published in the newspaper *L'Aurore* on its front page which pointed to the unlawful arrest of French Army General Staff officer Alfred Dreyfus over trumped up charges of espionage. Zola was later prosecuted for libel and had to flee to England to avoid being arrested.

The letter, the article and Zola still serve as inspiration to those committed to question the all-powerful state in its demonising of dissent and its use of power to browbeat and punish those who are critical of it.

Just last Tuesday, a telling statistic was released by the government. As many as 5,023 cases of sedition were filed between 2018 and 2022 under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. If trends from 2018 to 2020 are considered – of the 4,690 people arrested, only 149 were convicted – a case can be made that this was less for prosecution for the said crime and more persecution and this trend extended to the next two years. We use the term "persecution" because getting bail for cases filed under the UAPA is enormously difficult.

Draconian provisions

Take the example of Fahad Shah, editor of the website 'Kashmir Walla', who was not only granted bail but cases against whom were set aside by the Jammu and Kashmir High Court in November 2023. He was in custody after charges were framed under many offences including the UAPA. Shah and another scholar, Aala Fazili, were booked under the UAPA in a "narrative terrorism" case which alleged that a write-up they came up with in 2011 was aimed at "spreading terrorism and creating a false narrative".

The J&K High Court tore the case apart, observing that there was no material to suggest that "the article has any content

that provokes people to take arms and resort to violence". It also made observations on how UAPA was being applied and made remarks on the need for circumspection by agencies of the state when enforcing this provision.

It was not uncommon for the British colonial state to arrest dissidents, even members of the press, who were critical of it in India. That several prominent Indian public figures who were subject to this harassment were also connected to the freedom movement, led to the reasonable "freedom of expression" being guaranteed in India's constitution and also undergirded press and media freedoms. But these came under the severest threat during the Emergency.

The turning point

Quite a few books have been written about the Emergency, but a fairly recent one deserves mention. Gyan Prakash's *Emergency Chronicles: Indira Gandhi and Democracy's Turning Point*, published in 2019, drew from archival records, published material, films and interviews to capture the political crisis in Indian democracy that led to the Emergency. The book sets itself apart by not looking at Emergency as an anomaly in India's post-Independence democratic history, but links it to the dynamics of India's popular democracy as it played itself out since Independence. It makes the case that the Emergency marked a turning point in India's political history, eventually paving the way for caste politics and the rise of Hindutva.

Interestingly, the book begins with the ordeal faced by a then Left student activist in Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Prabir Purkayastha, during the Emergency, on September 25, 1975. He was "abducted" by the Delhi Police in what was a case of mistaken identity – the police had set out to arrest the then JNU Students Union President Devi Prasad Tripathi after receiving a complaint from no less than Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi.

His wife, Maneka, was a student at the School of Languages at JNU and when she had gone to attend classes the same day, she was asked by the student union leaders to boycott classes in protest against the Emergency. Despite the Additional Division Magistrate initially declining to issue a warrant for this "arrest", the then Lieutenant Governor instructed him to issue a warrant because the issue involved the "PM's house". This led to the arrest and incarceration of Prabir Purkayastha for over a year, under the draconian Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), first in Delhi's Tihar Central Jail and then in Agra where he spent nearly a month in solitary confinement.

Remembering the ordeal

Prabir recalls this ordeal in greater detail and goes on to recount the days spent in jail during the Emergency in his memoir, *Keeping up the Good Fight* that was published recently. After his release from jail, Prabir went on to become a successful power engineer while also wearing several hats as a publicly minded Left activist.

He was one of the founder-members of the Delhi Science Forum, which among other things played a vital role in promoting science and rationality besides taking up causes such as compensation for the victims of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, and intervening in public debates on science and technology policy. He was recently chair of Knowledge Commons, a body dedicated to promoting the dissemination of knowledge beyond intellectual property, and played a vital role in the Free Software Movement of India, an organisation that promotes the use and implementation of free and open source software in the country. Prabir is also founder and editor-in-chief of the alternate news and analysis website, Newsclick.in.

In jail, again

Ironically, today Prabir is in jail again. He

has been arrested, just like the journalist Fahad Shah was, on UAPA charges for his work in *NewsClick* after the organisation was subjected to several raids and searches in the last three years for alleged offences related to its funding.

Despite getting relief from a lower court and the Delhi High Court on matters related to the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax department, *NewsClick* was subject to a whole set of fresh allegations related to a "terror case with Chinese links".

An editorial in *The Hindu* called the FIR registered by the Delhi police as a "vague amalgam of sweeping accusations that do not actually disclose any offence, leave alone one of terrorism". Yet, Prabir is still in detention under the UAPA, as he awaits judicial hearing on the case.

As Prabir's case and that of a score of others who have been booked under draconian laws for their mere acts of dissent recently shows, India might not be under an Emergency today, but the situation faced by dissenters and activists, specifically those opposed to religious fundamentalism today is not any dissimilar.

As Gyan Prakash points out in his book, today's regime, "supported by ground troops, which Indira [Gandhi's] Emergency rule never enjoyed, and a largely compliant and corporatised electronic media, which did not exist in 1975-77... enjoys unprecedented power. It is equipped with the powers of the administrative state, including the law against sedition under the British-era Section 124A, preventive detention, and the Armed Forces Special Powers Act for use in the so-called 'disturbed' areas... Today, there is no formal declaration of Emergency, no press censorship, no lawful suspension of the law... Today, the courts, the press, and political parties do not face repression. But they appear unable or unwilling to function as the gatekeepers of democracy in the face of state power spiked with Hindu populist resentment."

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

India has several traditional games and sports, most of which have been played for thousands of years. Here is a quiz on some of them

Venkataraghavan Srinivasan**QUESTION 1**

What is the primary objective for the participants in *Jallikattu*?

QUESTION 2

The ancient Indian sport "Mallakhamb" combines gymnastics and martial arts. What is the apparatus used in Mallakhamb primarily made of?

QUESTION 3

A popular board game in India, Pachisi is believed to be the predecessor to which modern board game?

QUESTION 4

Modern Polo is believed to have originated in Manipur. What was the original name of Polo in ancient India?

QUESTION 5

Known for its unique chase and dodge style, in Kho-Kho, how many players from each team are on the field during a match?

**Visual question:**

Identify this sport. MURALI KUMAR. K

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. A fatwa ordering the execution of this writer was issued by the Supreme Leader of Iran, for this book, in 1989. **Ans: Salman Rushdie; The Satanic Verses**

2. On February 14, 2018, this South African politician tendered his resignation over corruption allegations. **Ans: Jacob Zuma**

3. This social media platform was launched in 2005 by these three former employees of PayPal. **Ans: YouTube launched by Steve Chen, Chad Hurley, and Jawed Karim**

4. Gregory Hines is known for this. **Ans: Tap dancing**

5. This English economist is known for his theory that said the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man. **Ans: Thomas Robert Malthus**

Visual: Identify this film, the actor and his character.

Ans: The Silence of the Lambs; Anthony Hopkins plays Dr. Hannibal Lecter

Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Rajmohan. V| Prashant Nain| Varun Gautam| Sahil Tukdi

Word of the day

Pedagogy:

the principles and methods of instruction; the profession of a teacher; the activities of educating or instructing; activities that impart knowledge or skill

Synonyms: instruction, teaching, education, didactics

Usage: The school modelled its pedagogy on his expertise.

Pronunciation: bit.ly/pedagogypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /pedəgojēz/

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

From Page One**Farmers' issue: Centre calls for talks yet again**

Haryana Director General of Police Shatrughan Kapoor said Section 144 had been imposed in 15 districts of the State. Considering the present situation, 64 companies of paramilitary forces and 50 companies of the Haryana Police were deployed, he added.

The Kisan Mazdoor Morcha and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) – the two umbrella bodies of around 200 farmers and farm labourer unions – had given the call for the 'Delhi Chalo' march.

Hospitals on alert

Meanwhile, in Punjab, all hospitals adjoining the Haryana boundary have been put on high alert, and emergency services are being provided 24x7. Punjab Health and Family Welfare Minister Balbir Singh said at least 40 injured were admitted to the Rajpura civil hospital; two of them had sustained serious head injuries and were undergoing treatment.

He condemned the Haryana government for "unprovoked police action at protesting farmers". Mr. Singh said the Haryana government had no right to stop farmers who were peacefully heading to Delhi to hold protests. "National highway is the property of nation and farmers were just [going] to pass from Haryana's jurisdiction to reach Delhi," he said, terming the actions of the government unconstitutional and illegal. The Minister urged the BJP-led Haryana government to let the farmers reach the national capital.

Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij blamed the Punjab government for intending to create chaos in Delhi by not making any effort to stop farmers. "When these groups [farmers] marched from Amritsar, the Punjab government did not make any effort to stop them anywhere on the way. This means they want to create chaos in Delhi," he said in a statement.

Coming in support of the ongoing protest, the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ugrahan), one of the largest outfits in Punjab, announced it would block rail traffic at seven places in Punjab on Thursday from noon to 4 p.m.

Chavan, Murugan in BJP's Rajya Sabha list

Given that the BJD could have secured a third seat from Odisha, this move is politically intriguing; in a statement, the party said its decision was meant to benefit Odisha in the fields of railways and information technology, both portfolios held by Mr. Vaishnav.

The move has triggered speculation that it may soften the Odisha BJP's confrontational stance towards the BJD-led government headed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, especially with simultaneous State and general elections on the horizon.

The Congress, now diminished to a non-entity in the State, has started pushing a narrative that the BJD and BJP are two sides of the same coin.

From Gujarat, apart from Mr. Nadda, the BJP has also fielded diamond baron Govindbhai Dholakia, owner of Sri Krishna Exports, one of the largest diamond companies in Surat. He is also a philanthropist and has built over 250 Hanuman temples in the tribal region of Dangs in southern Gujarat. Local media reports say that he had also given an individual donation of ₹11 crores for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

The other two candidates picked by the BJP from Gujarat are Jaswantsinh Parmar, a doctor from Godhra, and Mayank Nayak from Patan in north Gujarat. Both are considered other backward class (OBC) representatives, with Mr. Nayak being the former chairman of the Gujarat BJP's OBC Morcha.

Mr. Murugan's nomination from M.P. points to his proximity to the BJP high command, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi having attended Pongal celebrations at the Minister's residence.

Congress old-timers, loyalists in the fray

The Delhi Congress leader was appointed treasurer in October last year, after spending several months in the woods following his resignation as party general secretary in charge of Rajasthan.

The other two Karnataka nominees are, however, from the State. Rajya Sabha MP Syed Naseer Hussain, who is part of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's office, has been renominated. A former JNU Students' Union president, Mr. Hussain was suspended thrice during his last Rajya Sabha stint, for protesting against the Narendra Modi-led government on various issues. Another sitting MP to get a renomination is G.C. Chandrashekhar.

Kamal Nath ignored

In Madhya Pradesh, where the Congress can win one of five vacancies, the party has ignored the claims of former State Congress chief Kamal Nath and instead fielded Ashok Singh, an Other Backward Class (OBC) leader from Gwalior.

Mr. Nath's recent meeting with Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi in Delhi had fuelled rumours that he was looking for an RS berth.

In Telangana, the party has nominated another Gandhi family loyalist Renuka Chowdhury, along with M. Anil Kumar Yadav.

In Himachal Pradesh, the party has fielded Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who is retiring in April.

Shinde-led Shiv Sena nominates Deora for RS

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

The Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena on Wednesday announced Milind Deora, a former Congress leader and Union Minister, as its candidate for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, according to party sources.

Mr. Deora, who joined the Shiv Sena in January, has previously served as a two-time Lok Sabha MP from Mumbai South. He is likely to file the nomination on Thursday.

Son of the late Murli Deora, the 47-year-old stood out as one of India's youngest MPs and was known to be a member of 'Team Rahul Gandhi', a collective of young leaders, including Jyotiraditya Scindia, R.P.N. Singh, Jitin Prasada, and Sachin Pilot. Except for Mr. Pilot, all of them have switched allegiances to begin new innings in other parties.

The Shiv Sena is the BJP's ally in the western State and Mr. Deora's entry provided the party with a much-needed affable figure, boasting strong ties with business leaders and Delhi's political circles.

Sonia files nomination for RS polls from Rajasthan

This will be the Congress leader's first term in the Upper House of Parliament after serving five terms as a Lok Sabha member; Gehlot terms candidature as a 'matter of happiness' for the State

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson and former party president Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday filed her nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha elections from Rajasthan.

The polls will be held for three seats from the State on February 27.

The Opposition Congress is comfortably placed to win one of the three seats for the Upper House, while the ruling BJP is set to get the other two based on its strength in the Assembly. The BJP has already announced its candidates for two seats.

Bevy of leaders

Ms. Gandhi arrived at the Sanganer airport here on Wednesday and went to the Assembly to file the papers. Former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot, Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Vadra, Pradesh Congress Committee president Govind Singh



New innings: Congress leader Sonia Gandhi files her nomination for the Rajya Sabha election in Jaipur on Tuesday. Party leaders Ashok Gehlot and Govind Singh Dotsara are also present. ANI

Dotsara, and Leader of the Opposition Tika Ram Jolly accompanied Ms. Gandhi.

Four sets of nomination papers, proposed and seconded by the Congress MLAs, were submitted to Election Officer and Assembly Secretary Mahavir Prasad Sharma. Ms. Gandhi met the party MLAs in the Opposition lobby of the Assembly before filing the papers.

There are 10 Rajya Sabha seats from Rajasthan,

out of which six are with the Congress and four with the BJP. Two seats are falling vacant on the retirement of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Union Minister and BJP leader Bhupender Yadav on April 3, while the third fell vacant after the resignation of the BJP's Kiran Lal Meena following his victory in the 2023 Assembly election.

This will be Ms. Gandhi's first term in the Rajya Sabha after serving five terms as a Lok Sabha Member.

Mr. Gehlot, 77, who was first elected as an MP from Uttar Pradesh's Amethi in 1999 after taking over as the Congress president, now represents Rae Bareli in the Lok Sabha.

