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## U.S., U.K. hit Houthi targets in Yemen



A Tomahawk land-attack missile being launched by the U.S. against Houthi military targets in Yemen on Saturday. REUTERS

**Reuters**  
WASHINGTON/ADEN/  
BAGHDAD

The United States and Britain launched strikes against 36 Houthi targets in Yemen, in the second day of major U.S. operations against Iran-linked groups following a deadly drone strike in Jordan that killed three American soldiers last weekend.

The strikes late on Saturday hit buried weapons storage facilities, missile systems, launchers and

other capabilities the Houthis have used to attack Red Sea shipping, the Pentagon said, adding it targeted 13 locations across the country.

Houthi military spokesman Yahya Sarea said the strikes "will not pass without a response and consequences".

The Houthis did not announce any casualties.

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## MLAs return as Champai govt. faces floor test today

Govt. needs 41 votes; 39 ruling alliance legislators arrive from Hyderabad; Congress leader says no MLA is in touch with the BJP; rebel JMM MLA Lobin Hembrom offers conditional support to govt.

**Amit Bhelari**  
RANCHI

Legislators from the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM)-led ruling alliance returned to Ranchi from Hyderabad on Sunday for the crucial floor test of Chief Minister Champai Soren in the Jharkhand Assembly on Monday.

Former Chief Minister Hemant Soren has been cleared to participate in the trust vote, and at least one rebel JMM MLA has agreed to support the government, which will require 41 votes in the 80-strong Assembly to pass the floor test.

Congress Legislature Party leader Alamgir Alam, one of two Cabinet Ministers in the new government, was present to wel-



Crucial arrival: MLAs of the JMM-led ruling alliance arrive at the Birsa Munda Airport in Ranchi on Sunday. PTI

come the 39 returning MLAs when their chartered flight landed in Ranchi at 9 p.m.

"All our MLAs are intact and no one is in touch with the Bharatiya Janata Party. We are going to win the floor test. The BJP leaders were spreading rumours that some of our MLAs are

in touch with them. It's nothing as such," Mr. Alam said at the Ranchi airport.

From the airport, the MLAs were rushed straight to the Ranchi Circuit House where they will stay overnight before participating in the vote of confidence in the Assembly.

Immediately after the

swearing-in on Friday, 39 MLAs had been flown to Telangana and sequestered at a resort to prevent them from being approached by the BJP.

Mr. Hemant Soren, currently in the custody of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with an alleged land scam case, will also participate in the trust vote, after he was permitted to do so by a special court.

On the eve of the floor test, Lobin Hembrom, a veteran JMM leader and rebel MLA from the Biria Assembly seat, announced that he would back the new government, if it met his demands.

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'CONGRESS CONFIDENT'  
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BJP offered to drop cases if I joined it, I said never: Kejriwal

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday said the BJP asked him to join the party in exchange for letting him off in cases registered against him.

The Opposition party dubbed the statement as a "bundle of lies" and its Delhi chief Virendra Sachdeva challenged Mr. Kejriwal to either name the leader who made the offer or resign.

The CM's claim came a day after the Enforcement Directorate lodged a complaint in a court against him for skipping summons for the fifth time in a case linked to the excise policy.

Delhi Police had also served him a notice to join the probe into his allegations that the BJP attempted to "poach" AAP MLAs to topple his government.

At a foundation stone

laying ceremony of two school buildings in Rohini, Mr. Kejriwal said he won't succumb to such pressures despite the BJP-led Centre letting loose probe agencies behind AAP leaders.

"I'm not going to bow before them. They say come to the BJP, we will let you off. I said [I] will never join BJP," he said. "We are only building schools, hospitals, roads and providing water," he said, adding that these development works won't come to a halt even if he is "jailed".

"They [BJP] have hatched a conspiracy, but could not make us bow. If you thought schools won't be built, they will be built. Even if you put Kejriwal in jail, hospitals will be built, Mohalla Clinics will be built," the AAP chief said.

**NOTICE ISSUED TO ATISHI**  
» PAGE 2

## States hold the key to new reforms, says CEA

**Vikas Dhoop**  
NEW DELHI

India's energy transition goals hinge on power distribution companies turning viable and States opting for transparent, targeted

transfer of subsidies to beneficiaries, Chief Economic Adviser V. Anantha Nageswaran told *The Hindu*.

The interim Budget's "next-generation reforms" promise envisages working with sub-national govern-

ments to fix areas such as land-use norms, health and education outcomes, and labour laws, critical to spur job creation, he said.

**FULL INTERVIEW**

» PAGE 11



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\* Former Member Traffic Railway Board

\* Ex. Official Secretary to Govt. Of India

**Shri Anil Kumar Upadhyay IFS (Retd.)**

Former Additional Principal Conservator of Forests, M.P.

**Mrs Sangeeta Gupta, IRS (Retd.)**

Chief Commissioner Of Income Tax.

**Dr. Bala Prasad IFS (Retd.)**

(Ex Special Secretary to Govt. of India)

**Shri O.P. Singh IPS (Retd.)**

\* Former Director General of Police (DGP), UP

\* Former DGP CISF & NDRF

**Shri Ranjiv Singh Dalal IPS (Retd.)**

\* Former Director General of Police (DGP), Haryana

**Shri Kamalendra Prasad IPS (Retd.)**

\* Former Director General of Police (DGP), UP

**Shri Arun Jha, IAS (Retd.)**

Former Secretary, Govt. of India

**Shri B.B. Srivastava IAS (Retd.)**

\* Former Secretary to the Govt. of India Department of Land Resources (Ministry of Rural Development)

**Shri A.K. Mangotra IAS (Retd.)**

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## Crime Branch serves notice to Atishi over MLA poaching claim

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A team of Delhi Police's Crime Branch visited Delhi Minister Atishi's residence for a second time on Sunday and served her a notice in connection with allegations that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) attempted to "poach" Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs, an official said.

Officials had visited her and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residences on Friday as well to serve notices, but failed to do so since neither was home. On Saturday, Mr. Kejriwal received a similar notice over the claim and was asked to reply within three days.

As per the notice, Ms. Atishi and Mr. Kejriwal have been asked to provide information on the poaching claim, stating that the AAP leaders' comments suggest they are aware of certain information regarding the cognisable offence. A res-



Atishi addressing the media on Sunday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ponse is expected by February 5.

Addressing a press conference on the issue, Ms. Atishi said the notice does not contain any mention of an FIR or include penal provisions. She added that the officers who served the notice were being "forced by their political bosses".

"Police officers who have the passion to serve the country and protect women have been turned into a prime-time gimmick by their political masters."

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva, replying to Ms. Atishi's comments, accused the AAP leader of lying.

After HC pulls up AAP govt, Saxena says issues crippling health infrastructure violation of people's Fundamental Right; CM claims Finance, Health Secretaries openly defied orders, says several schemes affected in past due to non-disbursal of funds

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday sought the removal of Health and Finance Secretaries, responding to a letter from Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena who has criticised the Delhi government for the "pathetic state" of hospitals run by it in the national capital.

Mr. Saxena wrote to the Chief Minister on Saturday, three days after the Delhi High Court pulled up the Aam Aadmi Party government over the issue.

The court had taken *suo motu* cognisance of an incident, in which a man jumped out of a moving police van and died after being denied treatment at four government hospitals, three of them run by the



The communication between the L-G and the CM has come days after the HC pulled up the government over the issue. FILE PHOTO

Delhi government.

The L-G said in his letter, "Even as tall claims to the contrary have been made consistently by you and your Ministers, recent media reports highlighting the scathing observations made by the Hon'ble Delhi

High Court on the dismal state of affairs in Delhi's government hospitals have brought to the fore a rot that seems to have become deep-rooted."

He said the court's remarks, highlighting inadequate infrastructure,

manpower shortages, inefficient patient management, and potential financial mismanagement, paint a deeply troubling picture.

"These issues are not merely administrative oversights. They are direct violations of the Fundamental Duties of the government as well as the Fundamental Right to Health, and cast a long shadow of disrepute on the nation's capital," he said.

Replying to it, Mr. Kejriwal said he has asked the Health Minister to submit a report on the issues raised by him.

### Requests ignored'

"However, I wish to state that I have written to you earlier also to replace the Health Secretary, Deepak Kumar, who is not only inefficient but openly defies orders of his Finance Minister".

"In the interest of the people of Delhi, I again urge you to kindly replace them at the earliest," the Chief Minister said.

Man stoned to death after cricket match turns ugly

**Press Trust of India**  
NOIDA

A 24-year-old man died after he was hit on the head with stones by three men after an argument during a cricket match at Noida Extension on Sunday, the Noida police said.

The victim, Sumit, fell into a drain while trying to escape from the trio but was attacked again, the police added.

An FIR has been lodged against key accused Himanshu and two others at the Bisrakh police station and the body sent for a post-mortem.

## FIR lodged after child throws puppy from building

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Greater Noida Police has registered a case against unknown persons after a minor boy allegedly threw a puppy from a high-rise building onto the road, killing him, the police said on Sunday.

The FIR, filed by a volunteer at an NGO, People For Animals, said that the boy, aged about 9 or 10, is a resident of Gaur City-2, and that the act was recorded and the video shared with society residents. The complainant has sought the child's presence before a juvenile court.

## Ride-hailing apps, bike taxis behind our meagre earnings, say autorickshaw drivers

**Alisha Dutta**  
NEW DELHI

Autrickshaw drivers in the Capital complain about their incomes having been stagnant for close to a decade now, despite prices rising across the country due to inflation.

Drivers belonging to several unions across Delhi blamed the popularity of cheaper alternatives, such as bike taxis and ride-hail-

ing aggregator platforms, and their ability to quote the lowest rates for each ride. As a result, these drivers' earnings have been re-ceding.

Gopal Thakur, who has been ferrying passengers around the Karnal bypass in the city for close to two decades, said he used to make close to ₹1,200 a day around seven years ago – before the advent of ride-hailing applications like

Ola or Uber.

"Now that I am working for these apps, I struggle to make even ₹800 a day after paying a hefty commission to them," he said.

Mohammad Arman, an autorickshaw driver operating independently in south Delhi's Vasant Kunj, attributed the loss in income mainly to the incidence of commuters choosing bike taxis over autorickshaws.

"When a commuter is presented with the option of covering the same distance for ₹15 instead of ₹40, it's only logical that they would choose to book a bike taxi," he said.

"Many young drivers are being compelled to join ride-hailing apps in hopes of more customers and better pay," added Sanjay Chawla, an autorickshaw union leader.

Anurag Mazumdar, a re-

searcher in the field of the platform economy at the University of Illinois, told *The Hindu* that problems related to autorickshaw drivers' stagnating incomes will continue until the government steps in.

"The government must consistently recalibrate the meter and mandate that private entities cannot charge lower rates for the same distance, thus ensuring fair earnings," he said.

Autrickshaw drivers struggle to earn even ₹800 daily, since they have to pay commissions to ride-hailing platforms. FILE PHOTO

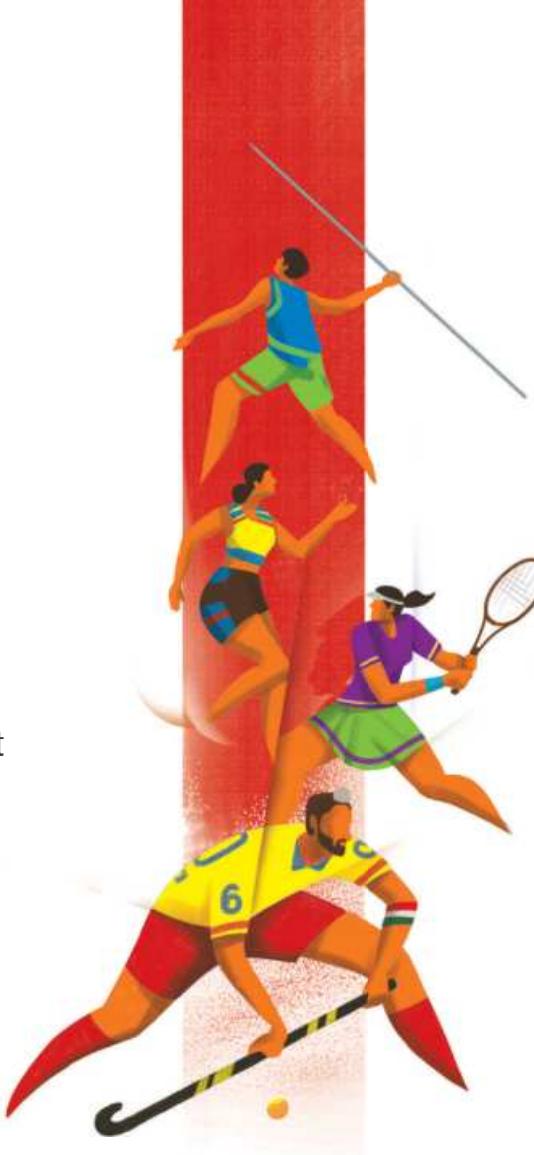
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## IN BRIEF



## Uniform Civil Code draft gets Uttarakhand Cabinet nod

The final draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) was approved by the Uttarakhand Cabinet, paving the way for its tabling in the State Assembly whose special session begins here on Monday. The Cabinet passed the UCC draft at a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on Sunday. The final draft of the UCC running into 740 pages in four volumes was submitted to Mr. Dhami here on Friday by a five-member panel headed by retired judge of the Supreme Court Ranjana Prakash Desai. The special session of the Assembly has been convened to pass the legislation on the UCC. PTI

## Murder case registered in death of woman judge in U.P.

A murder case has been registered against unidentified people in the death of a woman civil judge in Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh, following a complaint filed by her father, a police officer said on Sunday. The body of the civil judge was recovered on Saturday from her house. "Her father, who reached Badaun Saturday evening, however, claimed that unidentified persons killed his daughter. Based on a complaint filed by him, a case under Section 302 (murder) of the IPC was registered," an officer said. PTI

(Those in distress may contact Sanjivini, Society for Mental Health suicide prevention helpline: 011-40769002.)