A matter of happiness' Mr. Gehlot said Ms. Gandhi's candidature from Rajasthan was a "matter of happiness" for the State, as she was heartily connected with Rajasthan and had protected the interests of the State in the past. "During the UPA government, Soniaji, as the National Advisory Council chairperson, helped in bringing big projects such as refinery and metro train to Rajasthan and ensured cooperation from the Centre," Mr. Gehlot said in a post on X.

When Rajasthan faced drought four times during his first tenure as the Chief Minister, Ms. Gandhi visited many districts to take stock of the relief work, Mr. Gehlot added.

Tejashwi's political adviser gets RS ticket

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Three candidates of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) – Sanjay Jha of the Janata Dal (United) and Bhim Singh and Dharmshila Gupta of the BJP – filed their nomination for the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Akhilesh Prasad Singh of the Congress also filed the nomination whereas Manoj Jha and Sanjay Yadav of the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) will file the papers on Thursday.

Out of the six, the most interesting face is Mr. Sanjay Yadav – currently serving as political adviser to Tejashwi Yadav, former Deputy Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly. The man from Haryana has been working with Mr. Tejashwi Yadav since 2011 and is known as the brain behind many strategies of the RJD.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Sanjay Yadav said: "I am thankful to party chief Lalu Prasad ji and Tejashwi Yadav ji for giving me this opportunity and showing trust in me."

BJP got 90% of all corporate donations in 2022-23: report

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Getting richer: The BJP received ₹610.49 crore, while the Congress got ₹55.62 crore.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received nearly 90% of corporate donations worth ₹680.49 crore that five national parties together gathered in 2022-23, according to a report by election watchdog Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR).

The report focuses on donations above ₹20,000 received by the national political parties in the 2022-23 financial year, as per details submitted by them to the Election Commission.

These parties are the BJP, the Congress, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)], and the National Peopple's Party (NPP).

The last date for submission of contribution reports for the parties was September 30, 2023.

The total donations de-

clared by the national parties for 2022-23 stood at ₹850.438 crore. The BJP received ₹719.85 crore and the Congress ₹79.92 crore.

The donations declared by the BJP are more than five times the aggregate declared by the other parties together.

The BSP declared that it did not receive any donations above ₹20,000 during this period.

The total donations received by the national parties in 2022-23 increased by ₹91.70 crore, a rise of

12.09% from the previous financial year.

Congress sees dip

The donations received by the BJP increased from ₹614.62 crore in 2021-22 to ₹719.85 crore in 2022-23. On the other hand, the donations to Congress decreased from ₹95.45 crore in 2021-22 to ₹79.92 crore in 2022-23.

A total of ₹276.20 crore was donated to the national parties from Delhi, followed by ₹160.50 crore from Gujarat and ₹96.27 crore from Maharashtra.

Donations to the national parties made by the corporate or business sector amounted to ₹680.49 crore - 80.01% of total donations - out of which the BJP received ₹610.49 crore, while the Congress got ₹55.62 crore.

The BJP's ₹610.49 crore was more than eight times the total amount of ₹70 crore of corporate donations declared by all other national parties in 2022-23.

"The actions of the MIB [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting] gravely infringes the freedom of the Press, which has seen a serious slide in the past few years," the Press Club further said.

Press Club urges govt. to revoke order on magazine

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Press Club of India on Wednesday expressed concern over the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry's direction to the *The Caravan* magazine to take down a story it had published on the Army's alleged "torture and murder of civilians in Jammu".

The story titled 'Screams from the Army Post' has been taken down because of the Ministry's order issued under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act and the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021.

"The actions of the MIB [Ministry of Information and Broadcasting] gravely infringes the freedom of the Press, which has seen a serious slide in the past few years," the Press Club further said.

IN BRIEF**Modi, Shah, Rahul pay tribute to Pulwama attack victims**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday joined the country's top leaders in paying tributes to the 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawans who died in a deadly terror attack on this day in 2019 in Pulwama. "I pay homage to the brave heroes who were martyred in Pulwama. Their service and sacrifice for our nation will always be remembered," Mr. Modi said. Other senior leaders, including External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju and Rajeev Chandrasekhar also paid tributes.

Pakistan Rangers opened fire on Jammu border, says BSF

The Border Security Force (BSF) on Wednesday accused the Pakistan Rangers of resorting to unprovoked firing along the International Border in Jammu's R.S. Pura area. A BSF spokesperson said the unprovoked firing took place at 5.50 p.m. "It was befittingly responded to by BSF troops. Firing stopped at about 6.15 p.m. Troops are on high alert," BSF said, adding there were no reports of casualties in the incident.

SC collegium recommends transfer of Kerala HC judge

The Supreme Court collegium recommended the transfer of Justice Anu Sivaraman of the Kerala High Court to the Karnataka High Court. The judge had, in October last year, sought a transfer from the court. The collegium said in its order that it acceded to the request and resolved to recommend that the judge be transferred, in the interests of better administration of justice, to the High Court of Karnataka.

ED arrests 3 people for terror financing, money laundering

Three locals allegedly involved in the admission of Kashmiri students in Pakistani medical colleges were arrested in Srinagar, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) said on Wednesday. An ED spokesman identified the arrested persons as Mohammad Akbar Bhat, from Srinagar, Fatima Shah from Srinagar and Sabzar Ahmad Shaikh from Anantnag. They were arrested under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and the money they received was being used for terrorist activities.

Congress leaders listen to the woes of MGNREGS workers in Jharkhand

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Common cause: Workers raised four points: not getting enough work, problems with marking attendance, delay in wage payment, and lack of any delay in compensation and social audits. FILE PHOTO

Workers of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) have demanded that the Congress include a minimum wage of ₹500 in its election manifesto.

The MGNREGS workers were speaking at a *Jan Sunwai* or public hearing programme held as part of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Garhwa district of Jharkhand.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi who is leading the yatra was scheduled to be present, but could not participate since he travelled with his mother Sonia Gandhi to Jaipur to file her nomination papers. The Congress was represented by former Union Rural Development Minister and party general se-

cretary Jairam Ramesh, and CWC member Kanhaiya Kumar.

Issues with the scheme In an open discussion on the shortcomings of the programme and various impediments, workers broadly raised four points: not getting enough work, problems with marking attendance, delay in payment of wages and lack of any delay compensation and lack of social audits.

The workers also showcased the importance of the programme in their daily lives, including assets like community wells & ponds they have constructed through MGNREGS, countering criticism that the programme has little

or no asset creation role.

While concluding the programme, Balram who works for Jharkhand NREGA Watch handed over a ₹500 note to Mr. Ramesh, saying that this is the minimum wage expectation the workers have.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Nikhil Dey, one of the original authors of the MGNREGA, said: "In a democracy it is essential that the political parties go to the people before they frame their opinions or manifestoes. We hope other parties too will hold similar public hearings where we can have an open dialogue instead of one-way communication."

Mr. Ramesh, in a post on X, said that justice for *shramiks* (workers) is one of the core pillars of Congress's five *Nyay* promises, and the party will ensure every worker gets their due.

PM betrayed farmers by going back on MSP promise, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had "betrayed" farmers by not implementing the Swaminathan Commission recommendations on minimum support price (MSP) and should apologise to the country for it, the Congress said on Wednesday.

The party claimed that Mr. Modi was "opposing" what he had recommended when he was the Gujarat Chief Minister in March 2011.

"Be it the BJP's manifesto of 2014 or the recommendation of Chief Minister Modi's committee in 2011, the Modi government betrayed the farmers on the guarantee of giving legal MSP," Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera alleged.

Various charges

"PM Modi should apologise to the country – for speaking a lie to the farmers, for going back after filing an affidavit in the Supreme Court, for not answering the question of MSP through Right to Information, and for calling farmers terrorists," Mr. Khera said.

Countering the charge that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had not implemented the Swaminathan Commission report, Mr. Khera said that out of the 201 recommendations, the UPA had implemented 175.

More support pours in for farmers after police action

March will continue despite government blockade, says Shiv Kumar Kakka of SKM-NP; panchayat in Muzaffarnagar will discuss atrocities committed against farmers, says Rakesh Tikait of BKU

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Protesting farmers on Wednesday began receiving support from several like-minded groups across the country, a day after the police action on them. Though the Centre maintained that it was ready for discussions, farmer leaders said they had not received any formal information on it from the government.

Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda reiterated on Wednesday that the government was ready for talks. Amid reports that the Centre may also deploy Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to hold discussions with the farmers, Mr. Munda requested the farmers to keep in mind the difficulties faced by common people because of their protests. Shiv Kumar Kakka, senior leader of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha-Non Political (SKM-NP), told *The Hindu* from Jind in Haryana that the farmers were prepared for the Delhi march. "The government can block the march with all its strength, but we will march ahead," Mr. Kaka said.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) made it clear that it would oppose any attacks against farmers. Several constituents of the SKM, including the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) and the Bharatiya Kisan Union



Smoke alarm: Farmers take cover as police personnel fire tear gas canisters at them during a protest at the Shambhu Barrier along the Punjab-Haryana boundary on Wednesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

(BKU), said in separate statements that the use of drones to drop tear gas on farmers showed the "extreme vengeance" the BJP government held for the farmers.

AIKS warns the BJP government to desist from such attacks on democratic right to protest. AIKS will join in unity with all democratic forces as well as the SKM and the Joint Platform of Central Trade Unions to resist such repressive measures.

AIKS demands release of all arrested leaders and for ending repression," the AIKS said.

BKU leader Rakesh Ti-

kait said a panchayat would be organised on February 17 in Muzaffarnagar. "There will be a discussion regarding the atrocities being committed against farmers," Mr. Tikait said.

'Talk to annadatas'
Economist Madhura Swaminathan, daughter of the late M.S. Swaminathan, in a speech at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute on Tuesday, urged the Centre to not treat farmers as criminals. "They are farmers, not criminals. We need to talk to our *annadatas*. We have to find solu-

tions. In any future strategy we plan, we have to take the farmers with us," she said.

The CPI(M) also condemned the attacks on farmers. "The kind of atrocities that are being meted out to farmers, the barbaric suppression, should be stopped immediately. Their valid demand of MSP, for which they were given an assurance, needs to be fulfilled by the Modi government. If it tries to go back on its word, the government will not succeed," CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said.

He added that the office-bearers from across the State will meet on Thursday to discuss the prevailing situation and the group's future course of action.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the CrPC are in place in 15 districts of Haryana.

Haryana farmers' group asks govt. to show restraint

The Hindu Bureau
GURUGRAM

The national president of the Bharatiya Kisan Union-Charuni, Gurnam Singh Charuni, on Wednesday condemned the "inhuman" and "unconstitutional" methods being used by the government to allegedly suppress the farmers' agitation and called an emergency meeting of the office-bearers to plan the group's future strategy.

The farmers' group, which wields considerable influence among the farming community in Kurukshetra and adjoining districts, has thus far stayed away from the ongoing agitation.

Meeting today

In a video statement, released after a core committee meeting at Kurukshetra in the morning, Mr. Charuni advised the government to show restraint.

"There are reports of clashes at many points on the Haryana-Punjab boundary, and the use of force by the police. The government should show restraint... and prevent the situation from escalating further. It should be resolved through talks," he said.

On Wednesday, celebrated as Basant Panchami in parts of India, protesting farmers flew kites, an integral part of the festival.

Gagandeep Singh, a farmer protesting at the site said, "We brought the kites to celebrate the festival, but then the drones came. Accidentally, the string of the kite got entangled with the fans of the drone, making it difficult for it to fly. We tried to pull it down, but it pulled back and fell on the other side of the barricades."

Some farmers were seen applying a thick layer of toothpaste while others took to a mix of *multani mitti* (mud pack) and water to ease the burning sensation caused by tear gas. Some of them even brought along paddy win-



Taking a stand: A farmer moves towards the protest site at the Shambhu Barrier on Wednesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

Farmers fight tear gas with toothpaste and *multani mitti*

Amarjeet Kaur
CHANDIGARH

The farmers protesting at Shambhu, located on the Punjab-Haryana boundary, are adopting desperate means to defend themselves against the continuous tear gas shelling by the police.

On Wednesday, celebrated as Basant Panchami in parts of India, protesting farmers flew kites, an integral part of the festival.

Gagandeep Singh, a farmer protesting at the site said, "We brought the kites to celebrate the festival, but then the drones came. Accidentally, the string of the kite got entangled with the fans of the drone, making it difficult for it to fly. We tried to pull it down, but it pulled back and fell on the other side of the barricades."

Some farmers were seen applying a thick layer of toothpaste while others took to a mix of *multani mitti* (mud pack) and water to ease the burning sensation caused by tear gas. Some of them even brought along paddy win-

nowing fans to change the direction of the smoke emanating from the tear gas shells. Amit Punia, one of the protesters, said: "The tear gas is irritating the skin and eyes, causing unbearable burning sensation. Since toothpaste and *multani mitti* have a cooling effect, we are using them to protect our skin."

Breathing difficulties
Another farmer at Shambhu said many farmers have difficulty in breathing because of the tear gas. "Some farmers have been vomiting since yesterday and we are protecting ourselves with goggles, *multani mitti* and wet cloth over our face and nose," said Manjeet Singh.

Maheesh Choudhary, coordinating the media for the Kisan Majdoor Morcha, said, "It is impossible to combat the tear gas attacks; we don't have the means for it. It was quite symbolic that a kite could come in the way of a drone though. So far, we have been using wet jute bags on tear gas shells to protect ourselves."

Govt. has a 'dictatorial attitude', says Rahul

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday spoke with a farmer who was injured in the police action.

He accused the Modi government of having a "dictatorial attitude" towards the country's food providers.

In separate posts on social media platform X, Mr.

Centre uses British-era Act to block Internet in Punjab

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Gandhi reiterated his party's promise of backing MSP with a legal guarantee.

"Modi, his propaganda

machinery and friendly media are the enemies of the poor and farmers. When it comes to the interests of those who build India, 'government experts' start worrying about the budget. But it is not about the budget, it is about the intentions," he said.

As Punjab farmer groups prepared for a protest march to Delhi, the Union government invoked its powers under a British-era law to suspend mobile Internet in certain districts of the State last week, citing public emergency and public safety. This is the first time the Union government has issued such orders to block the Internet, outside of the national cap-

ital. Given that law and order is a State subject, the more usual procedure is for a State government to issue such orders, as was done in Haryana, which is governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Punjab, however, is ruled by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP).

In a departure from norms, the Union Home Ministry issued two orders, on February 10 and February 12, under the Temporary Suspension of Telecom Services (Public

Emergency or Public Safety) Rules, 2017 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885. The orders, issued following a reference by the Intelligence Bureau, resulted in the Internet being suspended within the jurisdiction of 20 police stations in seven districts of Punjab – Patiala, SAS Nagar, Bathinda, Sri Muktsar Sahib, Mansa, Sangrur, and Fatehgarh Sahib – till February 16.

A Punjab government official, speaking on condi-

tion of anonymity, said the Union government had the power to issue such orders under the Rules, adding that the Punjab government had not objected to it.

This provision was first used by the Ministry in 2019 during the protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), when the Internet was suspended in some areas of Delhi. As Delhi is a Union Territory, the police functions under the Home Mi-

nistry. Later, the same provisions were used to suspend the Internet again in parts of Delhi during the farmers' agitation of 2020-21 that lasted nearly 13 months.

The Rules, framed in 2017, empower the Union Home Secretary or a State's Home Secretary to pass directions to suspend telecom services, including the Internet, in an area "due to public emergency or public safety". Any such orders by the Union Home

Secretary have to be reviewed by a committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary within five days.

Accounts suspended
Social media platform X has suspended the accounts of journalist Mandeep Punia and news portal *Gao Savera* following a "legal demand". They were both reporting from the Punjab-Haryana boundary. Olympian Bajrang Punia termed this an attack on free speech.

Sharad Pawar-led NCP faction refutes claims on merger with Congress

The Hindu Bureau
PUNE

The top leadership of the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party faction on Wednesday refuted claims that it would be merging with the Congress.

Mr. Pawar recently lost control over the name of his party (which he founded in 1999) and the clock symbol after the Election Commission awarded both to the rebel faction led by his nephew, Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar. The commission later approved a new name - 'Nationalist Congress Party-Shradhachandra Pawar' – for Mr. Sharad Pawar's group.

The speculation that this group would merge with the Congress was triggered by a remark made by former NCP leader Mangaldas Bandal. Immediately after his statement, Bandal MP Supriya Sule, responding to questions about a potential merger, said: "The Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party will not merge with any political party. What responsibility does Mangaldas Bandal have in our party? Even I do not know this. Who is spreading such speculation?"

She said her party would contest the upcoming polls as part of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) coalition and that a meeting held on Wednesday was about seat sharing within the MVA and planning for future poll campaigns.

Government of Uttar Pradesh Directorate of Animal Husbandry, Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow-226007
No.- 2551 /Pur.Cell/E-Tender/Instruments(III)/2023-24. Dated: 10-02-2024

SHORT TERM E-TENDER INVITATION NOTICE

Hereby online tenders through e-procurement system are invited for rate approval of Veterinary Equipments/Machineries & Instruments etc. for A.I., Surgical, Pathological, Laboratory & Hospital use* (As per Schedules of requirement of e-tender) under the Department of Animal Husbandry, U.P. (for the financial year 2023-24) from Sole manufacturers, possessing valid manufacturing license or registered as Small Scale Industry for production and having 05 years experience for production of quoted items; Original Authorized Supplier for those equipment for which the Sole Manufacturer does not do marketing itself. Tenderer should produce valid Manufacturing License, and ISO certificates. The Tenderer should have BIS/ISI Certificate for the items for which BIS/ISI mark is required. Only those Tenderer will be eligible to participate in tender whose turnover for last 03 years is not less than Rs. 5.00 crore each year. MSME/SSI units of U.P. are being exempted from turnover Condition & MSME/SSI units of U.P. will be given purchase preference as per government policy. It is also to inform that only those tenderers who are registered for tendering (documentary proof for registration in U.P. Electronics Corporation Ltd. (UPLC), Lucknow is necessary to enclose) and having digital signatures in reference to this office memorandum No.3157/Pur.Cell/Kra.NI/E-pro/2016-17 dated 15-03-2017, shall be eligible to participate in tendering in Department of Animal Husbandry, U.P. Details regarding e-tender and tender form would be available on the departmental website www.animalhusb.upscdc.gov.in and U.P. Govt. eTender portal http://etender.up.nic.in within the stipulated period.

Particulars **Earnest Money (EMD) Rs.** **Tender Documents cost Rs.**
e-Tender for approval of rate of As per schedule of requirement of Veterinary Equipments Machineries etc. for A.I., Surgical, Pathological, Laboratory & Hospital use* for the goods upto Rs. 1.00 lakh for the financial year 2023-24 (As per Schedule III(B) of tender) Rs. 1500.00 and for each additional Rs. 1.00 lakh and there of Rs. 1000.00 as bid security

Cost of Tender Form (Non-refundable) in shape of Demand Draft of any nationalized/scheduled bank in the name of Director, Administration & Development, Animal Husbandry, U.P., Lucknow and amount of Earnest Money in shape of Fixed Deposit Receipt (FDR) of any nationalized/scheduled bank pledged in favour of Director, Disease Control & Farms, Animal Husbandry, U.P., Lucknow should compulsorily be deposited in the Directorate of Animal Husbandry, U.P., Badshahbag, Lucknow. The scanned copy of the Cost of Tender Form and e-Bid Security/EMD must be submitted along with the e-Bid and the original should reach to Director, Disease Control & Farms, Department of Animal Husbandry, U.P., Lucknow preferably on or before end date of submission of e-Bid but in any case, not later than 5 days after end date of submission of e-bid. Online e-bid should be submitted through U.P. Govt. e-Tender website http://etender.up.nic.in. The scheduled dates and time for the e-Tender are:-

1- Availability of Online Tender Forms : Date 16-02-2024 from 04.30 PM
2- Submission of Online Tender Forms start date : Date 16-02-2024 from 06.00 PM
3- Pre Bid Meeting : Date 23-02-2024 at 03.30 PM
4- Last Date for online submission of tender form : Date 01-03-2024 up to 12.00 PM
5- Opening of Online Tender Forms (Technical bids) : Date 01-03-2024 at 04.00 PM

Director
Disease Control & Farms
Animal Husbandry, U.P.,
Lucknow

RO No: 203330
Date: 13-02-2024
website: www.up.gov.in

KERALA WATER AUTHORITY e-Tender Notice

Tender No : KWA-JB/5047/2023-R3(RMC). Implementation of Enterprise Utility Service and Billing Solution in Kerala Water Authority with at least 5 years of operational support EMD : Rs. 5,00,000/-, Tender fee : Rs. 25,000/-, Last Date for submitting Tender : 11-03-2024 03:00:pm, Phone : 9447795252 Website : www.kwa.kerala.gov.in, www.tenders.kerala.gov.in

KWA-JB-GL-6-2352-2023-24

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.
Regd. Office: PSEB H.O. Building, The Mall, Patiala

Corporate Identification Number (CIN): U40109PB2010SC033813

Contact No. 96461-18773

TENDER ENQUIRY NO. : QQ - 2348/PO-P

Chief Purchase Officer/MM, Central Purchase Organization, PSPCL, 2nd floor, Multistory Building, The Mall, Patiala, invites E-Tender for Procurement of 2,30,000 No. 11 KV Composite Polymer Disc Insulators (Tongue & Clevis type), EMS 45 KN as per PSPCL specification no. QQ-2348/PSPCL/PO-P. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in from 14.02.2024 onwards.

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

C-121/24 76155/12/2707/2023/32446

Chief Engineer (HRD&GI)
Jalabhanav, Thiruvananthapuram

IN BRIEF



Lal Bahadur Shastri's grandson leaves Congress, joins BJP

Vibhakar Shastri, grandson of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Wednesday in Lucknow, hours after resigning from the Congress. "I will work as an ordinary member of the BJP and strive to strengthen the party and the organisation," said Mr. Shastri, addressing the media at the BJP office in Lucknow. Mr. Shastri fought three Parliamentary polls on the Congress symbol in 1998, 1999, and 2009.

SC to pronounce verdict on electoral bonds scheme today

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court is scheduled to pronounce its judgment on the legality of the electoral bonds scheme, which allows anonymous donations to political parties, on Thursday. The five-judge Bench is headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud. The members of the Bench are Justices Sanjiv Khanna, B.R. Gavai – two of the senior-most judges of the Supreme Court – and J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The petitioners in the case argued that the scheme violated citizens' right to information about the funding of political parties.

No more adjournment letters in after-notice bail cases: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Adjournments, denounced as a major factor for pendency, delay in court hearings, and a money-drainer for litigants, is no longer going to be easy in the Supreme Court.

A circular issued by the Supreme Court on Wednesday said it would not entertain letters of adjournment from lawyers in bail and anticipatory bail cases for which notice had been earlier issued by the court.

Letters of adjournment are last-minute requests by parties for postponement of cases listed before a Bench.

Tained in cases in which exemption from surrendering has already been granted; cases in which an interim order favouring the party seeking the adjournment is already in operation; and in matters in which suspension of sentence has been sought.

This would mean that the parties must necessarily appear in court in these categories of cases and the Bench would take a decision, in its own discretion, on whether to grant an adjournment.

In other cases, the circular said the request for adjournment of a case could

Study abroad has more takers from smaller cities

A pan-India study finds the desire for 'budget' degrees is rising among the middle class; among the 25,000 respondents, only 42.8% students from Tier 1 cities express interest in studying abroad

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

A majority of students who aspire to study abroad hail from Tier 2 and 3 cities, a pan-India study of 25,000 aspirational students by edtech start-up upGrad Abroad indicates.

"We are seeing rising interest from students hailing from cities like Thiruvananthapuram and Kottayam down south, Vadodara and Surat in the west, Lucknow in the north and so on when it comes to planning to study abroad," said Ankur Nyati, president, Study Abroad at upGrad.

Around 57.2% of the 25,000 respondents who expressed interest in studying abroad hail from Tier 2 and 3 cities, as compared to 42.8% who belong to Tier 1 cities.

The study also indicates that the desire for 'budget' degrees is rising among the middle class, with 41.1% of the respondents interviewed saying that they were unable to spend



Huge dreams: Many aspirants are in age group of 26 to 30 years and already have nearly six years of work experience. GETTY IMAGES

beyond ₹16 lakh to ₹25 lakh on studying abroad, as they had budget constraints. Another 13.4% said that their budget ranged from ₹6 lakh to ₹15 lakh, whereas another 40.4% said they had budget between ₹26 lakh and ₹50 lakh.

Departing from the popular notion that the aspirants were from international IB schools, 56% of respondents who expressed interest in study-

beyond were from State Boards, followed by 32% in CBSE and 12% students from ICSE, the study says.

Popular destinations

Annually nearly six to seven lakh Indian students go to study abroad. Germany and France are emerging as popular destinations among engineering and management students, compared to destinations such as Australia, Canada, and the U.K.

Around 66.5% respondents said that they preferred to seek an education loan to meet their requirements. About 64% of them said that they preferred non-collateral loans. In FY22, according to data shared by Ministry of Finance in Lok Sabha, India public sector banks disbursed ₹7,576.02 crore worth in loans, which is close to 90% of the total education loans in the country.

Interestingly, 34.4% aspirants who want to study abroad are in age group of 26 to 30 years and already have nearly six years of work experience before applying for their master's degree, the study noted.

About 55.6% of the respondents were keen on pursuing an MBA which opens doors to managerial roles, while the second-largest group (28.7%) expressed interest in Computer Science and Information Technology, including Data Science and Artificial Intelligence courses.



Ex-JNU student Umar Khalid withdraws bail petition from SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Former Jawaharlal Nehru University student leader Umar Khalid, an undertrial in a Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) case linked to the February 2020 Delhi riots for three years, withdrew his bail application from the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

Individuals, have sought time to consider the option of withdrawing from the Supreme Court to move the respective High Courts.

The hearing in the case had been through a persistent series of re-scheduling. His case has also travelled across different Benches of the Supreme Court in 2023.

Justice Trivedi had earlier pointed out that the hearing of and decision in the case should not be delayed any further. It was a matter concerning liberty.

Additional solicitor general of India S.V. Raju had countered that the accused was the reason why the framing of charges was delayed all these years.

Mr. Khalid is accused of being part of a "larger conspiracy" behind the communal violence.

Bengal prisoners did not get pregnant while in jail: report

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A report submitted in the Supreme Court by *amicus curiae*, senior advocate Agrawal, has belied reports that women inmates in West Bengal jails are getting pregnant in custody.

The Supreme Court had, a few days ago, taken *suo motu* cognisance of the issue. Previously, the Calcutta High Court had raised serious concerns when the issue was mentioned in a case linked to prison reforms.

Police response

In a five-page report submitted in the top court, Mr. Agrawal said he had made enquiries via email to the ADG & IG Correctional Services, West Bengal.

The senior police officer replied on February 10 that 62 children were born in jails in West Bengal during the last four years. The women inmates were either pregnant when they were

Amicus report comes after SC takes cognisance of the issue of pregnancies in custody

brought to the jails or had gone out on parole and were pregnant when they returned.

Mr. Agrawal said he had also held discussions with jail authorities in Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi to understand security measures in women's jails and barracks. He found that these complexes were guarded by women personnel.

The *amicus*, however, highlighted the need for a complete security audit of women's jails and barracks in the country. He said there was also a need to examine the medical facility available to women inmates to ensure that proper examinations were done at the time of admissions and at regular intervals.