## 'Vile and cowardly': Rahul condemns online trolling of Cong. Andhra Pradesh chief

## The Hindu Bureau

VIJAYAWADA



**Y.S. Sharmila hit out at her online detractors saying only cowards resort to cruelty when confronted with impending defeat**

Vivekananda Reddy's daughter Suneetha, who are being subjected to abuse."

Ms. Sharmila herself hit out at her online detractors saying only cowards resort to cruelty when confronted with impending defeat.

"Their actions may be vicious, but we derive strength from the support and affection shown by the people of Andhra Pradesh," she said on X, and thanked senior party leaders like Mr. Pallam Raju, Shashi Tharoor, Mr. Venugopal, and Jairam Ramesh for being with her in her fight against "paid trolls."

are highly deplorable, and the party stands firmly with them against these pathetic attempts to tarnish their reputation and the great legacy of Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy garu," he added.

"Insulting and threatening women, a vile and cowardly act, is unfortunately the most common weapon of the weak," Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X.

"Congress and I stand firmly beside Y.S. Sharmila ji and Suneetha ji, and strongly condemn this disgraceful attack," he added.

K.C. Venugopal said certain elements in Andhra Pradesh "are rattled by the huge support Ms. Sharmila and the Congress have been getting with every passing day." "The death threats and trolling against Sharmila ji and Suneetha ji

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# EDUCATION PLUS

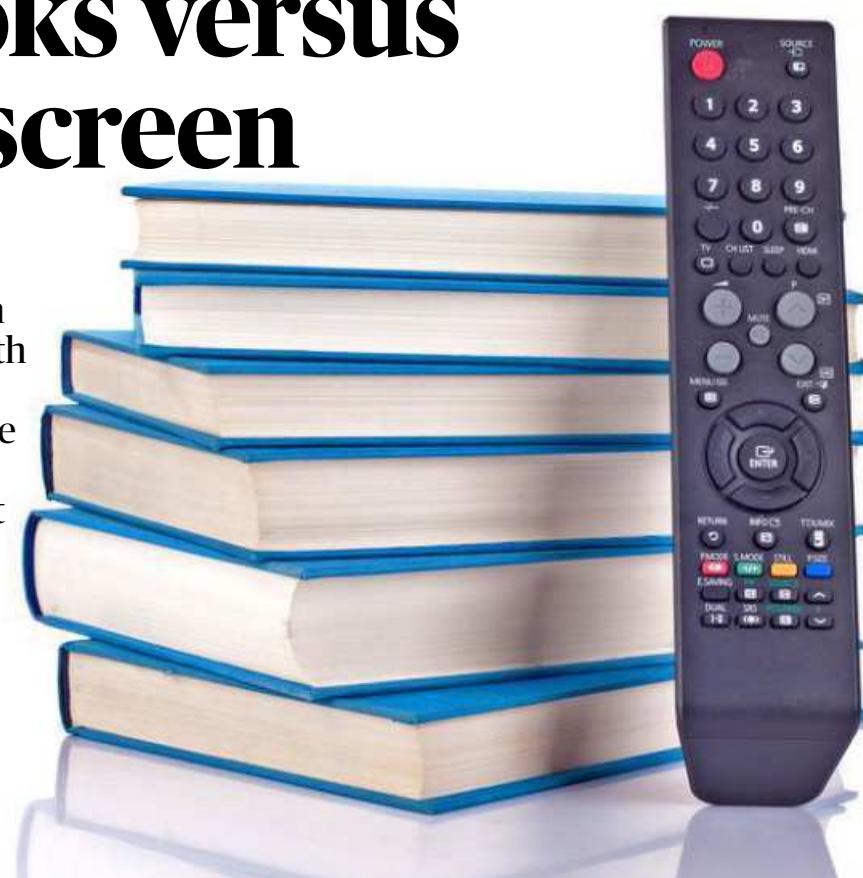
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## Books versus screen

Reading and watching can co-exist, as both play an important role in a child's development when used mindfully



### Sudeshna Sengupta

In the last few years, there has been a lot of brouhaha about how little youngsters are reading nowadays. Parents constantly ask how to get their children to read books at a time when technology offers a gamut of attractive tools.

While pondering over this tussle between reading and watching, I remembered the words of Groucho Marx, American comedian, writer, film, radio and television star: "I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set, I go into the other room and read a book."

For youngsters today, reading could be linked to watching and vice versa, as mobile phones have become ubiquitous. So where does the problem lie? Is it the way reading happens and the purpose? Does this suit the kind of immersive reading that earlier generations have known?

Let us consider a few valid arguments to support reading in the usual, conventional way.

Reading helps develop cognitive skills, including language acquisition, vocabulary, and comprehension. It stimulates the imagination and helps in critical thinking. This naturally culminates in a formidable communicative skill and the art of writing is enhanced as well. When we read, we think, decide, decode, deliberate and then state our truths and beliefs.

As readers, one has to create mental images. Apart from being a leisure activity, reading can also strengthen familial bonds when stories are shared, discussed and reflected upon. What is imperative here is to understand is reading should not be forced down children's throats. This may lead to a deep-rooted aversion. Reading should be engaging and enjoyable.

When it comes to watching, children learn concepts easily when there is visual learning. The scope for multi-sensory experiences is also appealing. With digital platforms being a source of content, the array of resources available offers a diversity of perspectives and ideas even when one

is within the four walls of a home.

#### Shared experiences

While no one can deny that technology is here to stay, is it possible to strike a balance between reading and watching? For example, what if adults were to be more proactive and design our lives to share the old and the new? For example, pick up the morning newspaper and show the children how it looks, feels and reads. Children learn best by imitation, so we need to practise what we wish our children to absorb.

How about visiting bookshops and choosing titles that the children want to read? If they like The Lion in the Library, do not buy Cinderella. If they like Nimmie's Wiggly Tooth do not give them Peter Pan. The time for Cinderella and Peter Pan will come. Spend time reading a book with them. Young children are more adaptable and curious. Ask questions about the story, discuss who they liked and why, make them critical thinkers even as you power their imagination.

Follow this routine when they watch someth-

ing. Sit with them and guide them to watch things that are enjoyable and informative. If they want to see Paw Patrol, ask them what is so special about the dogs. Guide them to thinking about loyalty towards family and friends.

When you start watching what they love to watch and read what they enjoy reading it becomes a shared experience. We need to frame a schedule for our engagements with our children. There can be a reading weekend and a watching hour. There can be bookshop visit and a 'choose-your-entertainment' evening. There can be a 'dress-up' as your favourite book character and a 'family holiday video hour' as well. Do not make them choose between the two.

The book and the screen can co-exist, as both are realities of life. So, prepare children to love what they are doing. It could be reading or watching; both play an important role in a child's development when used mindfully, while also giving them the freedom of choice.

The writer is the Academic Director at Vedanya International School.

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OFF THE EDGE  
Nandini Raman

I am in Class 9 and have decided to take Physics, Chemistry and Biology (PCB) in Class 11. My interests are Anatomy, Psychology, and so on. What I can do after Class 12? Vishnu

Dear Vishnu,  
Taking PCB in Class 11 and 12 opens up various opportunities. You can opt for an MBBS and specialise in fields such as surgery, internal medicine, paediatrics, and so on. You can become a dentist by doing a BDS.

Under the Allied Health Sciences, you could consider a B.Sc. Nursing, Bachelor of Physiotherapy, B.Sc. Biotechnology. Under Psychology and Behavioural Sciences, you can explore B.A. or B.Sc. in Psychology leading to careers in clinical psychology, counselling, research, or educational psychology. You could also choose a B.Sc. in Anatomy and Physiology or Bachelor of Pharmacy (B.Pharm), B.Sc. in Biomedical Sciences, or a B.V.Sc. (Bachelor of Veterinary Science).

You will have to prepare for competitive exams, such as NEET. Consult a career counsellor to help identify your specific interests and strengths. Your interests may evolve as you grow, so stay open to new experiences.

I am passionate about art but don't know about good

## Discover your interest

Uncertain about your career options? Low on self-confidence? This column may help

### institutes or career paths.

Aditya

Dear Aditya,  
Experiment with different mediums and styles to identify what you enjoy. Then you can choose a career path that excites you. Options include Fine Artist, an Illustrator, a Graphic Designer, an Art Educator, an Art Therapist, a Curator or a Gallery Owner. Hone your skills by attending workshops and taking courses. Build a portfolio of your work, as it is crucial when applying for an art programme or seeking employment. For formal education and training, look up institutions such as Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), and the Pratt Institute, in the U.S.. Connect with artists, art professors, and professionals and attend exhibitions and events to build your network. Publish your work online. Keep an eye out for aids, competitions, and grants to residencies to gain exposure.

I am doing a Bachelor's in Medical Lab Technology. I am interested in joining the Army. Will I be eligible after my graduation? Zubair

Dear Zubair,  
You may be eligible, provided you meet certain criteria and clear the relevant selection process. The Indian

Army offers several entry schemes for candidates, including medical and paramedical fields. Stay updated with their official recruitment notifications and guidelines at <https://www.joinindianarmy.nic.in/> where eligibility criteria, application process, and details for each role and entry scheme will be uploaded. You need to meet age requirements, and physical fitness standards, score a minimum percentage in your MLT degree, and clear the Army entrance exams, interviews, and medicals as part of the selection process.

The Army Medical Corps (AMC) recruits medical professionals, including MLT graduates, for various roles as a Short Service Commissioned (SSC) Officer with the option of extension. Army Paramedical Staff Recruitment offers paramedical staff positions, including laboratory technicians through direct recruitment or competitive exams. Military Nursing Service (MNS) may have positions for MLT graduates in specific capacities. Short Service Commission (Non-Technical) roles are also an option.

### psychology?

To pursue a career in Neurosciences and Forensics, you can consider a Bachelor's followed by a Master's and a PhD in Neurosciences and Forensics respectively. To secure a scholarship for Psychology and maintain a strong academic record in Class 12. A high percentage will make you eligible for merit-based academic scholarships offered by colleges and universities across the country and overseas as well. Contact the scholarships/financial aid office of the universities that you plan to apply to. They will provide detailed information on available scholarships and their application process. Research and apply well in advance of your intended enrollment date as each scholarship programme has a specific eligibility criteria and a reviewing process of validating the requirements and documents.

Doing well in the entrance exam for your Bachelor's admission increases your chances of securing academic merits/ scholarships. Many universities are attached to various non-profit foundations, private organisations and charities and state and national governments also provide scholarship opportunities. Check for these at the college/university admissions office.

**Disclaimer:** This column is merely a guiding voice and provides advice and suggestions on education and careers.

The writer is a practising counsellor and a trainer. Send your questions to [eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com](mailto:eduplus.thehindu@gmail.com) with the subject line Off the Edge

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# Editorial

## A sunshine initiative

Centre's solar initiative should be accommodative to States

**F**inance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's interim Budget day speech reiterated a plan by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to supply power to one crore households in the country using rooftop solar panels. This would help households save ₹15,000 annually, the Minister claimed. What is known so far is that households that have monthly electricity consumption of less than 300 units a month will be able to install a mid-sized system (1.2 kilowatt) with the government bearing the expense. This could mean a minimum outlay of ₹1 lakh crore. As of today, rooftop solar systems are subsidised up to 40%, with the remainder having to be borne by the consumer. Under the proposed policy, the subsidy will increase to 60% and the rest will be financed by a private developer who is affiliated to a public sector enterprise connected to the Power Ministry. This will ostensibly ensure quality in installation and also reliable service. There is a mechanism of 'net-metering', wherein surplus electricity produced by households can be sold back to the grid to make good the loan, though the actual way in which this is implemented can be quite complex. A monthly consumption of 300 units is paltry in houses where air conditioners and heaters are a given, but by national standards, is a significant metric of consumption. About 80% to 85% of 25 crore to 30 crore households in India use between 100 units and 120 units of power a month on average. Therefore, finding one crore houses that will be eligible for the plan will not be a difficult task.

The major difference from earlier solar promotion policies is that it is the Centre, as opposed to the State power distribution companies (discoms), that will be pushing for solarisation. India's discoms, most of which are heavily loss making, have had little incentive so far in moving high-consumption customers to decentralised solutions, such as rooftop solar. Given that such discoms have the best granular information about power supply at the household level, bypassing them will not be a successful strategy. The Centre's push to give visibility to a hitherto laggard programme is welcome. After all, the move towards decarbonised power will be half-hearted if it does not involve households. So far, only 12 gigawatt (GW) out of an intended 40 GW of rooftop solar panels has been installed. Here too, household rooftops account for only 2.7 GW with the rest being commercial or building units. The Centre's move can thus galvanise a subsidiary domestic industry of solar panels – the subsidies will not be available for imported panels – and must be tweaked in a way to be more accommodative to States. Else, there is a real risk that much of the challenges that have impeded previous initiatives will resurface.

## Unending woes

India must incentivise fishermen to give up bottom trawling

**T**he continuing arrests of fishermen from Tamil Nadu and Puducherry by the Sri Lankan Navy in the Palk Bay, despite diplomatic interventions at the highest level, and the attacks on them mid-sea by armed civilians are a matter of serious concern. True, Indian fishermen cross into Sri Lankan waters in search of catch, and affect the livelihood of Sri Lankan Tamil fishers. But the numbers this year are staggering. The detention of 23 fishermen and the seizure of two trawlers on Saturday, off Delft island on charges of "poaching", has taken the number of those arrested so far this year to 69, compared to 240 the whole of last year. Since 2013, Sri Lankan authorities have also remanded some fishermen in judicial custody for several months. This year, 34 fishermen, including 12 who were arrested last year, have been released, while over 45 men remain in custody. What is distressing for the community is the confiscation of their expensive fishing nets and vessels – this year, 10 boats were seized. By the time these boats are released through a judicial process or following diplomatic talks, most are not in a sea-worthy condition.

No doubt, Sri Lanka is under pressure from its northern province fishermen to act against Tamil Nadu fishermen, who they accuse of resorting to destructive bottom trawling, a practice banned by the country since July 2017. While India promised to end bottom trawling in the Palk Bay and incentivise fishermen to take to deep-sea fishing under the Blue Revolution Scheme, bottom trawlers are still active. Fishermen also face a practical problem as under the Tamil Nadu Marine Fishing Regulation Act 1983, mechanised fishing boats are permitted to fish only beyond three nautical miles from the coast. Since the distance between Dhanushkodi and the International Maritime Boundary Line is only nine nautical miles, breaches do occur, a point the Sri Lankan Navy should not overlook. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised in 2015, the tensions over fishing must be handled as a "humanitarian concern". Unfortunately, neither side has demonstrated consistency in the handling of the issue. In November 2016, the countries had agreed upon a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Fisheries that would meet every three months, and also have a bi-annual meeting of the Ministers of Fisheries. But the JWG has held just five sittings, the last one being in 2022. Tangible and targeted action is needed to encourage deep-sea fishing, bottom trawling being given up and the issue resolved with mutual compassion and periodic talks. Failing this, the Palk Bay would remain perilous territory for Indian fishermen.

# The path towards a pluralist civil society

**D**uring the inaugural session of the new Parliament, controversy erupted after Members were gifted copies of the Indian Constitution, wherein the Preamble appeared to have dispensed with the terms 'Socialist' and 'Secular'.

Interestingly, the civil society debate that followed remained hemmed in on whether either of these terms defined the true spirit of the Constitution. Without going into the merits of that debate, there is a largely unaddressed facet to point out; one which ought to comprise the basis of any such deliberative inquiry: the meaning of the opening words of the Preamble, 'We the People'.

The meaning or character of our popular sovereignty is often treated as a convenient myth or as a purely abstract assumption in our civil society discussions. Yet, as constitutional scholar Sarbani Sen argued in her book, *The Constitution of India: Popular Sovereignty and Democratic Transformations*, the revolutionary potential of the Constitution inheres in this very spirit of popular sovereignty. She looks at 'how the idea of popular sovereignty and its relation to constitutionalism developed as a result of inter-generational discourse in Indian political thought during the pre-founding colonial period'.

One can interpret the enactment of the Constitution as the culmination of a decades-long process of dialogue among contending political actors, wherein an important part of it focused on the character of the envisaged republic. The Preamble explicitly anchors the legitimising ends of the republic in terms of securing justice (social, economic and political), liberty (of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship), and equality (of status and of opportunity) to all Indian citizens.

When we reduce sovereignty of the "political community" to mere state sovereignty, we reduce the constitutional promises given above to vague aspirations floating in ether. The Constitution can only remain a living force in our democracy as long as the phrase, 'we the people', can somehow approximate to a discerning citizenry, which effectively discharges its agency as vigilant participants.

### The elite versus non-elite spheres

The western tradition of civil society tended to grant such a watchdog function, of counterbalancing the state's drive to monopolise sovereign power, to an elite public sphere. Counterbalancing the state implies constraining the excesses of government power. This liberal public sphere (as described by theorists such as Jürgen Habermas), platformed the educated middle classes, held to be engaged in a rational discourse centred on individual autonomy and self-interest.

The English language arena in India, particularly in journalism and civil society activism, reflexively borrowed from this western discourse the directing role of a modernising elite. Further, the normative assumptions



**Asim Ali**  
is a political researcher and columnist

underlying the question "who constitutes this modernising elite?" served to redouble the hold of the traditional elites on the public sphere. Broadly, the public sphere, tended to privilege the views of segments that skewed male, upper class and dominant castes.

Yet, this elite public sphere has largely remained inert in the face of severe challenges to prevailing constitutional governance.

Indeed, the more forceful democratic claims to the mantle of popular sovereignty have emanated from what we can term as the non-elite counter-sphere. This is the counter sphere of 'organisations and movements': social movements, farmers and labour groups, human rights activists, subaltern caste and tribal movements and their powerful examples such as the Una agitation by Dalits against caste-based violence; the Pathalgadi movement of tribals in Jharkhand; the farmers' movements of Punjab and Haryana; and the nation-wide protests by Muslims (led by women) against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.

Often, the liberal public sphere, even while being empathetic towards these movements, seeks to cast them in the subordinate role of 'sectional movements' or emotional/irrational upsurges, which can at the most merit conditional support. Yet, if we refuse to accord these counter sphere political actors a position of complete equality within our civil society, we will lose the liberatory potential of these 'radically democratic' forms of popular assertions and mass protests.

### Ambedkar's framing

B.R. Ambedkar had framed the Preamble in terms of heralding a "way of life, which recognises liberty, equality, and fraternity as the principles of life and which cannot be divorced from each other: Liberty cannot be divorced from equality; equality cannot be divorced from liberty. Nor can liberty and equality be divorced from fraternity. Without equality, liberty would produce the supremacy of the few over the many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative".

Equally, he refused to harbour naive presumptions about the self-perpetuating character of these constitutional principles. In his essay, 'Buddha and the future of religion', he wrote, Buddha also "did not believe that law can be a guarantee for breaches of liberty or equality...In all societies, law plays a very small part. It is intended to keep the minority within the range of social discipline." Since the majority is constrained not by law but by morality, Ambedkar held that "religion, in the sense of morality, must therefore, remain the governing principle in every society".

It might be instructive to juxtapose Ambedkar's plea for a transcendent civil morality with Gandhi's conception of swaraj or 'self-rule'. In the monograph, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance* (2016), historian Ajay Skaria explains that 'Swaraj' for Gandhi did

not confine itself to a mechanistic self-rule, but a creative process of self-realisation through which one might reach out towards a more secure and substantive plane of freedom and equality. The means to achieve Swaraj was thus 'satyagraha' (defined as "truth force" and "love force"). "For him (Gandhi), sovereign power is not exemplified only in the state. Rather, every self is deeply fissured, and sovereignty is ubiquitous, always exercised everyday by the self," Skaria wrote.

Therefore, Gandhi's practice of 'ahimsa' cannot be divorced from his insistence on recognising a deeply fissured self. The politically fabricated wholeness or boundedness accorded to the self (whether 'Hindu Self' or 'Muslim Self'), mirroring the colonising Europe's axioms of national sovereignty, had led to much bloodshed in the subcontinent in the last century.

The folly of mimicking the imperialists' arrogance wrecked other countries as well, not least the militaristic Japan of the first half of the 20th century. The book, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Past into History* (1995), uncovers how Japanese violent militarism was built on the fundamental assumption of a perfected modern self. This construction of this supremely confident self necessitated the reflexive displacement of the western Orientalist category of a 'backward Other' from itself onto other subordinated peoples. According to Tanaka, Japan's historians constructed their own backward Orient, defined by the "Asiatic culture... Asiatic nature was characterized by its gentleness, moral ethics, harmony, and communalism; Japan's genius lay in its ability to adapt creatively only those Asiatic characteristics that were harmonious with its own nature; and Japan thus became the possessor of the best of Asia".

### Having the right dialogue

It becomes clear that a progressive civil society in India can only be a plural civil society, if it is structured on the free and equal participation of every community. Regarding any particular community as socially backward or intellectually inferior (compared to any assumed authentic 'self') inevitably skids into perilously unexamined pride.

The path towards a pluralist civil society must, thus, be forged through honest and introspective dialogue. This is not the shallow but the commonplace mode of dialogue – a form of debate focused on achieving a framework of objectively correct knowledge. But the particular form of dialogue stressed by Gandhi, Ambedkar and modern theorists of deliberative democracy seeks to understand the position of the 'other'. It is through this empathetic engagement with the concerns and the world views of 'others' that we can build a stable foundation of mutual self-understanding, thus opening up possibilities for genuine solidarity. The alternative is a civil society with little self-knowledge beyond chauvinistic pride, and little agency beyond being the handmaiden of an increasingly authoritarian state.

# Micro-credentials, the next chapter in higher education

**H**igher education institutes (HEIs) in India must play a much more active role in ensuring that students become employable by connecting them with the careers and job opportunities of tomorrow. This is because there is a gap between the knowledge that students acquire in HEIs and the knowledge they must have in order to become employable.

Micro-credentials are emerging as a disruptive way of bridging this gap to acquire 'just-in-time' modern skills and competencies. They are evolving as the new normal in higher education due to their flexibility, accessibility, and advantages. It must be noted that hiring practices are also changing, with a tendency to prioritise skills over degrees, and the endorsement of micro-credentials is on the rise.

### The essence of micro-credentials

What are micro-credentials? They are short-duration learning activities with proof of specific learning outcomes that are validated through a standard and reliable assessment process. Micro-credentials are offered in online, physical, or hybrid modes at various levels, such as beginning, intermediate, or advanced. In contrast to micro-credentials, students must study for several years to obtain macro-credentials such as undergraduate degrees. In addition, micro-credentials can also be designed for life-long learners, i.e., working professionals who may not be able to attend a formal degree programme in a university.

Micro-credentials, as a path to life-long learning, are still developing. An obvious sign of this is how assorted terminologies, such as digital badges, micro-master degrees, nano-degrees, and online certificates, are being used for this short-duration learning.

Multiple players such as Atingi, Alison.com, Credly, Coursera, edX, FutureLearn, Google, LinkedIn, Microsoft, PwC and Udacity offer micro-credentials. Many universities in Australia, Canada, Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States are also engaged in providing



**Mamidala Jagadish Kumar**

is Chairman, University Grants Commission (UGC) and was the twelfth Vice-Chancellor of Jawaharlal Nehru University

Higher education institutes in India can be the catalysts in integrating micro-credentials with existing academic programmes

micro-credentials. More organisations are expected to join this growing club.

In formal degree programmes conducted by HEIs, 'credits' are used to assign value to different forms of learning – lectures, tutorials, laboratory work, seminars, projects, internships and so on. In such macro-credential programmes, courses are generally designed to be of three to four credits, and one credit corresponds to one hour of lecture or two hours of lab work per week. Therefore, in conventional educational programmes, 'credit' is associated with the time spent in a classroom or a lab.

However, in micro-credentials, the trend is to associate the credit with the notional hours spent acquiring a defined minimum competency. As this makes micro-credential credits consistent with those in conventional higher education, they can be universally validated and recognised.

Regardless of this, what is required is clear quality benchmarking and a regulation of these micro-credentials to prevent significant divergences in learning outcomes and facilitate their easy endorsement in the workplace and higher education institutes.

India now has a National Credit Framework (NCF), which spells out learning outcomes and corresponding credits a student should accumulate in order to progress to the next level of learning. One of the primary benefits of micro-credentials is that they are portable and stackable on a digital platform such as the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).

### Fostering trust is a key step

To ensure that micro-credentials denote a genuine acquisition of skills, they must be aligned with higher education standards in the areas of delivery, assessment, grading and the awarding of qualifications. Our capacity to devise reliable assessment methods is critical in fostering trust in micro-credentials, and in this task, the association of HEIs is of great importance.

For students in Indian universities, micro-credentials can open up opportunities in

integrating diverse skills as a part of their regular education, or they can store the credits on the ABC platform for redemption later or to get a separate certificate or diploma in addition to their macro-credentials. Depending on the duration and learning outcomes, micro-credentials can be given as between one to five credit short modules. Or, learners can accumulate multiple short modules to earn the total number of credits required to obtain a degree as specified in the NCF.

### There is much potential

As the NCF is being implemented across the country, it is the right time for Indian HEIs to plan to develop micro-credentials in partnership with industry. The NCF offers an opportunity for HEIs to examine the development of credit-based micro-credentials as a part of regular degree programmes. Broader deliberations must take place on the potential impact of micro-credentials and the additional value they can create in the tertiary education system.

Is there enough demand for micro-credentials in India? With the focus of the National Education Policy 2020 on providing skilled education to students right from school to the higher levels, and with employers looking for young employees with adequate skills and competencies to boost productivity, learners are increasingly viewing micro-credentials as a value-added advantage. Therefore, millions of students could be looking to earn micro-credentials either as stand-alone credits or as a component of their standard higher education.

Indian HEIs must serve as agents of transformation and consider introducing micro-credentials a vital element of their strategic institutional objectives. Further to this, regulators and HEIs must work towards harmonising micro-credentials with existing academic programmes by coming up with clear validation metrics.

*The views expressed are personal*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bharat Ratna for veteran

The move to confer the Bharat Ratna on L.K. Advani would make many recollect his Ram temple movement, the demolition of the Babri Masjid, and other charges

that altered politics. He may seem happy to accept the top award but his conscience is sure to nag him as it is a pyrrhic award.