PM inaugurates Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple

Press Trust of India
ABU DHABI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the inauguration of the BAPS Temple in Abu Dhabi. ANI

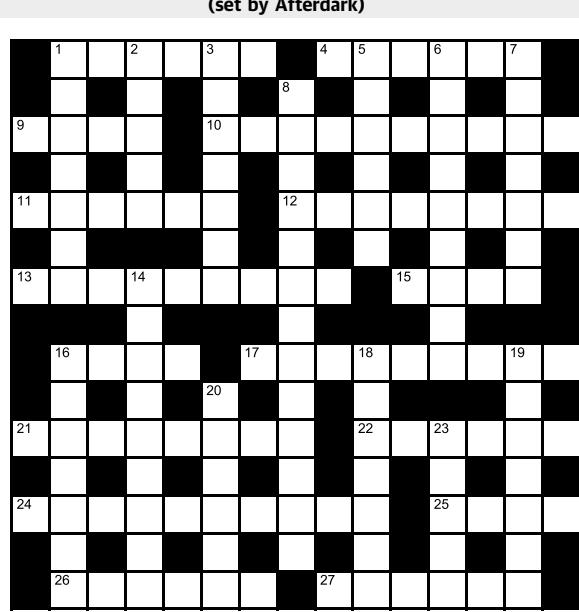
hyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan and spiritual leaders from all faiths.

Recalling the consecration ceremony of the newly constructed Ram temple in Ayodhya last month, the Prime Minister said it was his good fortune to have witnessed the inauguration of the BAPS temple in Abu Dhabi. "Our immense pleasure in Ayodhya has been further enhanced by the wave of happiness received in Abu Dhabi today. It is my good fortune that I have been a witness to the

grand Shri Ram temple first in Ayodhya, and then to this temple in Abu Dhabi," he said.

The BAPS temple is built on a 27-acre site in Abu Mreikhah, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, at a cost of around ₹700 crore.

He said the UAE, which till now was known for Burj Khalifa, Future Museum, Sheikh Zayed Mosque, and other hi-tech buildings, has now added another cultural chapter to its identity.

TH CROSSWORD + 14098
(set by Afterdark)

Across

- Ear visits British bank that is next door (6)
- Indulge and include a politician in workout and reading (6)
- Cuba rebate stores vacant (4)
- A knot about friendship and trouble (5,5)
- Door confining settler in a cell (6)
- Two criminals held by iron restraint at the end by hawkers, perhaps (8)
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CM YK

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13 So, well by a review we arrive at PV = k (6,3)

15 Mock that man's shrimp starter (4)

16 Fasten with difficulty (4)

17 By the second half of the year, called a new girl for grading (9)

21 Say, bronchiodilator in hospital at Alabama cannot be seen often (8)

22 Basset, setters hold a lot of value (6)

24 Rose's issue about men is related to recovery (10)

25 Bill is a killer primarily (4)

26 Street paved with cement, perhaps (6)

27 Respect for soldiers saving first lady facing resistance (6)

Down

1 Supporter backed by a party gaining victory is bragging (7)

2 Location identified for the audience (5)

3 Orders for duke at London district to meet revolutionary prophet (7)

5 Silver and gold girl traded with Earl is antique (3-3)

6 Say, killing pig is not on; no time to be wicked (9)

7 Romeo slips missing second step in the front; bone disease, perhaps (7)

8 Huge fire in company's new stores stocking sink (13)

14 Lady is with a man, a broker perhaps (4,5)

16 Idiotic moneymen trade top assets for nothing (7)

18 Inquire about new partner foregoing first love with shame, disheartened (7)

19 Fool's worth some salt (7)

20 Mark, a lawyer takes on tech giant skimming at the top (6)

23 Dark story in which father dies, son takes over (5)

15 Mock that man's shrimp starter (4)

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KYIV

Ukraine says its forces destroyed Russian warship in Black Sea



Ukraine said on Wednesday it had destroyed another Russian warship in the Black Sea, a key battleground of the two-year war where Kyiv's campaign has been building momentum. Its military along with intelligence units "destroyed" the "Caesar Kunikov" Russian landing ship off the coast of the Crimean peninsula. AFP

BEIJING

China condemns Taiwan after two nationals killed in boat crash



China condemned Taiwanese authorities on Wednesday after two Chinese nationals died in a boat accident while pursued by Taiwan's coast guard. The Chinese boat was carrying four persons when it capsized near the Kinmen Islands, throwing all onboard into the water, Chinese and Taiwanese authorities said. AFP

SEOUL

Two police officers convicted over S. Korea's 2022 Halloween crush



A South Korean court sentenced two former senior police officers on Wednesday for destroying evidence linked to Seoul's deadly 2022 Halloween crush. Nearly 160 people were killed when a crowd comprising tens of thousands tried to make their way through a narrow alleyway in Itaewon on October 29, 2022. AFP

SEOUL

North Korea fires several cruise missiles as part of weapons trials



North Korea fired multiple cruise missiles on Wednesday, part of a string of weapons tests this year that have accompanied aggressive rhetoric from leader Kim Jong-un. Earlier this week, North Korea announced it had tested a new control system for a multiple rocket launcher it said would have an "increased" battlefield role. AFP

Subianto claims 'victory for all Indonesians' in presidential vote

The Defence Minister, who has incumbent President Joko Widodo's son for running mate, had won 57% votes in first round, preliminary results showed; officials results not due until next month; nearly 205 million were eligible to cast their ballots

Agence France-Presse

JAKARTA

Former general Prabowo Subianto claimed victory in Indonesia's presidential election on Wednesday as preliminary results put him well ahead of his two rivals to lead Southeast Asia's biggest economy.

Polls have long shown the fiery Defence Minister to be the favourite after he pledged to carry on the agenda of popular outgoing leader Joko Widodo, who is accused of inappropriately backing his campaign and whose son is Mr. Subianto's running mate.

"All counts, all pollsters... showed figures that Prabowo-Gibran won in one round," he told a cheering crowd of supporters



Victory moment: Prabowo Subianto, left, delivers his speech as Gibran Rakabuming Raka looks on, in Jakarta. REUTERS

ters at a packed arena in central Jakarta, referring to his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka.

"This victory should be a victory for all Indonesians."

Official results are not due until next month but at least four government-

approved groups – making projections based on official early tallying – showed Mr. Subianto winning around 57% for a clear majority in one round.

Mr. Subianto, who was a military chief during the Suharto dictatorship a generation ago, needs more

than 50% of the overall vote and at least a fifth of ballots cast in over half the country's 38 provinces to secure the presidency.

The 72-year-old – who pushed street protests and launched legal challenges after losing the previous two elections – thanked his supporters and called for unity.

'Waiting for the count'
Fellow candidate Anies Baswedan, who had been the favourite to battle Mr. Subianto in the event of a second-round vote, said he would respect the result only when it was finalised.

But analysts said the projections indicate that Mr. Subianto has likely avoided a second electoral battle in June against his rivals Mr. Baswedan and

Ganjar Pranowo.
Nearly 205 million people were eligible to vote in the fifth presidential election since the end of Suharto's dictatorship in 1998.

Logistical feat
A logistical feat in which more than 20,000 seats were up for grabs saw planes, helicopters, speed-boats and even cows used to cart ballots around the sprawling archipelago of nearly 280 million people.

The vote across 8,000,000 polling stations began Wednesday morning in the restive region of Papua and ended at the other end of the country in jungle-clad Sumatra, while some stations in Jakarta stayed open late after the capital was inundated by thunderstorms.

'PML-N and allies are mulling a 25-member Cabinet in Pak.'

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE



Discussions are underway in Pakistan on the composition of the new federal Cabinet of the coalition government with the possibility of a 25-member line-up in its initial phase, according to a media report on Wednesday.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leadership, comprising Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif, engaged in a crucial meeting to review the party's interactions with various allies and considered the names of potential Cabinet members, sources privy to the development told *The Express Tribune* newspaper.

During the meeting, Shehbaz Sharif, 72, briefed his elder brother, Mr. Nawaz, 74, on the party's alliances and deliberated on potential candidates for the federal Cabinet. In the

Ishaq Dar, Ayaz Sadiq, Khawaja Asif, Ahsan Iqbal, Marriyum Aurangzeb, Attaullah Tarar, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Riazul Haq Jui, Bilal Azhar Kayani, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, Qamarul Islam Raja, and Rana Tanveer Hussain.

Power split-up

In earlier reports, the PML-N outlined an initial power-sharing formula for the upcoming government. The formula suggests that if the coalition agrees to appoint a PML-N candidate as the Prime Minister, the positions of President and Speaker would go to the PPP.

On Tuesday, Mr. Shehbaz emerged as a leading contender for the premiership, garnering support from former coalition partners, including Pakistan Peoples Party, Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid, Balochistan Awami Party, MQM-P and IPP.

The PML-N has shortlisted 15 senior leaders for ministerial roles, including

'Saboteurs hit Iran pipelines disrupting gas supply'

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Two explosions struck gas pipelines in Iran early on Wednesday in an act of "terrorism and sabotage" that disrupted gas supplies in three of the country's provinces, state media reported.

The saboteurs hit pipelines in the cities of Borujen and Safashahr. There were no casualties in the explosions or the ensuing fires.

Israel forces 'begin series' of air strikes in Lebanon

Agence France-Presse

JERUSALEM



Flash point: Officials transport a person, wounded in a rocket attack fired from southern Lebanon, in Israel's Safed. AFP

targets" in the areas of Jabal El Braij, Houneh, Durnin, Adchit and Sawwaneh, the military said.

Lebanese media reported

saw medics and troops evacuating a wounded person by military helicopter from Safed's Ziv hospital.

There was no immediate claim for the rocket launches from Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, which has traded near-daily fire with Israeli troops since the outbreak of the war in Gaza more than four months ago.

Israeli Army chief Herzl Halevi said after meeting commanders near the border with Lebanon that Israel's "next campaign will be very much on the offensive, and we will use all the tools and all capabilities".

"We are intensifying the

strikes all the time, and Hezbollah are paying an increasingly heavy price," he said in a statement.

Fears have grown of another full-blown conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, with tens of thousands displaced on both sides of the border amid soaring regional tensions.

Since the outbreak of the Hamas-Israel war on October 7, at least 243 people have been killed in Lebanon, most of them Hezbollah fighters but also including 30 civilians, according to an AFP tally.

On the Israeli side, nine soldiers and six civilians have been killed.

Turkey's Erdogan visits Egypt as ties are back in full swing

Associated Press

CAIRO

Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held talks in Cairo on Wednesday with his Egyptian counterpart in efforts to rally support for growing demands in the region that Israel halt its war against Hamas in Gaza.

Mr. Erdogan met with President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi at Cairo's Ittihadiya palace, according to Egyptian state-run media. Their talks focused on bilateral relations and regional challenges, especially efforts to stop the war in Gaza. Mr. el-Sissi later said at a joint news conference.

Mr. Erdogan's visit comes as ties between Ankara and Cairo are back on track after years of tensions and frosty relations.

Maldives registers 186 deportations, including 43 Indians

Press Trust of India

MALE

The Maldives has deported 186 foreigners, including 43 Indians, after accusing them of committing crimes like visa violations and drug offences, according to a media report.

The highest number of people deported was from Bangladesh. At least 83 Bangladeshis were deported followed by 43 Indians, 25 Sri Lankans and 8 Nepalis. The date of their deportation is not yet known, Male-based news outlet Adhdhuv reported.

The deportations come as efforts are underway in the Maldives to shut down businesses operated illegally.

Homeland Security Minister Ali Ihusan said at a

press briefing on Tuesday that the Ministry was working together with the Economic Ministry to take action against illegal businesses operating under various names.

Foreigners' stake
These include both registered and unregistered businesses, the minister noted. Such businesses include those operated by a foreigner instead of the registered owner, Home Minister Ihusan said.

If the registrar believes based on sufficient evidence that a business is operated with a foreigner earning profits either directly or indirectly, a law was enacted in December 2021 to allow the registration of such businesses to be terminated.

SITarc SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL TESTING AND RESEARCH CENTRE (SITARC)

83 & 84, Avarampalayam Road, K.R. Puram Post, Coimbatore - 641 006

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

For and on behalf of SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL TESTING AND RESEARCH CENTRE (SITARC) separate sealed tenders for TECHNICAL BID and FINANCIAL BID are invited from reputed firms for supply of **Automated Electric Motor Test System**.

TENDER SCHEDULE

Tender Notice No. SLPP/AMTB-EQPT/2023-2024/001

Description of Tender: Supply, Installation and Commissioning of Automated Electric Motor Test System

Approx. Estimated Value of Tender: Rs. 400 Lakhs

Date of Tender Document Sales Start: 15.02.2024 (10.00 AM)

Date of Tender Document Sales Close: 07.03.2024 (04.00 P.M.)

Last Date for Submission of Tender: 08.03.2024 (03.00 P.M.)

Date of Opening of Technical Bids: 08.03.2024 (04.00 P.M.)

Date of Pre-Bid Meeting: 22.02.2024 (10.00 AM)

Tender document including technical specifications and other information can be obtained from the Director, Scientific and Industrial Testing And Research Centre (SITARC), 83 & 84, Avarampalayam Road, K.R. Puram Post, Coimbatore - 641 006 on any working day or before the last date indicated above. The tender document can also be downloaded from the websites: www.sitarc.com and www.tendersonline.com (under the Tenders Categories - Free Tenders). The tender may be cancelled, withdrawn or postponed at any time by SITARC without assigning any reason.

Director, SITARC

CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TELEMATIC

ELECTRONICS CITY, PHASE-I,
HOSUR ROAD, BENGALURU-560104.

Dated : 15.02.2024

RECRUITMENT OF ENGINEERS / RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

It is hereby notified that the last date for receipt of applications for the post of Engineers and Research Associates published vide Advt. No. C-DOT / HR / CG / 2024 / 01 dated 05.01.2024 has been extended till 15 Mar 2024, 5pm. Kindly visit our website www.cdot.in for more details.