R. Janakiraman,  
Chennai, Tamil Nadu

The move is a master stroke by the Prime Minister. Mr. Advani changed the course of Indian politics and history and deserves the honour.  
He committed himself to

what he believed in.

Kshirsagara Balaji Rao,  
Hyderabad

### Minister at conclave

A report, on a Union Minister losing his cool at

youth conclave' after she was peeved by the response of the audience to the rendering of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai', showed that she was petulant and lacked respect for the youth.

expect leaders to uphold the democratic spirit, encouraging a diversity of opinions and also ways of expressing patriotism.

Kurian Mathew,

To read newspaper at 6 am, send WhatsApp to 8168305050 now.

# Holding Israel accountable

The pivotal function of international law is to hold states accountable. The historic decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Israel must be seen in this light. This dispute arose after South Africa moved the ICJ, alleging that Israel's offensive military action in Gaza had resulted in the genocide of the Palestinian people, as defined in Article II of the Genocide Convention, 1948. While the ICJ is yet to rule on whether Israel is committing or has committed genocide in Gaza, it did indicate provisional measures, that is, issued an interim order to protect the rights of the parties under the Genocide Convention till the time it decides the issue on merits. At this stage, the ICJ has ruled that it was plausible that Israel was committing genocide in Gaza. Echoing how precarious things are, the ICJ said that the humanitarian situation in Gaza is "catastrophic", with more than 25,000 Palestinians dead.

**Conditions to be satisfied**  
As Robert Kolb and others have argued, under Article 41 of the ICJ Statute, the court will indicate provisional measures if the following conditions are satisfied. First, the ICJ should have *prima facie* jurisdiction, that is, the act complained of should fall within the purview of the Convention under which the claim has been made. Second, there must be a link between the measures that the applicant requests and the rights to be protected. Third, the rights that the applicant wants to protect are plausible. Fourth, there should be a risk of irreparable prejudice if the plausible right is not protected. Fifth, prejudice should be capable of materialising before the final determination or adjudication of the dispute.

All these conditions, in this case, are satisfied. The ICJ held that *prima facie*, it has jurisdiction over the dispute under Article IX of the Genocide Convention. It is

**Prabhash Ranjan**

teaches at the Faculty of Legal Studies, South Asian University. Views are personal

The ICJ's decision is momentous because it raises serious questions about how Israel has carried out its military operations, which Tel Aviv will have to answer

vital to remember that the ICJ's jurisdiction, in this case, is restricted to issues under the Genocide Convention. It has no jurisdiction over war crimes or crimes against humanity allegedly committed by Israel in Gaza. The court also held that South Africa has the standing to bring this claim against Israel because all countries that are parties to the Genocide Convention have a common interest in ensuring the prevention, suppression, and punishment of genocide.

The ICJ held that Palestinians appear to constitute a distinct national, ethnic, racial, or religious group and, therefore, are a protected entity within Article II of the Genocide Convention. Proving the crime of genocide requires establishing two elements: physical or *actus reus* and mental or *mens rea*. While the physical element focuses on aspects like killing or causing bodily harm to a particular group, the mental element, which is difficult to prove, is related to the intent to destroy at least a substantial part of the particular group. In the current case, given the massive death and destruction that the Israeli actions since October 7, 2023 have caused to Palestinians, the physical aspect is quite evident. On the intent part, the ICJ noted statements of several Israeli senior officials. For instance, the court took cognisance of the statement of the Israeli defence minister talking of a "complete siege" of Gaza with no electricity, food, and fuel. These dehumanising statements were sufficient to plausibly read as implying the intent to commit genocide, as international lawyer Marko Milanovic has also argued.

Thus, the court found that some of the rights South Africa claims, and which it is seeking to protect under the Genocide Convention, are plausible.

Subsequently, the ICJ held that there was a real and imminent risk of irreparable prejudice if it did not order provisional measures. This irreparable prejudice would

be caused to the rights found plausible under the extant proceedings, namely the right of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip to be protected from acts of genocide and the right of South Africa to seek Israel's compliance with the Genocide Convention.

#### Provisional measures

While the ICJ, unlike the Ukraine v. Russia case, did not order the ceasing of the military operations in Gaza, it did indicate six significant provisional measures. These measures require Israel and its military to take all measures not just to prevent the commission of genocide but also public incitement to commit genocide; ensure humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza; prevent the destruction of evidence related to allegations of genocide; and submit a report to the court on all the measures adopted within a month. As an obiter, the ICJ also said that all parties involved in the Gaza Strip conflict are bound by international humanitarian law.

The ICJ's decision is binding on Israel and constitutes part of its international legal obligations. If Israel continues its calamitous military actions, ignoring its obligations under the Genocide Convention, it will be a brazen violation of international law. Cynics might argue that none of this matters because the remedy for not complying with ICJ rulings lies with the United Nations Security Council, which has Israel's all-weather friend, the United States. But the ICJ's decision is momentous because it raises serious questions about how Israel has carried out its military operations, which Tel Aviv will have to answer. The decision also sends a clear message to several other world leaders craving for hot pursuit who often employ dehumanising rhetoric against their opponents. Israel must be careful of not just the courts of law but also the court of public opinion. Finally, South Africa deserves all accolades for showing the courage to bell the cat.

# A major revamp needed for Dharani

The one-stop solution for land-related transactions is plagued by problems

#### STATE OF PLAY

**M. Rajeev**

rajeev.madabhushi@thehindu.co.in



The Dharani portal, the much-hyped one-stop solution for land-related transactions in Telangana, is apparently headed towards a major revamp so that it is user-friendly and ensures seamless transactions.

The portal, which was launched in 2020, has drawn flak right from its inception from both political parties and land owners. The Congress, which was then in the Opposition, claimed that land was being alienated in favour of leaders of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in the name of Dharani at the expense of poor landowners, who were made to run from pillar to post to get their problems resolved. Complaints about the portal include patta land being included in the prohibited list, mismatches between the extent of land in records and the actual field dimensions, and the absence of a provision for registering lands in the name of multiple owners.

On becoming Chief Minister, A. Revanth Reddy appointed a high-level committee to evolve guidelines for the permanent resolution of long-pending land disputes. The committee has been mandated to suggest measures to permanently resolve the complaints that have been raised by landowners since the inception of Dharani.

The five-member committee has started holding discussions with all the stakeholders to understand the functioning of the portal. It has stumbled upon many lapses. It believes that the portal needs major changes on the technical, administrative, and legal sides.

dimensions. The system allows the user to make an application for removal of the land from the prohibited list or one pertaining to the extent of land, but not both at the same time. In case users apply for rectification of both these issues at the same time, their application gets rejected. "Rejected applications – around 8 lakh, which is nearly half the total of 16 lakh applications that have been received so far – reflects the gravity of the situation," said Mr. Kumar.

He also said that the Telangana government has made it mandatory to pay ₹1,200 per application, which is not the case in several other States which introduced similar systems. "No steps have been taken to create awareness among the people about the modules that have been put in place and the specific problems that will be addressed through the portal," he said.

As a result, the public has been facing numerous problems in selling/buying land as sufficient modules for different transactions have not been incorporated into the portal. "Major changes are required in the software as well as in the administration of the portal. For this, there is a likely need for change in the law," said Sunil Kumar, a land laws expert who is part of the committee.

The system has been designed in such a manner that it allows just one transaction at a time. Users who face multiple problems related to their land are not able to access the portal to have their grievances redressed. For instance, several landowners have complained that their lands have been placed in the prohibited list. At the same time, they have complained about the mismatch in the extent of the land in records and in actual field

In this context, concrete measures for rectifying lapses and making the portal more user-friendly are urgently required.

# Panchayats earn only 1% of their revenue through taxes

Most of their revenue comes from the Centre and the States as grants

#### DATA POINT

**The Hindu Data Team**

Only 1% of the revenue of panchayats was earned by them, with the rest being raised as grants from the State and the Centre, show data. Specifically, 80% of the revenue was from Central government grants; only 15% was from State government grants. Consequently, the revenue raised by panchayats formed a minuscule share of the States' own revenue.

Panchayats act on three levels – gram sabhas, panchayat samitis, and zila parishads. They are responsible for a variety of tasks including agriculture, rural housing, water management, rural electrification, healthcare, and sanitation. In some cases, zila parishads are also responsible for maintaining schools, hospitals, dispensaries, and minor irrigation projects.

However, due to dependence on the Centre and the State for their funds, most panchayats suffer from interference from the top two tiers of the system, according to news reports. In August last year, several panchayat heads protested in Chennai asking for independence of the Panchayati Raj. A news report from Telangana last year stated that the failure of the State government in releasing funds on time forced sarpanches to use private funds. The Standing Committee on Rural Development and Panchayati Raj said in March last year that 19 out of 34 State/Union Territories did not receive any funds under the Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan scheme in FY23. The programme was started for building capacity and training elected representatives.

The recently released report by the Reserve Bank of India on the finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions for 2022-23 argues that one of the ways forward is to promote greater decentralisation and empower local leaders and officials. According to the report, an-

chayats had recorded a total revenue of ₹35,354 crore in 2022-23 (**Chart 1**). Of this, just ₹737 crore was earned by their own tax revenue. Panchayats can earn this through taxes on profession and trades, land revenue, stamps and registration fees, taxes on property, and service tax.

Panchayats also earned ₹1,494 crore through non-tax revenue, which is mostly earnings from interest payments and Panchayati Raj programmes. In contrast, they earned ₹24,699 crore as grants from the Central government and ₹8,148 crore as grants from the State governments. **Chart 2** shows these numbers per panchayat.

In 2022-23, each panchayat earned just ₹21,000 as its own tax revenue and ₹73,000 as non-tax revenue. In contrast, each panchayat earned about ₹17 lakh as grants from the Central government and more than ₹3.25 lakh as grants from the State governments. In essence, just 1% of panchayats' revenue comes from their own revenue (**Chart 3**).

When we look at the average revenue earned per panchayat in 2022-23, there are wide variations among States. In Kerala, the average revenue raised by each panchayat was over ₹60 lakh in 2022-23. West Bengal came a close second with an average revenue of ₹57 lakh per panchayat. The revenue was over ₹30 lakh per panchayat in Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Odisha, Sikkim, and Tamil Nadu; and less than ₹6 lakh in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Mizoram, Punjab, and Uttarakhand (**Chart 4**).

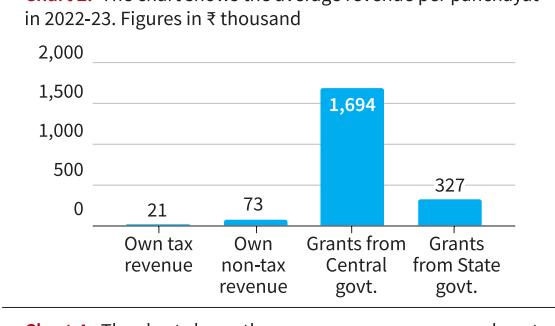
Due to meagre revenue raising potential, panchayats' share in the respective State's own revenue was poor. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, revenue receipts of panchayats formed just 0.1% of the State's own revenue. The revenue of panchayats in Uttar Pradesh formed 2.5% of the State's own revenue, the highest among States. **Chart 5** shows the revenue of panchayats as a share of State's own revenue in 2022-23.

## Too top heavy

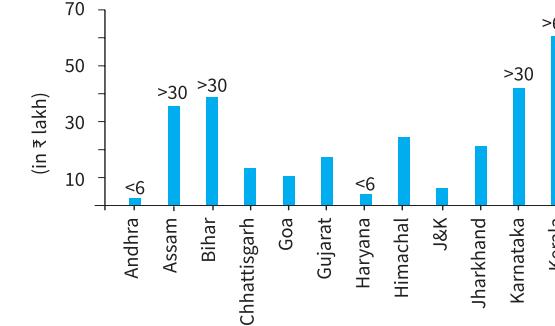
The charts are based on data collated from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) report titled, 'Finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions'



**Chart 2:** The chart shows the average revenue per panchayat in 2022-23. Figures in ₹ thousand



**Chart 4:** The chart shows the average revenue per panchayat across States in 2022-23. Figures in ₹ lakh



**Chart 5:** The chart shows the revenue of panchayats as a share of State's own revenue in 2022-23. Figures in %

#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

**The Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 5, 1974

## Pakistan to build warships for Arab States

London, Feb. 4: A direct consequence of the steep rise in price of Arab oil is that a fantastic quantity of Western military hardware is being pumped into the Arab oil kingdoms, and Pakistan is fast cashing in by training Arab military personnel to use it. Though Pakistan may not have either the cash or the resources to purchase vast quantities of highly sophisticated weaponry, in the Muslim world, Pakistan, after Egypt, has the best qualified personnel to handle these weapons. The French were the first to realise this and both Pakistan and France are now collaborating on plans for a massive armaments manufacturing, servicing and training complex in Pakistan, which would serve Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf emirates. France is determined to use Pakistan as an Arab arms supply base and in the process Pakistan will reap a hefty foreign exchange bonanza and some military advantage. Saudi Arabia has already trained more than 4,000 soldiers and airmen in Pakistan in a contract worth \$10 million (Rs. 7.5 crores) a year. According to informed sources in Western capitals, Pakistani diplomats are under direct personal instruction from Prime Minister Bhutto to ensure that they are in full confidence of the diplomats of Arab oil kingdoms about the current arms negotiations, particularly with Britain and France.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 5, 1924

## Indian Finance

The "Times" pays a tribute to the remarkable improvements recently effected by the Government of India in its financial mechanism as the result of merging the Presidency Banks into the Imperial Bank of India. The paper says that in no respect is this more beneficial than in the development of India's money power, particularly through the medium of the Imperial Bank. The paper further says it is authoritative un-official testimony to the fact that the Government has been enabled to make remittances to London of exceptional magnitude without disturbing the exchange market of Indian currency. The position may now be regarded as impregnable.

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The number of people who died in Chile due to forest fires**

**46** The deaths were caused due to intense forest fires burning around a densely populated area of central Chile. The El Niño weather pattern has caused droughts and hotter-than-usual temperatures along the west of South America this year. PTI

**The amount oil Public Sector Undertakings will invest in FY25**

**1.2** in lakh crore. ONGC, IOC and other oil PSUs will invest the amount in oil and gas exploration, refineries, petrochemicals and laying pipelines. The investment proposed in 2024-25 is 5% higher than the ₹1.12 lakh crore spent in the current fiscal year. PTI

**The roads blocked due to snowfall in Himachal Pradesh**

**518** Officials said 161 roads have been closed in Shimla followed by 157 in Lahaul and Spiti, 71 in Kullu, 69 in Chamba and 46 in Mandi district. Additionally, 478 transformers and 567 water supply schemes have been disrupted. PTI

**The workers fired from Chinese tech giant Tencent**

**120** Employees were dismissed for violating its anti-fraud rules. Billions of dollars in market capitalisation have been lost, and profits have plummeted due to a crackdown by Chinese authorities that started in late 2020. AFP

**Rohingya refugees arrested for fleeing detention centre**

**41** Rohingya migrants rioted in their detention building before escaping the immigration centre in the Perak state of Malaysia. This is the second time in two years that such a breakout has occurred. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## On Uttarakhand's uniform civil code

What was the debate surrounding the UCC in the Constituent Assembly? Can a State government implement a State-wide UCC? Why has the Supreme Court not given a definite order regarding the implementation of a UCC?

### LETTER & SPIRIT

Aaratrika Bhaumik

#### The story so far:

The Uttarakhand Assembly is likely to pass the State's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill during its four-day-long session this week. A State-appointed panel constituted to draft the UCC submitted its final report to Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami on February 2. The report has also been passed by the State Cabinet. The introduction of a UCC was a key poll promise of the BJP in the run-up to the 2022 elections in Uttarakhand.

#### What does a UCC aim to do?

A UCC seeks to create a uniform set of laws to replace the distinct personal laws of every religion pertaining to subjects such as marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. This stems from Article 44 of the Constitution which mandates that the state "shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India." The provision is a part of the Directive Principles of State Policy, which although not enforceable, play a pivotal role in governance.

Whether the provision should be included as a fundamental right or a directive principle was the subject of intense debate in India's Constituent Assembly. Opponents feared that it would dilute the rights of religious minorities in India and destroy its diversity. Member Naziruddin Ahmad from Bengal argued that it would come in the way of Article 19 of the draft Constitution (now Article 25) which guarantees the fundamental right to freedom of religion subject to reasonable restrictions such as public order, morality, and health. He also emphasised that such a uniform set of laws could not be implemented without securing the consent of the concerned communities. On the other hand, member K.M. Munshi contended that a UCC would not defeat the principle of freedom of religion since the state is empowered to make laws related to religious practices if they were intended for social reform. He highlighted various benefits such as promoting equality for women, since personal laws often prevent the elimination of discriminatory practices against women.

Taking a more ambivalent stance, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that although a UCC was desirable, it should remain "purely voluntary" during the initial stages. He stated that since the provision was merely recommendatory, it should not be imposed upon all citizens. The matter was settled by a 5:4 majority vote, with the sub-committee on fundamental rights headed by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel deciding that establishing a UCC should not fall within fundamental rights.

**What about the Uttarakhand UCC?** In June 2022, the Uttarakhand government constituted an expert committee headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai to examine ways for the implementation of a UCC. The move followed Mr. Dhami's promise that he would implement a UCC in the State if re-elected. The committee was supposed to submit its report in November 2022 but the deadline was extended multiple times despite the Chief Minister announcing in June last year that a draft UCC was ready.

Right from the start, the proposal has been met with opposition from rival political parties. Congress representatives from the State have alleged that the move is BJP's poll plank and that it wants to



Flatten out: UCC committee chairperson Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai hands over the UCC report to the Uttarakhand CM in Dehradun on February 2. ANI

keep the pot simmering to polarise voters ahead of the general elections. Pritam Singh, one of the two Scheduled Tribe (ST) MLAs of the State, pointed out earlier that the tribal community which comprises 2.9% of the State's population had not consented to the UCC. The Van Gujjar tribe, a Muslim nomadic tribe with a population of around 60,000, has also expressed apprehensions over the law.

**What changes can be expected?** The draft UCC is set to focus on gender equality by introducing provisions that treat men and women equally, especially in matters pertaining to inheritance. It will also revoke practices governing marriage and divorce such as polygamy, *iddat* (mandatory period of waiting to be observed by women following the dissolution of a Muslim marriage) and triple talaq. The Code is also likely to extend an equal property share to Muslim women against the existing 25% share accorded under Muslim personal law. However, the minimum age for marriage for men and women is set to remain the same – 18 years for women and 21 years for men. Other issues such as divorce, marriage registrations, adoption, and social security for ageing parents will also be covered under the law. The committee has reportedly also prescribed the mandatory registration of live-in relationships.

Speaking to the media last year, Mr. Dhami clarified that the proposed UCC was not aimed at appeasing any particular community but was instead aimed at empowering all sections of society. "After its implementation, reservation of any class, marital rights, customs, etc will not be affected," he assured.

**What has the Supreme Court said?** Over the years, the Supreme Court has deliberated upon the UCC in several judgments, but refused to issue any directive to the government since law-making falls within the exclusive domain of Parliament. In its 1985 judgment in the *Shah Bano Begum* case, the Court observed that "it is a matter of regret that Article 44 has remained a dead letter" and called for its implementation.

Such a demand was reiterated in subsequent cases such as *Sarla Mudgal versus Union of India* (1995), and *John Vallamattom versus Union of India* (2003) among others.

Reviving the push for a UCC, six petitions were filed in the Supreme Court between 2021-2022 seeking uniformity in divorce, maintenance, and alimony laws on the ground that they discriminated against women, thereby violating Article 14 (right to equality) and Article 15 (right against discrimination based on religion and gender) of the Constitution. Some of the petitioners included BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay and former Chancellor of Maulana Azad National Urdu University Firoz Ahmed Bakht, among others. However, in March last year, a Bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud dismissed these petitions by observing that such issues fall within the exclusive domain of Parliament.

In January last year, the Court dismissed a petition challenging the Uttarakhand government's move to set up an expert committee on the UCC by highlighting that Article 162 permits the exercise of such powers. "Article 162 of the Constitution indicates that the executive power of a State extends to matters with respect to which the Legislature of the State has power to make laws. In view of the provisions of Entry 5 of the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule, the constitution of a Committee per se cannot be challenged as ultra vires," the order read. Entry 5 of the Concurrent List deals with "marriage and divorce; infants and minors; adoption; wills, intestacy, and succession; joint family and partition; all matters in respect of which parties in judicial proceedings were immediately before the commencement of this Constitution subject to their personal law."

**What has the Law Commission said?** In 2016, the BJP government requested the Law Commission of India to determine how to formulate a uniform code given the existence of "thousands of personal laws" in the country. In August 2018, the 21st Law Commission headed by former Supreme Court Justice Justice

Balbir Singh Chauhan submitted a 185-page consultation paper on "Reforms of family law" wherein it observed that the "formulation of a Uniform Civil Code is neither necessary nor desirable at this stage". The report stated that a unified nation did not necessarily need "uniformity," adding that secularism could not contradict the plurality prevalent in the country. It, however, recommended that discriminatory practices and stereotypes within existing personal laws should be amended.

However, on June 14 last year, the 22nd Law Commission headed by Justice (Retd) Rituraj Awasthi issued a notification to elicit views from various stakeholders – including public and religious organisations – on the UCC. As Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court, Justice Awasthi had ruled in favour of the Karnataka government's order prohibiting hijab in educational institutions.

**What happens next?** Following Uttarakhand's footsteps, two other BJP-ruled States – Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat – have appointed committees to initiate the formulation of a UCC. A similar proposal was also a part of BJP's election manifesto for the Karnataka Assembly polls where the Congress eventually secured a landslide victory.

Whether the Centre is likely to propose a UCC at a pan-India level is debatable. It will perhaps tread cautiously and await the outcome of the exercise undertaken by individual States first. The anticipated report of the 22nd Law Commission is also likely to be of persuasive value. However, in the recent past, there has been strong advocacy for the UCC by both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

This renewed vigour towards a UCC is also likely to be affected by a pending query before the Supreme Court related to the "scope and ambit of the right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution". The question was framed by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in the *Sabarimala* case for reference to a larger bench. Despite the passage of three years, no progress has been made on it.

### THE GIST

▼ The Uttarakhand Assembly is likely to pass the State's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill during its four-day-long session in February.

▼ The draft UCC is set to focus on gender equality by introducing provisions that treat men and women equally, especially in matters pertaining to inheritance. It will also revoke practices governing marriage and divorce such as polygamy, *iddat* (mandatory period of waiting to be observed by women following the dissolution of a Muslim marriage) and triple talaq.

▼ Following Uttarakhand's footsteps, two other BJP-ruled States – Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat – have appointed committees to initiate the formulation of a UCC.

## CACHE



ISTOCKPHOTO

## The importance of keeping personally identifiable information safe

PII is any data or information maintained by an organisation or agency that can potentially be used to identify a specific individual. Threat actors can gain access to exposed PII and misuse it to launch targeted attacks on individuals

## Nabeel Ahmed

**R**ecently, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs fixed a critical vulnerability in its online portal months after a cybersecurity researcher reported it to the Computer Emergency Response Team of India (CERT-In). The vulnerability reportedly exposed personal details – like Aadhaar, PAN, voter identity, passport, date of birth, contact number and address – of more than 98 lakh directors of Indian companies. The vulnerability also exposed the personal data of top industrialists, celebrities, and sports personalities in the country.

## What is Personally Identifiable Information?

Personally Identifiable Information (PII) is any data or information maintained by an organisation or agency that can potentially be used to identify a specific individual. This could include information such as Aadhaar, PAN, voter identity, passport, date of birth, contact number, communication address, and biometric information. The constituents of PII vary depending on an individual's home country. However, non-PII in tandem with additional information can be used to identify an individual. Non-PII information includes photographic images (especially of the face or other identifying characteristics), place of birth, religion, geographic indicators, employment information, educational qualifications, and medical records.

All this information can be used to identify individuals accurately. And while access to one set of PII may be enough to compromise online security, access to multiple databases can be used to identify and target individuals.

## What is the difference between sensitive and non-sensitive PII?

Non-sensitive PII is publicly available information and can be stored and transmitted unencrypted. This includes information such as zip code, race, gender, and religion. They cannot be used to accurately identify an individual.

Sensitive PII, when exposed, can be used to identify individuals and potentially cause harm. Some of the most important components that constitute sensitive PII are stored by employers, government organisations, banks, and other digital accounts used by individuals.

**What are the risks of PII exposure?** Cyberattacks and weaknesses in digital infrastructure can lead to the exposure of citizens' PII. Threat actors can gain access to exposed PII and misuse it to launch targeted attacks on individuals. These attacks could range from phishing attacks with messages curated with PII information, to fraudulently opening bank accounts, and siphoning funds from accounts allotted to beneficiaries of government welfare programmes.

Threat actors may also use such information to obtain cellular connections, credit cards, and compromise the security of an

individual's digital accounts. Threat actors are also known to sell exposed PII information on the dark web.

## What are the recent events where PII was compromised?

In 2023, reports emerged that a bot on Telegram was returning the personal data of Indian citizens who registered with the COVID-19 vaccine intelligence network (CoWIN) portal for vaccination purposes. A similar data breach was reported when an American cybersecurity company said that the PII of 815 million Indian citizens, including Aadhaar numbers and passport details, were being sold on the dark web. At the time, a cybersecurity company, Resecurity, said it contacted multiple victims who verified the validity of their data. The government of India denied allegations of a biometric data leak, as well as a breach in the CoWIN portal. It did, however, launch an investigation into the allegations that led to the arrest of a man in Bihar, along with a juvenile in June 2023. A data breach was also reported in the RailYatri platform in January 2023.

Additionally, 67% of Indian government and essential services organisations experienced over a 50% increase in disruptive cyberattacks, a report from Resecurity said. Furthermore, a survey of 200 IT decision-makers noted that 45% of Indian businesses experienced more than a 50% increase in cyberattacks.

## How can one protect PII?

Individuals may not be able to prevent

leaks in databases of government organisations or service providers. However, they can take steps to ensure that their PII is not readily available to threat actors.

Look for HTTPS in URLs when visiting unknown websites. The "S" stands for secure and is used by legitimate websites to secure collected information from unsecured connections. Some browsers may also use a lock symbol in the URL bar to signify that a website is secure.

Use a VPN when accessing sensitive information using public networks. A VPN helps protect PII and other vital data by securing your online connection from prying eyes on public networks.

Keep a tab on your PII like Aadhaar, passport, PAN, Voter ID, and other important proofs of identity. Avoid sharing or accessing images or details of identity documents through unknown devices.

In case you do access them at a photocopy shop or devices owned by others, make sure to delete the documents even from recycle bins to ensure they are not misused.