Sd/- Registrar

THE HUTTI GOLD MINES COMPANY LIMITED

(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
Hutti - 584 115, Raichur Dist., Karnataka State. Ph: (08537) 275463, 276339, Fax: (08537) 275048, 275054
e-Mail: material276339@gmail.com website: www.huttigold.karnataka.gov.in

TENDER NOTIFICATION NO. 27/23-24 DT: 15.02.2024

(Through e-procurement Portal only)

Tender is invited by "The Dy. General Manager (Materials)" for the procurement of following items from reputed manufacturers/ authorized dealers as detailed below.

| SI No | Description | Approx value in Crores (Rs.) | EMD in Rs. |
|-------|--|------------------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Manufacturing, testing, supply and commissioning of LPDT at Hutt Gold Mine. HGML/2023-24/IND0124/CALL-2. | 9.20 | 13,81,000/- |
| 2 | Procurement Of Sag Mill Full Set Of Liners. HGML/2023-24/IND0155. | 3.81 | 5,73,000/- |
| 3 | Manufacturing, Testing, Supply and Commissioning of Single Boom Drill Jumbo at Hutt Gold Mine. HGML/2023-24/IND0122/CALL-2. | 3.81 | 5,73,000/- |
| 4 | Annual Maintenance Contract Of Sandvik Ug Heavy Equiments. HGML/2023-24/OW/WORK_INDENT7/CALL-3 | 3.66 | 5,50,000/- |
| 5 | Supply, Fabrication, replacement of wornout, damaged structures and Painting of the structures in Leaching plant and Sag and Ball mill plant. HGML/2023-24/OW/WORK_INDENT38/CALL-3. | 1.88 | 2,83,000/- |
| 6 | Supply of Hydrate Lime. HGML/2023-24/IND0164. | 1.44 | 2,16,000/- |

Calendar of Events:

(1) Pre-Bid Meetings (Zoom):- 29.02.2024 for SI.No.1 at 10.00 AM, SI.No.2 at 10.30 AM, SI.No.3 at 11.00 AM, SI.No.4 at 11.30 AM and SI.No.5 at 12.30 PM.

(2) Last date for receipt of tender:- 15.03.2024 at 4.00 P.M.

(3) Opening of Technical Bid on :-18.03.2024 at 10.00 A.M.

For further details interested bidders are advised to log on to website [https://www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in](http://www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in) or contact the office of undersigned during working hours. For participating in the above tender bidder needs to be registered in e-procurement portal.

Sd/- General Manager (Tech)

LEADING GOLD PRODUCER IN INDIA

DESTINY

Ashwin will complete 500 wickets in my home town Rajkot: Jadeja



With Ravindra Jadeja missing the second Test due to a hamstring strain, Ashwin added three wickets in the second Test to remain one short of 500 wickets. But Jadeja said, "I thought he would complete it in the first Test; but it's okay, whatever is written in destiny... he will complete his 500 wickets in Rajkot, in my home town."

GAMEPLAN

The extra seamer will give us the best chance of winning: Stokes



Ben Stokes revealed that England will play an extra seamer (Mark Wood) in the Rajkot Test. "Taking a bit of knowledge from the last match we played here, it was a pretty true, flat wicket. I think this one is a good wicket. Bringing in an extra seamer is the option we've gone with because we think it will give us the best chance of winning."

DOMINANT DISPLAY

Nissanka on song again as Sri Lanka sweeps series



Sri Lanka eased past Afghanistan by seven wickets in the third ODI at Pallekele on Wednesday to complete a 3-0 sweep in the series. Pathum Nissanka smashed his second hundred of the series.

The scores: Afghanistan 266 in 48.2 overs (Shah 65, Azmatullah 54) lost to Sri Lanka 267/3 in 35.2 overs (Nissanka 118, Fernando 91).

TURNING THE TABLES

Dabang rally to beat Thalaivas, Paltan knock out Warriors



Dabang Delhi produced a stunning comeback as it erased a 13-point deficit to clinch a 45-43 win over Tamil Thalaivas in a PKL Season-10 match in Kolkata on Wednesday. Ashu Malik was Dabang's star with 18 raid points, the same as Thalaivas' Narendra. Puneri Paltan knocked Bengal Warriors out of playoffs contention, winning 29-26.

'Milestones match' lines up 100, 500, 700, debut(s) and crucial series lead

Stokes, Ashwin, Anderson, Sarfaraz and Jurel in the limelight; England to field two pacers on a 'typical Rajkot pitch' that will get all the facets of the game in play, while India will have perhaps the most inexperienced batting line-up in a Test for over a quarter of a century

ENGLAND IN INDIA**Amol Karhadkar**
RAJKOT

Cricket is a unique team game where individual performances get highlighted more than team accolades. No wonder then that the buzz around the Nirjan Shah Cricket Stadium on the outskirts of a laid-back city has been more about milestones awaiting over the next five days.

In fact, such is the immensity of the achievements that are in the offing that it will not be an overstatement to refer to the third Test between India and England as a 'milestones match'.

R. Ashwin, the crafty off-spinner, is just one wicket away from being only the second Indian and ninth bowler overall in the 500-wicket club.

Ben Stokes, the England captain, will become the 16th England cricketer to earn 100 Test caps, something that signifies longevity and consistency in the toughest format.

And Stokes' senior – the unstoppable James Anderson – is a mere five scalps shy of scaling Mt. 700 and joining the elite club of



Lifting the game: Gill will be keen to stretch his fine form, while Patidar will strive to make an impact. VIJAY SONEJI



Lifting the game: Gill will be keen to stretch his fine form, while Patidar will strive to make an impact. VIJAY SONEJI

Muttiah Muralitharan and Shane Warne. Should all three milestones be ticked, one can be sure that the surface at the stadium – being referred to as a "typical Rajkot pitch" that will get all the facets of the game in play – will be hailed as the best pitch of the series.

It could also be a milestone moment for two India

players who could be handed a Test debut. Sarfaraz Khan, the domestic run-machine, looks to be more or less a certainty to end his prolonged wait for a Test cap as the No. 5 batter.

Should India prefer Dhruv Jurel, the rookie keeper, in place of K.S. Bharat, it will be a rare oc-

casion of two debutants playing in the same match.

The last such occasion for India turned out into a memorable – and milestone – moment when Washington Sundar and T. Natarajan debuted together at The Gabba in 2021.

But unlike in Brisbane for the famous series-finale, India will have little

liberty in its batting riches. With Sarfaraz and Patidar who debuted in the last Test – despite the duo's domestic prowess – India will have perhaps the most inexperienced batting order in a Test for over a quarter of a century.

Enough of milestones, one may say. After all, the series is at a critical junc-

ture. But the milestone men will obviously have a huge bearing on the game. If Ashwin and his partner Ravindra Jadeja – playing at home – can spin their web around the England batters, it will obviously take India closer to snatching the lead in the series.

Similarly, the inexperienced middle order will have to withstand the pace of Mark Wood – recalled into England XI – even with the older ball. For the first time in the series, England has opted to go into a Test match with two pacers.

It will be interesting to see if the pacers can ensure England's batters aren't left with too much on their plate.

The teams:
India (from): Rohit Sharma (Capt.), Jasprit Bumrah (Vice-capt.), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (wk), K.S. Bharat (wk), R. Ashwin, Ravinda Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohammed Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep, and Devdutt Padikkal.

England (XI): Ben Stokes (Capt.), Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Foakes, Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Mark Wood, and James Anderson.

Match starts at 9.30 a.m.

Rohit will lead India in T20 World Cup, reveals Jay Shah

Amol Karhadkar
RAJKOT

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah has announced that Rohit Sharma will lead India at the T20 World Cup in June.

"We may have lost the final of the 2023 ODI World Cup, but we won hearts there by winning 10 matches in-a-row. I am confident that India will lift the 2024 T20 World Cup under Rohit Sharma's captaincy at Barbados," Shah said during his speech while the renaming the SCA Stadium as the Nirjan Shah Stadium on Wednesday.

Shah's statement came with Rohit, head coach Rahul Dravid and chairman of men's national selection panel Ajit Agarkar in attendance at the function.

Minutes later, Shah told a select group of journalists that Rohit continues to remain "India's captain in all the formats".

He added that the decision had been made in consultation with the selectors before Rohit and Virat Kohli returned for the T20I series against Afghanistan in January.

"Rohit was captaining (in the past and in other formats) and he came back for the Afghanistan series, which means we were going to let him continue forward," Shah said.

"When Hardik was in-



Rohit. VIJAY SONEJI

jured in the (ODI) World Cup, who else can we give the captaincy (to)?" Shah said.

"In the third T20I against Afghanistan, India were 22 for four and the way he took the team to 212 for four, we can't question much about him, right? He has the ability. As I said, we won ten games in the ODI World Cup. We didn't win the final, but it's part and parcel of the game. Whoever plays better, wins."

Since India's semifinal exit at the T20 World Cup in November 2022, Hardik Pandya has led India in a majority of T20Is. When Rohit was recalled for the T20I series at home against Afghanistan in January, it was the first indication of him and Virat Kohli set to feature in the 2024 edition.

Shah also confirmed that Hardik will be Rohit's deputy at the T20 World Cup.

Ashwin completing 500 Test wickets is really huge: Jadeja

Amol Karhadkar
RAJKOT

For over a decade, R. Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja have been two sides of India's spin coin that has tossed a majority of the opposition batting line-ups around, especially while playing at home.

It will thus be fitting to witness that Ashwin – who was left agonisingly close from reaching the 500-wicket mark in Test cricket in Visakhapatnam – is set to make history with Jadeja at home and possibly bowling from the other end.

"He will definitely complete his 500 wickets on this ground. I am very excited because I have been playing with him for 12-13 years and to achieve this milestone of completing 500 Test wickets is really huge," Jadeja said.

While Jadeja confirmed he was fit and available for the game, he admitted that he will have to look after his body in order to avoid frequent breakdowns that have been a feature in his sojourn over the last couple of years.



Besides Ashwin's milestone, India is set to field an extremely inexperienced middle-order.

Jadeja said, "All these new boys are coming into the side after playing a lot of First Class cricket. These are seasoned players, they know how to play long innings and have an idea how it goes in Test cricket," Jadeja said.

"If they are making Test debut in Australia or South Africa, the player also lacks confidence whether they will be able to perform or not. It (India) is an ideal place for them."

We have got our own processes against every bowler: Stokes

Sports Bureau
RAJKOT

In a series that was touted to be dominated by spin, Jasprit Bumrah has emerged as the leading wicket-taker. The pace ace has left the best of England batters, including captain Ben Stokes, dumbfounded in the first two Tests.

While Bumrah was not to be seen at the ground during India's three preparatory sessions in the lead-up to the third Test here, Stokes could only hope that the England batting group figures a way out to solve the Bumrah puzzle.

"Bumrah is an unbelievable bowler. He has proven that for a very long time and has performed really well in the two games. I think everyone has got their own way of not trying to deal with Bumrah but we do have to score runs off him as well and that's what we will try to do," Stokes said on Wednesday.

"But when that doesn't work you just have to give credit to the bowler and Jasprit has been outstanding the first two games. We

have all got our own processes against every single bowler and there is no team way of playing anyone. But as we always try to do, we will be trying to keep the focus around us."

The last time England played in Rajkot – in 2016 – Stuart Broad played his 100th Test. More than repeating the same feat himself, Stokes cited the example of the last match as the reason behind replacing offie Shoaib Bashir with pacer Mark Wood in England's line-up.

Ramkumar's purple patch began with his first authoritative hold of the afternoon – to 2-2 in the se-

Ramkumar does the giant-killing act with Nardi's scalp, enters last eight

BENGALURU OPEN**N. Sudarshan**
BENGALURU

India's Ramkumar Ramanathan sent top seed Luca Nardi packing 1-6, 6-4, 6-4 to enter the singles quarterfinal of the dafaNews Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger, at the KSLTA courts inside Cubbon Park here on Wednesday.

Nardi played a splendid first set, replete with aggressive returns and short-angled winners. The World No. 108 landed 86% of his first serves, won 92% of those points and didn't face a single break-point.

But the weather – a sweltering 33°C courtside at noon – soon brought the players closer. Nardi, who had reached the final in Chennai last week and had also played a long three-setter on Tuesday, struggled even as Ramkumar's superior energy levels and a steady exhibition of tennis carried the day.

Ramkumar's purple patch began with his first authoritative hold of the afternoon – to 2-2 in the se-



Made to sweat: Ramkumar's superior energy levels in sweltering conditions helped him prevail over Nardi. SUDHAKAR JAIN

Nardi's service game picked up steam in the third set, and the gulf in class between the highly rated 20-year-old and Ramkumar started showing again. But the latter displayed superior staying power as he ran down every single ball and forced Nardi to go the extra mile.

The point that probably sapped Nardi's spirit was the easy smash from the forecourt he sent long to get broken in the fifth game.

The end seemed nigh and Ramkumar soon had his second consecutive Challenger main draw singles match win, a first since November 2022 (Kobe, Japan).

Other results:
Second round: Seong Chan Hong (kor) bt Alexey Zakharov (rus) 6-4, 7-5; Oriol Roca Batalla (spa) bt Tristan Boyer (usa) 7-5, 6-3; Maks Kasnikowski (pol) bt Benjamin Bonzi (fra) 6-3, 6-4.
First round: Stefano Napolitano (ita) bt Dane Sweeny (aus) 6-3, 6-3; Adam Walton (aus) bt S.D. Prajwal Dev 6-3, 6-0.
Doubles: **First round:** Myneni & Ramkumar bt Bantia & Prajwal Dev 6-0, 7-6(2); Echegui (tun) & Roca Batalla (spa) bt Bolipalli & Poona Chaitanya 6-4, 6-4.

cond set. In the next game, he cut through, as Nardi's serve wobbled and the Italian double-faulted on break-point. The 29-year-old Indian took care of his serve well to level the contest.

IN BRIEF



Piedt's five-for gives South Africa slender lead

Recalled South African spinner Dane Piedt claimed five New Zealand wickets on Wednesday to give the tourists a 31-run lead at stumps on the second day of the second Test at Hamilton.