Avoid sharing personal information on social media platforms.

In case your PII is leaked, be on the lookout for phishing attacks, that may use leaked information to convince you they are legitimate.

Keep a tab on your bank account transactions, credit cards, and credit score; a hit in the score could mean your PII has been misused to procure credit cards in your name.

## THE DAILY QUIZ

On Cristiano Ronaldo's birthday, a quiz on one of the greatest footballers of all time

## V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**  
He was named after which famous world leader of whom his father was a big fan?
- QUESTION 2**  
What is the nationality of Ronaldo and with which native club did he make his professional debut in 2003 before moving to Manchester United?
- QUESTION 3**  
What connects Ronaldo to David Beckham, Eric Cantona, Bryan Robson, and George Best?
- QUESTION 4**  
Which are the two major tournament titles that Ronaldo

has won with the senior Portugal side?

**QUESTION 5**  
In 2009, Ronaldo moved to Real Madrid in a deal that was the most expensive association football transfer in history then. What was the amount involved?

**QUESTION 6**  
If Ronaldo was C in the dreaded striking trio nicknamed BBC at Real Madrid, who were the two Bs?

**QUESTION 7**  
Between 2008 and 2018, Ronaldo won five Ballon d'Or trophies. Apart from finishing runner-up to Messi on five occasions, to whom did he end up second best in 2012?



## Visual question:

What is the nickname given to this famous celebration when after scoring a goal he jumps into the air and does a mid-air pirouette? GETTY IMAGES

**Questions and Answers to the February 2 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. This Prime Minister never completed any of his three terms in office. In 2023, he returned to Pakistan after a self-imposed exile. **Ans: Nawaz Sharif**

2. This leader is remembered in India as the architect of the Kargil War. **Ans: Pervez Musharraf**

3. The first governor-general of Pakistan once called this leader "my right hand." **Ans: Liaquat Ali Khan**

4. This leader was the brain behind Operation Gibraltar. **Ans: Zulfikar Ali Bhutto**

5. This Pakistan Prime Minister was Speaker of Parliament. **Ans: Yusuf Raza Gilani**

Visual: Name the woman sitting next to Indira Gandhi. **Ans: Benazir Bhutto**

**Early Birds:** K. N. Viswanathan| Prashant Nain| Riya Virdi| Sadhan Kumar| Panda



## KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

*There is no question of us going there*

His jokes are going to be lame and he will be angry with us for not laughing and applauding

## S. Upendran

"Why weren't you at the party last night? Saurabh entertained us with his jokes."

"That's the main reason I didn't come. Wanted to avoid Saurabh and his jokes. I've always found them very lame."

"Saurabh is not lame. There's nothing wrong with his legs. In fact, yesterday..."

"I said his jokes were lame. When you say that someone's jokes are lame, what you're suggesting is that you don't find them to be particularly funny."

"The jokes don't really make you laugh because they're rather predictable."

"Exactly! There's no substance in them. They are of poor quality. Saurabh thinks that he has a great sense of humour. If you ask me, most of his jokes are just lame."

"How about this? *Sita's jokes were so lame that not even her husband laughed.*"

"Sounds good. By the way, it's no longer considered appropriate to use the word 'lame' with people. A lot of people think that the use of this word with people is offensive."

"Then, what are we supposed to say?"

"One of the terms accepted nowadays is 'physically challenged'. The boy couldn't run because he was physically challenged."

"So, am I supposed to say, our dog is physically challenged? Can I say..."

"The use of 'lame' with animals seems to be okay. You can talk about a lame horse or dog."

"I see. Your boss was very angry on you for not coming to the party."

"You mean 'with', don't you?"

"What? What do you mean 'with'?"

"The boss was 'angry with you' and not 'angry on you'. You are never 'angry on someone'."

"But a lot of people in our country say that all the time."

"That's true! But native speakers of English would find it unacceptable. It's always 'angry with someone'."

"The Manager was angry with the players for coming late to the function."

"That's a good example. I was angry with myself for losing my temper."

"Are you planning to go to Hampi next weekend with Mani and his friends?"

"There's no question of going!"

"No question of going to Hampi? Does it mean that you're not going?"

"The expression 'no question of' is used to mean 'no possibility'."

"So, when you say there's no question of my going to Hampi, what you're saying is that you're not going to Hampi – there's no chance of it happening."

"Exactly! *We've had so much rain the past few days, there's no question of the match starting on time.*"

"In other words, you're saying that the match will not start on time. How about this example? *With the deadline being next week, there's no question of the boss granting you leave.*"

"There's no question of getting a raise, either!"

upendrankye@gmail.com

## Word of the day

## Wistful:

showing pensive sadness

## Synonyms:

contemplative, meditative

## Usage:

*She took one last wistful look at the house.*

## Pronunciation:

bit.ly/wistfulpro

## International Phonetic Alphabet:

/wɪstfʊl/

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## From Page One

## Champai government to face floor test today



MLAs of the JMM-led ruling alliance arriving at the Birsa Munda Airport in Ranchi on Sunday. PTI

These include: the imposition of prohibition in the State; protection of forests; water conservation; and a special court to expedite trials in cases filed against tribals and local residents.

JMM sources said that Mr. Hembrom's announcement came after a 20-minute meeting with the party's founder and former Chief Minister Shibu Soren at his official residence. "I have decided to support the government during the trust vote; however, the government must look at my demands which are for the betterment of Jharkhand," Mr. Hembrom said.

However, Chamra Linda, another rebel JMM MLA who represents the Bishnupur Assembly seat, would not discuss his intentions ahead of the vote. "Wait for the floor test, I will not say anything on it," Mr. Linda said.

JMM MLA Ramdas Soren, who represents the Ghatshila Assembly seat, is unwell and currently hospitalised. It has not yet been confirmed whether he will be present during the trust vote.

The ruling alliance has 48 MLAs, including 29 from the JMM, 17 from the Congress, and one each from the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). The main Opposition coalition in the State has 30 MLAs, including 26 from the BJP, three from the All Jharkhand Students' Union, and one from Ajit Pawar's faction of the Nationalist Congress Party.

## U.S., U.K. hit Houthi targets in Yemen

The Yemen strikes are the latest blows in a conflict that has spread into West Asia since October 7, when the Palestinian militant group Hamas stormed Israel from the Gaza Strip, igniting a war that has drawn Tehran-backed groups into attacks on U.S. and Israeli targets on several fronts.

On Friday, the U.S. carried out the first wave of that retaliation, striking in Iraq and Syria more than 85 targets linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and militias it backs, reportedly killing nearly 40.

The violence has added to concerns of the potential for further escalation. Iran, a supporter of Hamas, has so far avoided any direct role in the conflict, even as groups it backs have entered the fray from Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the latest attacks on Yemen were "a flagrant violation of international law by the United States and Britain", warning the continuation of such attacks was a "worrying threat to international peace and security".

The Pentagon has said it does not want war with Iran and does not believe Tehran wants war either. U.S. Republicans have been putting pressure on President Joe Biden, a Democrat, to deal a blow to Iran directly.

## When taxman cometh for nuns' share

They have appealed to top court that by undergoing 'civil death' by becoming nuns, their income becomes that of their congregations; Kerala HC had said that canon law can't prevail over civil law

## Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has decided to examine whether nuns earning salaries must pay income tax.

Christian missionary orders, from the Franciscans to the Carmelites, recently argued in the apex court that nuns and priests enter a state of "civil death" when they take their vow of poverty, and so need not pay tax.

Their "salaries" are not used for their personal expenses, but go to their respective congregations, they argued. The orders also contended that a nun takes the three sacred vows of obedience, chastity, and poverty after undergoing rigorous training.

Nuns, who live ascetic lives, cannot own property and will never marry. The income they earn becomes that of their congregations, which submit tax returns if necessary.



The Income Tax Department has directed educational authorities to deduct tax at source from members of congregations receiving salaries from the government. GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

"Once a person takes the vow of poverty, she denounces all her earthly relationships with the natural family. She undergoes civil death. Even if the natural parents of a nun die intestate, the assets of the deceased parents do not devolve upon the nun," said one of the petitions, filed by the Sister Superior of the Franciscan Missionary of St. Clare, represented by advocate Romy Chacko.

The various

congregation has "overriding title over its members", but cannot prevail over civil law.

The appeal in the Supreme Court has now argued that a person who undergoes "civil death" cannot earn an income. However, the High Court had reasoned that a person who was in a state of "civil death" cannot be expected to carry on "regular activities" and enjoy fundamental rights.

"Civil death" only means the assessee cannot earn any income and she loses proprietary rights. Civil death does not mean suspension of fundamental rights or to lead a cloistered life. The point is not whether she can practice any profession but whether she does it as a part of charity without earning an income for herself," said the special leave petition filed in the Supreme Court.

## French electronics major Thales to expand strategic collaborations with India

## Dinakar Peri

NEW DELHI

French electronics major Thales is significantly expanding its investments as well as sourcing from India. A joint venture, Thales Reliance Defence Systems Ltd., in Nagpur is now the Group's global production centre for airport navigational aids, while Bharat Electronics Limited-Thales Systems in Bangalore manufactures high-tech products such as low-band receivers for the electronic warfare suite of Rafale jets.

"We are trying to expand and strengthen our local footprint," said Ashish Saraf, vice-president and country director, Thales India.

India is currently negotiating the purchase of 26 Rafale-M jets for the Navy.

In addition, Thales will be establishing a maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility in the Delhi-National Capital Region with "multi-million Euro" investment for its Indian airline customers.



Ashish Saraf

towards avionics, Mr. Ashraf said in a written interview to *The Hindu*. "India is a strategic country for Thales with immense potential across our key markets including defence, aerospace as well as digital identity and security solutions. We take pride in our partnership with India built over the past seven decades," he said.

Elaborating on the MRO facility, he said that "combining the strengths of Indian civil aviation market with Thales's prowess in avionics", they are investing in an MRO set-up in India to provide "world-class service efficiency" to their airline customers. "The

spirit of 'Make in India', we are also further building on our defence foothold by developing local services capacity to better support our Indian defence customers to achieve their operational readiness as well as provide all integrated logistics support in India, including maintenance, spare parts, and training," Mr. Ashraf said.

Stating that they have steadily built advanced in-country capabilities across manufacturing, critical systems, and services in India through local teams and collaborations, Mr. Ashraf said their objective has been "Make in India for India and for the world", enabling the local industry to play a greater role in worldwide markets. "We are investing in the larger supply chain ecosystem in India. Our purchasing volume in India in the last five years has been around €750 million. This supply chain ecosystem has led to creation of close to 2,000 indirect jobs in India," he said.

## Sri Lankan Navy arrests 23 fishermen from T.N.

## L. Srikrishna

RAMESWARAM/COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan Navy arrested 23 fishermen from Rameswaram and Thangachimadam on charges of poaching and impounded two mechanised boats near Neduntheevu on Saturday. Fishermen associations in Ramanathapuram district called for a boycott of the Lok Sabha election as a mark of protest.

The Sri Lankan authorities have reportedly taken the fishermen to Myliti Port. The arrested are likely to be produced before a court. According to Fisheries Department officials, 492 tokens were issued on Saturday at Rameswaram Jetty. The boats, belonging to J. Sahayaraj and A. James, were detained by the Sri Lankan Navy on Saturday night.

Jesu Raja, a fishermen leader, told *The Hindu* that the arrest of fishermen in the Palk Bay by the Sri Lankan Navy had become a regular affair. Each boat costs anywhere between ₹25 lakh and ₹3 crore.

## Moscow Indian Embassy staffer held in U.P. on espionage charge

Satendra Siwal was arrested in Meerut by the Anti-Terror Squad for allegedly passing information to Pakistan's ISI for money; he was hired as 'multi-tasking staff' in the External Affairs Ministry, had been working in the embassy since 2021

## The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Police on Sunday arrested an employee of the Indian Embassy in Moscow for allegedly spying for Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

The accused, identified as Satendra Siwal, a resident of Shahmahiuddinpur village in Hapur district, was hired as "multi-tasking staff" in the External Affairs Ministry and had been working at the embassy in Moscow since 2021. The position is comparable to that of an office attendant.

The Anti-Terror Squad (ATS) of the Uttar Pradesh Police, in a statement, said it arrested Mr. Siwal in Meerut, where he was questioned by officers, and confessed to the crime.

"The ATS received tip-off from confidential sources that ISI handlers were luring employees of the MEA with money to derive information about the De-



Background check: Police personnel visiting Satendra Siwal's native place in Hapur on Sunday after he was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Anti-Terrorist Squad for allegedly spying for Pakistan's ISI. PTI

fence Ministry, MEA, Indian Army and Indian military installations, posing a huge threat to the internal and external security of India.

After verifying the information through technical and physical surveillance, Satendra Siwal, an employee posted as IBSA (India-based security assistant) at the Indian Embassy in Moscow was called for questioning to the ATS field unit in Meerut, where he failed to give satisfactory replies during interrogation and accepted his crime," the ATS said.

The External Affairs Ministry said it was working with relevant investigative authorities in the case. "The Ministry is aware of Mr. Siwal's arrest in Uttar Pradesh, who was posted as security assistant in Embassy of India, Moscow. It continues to work with the investigative authorities in the matter," a source within the Ministry said.

According to one theory in the official circles, Mr. Siwal was probably honey-trapped through social media or lured with financial rewards.

The ATS press release said that he had passed on information to the ISI in exchange for money. A first information report (FIR) was registered against him at the ATS police station, Lucknow under Sections 121 (A) of the Indian Penal Code and Sec-

tions 3,5, and 9 of the Official Secrets Act, 1923. Two mobile phones, one Aadhaar card, a PAN card, an identity card, and ₹600 were recovered from the accused, the ATS said.