The scores: South Africa 242 in 97.2 overs (Ruan de Swardt 64, David Bedingham 39, Shaun von Berg 38, Raynard van Tonder 32, O'Rourke 4/59, Ravindra 3/33) vs New Zealand 211 in 77.3 overs (Kane Williamson 43, Tom Latham 40, Will Young 36, Neil Wagner 33, Piedt 5/89, Paterson 3/39).



Beth Mooney back as Gujarat Giants captain

Beth Mooney will captain Gujarat Giants in the second edition of the Women's Premier League. The Australian opener was injured in the opening match of the inaugural WPL between Giants and Mumbai Indians last year and could take no further part. Sneh Rana had taken over from Mooney for the remaining part of the tournament.

Arjun continues to lead in PGTI Players' Championship

Arjun Prasad carded a five-under 65 to retain his lead with an aggregate of 13-under 127 after the second round of the Tata Steel PGTI Players' Championship at Tollygunge Club golf course in Kolkata on Wednesday. 56 professionals made the cut that was applied at 138.

The scores (second round): 127-Arjun Prasad (62, 65); 130-Sachin Baisoya (63, 67), Rahul Gangjee (65, 65), Stepan Danek (64, 66); 131-Badal Hossain (66, 65), Saptak Talwar (66, 65), Shankar Das (67, 64), Mani Ram (65, 66).

TCS World 10K Bengaluru run has a new home

The TCS World 10K Bengaluru run has found a new home. The 16th edition of the World Athletics Gold Label road race will be flagged off at the Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw Parade Ground, it was announced here on Wednesday. Previous editions were flagged off at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium. The race will be held here on April 28. The event offers a total prize money of \$210,000. Registrations for all race categories will commence on Thursday, on tcsworld10k.prociam.in.



Carey equals record with eight catches in a List A innings

Australia's Test wicketkeeper Alex Carey equalled an international record with eight catches in a domestic one-day cricket match in Adelaide on Wednesday. Carey held eight catches for South Australia in a limited-overs win over Queensland. He took five catches off the bowling of Jordan Buckingham and equalled the List A world record with his eighth catch to dismiss Matt Kuhnemann. Two other wicketkeepers have taken eight catches in a List A innings, both in England. Derek Taylor set the record playing for Somerset in 1982 and Worcestershire's James Pipe matched it in 2021.

LIVE TELECAST

Australia Women vs South Africa Women: Only Test, day 1, Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8.30 a.m.
India vs England: 3rd Test, day 1, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.
PVL: Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LIV, 6.30 & 8.30 p.m.
ISL: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.
Europa League: Sony Sports Ten 1, 2 & 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 11.30 p.m. & 1.30 a.m. (Friday)
New Zealand vs South Africa: 2nd Test, day 4, Prime Video, 3.30 a.m. (Friday)

De Bruyne dazzles as Manchester City cruises against FC Copenhagen

The Belgian scores one and has a hand in two more; Brahim Diaz's magical moment helps Real Madrid edge a tight game away to RB Leipzig

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Associated Press
COPENHAGEN

Kevin De Bruyne scored one goal and had a hand in two more as Manchester City resumed its quest to retain the Champions League title with a 3-1 win at FC Copenhagen in the first leg of the round of 16 on Tuesday.

Only a careless mistake from goalkeeper Ederson Moraes, which led to Copenhagen's equaliser in the 34th minute via midfielder Magnus Mattsson, prevented City from taking an even more commanding lead into the second leg in Manchester in three

weeks. De Bruyne is often City's man for the big occasion and he delivered again at the start of the knockout stage, driving home the opening goal in the 10th minute after running onto Phil Foden's pass on the right side of the area.

Outplayed
Copenhagen was outplayed in the first half but still managed to pull level in the 34th after Ederson's pass out from his area went astray.

City retook the lead in the first minute of first-half stoppage time. While the build-up wasn't pretty, the finish from Bernardo Silva certainly was.

The build-up to the third goal in second-half stoppage time was much

easier on the eye and again it involved De Bruyne, who ran onto Foden's pass down the inside right channel and cut the ball back to the England midfielder, who slotted home.

Brahim Diaz stepped up in the absence of Jude Bellingham, scoring after a mazy solo run to lead Real Madrid to a 1-0 win at Leipzig.

Diaz combined some nifty dribbles with a powerful run to get past three Leipzig defenders before hitting the top corner with a left-footed shot from inside the area in the 48th.

The results: Pre-quarterfinals, first leg: RB Leipzig 0 lost to Real Madrid 1 (Diaz 48); FC Copenhagen 1 (Mattsson 34) lost to Manchester City 3 (De Bruyne 10, Silva 45+1, Foden 90+2).



Standout performer: De Bruyne sends City on its way to a comprehensive win with this opening goal against Copenhagen. REUTERS

India women stun China in BATC, men rout Hong Kong

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
SHAH ALAM (MALAYSIA)

Two-time Olympic medalist P.V. Sindhu made a winning return from a lengthy injury lay-off as India stunned formidable China 3-2 in the women's competition of the Badminton Asia Team Championships (BATC) on Wednesday.

Making a mark
With just two teams in Group W, India was assured of a knock-out round berth even before its opening match but the team made its mark in style with the shock win over the top-seeded Chinese side.

The Indian men's team, which lifted the Thomas



Winning return: Sindhu, who was missing in action since October due to a knee injury, beat higher-ranked Han Yue. INSTAGRAM/BADMINTONASIA

Cup in 2022 and secured a first-ever silver medal at last year's Asian Games, registered a dominating 4-1

victory over Hong Kong to qualify for the knock-out round from Group A.

Hong Kong had lost to

China 0-5 on Tuesday.

India will take on top seeds China on Thursday to decide the group winner in the men's section.

The results:

Women: India bt China 3-2 (P.V. Sindhu bt Han Yue 21-17, 21-15; Tanisha Castro & Ashwini Ponappa lost to Liu Sheng Shu & Tan Ning 19-21, 16-21; Ashmita Chaihna lost to Wang Zhi Yi 13-21, 15-21; Treesa Jolly & Gayatri Gopichand bt Li Yi Jing & Luo Xu Min 10-21, 21-18, 21-17; Anmol Kharb bt Wu Luo Yu 22-20, 14-21, 21-18).

Men: India bt Hong Kong 4-1 (H.S. Prannoy lost to Ng Ka Long Angus 18-21, 14-21; Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Chirag Shetty bt Lui Chun Wai & Yeung Shing Choi 21-16, 21-11; Lakshya Sen bt Chan Yin Chak 21-14, 21-9; M.R. Arjun & Dhruv Kapila bt Chow Hin Long & Hung Kuei Chun 21-12, 21-7; K. Srikanth bt Jason Gunawan 21-14, 21-18).

Anirudh-Vijay pair loses in the pre-quarterfinals

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

Anirudh Chandrasekar and Vijay Sundar Prashanth were beaten 6-3, 7-5 (5) in the doubles pre-quarterfinals by Guido Andreozzi and Miguel Reyes-Varela in the \$742,350 ATP Tennis tournament in Delray Beach, USA.

Other results:

\$15,000 ITF men, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand: Singles (first round): Maximus Jones (Tha) bt Bharath Kumaran 6-1, 6-4; Nitin Kumar Sinha bt Kosuke Ogura (Jpn) 6-3, 5-7, 7-6(7).
Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Mitsuki Leong (Mas) & Nitin Kumar Sinha bt

Natthasith Kunswan & Anapat Timangkul (Tha) 6-3, 6-2.

\$15,000 ITF men, Sharjah El Sheikh, Egypt: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Finn Bass (GBR) & David Perez Sanz (Esp) bt Anurag Agarwal & Kevin Humphreys (Ger) 6-2, 6-3.

\$15,000 ITF men, Monastir, Tunisia: Singles (first round): Chirag Duhani bt Pietro Mugelli (Ita) 6-4, 6-1.

\$25,000 ITF women, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand: Singles (first round): Lantana Tararudee (Tha) bt Zeel Desai 6-3, 6-1.

Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Zhibek Kulambayeva (Kaz) & Lanlana Tararudee (Tha) bt Zeel Desai & Anastasia Sukhotina 6-1, 7-5.

Ya-Hsin Lee (Tpe) & Liu Fangzhou (Chn) bt Ashmitha Eswaramurthi & Xun Fang Ying (Chn) 6-2, 6-3.

Missed chances cost Indian women despite a good show

FIH PRO LEAGUE

Sports Bureau

Indian women played some of their most impressive hockey in recent times, but ended up on the losing side against Netherlands, going down 1-0 in Rourkela on Wednesday as scoring woes continued.

India's defence kept the Dutch at bay for long periods in a game played at high intensity all through, frustrating them enough to force errors and even denying Yibbi Jansen of five penalty corners but the team's inability to finish off attacks and get their shots on target inside the attacking circle continued to haunt.

Bizarre suspension
The Indian defence managed to hold on even after a bizarre suspension for India goalkeeper and captain Savita towards the end of Q3 for kicking the ball outside the circle on a day when she was otherwise outstanding.

It was for the first time in over two months that the Dutch women failed to score in the first quarter and it needed a flash of brilliance from Felice Albers to trap a rebound at shoulder height and tap it in for them to score.

India even took control



On target: The Netherlands' Felice Albers is pleased as punch after scoring the lone goal of the match against India. X@FIH_HOCKEY

and dominated the third Quarter and parts of the fourth, creating multiple chances and a series of penalty corners but the Dutch defence and goalkeeper Anne Veenendaal, tested for the first time this season, held firm as the Dutch took home a 10th straight win.

Australia, meanwhile, avenged its defeat to China in the Bhubaneswar leg of

Sakshi and Bajrang cry foul, threaten fresh protest

WRESTLING

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Olympic medal-winning grapplers Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia on Wednesday alleged that Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Sanjay Singh used 'devious means' to get the suspension on WFI lifted by United World Wrestling (UWW) and threatened to restart their agitation

against the body.

The UWW on Tuesday lifted the provisional suspension on India but directed the national federation to provide written guarantees that there would be no discriminatory action against the prototyping trio of Punia, Malik and Vinesh Phogat.

The trio has been protesting for more than a year, demanding the arrest of former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

"We came to know yes-

terday that Sanjay Singh had done some setting with UWW to get the suspension lifted. Brij Bhushan and Sanjay Singh have left no stone unturned to show that they are above the law," said Sakshi in a video posted on 'X'.

"Our protest has only been suspended. I might have retired from wrestling but I not will tolerate Brij Bhushan or his people running the federation and harassing women," she asserted.

Devanshi shoots gold in women's junior air pistol; Lakshita second

WORLD CUP

Sports Bureau

Devanshi Dhamma shot 240.0 to beat compatriot Lakshita by two points and win the air pistol gold for junior women in the World Cup in Granada, Spain, on Wednesday.

In junior men's section, Paras Khola, the only Indian in the fray, shot 561 for the 15th spot. The medals took India further up on top of the medals table, with four gold, three silver and two bronze. Georgia was second with a gold, a silver and two bronze.



The results:
Air pistol: Junior women: 1. Devanshi Dhamma 240.0 (572); 2. Lakshita 238.0 (572); 3. Mariami Prodiashvili 213.1 (571); 4. Drishti Sangwan 563.

Kyrgyzstan was the other country to win a gold medal.

Season three of Prime Volleyball League launched

Delhi Toofans joins the bandwagon as nine teams will vie for the top honours; this edition will also see the introduction of Super 5s stage



All set: Captains from the nine teams pose with the big prize in Chennai on Wednesday. M. SRINATH

Sports Bureau CHENNAI

The third season of the Prime Volleyball League (PVL), set to begin at the SDAT multi-purpose Nehru indoor stadium here on Thursday, was officially launched at the Taj Club House here on Wednesday.

The league CEO Joy Bhattacharjya and Baseline Ventures Pvt. Ltd's co-founder and managing director Tuhin Mishra were present along with the nine team captains.

Ahmedabad Defenders, Bengaluru Torpedoes, Calicut Heroes, Chennai Blitz, Hyderabad Black Hawks,

Kochi Blue Spikers, Kolkata Thunderbolts, Mumbai Meteors, and this season's entrant Delhi Toofans are the nine teams.

This season, which ends on March 21, will see the introduction of Super 5s. The Super 5s stage will take place from March 11 to 18 when the top five teams from the league stage will compete in a round-robin format.

The team that finishes first in the Super 5s will directly qualify for the final, while the second-placed and the third-placed teams will compete in the eliminator on March 19 to decide the other finalist.

On Super 5s, Calicut He-

roes captain Jerome Vinith said: "It's good for all the teams. Because, it's very difficult to show our potential in 15 points. Semifinal is just one match, and 15 points is very short-term. It's very nice of Prime Volleyball to add this thing."

Every match will be played for five sets, and each set will be played for 15 points.

A 5-0 win will bring the team three points, while any other win will bring two points. In case of a tie in the number of points in the standings, the sets won will be considered.

The eliminator and final will be played in the standard best-of-five format.

Petratos' goal ends Goa's 12-match unbeaten run

ISL-10

Sports Bureau MARGAO

Mohun Bagan Super Giant ended the 12-match unbeaten streak of FC Goa in ISL-10 with a 1-0 win at the Fatorda Stadium on Wednesday.

Dimitrios Petratos' 75th-minute strike sealed the deal for the Mariners as they scored a second consecutive win and stopped Manolo Marquez's team from bridging the gap with league leader Odisha FC (31 points in 15 matches).

Goa remained in the second spot with 28 points in 13 games while Mohun Bagan moved to third (26 points in 13 matches).

Though the host tested the Kolkata giant in the first 20 minutes, it failed to flourish in the final third. Brandon Fernandes was at the forefront of the Goa moves, setting up deliveries for Carlos Martinez and Noah Sadaoui.

Caught off-side

Martinez was caught off-side after being in a promising position in the fifth minute, and one of Brandon's own efforts from

long range was on target but stopped by goalkeeper Vishal Kaith.

In the 21st minute, Petratos' curling shot was saved by a diving Goa custodian Arshdeep Singh.

In the 75th minute, the visitors broke on the counter and a usually organised Goa backline looked out of shape.