## Important post

Moscow is an important mission from the defence point of view as a significant part of Indian military hardware is sourced from Russia. Bilateral relations with Russia have also increased since that country's conflict with Ukraine. The case involving Siwal comes after nearly 14 years of the Madhuri Gupta case, which too involved a Pakistani angle.

Gupta, who was stationed in Pakistan, was arrested in Delhi after she came home for vacation. It was alleged that she was trapped by Pakistani intelligence officials who were using her to access official information. Gupta, however, claimed to be innocent. She spent several years in prison and passed away at the age of 64 in Delhi in 2021.

Trafficking case: NIA files chargesheet against 3 from Myanmar

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has filed a chargesheet against three Myanmar nationals in a major international human trafficking case allegedly involving illegal trafficking and infiltration of foreign nationals, primarily of Rohingya origin, into India across the India-Bangladesh border.

The accused have been identified as Rabi Islam, alias Rabiul Islam; Shafi Alam, alias Sofi Alom; and Mohammad Usman. They are all permanent residents of Myanmar's Maungdaw district, the agency said.

According to the NIA, the three had illegally entered India, in collusion with traffickers and touts, without any valid travel document. They were also involved in facilitating the infiltration of numerous other foreign nationals through unauthorised and illegal border routes, the chargesheet said.

The NIA also detected instances and evidence of forgery of documents.

# 'Consensus with States and energy security are part of reforms'

Chief Economic Adviser says as the economy develops a momentum of its own, fiscal policy can go back to rebuilding the fiscal space which might be needed at some point in time in the future; he adds that it is a good idea to have a periodic review of decisions such as Goods and Services Tax and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and take a look at how effective they are, and what needs to be tweaked

## INTERVIEW

**V. Anantha Nageswaran**

Vikas Dhoot

**signalling for the future, unlike the 2019 interim Budget. Was this based on the government's 10-year track record, which your recent Economic Review termed commendable?**

That is the main reason. It's also important to articulate that you come up with a counter-cyclical fiscal policy when it is needed, and when the economy recovers, you must pull back the fiscal stimulus slowly in such a way that you rebuild the fiscal space for the next time it is needed.

The problem in the world today, and part of the reason inflation was such a big surprise for many countries in 2022 and 23... is not because of the Ukraine-Russia conflict or supply chain disruptions; they might have added their bit. But the real issue was the stimulus that

stayed too much, too big, and for too long. The same thing happened in India in 2010-11 and 2011-12, when the crisis didn't affect us that much, but we still had a stimulus which stayed for too long. Then you have to deal with the aftermath. I don't think we want to repeat all of that.

At the same time, the government is not taking its eyes off the ball on financial inclusion and taking care of the poor. That's why the PM Gareeb Kalyan Anna Yojana was extended for five years.

So, this is the reason to stick to the framework of what a vote on account should be, and the projection of a 5.1% of GDP target for fiscal deficit. As the economy develops a momentum of its own, fiscal policy can go back to rebuilding the fiscal space which might be needed at some point in time in the future.

Many reforms are not next-generation, but a continuation. We have been doing Direct and Indirect Tax re-



**You had identified some priorities for future reforms, including health and learning outcomes, easier MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises) compliances, and the Budget mentioned next generation reforms.**

form. Corporate tax rates have been simplified. For households, you have two options available to compute taxable income, and there are capital gains taxes on different assets. All those things can be re-examined even if you decide not to change them.

What I would consider a next-generation reform is, as the Finance Minister said, about consultations and consensus building

with State governments and stakeholders, because much of these lie in the realm of sub-national governments – States and below. Whether it is health or learning outcomes, skilling issues, land reforms, land conversions – the most important thing, and then the labour codes notification, which is key for employment generation.

All these things are predominantly State subjects or equally between the State and the Centre. I would consider those as the areas for next generation reforms. The other area is the energy security aspect in the context of energy transition. You can't do energy transition unless discoms are viable, which also falls in the realm of State governments.

**Do we need a new prescription on discom**

**reforms after the UDAY scheme?**

Ultimately, everything has to come down to – are you economically viable and able to recover user charges correctly? Packages can only take care of the legacy losses. But to move forward, we honour power purchase contracts and we charge an economically viable rate, which is not unaffordable and not unviable for power producers. Therein lies the answer.

If you want to subsidise, you must be extremely transparent and provide some kind of targeted transfer of money to those households and businesses whose consumption you want to subsidise, so that it is not generalised.

**How important are reforms like Goods and Services Tax rate rationalisation?**

That is something the GST Council should look at. It's about seven years since the introduction and rates are being rationalised over time for different reasons. But I think you can take a look at it from a comprehensive perspective.

In the last Budget, the Finance Minister made a point about taking a look at the regulatory institutions, and frameworks and regulations in periodic intervals. A similar thing can apply to any policy decision that is in perpetuity. If it has a natural sunset clause, it's okay.

But for things that are there forever, it is a good idea anyway to have a periodic review and take a look at how effective they are, what needs to be tweaked or overhauled. Many of these things, like GST and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, come under that category.

## Congress confident that Jharkhand govt. will clear floor test

Central agencies being misused against INDIA bloc leaders, says Jairam; party claims MLAs were shifted to Hyderabad due to agencies' threats

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

**Trust vote:** Security personnel patrolling the premises of the Jharkhand Assembly on Sunday, the eve of the floor test. ANI

The Congress on Sunday expressed confidence that the Jharkhand government will survive the floor test on Monday and go on to complete the tenure.

The tenure of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha-led alliance government ends in November. The ruling alliance, comprising the JMM, the Congress, and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, has 48 MLAs.

"It is an 81-member Assembly and we have sufficient majority to clear the trust vote. And [former Chief Minister] Hemant Soren has been granted permission by the special court to cast his vote during the confidence motion. What does it show? This is a conspiracy by the Narendra Modi government and the Enforcement Directorate. All agencies are being misused against the lead-

ers of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc. They are no longer independent institutions, they work at the Prime Minister and Home Minister's directions," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said.

Thirty-nine MLAs had been shifted to a Hyderabad resort in the interim period between the swear-

ing-in and the floor test. This was only due to threats from various Central agencies, Congress secretary Pranav Jha told presspersons at the Hyderabad airport. "We didn't need to come, we came because the BJP was still trying to break us, not by giving us money but threatening our public representatives using the Central agencies," he said.

The Congress was quick to clarify that the detailed route for the yatra will be

## Didn't receive invite for U.P. leg of Nyay Yatra, says Akhilesh

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

In fresh trouble for the INDIA bloc, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said he had not received any invitation for the Uttar Pradesh leg of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra of the Congress. The yatra is expected to enter the State on February 16.

Speaking to presspersons in Lucknow, Mr. Yadav, when asked about whether he will join the Congress's yatra, said, "Many events are organised for which we don't receive invitation. Why should we ask for an invitation?"

**Cong.'s clarification**

The Congress was quick to clarify that the detailed route for the yatra will be

shared with the allies in the State as soon as it is finalised, in bid to clear any possible misunderstanding between the two parties.

Tagging a video of Mr. Yadav's remarks, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the detailed programme of the yatra in Uttar Pradesh will be finalised in a day or two. "After this it will be shared with the constituent parties of INDIA bloc in the State. Their participation in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra will further strengthen the INDIA bloc," he said.

The alliance is in a precarious position in Uttar Pradesh, where Mr. Yadav asserted that the seat division has been clinched with 11 seats for the Congress, but the Congress claims it is not yet final as it hopes for more.

## Cong. denies rift, says seat talks on with Trinamool

The Hindu Bureau  
RANCHI

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh on Sunday dismissed any rift with Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee over the seat-sharing issue ahead of the Lok Sabha election. Talks were still going on, he said.

Responding to remarks by Ms. Banerjee, who said the Congress would not win even 40 seats in the Assembly election, Mr. Ramesh said the Congress was going ahead and taking together all parties of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

"Since day one [of alliance], the only motive of the Congress was to make the INDIA bloc stronger. I accept that there are some



**Poll pitch:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with supporters during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Dhanbad on Sunday. ANI

minor issues in West Bengal but let me say that the INDIA bloc has not been formed for the Assembly election – it is for the Lok Sabha election," Mr. Ramesh said.

Earlier in the day, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, as part of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, reached the Godhar Kali Colony in Dhanbad. He set up a chaupal (community space) to listen to people. Villagers spoke to him of the problem of unemployment.

"Even Ms. Banerjee's priority is to defeat BJP, and this is what she has been saying continuously. All the time, the Congress party is trying its best to strengthen the INDIA bloc

## Bhujbal says he had resigned from Shinde Cabinet in November

The Hindu Bureau  
PUNE

**Chhagan Bhujbal**

SC/ST Act invoked against BJP MLA

Shoumojit Banerjee  
PUNE

The Thane Police have booked Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Ganpat Gaikwad, accused of shooting and injuring Shiv Sena (Eknath Shinde faction) leader Mahesh Gaikwad inside a police station in Ulhasnagar, under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, said authorities on Sunday.

Mr. Ganpat Gaikwad, a three-time legislator from the Kalyan East constituency, had pumped six bullets into Kalyan Shiv Sena (Shinde faction) leader Mr. Mahesh Gaikwad while injuring the latter's associate, Rahul Patil, late Friday night over an apparent case of land dispute.

According to the Hill Line Police, they have now booked the MLA based on a complaint filed by a resident of Dwarli village.

However, soon after Mr. Bhujbal's revelation, Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis clarified that his resignation had not been accepted.

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Email id: komulengineers@gmail.com Ph No.: 776096584 / 8884910649					
IFT No: KCMU/ENGG-Electrical/00324/9879/2023-24, Date 23.01.2024					
Kolar-Chikkaballapur District Co-operative Milk Producer Societies' Union Limited invites tenders through e - procurement portal www.kppp.karnataka.gov.in vide tender indent No: KMF/2023-24/EU/WORK_INDENT117 interested eligible bidders can participate for the work detailed in the Table below.					
Sl. No.	Name of work	Approximate Value of work (Rs.)	Earnest Money Deposit	Period of Completion	Class of contractor
1.	Supply, Installation, Commissioning and Testing of Complete Internal Electrification, ELV & Fire Fighting Works for mvk golden dairy building,	06.98 Crores (Excluding GST)	7 Lakhs	09 Months	Class-1 A Electrical

- Date of down loading of tender document from 29.01.2024 to 02.03.2024
- Last date for queries: 14.02.2024 with in 5.30PM
- Pre bid meeting: 15.02.2024 at 11.30AM
- Last date and time for receipt of tenders: 02.03.2024 up to 5.30 PM
- Time and date of opening of cover(A) one of technical tender: 04.03.2024 up to 11.30 AM
- Time and date of opening of cover(B) two of commercial tender: Will be intimated to the qualified tenders

Sd/-, The Managing, Director, Tender inviting authority - KOMUL

CHENNAI METRO RAIL LIMITED (A Joint Venture of Govt. of India & Govt. of Tamil Nadu) METROS, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai - 600 035					
NOTICE INVITING e-TENDER on Rolling Basis					
Tender: 01 Tender for Licensing of Promotion Rights on selected 3 Metro Stations of Corridor I & II of Phase 1					
Contract ID CMRL/BD/PR/2023/490/07					
Tender: 02 Tender cum auction for Licensing of Commercial Development at Nehru Park					
Contract ID CMRL/BD/PD/2023/493/04					
Tender: 03 Tender for Licensing of commercial space located at Ancillary buildings / Independent buildings located adjacent to Selected Elevated and UG Metro Stations along Phase-I and its Extension					
Contract ID CMRL/BD/ANC-ASB/2022/482/02					
Documents downloaded from e - tendering website https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app.					
The above tender (01-03) documents downloaded from 05.02.2024 through e-tendering website https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app.					
For due date of Bid submission, date of Bid opening and complete details, please visit e-procurement website: http://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app. The tender will continue in rolling basis. Prospective bidders are required to periodically check the e-procurement website to know the currently available inventories. The available inventories will be updated till the process will continue till award of all stations for Promotion Rights licensing, commercial space at Nehru Park and Station commercial spaces. Any Corrigendum/Addendum to this publication, if any, would appear only on above mentioned website and will not be published in newspapers.					
Tender inviting Authority: Chief General Manager (P&BD), Chennai Metro Rail Limited, METROS, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai-600 035. Phone - 044-2437 8000 / www.chennaimetrorail.org. E-mail: krishnan.rm@cmrl.in					
Chief General Manager (P&BD) Chennai Metro Rail Limited					

DIPR/ 624 / TENDER/2024

Chief General Manager (P&BD) Chennai Metro Rail Limited

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH SAMAGRA SHIKSHA					

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## IN BRIEF



## Chandigarh mayoral polls: SC to hear councillor's plea today

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday an Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor's plea challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order that refused to grant interim relief to the party seeking fresh mayoral polls in Chandigarh. A Bench of Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra is likely to hear the matter. The case was mentioned by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for councillor Kuldeep Kumar, a candidate for the Mayor's post on February 2 seeking urgent hearing. The BJP's victory came as a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers. PTI

## Applications for JEE-Main open, to conclude on Mar. 2

Applications for the second edition of the engineering entrance exam JEE-Main are now open and will stay on till March 2, according to the National Testing Agency (NTA). The exam is scheduled to take place from April 4 to 15. "The candidates who have applied and successfully paid the examination fee for JEE (Main) 2024 Session 1 and wish to appear for JEE (Main) 2024 Session 2, are required to log in with their previous application number and password as provided in session 1," said Sadhna Parashar, Senior Director (Exams), NTA. "Those candidates who have not applied earlier, need to apply afresh as per the schedule," she added. PTI

India will have a modern justice system, says Shah

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said that crimes and criminals do not respect geographical borders and hence, different law enforcement agencies also should not consider any border as a hindrance. Instead, they should consider them as meeting points for solving crimes, he said, while addressing the Commonwealth Attorney- and Solicitor-General Conference.