Manvir Singh tried to slot home past Arshdeep and the goalkeeper, who had kept the most clean sheets in the league before this game, made a hasty clearance that Petratos pounced upon to score the winner.

India hands over Chess Olympiad Torch to Hungary



Hand over: Union Sports Minister Anurag Thakur passes the Chess Olympiad Torch to Judit Polgar in the presence of Viswanathan Anand and FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Sports Bureau NEW DELHI

India hosted the Olympiad in 2022 in Mamallapuram and grand arrangements were hailed by one and all.

During the torch handoff ceremony, Mr. Thakur said, "Chess is an intellectual legacy that India probably offers to the world, and it is not merely a sport, but a reflection of strategic depth and philosophical wisdom."

"The elegant sport not only sharpens the mind but also teaches invaluable lessons of patience and resilience and takes one onto the path of intellectual pursuit of strategic mastery."

On his part, Dvorkovich recalled his visit to India in June 2022 when he was part of the first-ever Chess Olympiad torch relay, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and his idea of starting the torch relay from India before every edition of the Olympiad becoming a reality.

Surreal and emotional: Hamilton at 2024 Mercedes car launch

FORMULA ONE

Agence France-Presse LONDON

Lewis Hamilton admitted it felt "emotional" and "surreal" to take part in the final Formula One car launch of his Mercedes career on Wednesday.

Hamilton, a seven-time World champion, will leave Mercedes at the end of the 2024 season in a stunning switch to Ferrari.

The 39-year-old had signed a new two-year deal with Mercedes worth £100 million (\$126 million) in August.

Speaking at the Mercedes launch for the first time since his blockbuster

move was confirmed, Hamilton said: "The last few weeks have obviously been emotional and it is very surreal to be here."

"The focus through the whole of winter training is getting the team back to where we once were."

"We have had these difficult couple of years which have been really grounding for us. It has helped us regroup and really look at things."

Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff, standing alongside Hamilton at the launch, added: "It has been a very busy winter. It will be our last season with Lewis so we are keen on bringing a quick car."

Hamilton, who joined Mercedes from McLaren in 2012, said: "It may be recalled that

2013, won six of his record-equalling seven World championships with the Silver Arrows.

But the British driver has struggled to match Red Bull rival Max Verstappen since he missed out on what would have been a record eighth world championship in 2021 in controversial fashion.

His long goodbye to Mercedes made for an awkward final car launch at the team's Northamptonshire base.

Hamilton answered just three questions from the Mercedes moderator during the brief nine-minute event. "I came here in 2013 so 11 years with the team and now I am starting my 12th," he said.

THE SPECIAL OFFICER AND COMPETENT AUTHORITY (UNDER KPIDFE - IMA & OTHER SCAM)

3rd Floor, Podium Block, Visvesvaraya Towers, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru - 560001. Phone No: 080 - 29565353, 29566556, 29604556

E-mail: splocaima21@gmail.com

NOTICE / INVITATION FOR E-AUCTION FOR MOBILE ITEMS

Pursuant to attachment of movable properties by the Government under the provisions of the Karnataka Protection of Interest of Depositors in Financial Establishments Act, 2004 (KPIDFE Act) and pursuant to the absolute attachment order by the Hon'ble Special Court the Special Officer & Competent Authority (under KPIDFE - IMA and other Scam), is issuing notice for e-auction of the movables attached through e-auction on 'as is where is and whatever there is basis'.

"SPLOCA" here by invites bids from the in tending bidders along with a bid deposit as mentioned in the table below as Earnest Money for MOBILE ITEMS - Crafts & Textile items to be paid through DD drawn in favor of "Special Officer and Competent Authority (EMD)" or through RTGS / NEFT to the Account number 41506340119, IFSC Code: SBIN040277 STATE BANK OF INDIA, VIDHANASOUDHA Branch.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE MOBILE ITEMS

| S. No | Description of items | Reserve Price (Rs) | EMD (Rs.) | Bid Increase Value (Rs.) |
|---------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------------|
| CRAFT ITEMS | | | | |
| 1 | Metal Items | 2,67,005/- | 14,000/- | 1500/- |
| 2 | Wood Items | 9,05,633/- | 45,000/- | 5000/- |
| 3 | Marble Items | 5,99,380/- | 30,000/- | 3000/- |
| 4 | Art Jewellery and Bangles | 1,55,384/- | 8,000/- | 800/- |
| 5 | Silver Items | 10,18,355/- | 50,000/- | 5000/- |
| 6 | Sandal Soap and Powder | 55,720/- | 3,000/- | 300/- |
| 7 | Orissa Painting | 1,27,163/- | 6,000/- | 600/- |
| 8 | Leather Shoes and Ladies Bags | 23,820/- | 1,000/- | 100/- |
| TEXTILE ITEMS | | | | |
| 1 | Ladies Clothing and Accessories | 28,00,000/- | 1,40,000/- | 10000/- |
| 2 | Children's Clothing | 2,40,000/- | 12,000/- | 1000/- |
| 3 | Gents and Common Clothing | 8,00,000/- | 40,000/- | 3000/- |
| 4 | Thaan | 6,00,000/- | 30,000/- | 3000/- |

Date of Inspection and Time: 4th March 2024, 11.00 AM to 2.00 PM.

Date of Pre Bid Meeting and Time: 4th March 2024, 3.00 PM to 4.00 PM.

Last Date of Submission of Bids and EMD Submission: 1st March 2024, Before 5.00 PM.

Date and Time of E-Auction: 5th March 2024, 11.00 AM to 1.00 PM.

For Registration & Online Auction, you can login to: <https://www.bankeauctions.com>.

The interested bidders who require auction related information can contact Joint Secretary, Office of the Special Officer & Competent Authority, 3rd Floor, Podium Block, Visvesvaraya Towers, Dr. Ambedkar Veedhi, Bengaluru - 560001, e-mail ID: splocaeauction@gmail.com or Contact Mobile No.: 8217203930.

Sd/-

The Special Officer & Competent Authority (Under KPIDFE - IMA & Other Scam) Bengaluru.

Place: Bengaluru

Date: 14-02-2024

DIPR/CP/3579/Adverto/2023-24

Government of Himachal Pradesh Jal Shakti Department

Notice Inviting e-Tender

The Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Vibhag, Flood Protection Division, Gagron (HP) invites online e-tender on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh from approved eligible contractors for the following works through online process:-

Sr. No. Name of Work Estimated cost Earnest Money Cost of Tender document Time Limit Eligible Class of Contractor

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------|-----------|
| 1 | C/o 20 Nos. Tubewells in village Shivpur Pandra, Kailash Nagar, Kalruhi, Lower Andora, Pirthipur, Harwal, Bhaderkali (Maira Amb Harian Basti), Dangoh, Dangoh-II, Lower Joh Beh, Joh, Dangoh Khas, sagnai, Tubewell No. 1 Kaloh (improvement), Tubewell No. 37 Mukbaripur (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and development of 2 Nos. 125 mtrs deep T/well at village Kalruhi, Joh, 4 Nos. 140 mtrs deep T/well at village Kailash Nagar, T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of T/well) T/well Dangoh Khas, T/well Daulatpur (Replacement of T/well) and 2 Nos. 150mtrs deep T/well at village Dangoh, Dangoh-II). | Rs. 1,68,29,015/- only | Rs. 2,00,790/- only | Rs. 1500/- | 3 (Three) Months | Class "C" |
| 2 | C/o 20 Nos. Tubewells in village Shivpur Pandra, Kailash Nagar, Kalruhi, Lower Andora, Pirthipur, Harwal, Bhaderkali (Maira Amb Harian Basti), Dangoh, Dangoh-II, Lower Joh Beh, Joh, Dangoh Khas, sagnai, Tubewell No. 1 Kaloh (improvement), Tubewell No. 37 Mukbaripur (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and development of 2 Nos. 125 mtrs deep T/well at village Kalruhi, Joh, 4 Nos. 140 mtrs deep T/well at village Kailash Nagar, T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and development of 2 Nos. 125 mtrs deep T/well at village Kalruhi, Joh, 4 Nos. 140 mtrs deep T/well at village Kailash Nagar, T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and development of 2 Nos. 125 mtrs deep T/well at village Kalruhi, Joh, 4 Nos. 140 mtrs deep T/well at village Kailash Nagar, T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and development of 2 Nos. 125 mtrs deep T/well at village Kalruhi, Joh, 4 Nos. 140 mtrs deep T/well at village Kailash Nagar, T/well Gundpur Banehra (Replacement of Old T/well), T/well at Daulatpur (Replacement of Old T/well), Tubewell No. 49 Jadla (Improvement), Tubewell No. 83 Lohari (improvement) and Upper Lohari (improvement) in Gagron Constituency Distt. Una (HP) (SH: Drilling of Tubewell, lowering of assembly and | | | | | |



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I see them as a tough team with a lot of potential to make progress and waves, says Vishaal Uppal

Mentor for national champion Shrivalli is confident of her climbing up the ladder; feels that with support, women's tennis in the country can produce world-beaters

Kamesh Srinivasan

Vishaal Uppal has been strongly intertwined with Indian tennis for many years. Not many may remember, but Vishaal had beaten Rohan Bopanna in the final for the National grass court title. He had won a crucial doubles rubber with Leander Paes in the Davis Cup tie against Korea, beating a team that had Hyung Taik Lee.

He had also won the Asian Games medal with Mustafa Ghose, when Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi won the gold.

He has been the captain of the Fed Cup team, now known as the Billie Jean King Cup. More importantly, he guided the team to the World Group play-off for the first time in history.

Vishaal runs a tennis academy, the Tennis Project in Gurugram. More than that he is now familiar in the tennis circles as the mentor for the women's national champion Shrivalli Bhamidipati, who has made rapid strides in recent weeks.

The 22-year-old Shrivalli had won her maiden singles title in the \$25,000 ITF women's event in Bengaluru in November. She was slowly realising her potential.

Yet, there was no hint of what she unleashed in the \$115,000 WTA tennis tournament in Mumbai. Shrivalli won three matches in a row, including the one over former world No. 56, Nao Hibino of Japan, now ranked 93. She played a vibrant match on equal terms against the teenage sensation, Alina Korneeva and went down in three tough sets, after winning the first.

To put things in perspective, despite not breaching the top-500 in ranking, Shrivalli was beating players in the top-100 to 300 bracket. Was it a surprise for Vishaal, even though he has been working diligently, tuning her thoughts to a positive wavelength?

"I wasn't surprised at the way Shrivalli played in Mumbai. I was happy to see her execute the things I have been working with her. What pleased me most was the mentality she played with, in her matches. Her tennis playing ability and talent is known to everyone. So, tennis wise it was not a surprise for me", said Vishaal.

The 16-year-old Korneeva, who was World No.1 junior last year, having won Australian Open and French Open singles titles, apart from making the semifinals of Wimbledon, has already won three women's titles in the professional circuit. Shrivalli matched her in every department before Korneeva nosed ahead, playing strong on the big points in the climax. As luck would have it, Korneeva fell ill and could not play the quarterfinals.

"That is the way it goes. Korneeva had to give a walkover, which was a loss for the tournament as she is a rising star of the WTA Tour. She had earned her spot in the quarterfinals by beating Shrivalli", observed Vishaal.

There is no doubt that Shrivalli has progressed tremendously, especially in terms of self-belief which helps her play best tennis in match situations. She enjoys the competition and thrives under pressure as it tunes her focus to a higher



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

degree. With conviction in her ability to compete, Shrivalli no longer allows the reputation of her opponent or the situation of the score to weigh down her performance.

She is growing as a tennis player, and definitely needs to work more on her game and consistency.

"We have to work on and improve every aspect of her game. Have to pay attention to detail, her mentality, physicality and tactical awareness", said Vishaal.

There will be three more tournaments in a row in India, the \$25,000 events in Gurugram, Nagpur and Indore, providing the chance for Shrivalli and the rest to gain precious match experience and improve their status on the WTA computer, so as to play at a higher level.

"Shrivalli has to stay focused on her

process and continue to develop her mentality. The tournament in Gurugram has a tough entry list. Having said that, if she executes our plan well then Shrivalli will be a very dangerous player in the upcoming three tournaments in India", said Vishaal.

It is not about Shrivalli alone, as it is a bunch of Indian girls who are hunting the big fish in the competitive ocean. Sahaja Yamalapalli, Rutuja Bhosale, Zeel Desai, Vaidehi Chaudhari and of course the leader, Ankita Raina, are all capable of winning against better ranked opponents on their day.

Sahaja was outstanding in Mumbai in beating the top seed Kayla Day of the USA in the first round. She was two points away from beating Polina Kudermetova in the pre-quarterfinals before the Russian stepped it up brilliantly to snuff the challenge. Rutuja had lost a tough second round in three sets against Katie Volynets of USA.

"I was very happy to see our girls perform the way they did in Mumbai. Two Indian girls beating two top 100 players in the same tournament was unheard of. Also, they didn't lose easy matches. Every match was a tough loss and our girls had chances to win. This surely will give them and other Indian girls a lot of belief", pointed out Vishaal.

Considering their excellent fare, do the Indian girls deserve more such big events at home?

"I believe, for now, one WTA \$125K event is enough. We need to concentrate more on hosting the \$60K, \$40K, \$25K and \$15K tournaments as we have to focus on the larger talent pool and give them the opportunity to rise in the world as well", said Vishaal.

The vision
To his credit, Vishaal has also been hosting some of the ITF women's events in the last few years, even when not many were conducted in the country overall. He will be hosting the next one at his academy in Gurugram, and has plans to keep the corporate world engaged in the sport.

"I am happy to do my bit to help out

players. I am happier at the way the girls are making use of the opportunities. That is what is exciting about hosting these tournaments. At the end of the day, it is to benefit our players and for their development", said Vishaal.

In the back-to-back tournaments hosted at his centre, Karman Kaur Thandi and Sahaja Yamalapalli had won the singles titles last year, despite the strong presence of foreign players.

He feels that women's tennis needs more tournaments at home, and the players need to get funding, coaches, physios for development.

"We need to make sure the camaraderie between the players remains good and they push each other to get better in a positive manner", he said.

Honoured

He did lose his captaincy of the national women's team rather unceremoniously when the going was great, but Vishaal was happy to have played his part well.

"I felt humbled and honoured to be the captain. I did my best and I am happy I was able to lead the team to the World Group play-off, especially being the first captain to do so. I know I gave it my 100% and that makes me happy. Also, knowing I brought about positive changes and a winning mentality in the team was satisfying", said Vishaal.

The experience of leading the women's team taught him a lot and helped him understand women's tennis a lot better.

"It was about how to handle and work with the players when the pressure was on", he recalled.

He does strongly feel that Indian women's tennis has good scope to progress.

"Our team has a great mix of experience and youth. I see them as a tough team with a lot of potential to make waves and progress. I see them having the potential to once again reach the play-off and challenge to go further ahead. However, I do feel that they need strong leadership and a support staff that works hard with them and believes in their potential", he signed off.

THE GIST

Vishaal runs a tennis academy, the Tennis Project in Gurugram

The 22-year-old Shrivalli had won her maiden singles title in the \$25,000 ITF women's event in Bengaluru in November and she was slowly realising her potential

The experience of leading the women's team taught Vishaal a lot and helped him understand women's tennis a lot better



SCIENCE

Does updating COVID-19 vaccines frequently have any benefits?

The 'match' between the viral strain loaded in a vaccine and the strain circulating in the population influences a COVID-19 vaccine's effectiveness. In flu vaccines, with which COVID-19 vaccines share many similarities, effectiveness can vary by as much as 15% between a match and no match

Vipin M. Vashishtha

Researchers update the composition of influenza vaccines every six months to match the strains of the virus that are circulating in the wild, so that the shots may provide protective immunity against the flu. But despite their best efforts, researchers rarely perfectly match the strains loaded in the vaccine with the strains circulating by the time the vaccines reach the market.

The reason for this is the long gestation period – usually at least six months – between identifying the circulating strain and the development, manufacturing, and distribution of the vaccines. By the time the updated flu vaccine is available, the circulating strain may have drifted from the one contained in the vaccine, thanks to the high mutational rates of influenza viruses.

The 'match' between strains included in the vaccine and strains in circulation is the most important factor controlling the vaccine effectiveness (VE) of flu vaccines. The VE increases by more than 25% when there is a match with the circulating strains but can be as low as 10% in seasons when there is no match.

Another issue with flu vaccines is the durability of protection. According to a recent study, the VE declines by 7% for H3N2 to 11% for H1N1 viruses per month, and could vanish as soon as 90 days after vaccination.

There are some striking similarities between the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. The VE of COVID-19 vaccines varies according to the disease's progression as well as the circulating strains. With the advent of the highly mutated Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, the VE of COVID-19 vaccines has nose-dived.

According to one large study, COVID-19 vaccines had a VE of 52.8% against the Delta variant but only 16.4% against the Omicron. Another large review – of the findings of 78 studies on the VE of four COVID-19 vaccines before the advent of Omicron – concluded that VE against symptomatic disease waned by 20-30% by the sixth month of the primary series.

Thus, researchers worldwide rushed to revise COVID-19 vaccines that contained the ancestral strain to match the circulating strain of SARS-CoV-2, and thus remain clinically relevant.

In early 2023, a highly mutated sub-lineage of the Omicron variant, XBB.1.5, emerged. It was antigenically as distant from the ancestral strain of SARS-CoV-2 as the latter was from the SARS-CoV-1 virus. There were three COVID-19 vaccines available as booster doses at this time: the monovalent ancestral (OG) shot, a bivalent OG+BA.1 shot, and a bivalent OG+BA.5 booster. However, as stated above, none of the vaccines (including mRNA vaccines) were found to be efficacious against infections of this hypermutated variant.

Subsequently, the vaccine was updated in mid-2023 to include the antigens of the XBB.1.5 strain. But by the time the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) approved and recommended the updated monovalent vaccine as a booster, another new lineage of Omicron, JN.1, had emerged with more than 30 mutations in the spike protein and a high immune-evasion potential. By January 2024, JN.1 had completely replaced XBB.1.5 in the population.



A health worker prepares to administer a booster dose of Covishield at a government health centre in Hyderabad, December 2022. RAMAKRISHNA G./THE HINDU

The CDC estimated the updated booster was around 50% efficacious against symptomatic JN.1 infections but some experts doubted this figure.

Merit in updating COVID-19 boosters
The matching problem raises a pertinent question: Is it prudent to attempt frequent updates?

One interesting study from Australia, uploaded as a preprint paper on February 9, analysed this question in detail. Researchers retrospectively analysed 18 studies that investigated the ability of the OG, the OG+BA.1, and the OG+BA.5 boosters to neutralise the variant that started circulating immediately after their deployment. They found that updated vaccines consistently improved neutralising antibody titres by 40% or more compared to non-updated vaccine formulations.

Specifically, the researchers found that relative to the OG antigens' efficacy against XBB.1.5, the BA.1 update did a better job and the BA.5 update did even better. Based on these benefits in the neutralisation titres, they predicted that updating an existing vaccine should, on average, induce a 1.52-times higher titre against a future variant compared to boosting with an older formulation. The researchers also stated they expect a 11-25% increase in VE against symptomatic disease and 23-33% against severe disease caused by the future variant.

In sum, the study supports the case for revising COVID-19 vaccines' formulations as often as possible.

However, there are some confounding factors, including past exposure to infections, inter-study variations of such exposures, *in vitro* and *in vivo* differences, and publication biases. The researchers also clarified the benefits of the update



The effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines varies according to the disease's progression as well as the strains. With the advent of the Omicron variant the VE of COVID-19 vaccines has dived

would depend on the 'distance' between the antigens in the updated vaccine and the future variant that eventually circulates. Indeed, there is no guarantee that a profoundly drifted variant with a very high transmissibility and more virulence won't emerge in future, and which would negate the advantage of updating existing vaccines.

Further, the researchers only explored one arm of the immune system: the humoral immunity conferred by antibodies. The other arm, cellular immunity conferred by T-cells, wasn't considered. T-cells are like airbags: they deploy on their own and become safer to use with every accident (or exposure) that engineers study. Antibodies are like brakes. Our brain deploys them. They are terrific when new but suffer wear over time, and need to be updated.

Does India need an updated booster?
In India, the advent of Omicron (mainly BA.2) in January 2022 and its resultant mild disease rendered a much lower uptake of COVID-19 vaccines.

For many Indians, the pandemic is long past, notwithstanding a few surges in 2023. Currently, there is no Indian vaccine with antigens matching the currently dominant JN.1 strain or its predecessor, XBB.1.5. Corbevax, the vaccine made by Biological E, is currently

developing an XBB-based vaccine.

Whether Indians should be boosted with an updated COVID-19 vaccine depends on the objective. If it is to prevent severe disease, hospitalisation, and death, only three exposures – through natural infection or vaccination – will suffice to confer protection irrespective of the antigenic makeup of the circulating variant. (This protection is provided by our T-cells.) This is the case with most healthy, immunocompetent individuals.

For the vulnerable sections of society, like the elderly and those with comorbidities and immunodeficiencies, it is desirable to actively prevent an infection. These individuals need an updated booster. The vaccines based on OG or older strains may not offer meaningful protection owing to the mismatch and other factors.

All available influenza vaccines are being developed on conventional egg-based or cell-culture platforms, which is why updating them takes six months or more. Many COVID-19 vaccines use the mRNA platform whose main attraction is the ease and speed with which they can be modified. Unfortunately, updating mRNA vaccines has also required four to six months.

India also has a next-generation mRNA vaccine called Gemcovac, developed indigenously by Gennova Lab and based on the old Omicron variant. It can also be updated to use a contemporaneous variant, but that depends on the need and the will of the national recommending authority as much as the still-evolving SARS-CoV-2 virus.

(*Vipin M. Vashishtha is past national convener, IAP Committee on Immunisation, and director, Mangla Hospital & Research Center, Bijnor.*)

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

ENIAC: the first programmable, digital computer

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QUESTION 1
ENIAC was the world's first programmable, electronic, digital computer. It was dedicated to the University of Pennsylvania on February 15, 1946. What does ENIAC stand for?

QUESTION 2
During the Second World War, the University's Moore School of Engineering hired more than 200 women as _____ . Six of them were assigned to program ENIAC to perform calculations that would determine the trajectories of ballistic missiles. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3
The first program ENIAC ran, through December 1945 and January 1946, was to

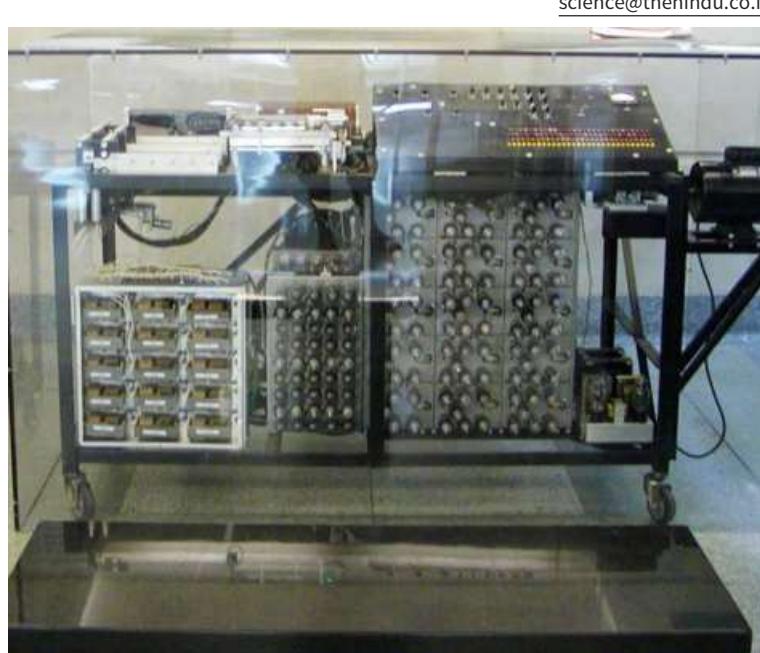
check whether a _____ weapon would work. It determined that a scheme proposed by Edward Teller wouldn't, so Teller and Stanislaw Ulam came up with the popular staged design. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 4
ENIAC's work on the answer to Q3 inspired Ulam and John von Neumann to use the computer to calculate the distances neutrons can travel through different materials using X methods. This problem had previously required large groups of people to perform a large number of calculations, and the computer's success with these methods was pivotal to establishing X's usefulness in science. Name X.

QUESTION 5
At least five programming languages were designed to run problems on

ENIAC. Name the programmer who built the fourth, called ARC Assembly. Among other achievements, she coauthored the book 'Coding for A.R.C.' with her husband; the book contained the world's first assembly code.

Answers to February 13 quiz:
1. What CfA scientists said V886 Centauri could be the universe's largest of – **Ans: Diamond**
2. CfA scientists' nickname for the core of V886 Centauri – **Ans: Lucy**
3. Name for stars made of electron degenerate matter; subtype to which V886 Centauri belongs – **Ans: White dwarf; ZZ Ceti**
4. Branch of science that studies how stellar bodies oscillate – **Ans: Astroseismology**
5. Largest counterpart of V886 Centauri on the earth – **Ans: Cullinan diamond**
Visual: **Body-centred cubic**
First contact: P.N. Moorthy | Shamim Mondal



Visual: In a landmark 1973 case, a district court in the U.S. invalidated the 1964 patent for ENIAC and ruled that its design was derived from the device shown above. Name the device. MANOP



The horseshoe crab has remained unchanged for over 450 million years. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Scientists seek more protections for 'living fossil'

Reuters

Environmental groups on Monday petitioned the U.S. government seeking endangered species protection for the American horseshoe crab, a "living fossil" under threat from commercial harvests for bait and biomedical use as well as from habitat loss and climate change.

These spine-tailed sea creatures, named for the shape of their body shells, were once a familiar sight to summer beachgoers along the U.S. mid-Atlantic and Gulf Coasts.

But populations have crashed in recent decades, with spawning numbers down two-thirds from 1990 in the Delaware Bay estuary that was once their biggest stronghold, according to conservation groups. Research also shows their egg densities falling more than 80% in the past four decades.

Those trends are tied to stress on other marine species that feed on their larvae and eggs, including the rufa red knot, a migratory shorebird whose own 2014 threatened-species listing cited horseshoe crab harvests as a contributing factor.

Classified not as true crabs but as marine arthropods more closely related to spiders and scorpions, horseshoe crabs are among the oldest living creatures on the earth, with fossils of their ancestors

Pharmaceutical companies reap horseshoe crabs in large numbers for their blue-coloured blood, which contains a clotting agent used to test drugs and medical devices for bacterial endotoxins

dating back some 450 million years.

"We're wiping out one of the world's oldest and toughest creatures," said Will Harlan, a senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity, one of 23 groups petitioning the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for the endangered species declaration.

Such a listing would generally make it unlawful to harm or kill a horseshoe crab without a special permit. The petition also seeks designation of "critical habitat" to be protected, especially during spawning season.

The petition cites numerous threats to the American horseshoe crab, one of four living species of the animal, stemming from human activities.

Pharmaceutical companies reap horseshoe crabs in large numbers – nearly 1 million in 2022 – for their blue-coloured blood, which contains a clotting agent used to test drugs and medical devices for bacterial endotoxins, the petition said.

Regulations allow the biomedical industry to extract only a portion of a horseshoe crab's blood and then release it alive in the area it was collected, though 10-15% of harvested animals die during this process, NOAA says on its website.

The creatures also face growing habitat loss from oceanfront development, dredging, pollution, coastal erosion and sea-level rise linked to global warming from increased greenhouse gas emissions.

Mass die-offs have been observed in the past three years, with NOAA in 2023 ranking the horseshoe crab's overall vulnerability to climate change as "very high," the petition said.

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