Mr. Shah also said that when the three recently enacted criminal justice laws are implemented, one can get justice up to the High Court level within three years of registering a first information report (FIR). Referring to the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act, Mr. Shah said that after the complete implementation of these three new laws, India will have the world's most modern criminal justice systems.

Mr. Shah said that the government has worked on the model that justice essentially should have three A's, by being accessible, affordable, and accountable.

## Manipur cadets clash at Assam academy

The scuffle started when two trainees indulged in verbal abuse after one of them brought liquor from a local market into the academy in Dergaon

**Press Trust of India**  
GOLAGHAT

At least seven Manipur police trainees, who were undergoing training at the Lachit Borphukan Police Academy in Golaghat district of Assam, were injured when a clash broke out between cadets of two groups, a senior official said on Sunday.

The scuffle started when two trainees indulged in verbal abuse after one of them brought liquor from a local market into the academy in Dergaon around dinner time on Saturday night.

This escalated into a full-blown clash between the groups, injuring several of them, a senior official of the academy said.

"Seven trainees from Manipur were injured as a result of the scuffle. Out of those injured, three were sent to the Jorhat Medical College and Hospital for better treatment, while four were released after preliminary medical intervention at the local hospital," he said.

Meanwhile, Assam Director-General of Police



Several trainees are undergoing training at the Lachit Borphukan Police Academy in Golaghat district of Assam.

Gyanendra Pratap Singh said the scuffle at the Police Academy took place among young trainees from Manipur.

"They have been briefed in no uncertain terms to follow instructions and protocols of the training institute from drill to discipline to decorum. No scope would be presented to anyone to deviate from the principles that guide training in our academy... Any aberrant behaviour would be corrected through tough training measures," he said.

He said the scuffle had broken out over serving dinner. "The matter is now re-

solved. The Range IGP and DIG, Training are with the boys," he said, sharing several pictures of the trainees sitting on the ground in the presence of Assam police personnel.

An official of the academy said the Manipur Police had deputed a senior IPS officer from the State to take stock of the situation.

"A senior officer from Manipur police, M. Pradip Singh, IPS, is being deputed to Dergaon to take stock of the situation. The matter is being monitored by the Manipur police on real time basis and the situation is under control," the Manipur Police said in a post on X.

PM's 'total silence' on Manipur a 'horrific injustice': Congress

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday condemned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "total silence" on the situation in Manipur. The Congress alleged that his inaction was a "horrific injustice" on the people there.



The PM goes to Guwahati for a roadshow but cannot and will not go to Imphal... A horrific anyay by the PM on the people of Manipur

**JAIRAM RAMESH**  
Congress general secretary

2023, after a tribal solidarity march was organised in the hill districts in protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

While a section of Kukis has demanded a separate administration or separation from the Manipur government, Meitei groups oppose this demand and have warned legislators to prevent any move that seeks separation. Meiteis account for about 53% of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribal people, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40% and reside mainly in the hill districts.

After meeting Mr. Shah, Mr. Singh said the Centre was set to take "some important decisions" in the interests of the people of the State. During the meeting, "matters of paramount importance" concerning Manipur were discussed.

Ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3,

## Bengal children rescued as bonded labourers from T.N. want to return to work after turning 18

**Shiv Sahay Singh**  
KOLKATA

A boy at Amragachi village in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas will turn 17 on March 23. He, however, is eagerly waiting for his next birthday in 2025, when he will turn 18.

Rescued as a 'bonded labourer' from Chennai in February 2023, he often has a conversation with his father about his future.

His father, a farmer with less than half an acre of land, consoles him. "You may go to work when you turn adult," the father tells the Class 10 student outside their small hutment that requires urgent repair.

He was rescued as a 16-year-old, with 21 other children, most of them from North 24 Parganas district.

The release certificate of the teenager mentions Section 12 of the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1978 and the address



**Uphill struggle:** Employers exploit vulnerable young adolescents, paying them absolutely no wages. FILE PHOTO

but that has not made much of a difference in their lives.

Of the 22 children rescued from jewellery making units in Chennai as 'bonded labourers', about 15 of them have returned to Chennai to work in the same profession and in most cases with the same employers who had engaged them earlier.

In the adjoining village of Asudih, there is another teenager who was rescued from Chennai. His father, who has sold a portion of his land to construct a house, is upset that his son did not get an additional ₹50,000 which the employers should have given to rescued children. The families complain that in certain cases, the employers deposited money but later threatened the poor families to return the money.

The villagers point out that there are houses belonging to the agents and owners who run the jewellery manufacturing units in Chennai. These intermediaries and employers are known to the parents and sometimes are also distant relatives of these young boys.

These agents and employers assure the families to train young men and in turn, exploit vulnerable young adolescents from impoverished backgrounds, paying them absolutely no wages.

R. Karuppusamy, State convener, Campaign Against Child Labour, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, who is associated with READ, an NGO partner of Integrated Leadership Forum Against Trafficking, (ILFAT), said that as a source State, West Bengal should take the initiative and provide some support to the children and their families who were rescued as bonded labourers.

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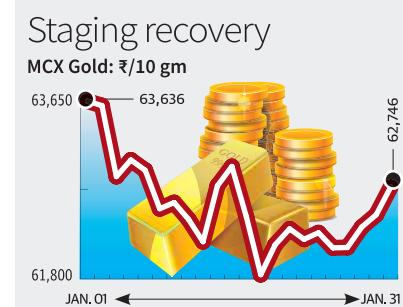
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# MONEYWISE

## PRECIOUS METALS



## Gold, silver end Jan. on a low note

Strength in U.S. dollar and the recovery in the equity markets dented sentiment towards the precious metals

**B. Krishnakumar**

The first month of the year 2024 turned out to be an uneventful one for precious metals. Both gold and silver witnessed range-bound price action in January. The strength in U.S. dollar and the recovery in the equity markets dented sentiment towards the precious metals. It was, however, positive to note that the Comex gold price managed to sustain above the psychological \$2,000 level throughout the month.

Comex gold closed 0.68% lower in January to end at \$2,057.7. Comex silver witnessed a relatively steeper cut of 4.02% in January to settle at \$23.06 an ounce at the end of January.

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, MCX gold closed 1.27% lower in January and closed at ₹62,746 per 10-gram. MCX silver closed 2.89% lower at ₹72,252 per kilogram.

**Confined to range**  
Comex gold price has been confined recently in the \$2,000-2,100 range. A decisive breakout from this range is required to set the tone for the next big directional move in gold. Above \$2,100 the Comex gold price could head to \$2,150-\$2,160 zone. A fall below \$2,000 would be a sign of weakness and could push the price to \$1,930-\$1,940 zone.

Comex silver is yet to breakout of the \$21.9-\$26.4 range that it has been confined to in the past couple of months. Only a breakout of this range would trigger the next big move in silver. Until then expect volatile price action within this range. A fall below \$21.9 would be a sign of weakness and the price could then slide to \$19.8-\$20.

Mirroring the global trend, the price action in MCX gold was devoid of any trend. The price is stuck in the range of ₹61,300-64,200. A move above ₹64,200 would impart momentum to the upside and the price could then head to ₹65,500-66,000. A fall below ₹61,300 would be a sign of weakness and could push the yellow metal's price to lower levels.

The MCX silver price is still confined in a broad range and this range has contracted in January.

The price range has shrunk to ₹70,700-74,000 zone in the past few weeks. The short-term price movement would hinge on the direction of the breakout from this range.

A move above ₹74,000 would be a sign of strength and could push the price higher to ₹76,500-77,500.

A fall below ₹70,700 would impart weakness and could push MCX silver price to ₹68,000-68,500. Until the price breaks out of the above range, expect volatile range-bound price action to persist.

To summarise, expect range-bound and volatile price action to persist in precious metals. Only a breakout from the prevailing range would lead to any meaningful move.

(The author is Chennai based analyst/trader. The views and opinion featured in this column are based on the analysis of short-term price movement in gold and silver futures at COMEX & Multi Commodity Exchange of India. This is not meant to be a trading or investment advice)

**Send queries** on personal finance and investing to the [moneywise@thehindu.co.in](http://moneywise@thehindu.co.in). Our experts in personal finance will respond to select queries, but will not give specific recommendations for investment in a particular mutual fund, share or fixed deposit.



**For starters:** Primarily, a secured credit card helps you rebuild a poor credit score or start your credit journey. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

## How secured credit cards help build credit score

By showcasing responsible credit management with secured credit cards, you can position yourself for a transition to unsecured credit cards

### CREDIT PROFILE

**Radhika Binani**

**A** good credit score not only opens doors to multiple credit opportunities but also gives you the power to negotiate a better deal with lenders. However, individuals who are new to credit or those with a damaged credit score might face difficulty in getting approval for loans and credit cards. They would first need to build a good credit score to increase their chances of availing loans at a more favourable interest rate or a credit card that suits their needs. Secured credit cards could come as a valuable tool for such consumers to help build a solid credit profile.

#### Collateral needed

Issued against a collateral, generally a fixed deposit, secured credit cards require the users to make a deposit upfront. This serves as collateral, thus lowering the risk for the card issuer while offering a crucial chance for users to rebuild their credit. If the user defaults on credit card payments in future, the issuing bank has the right to use the deposit amount to cover their losses.

The deposit amount also determines the credit limit offered on the secured credit card. The issuer offers 80-90%, sometimes up to 100%, of the deposit as credit limit.

Apart from requiring a



Spend only as much as you can afford to repay, do not exhaust the entire credit limit and establish a strong repayment history

deposit, secured credit cards function the same way as unsecured credit cards. Cardholders can use it to make purchases online and offline, convert big-ticket expenses into EMIs and earn value-back on spends in the form of reward points or cashback.

#### Low/no fee

While most secured credit cards charge a very low or no annual fee and come with a basic rewards or cashback programme, some secured cards may also offer accelerated earnings on select categories.

For example, the IDFC FIRST WOW Credit Card offers up to 3X reward points on UPI spends and Kotak 811 Dream Different Credit Card offers 2X rewards on online spends.

You can maximise benefits with optimal use of the value-back programme on the secured credit card. You can use the card to earn accelerated rewards, discount deals and avail other limited period offers. However, you should not overspend just to earn more rewards.

Primarily, a secured credit card helps you rebuild a poor credit score or start your credit journey. Since



It is also important to regularly monitor the usage on your secured credit cards as well as your monthly credit score to see the impact

the activity on secured credit cards is reported to the credit bureaus, you can show responsible behaviour by making timely payment of credit card bills. Spend only as much as you can afford to repay, do not exhaust the entire credit limit and establish a strong repayment history.

If rebuilding credit is your primary concern, it is also important to regularly monitor the usage on your secured credit cards as well as your monthly credit score to see the impact and stay on track.

In addition to availing the benefits of a credit card, users will also earn interest on their deposit against which the card is issued. The rate of interest varies from issuer to issuer and also based on the fixed deposit tenure. With IDFC FIRST WOW Credit Card, for example, you can earn 7.5% interest on your fixed deposit. Hence, secured credit cards offer benefits in three ways:

1) You can avail general benefits of a credit card like EMIs, up to 50 days of interest-free period, reward points, etc.

2) You will earn interest on your deposit

3) With responsible us-

age, you can build or improve your credit score.

While selecting a secured credit card, you should compare different options and choose the one where the rate of interest on deposit is higher and, at the same time, the card offers benefits more aligned to your purchase patterns.

#### Making a transition

By showcasing responsible credit management with secured credit cards, you can position yourself for a transition to unsecured credit cards. Unsecured cards typically offer higher credit limits as well as better benefits. With an improved credit score and a history of responsible credit usage, you could be eligible for unsecured cards that better align with your spending habits and could help you save a substantial amount on your regular spends.

#### Card upgrade

Sometimes, card issuers take note of these financial habits and may offer an upgrade to their secured credit cardholders. However, if your card issuer is not offering an upgrade, you can consider applying for an unsecured card after using the secured card responsibly for at least 6 months.

Secured cards can prove to be the stepping-stones of building a positive credit profile by demonstrating disciplined usage, opening the doors to more credit opportunities.

(The writer is Chief Product Officer, Paisabazaar)

## Outsourcing your asset allocation

### THINKINVESTOR

You must decide how much of your annual savings must be invested in equity and bonds. First, you must fix the time horizon; next, the amount required at the end of the time to achieve the goal

**Venkatesh Bangarawaswamy**

Hybrid funds invest in equity and bonds. In this article, we discuss hybrid funds in the context of your asset allocation decision, given that you will invest in equity and bonds for your goal-based investments.

You must decide how much of your annual savings must be invested in equity and bonds. This decision is based on several factors. First, you must fix the time horizon for your life goal, say, 10 years. Next, you must determine the amount required at end of 10 years to achieve the goal. Then, you must determine how much you can save from your current income towards achieving this goal. Finally, you must make a realistic assumption on the expected post-tax returns on equity and bonds.

Suppose you expect equity to generate pre-tax return of 12%, translating into post-tax return of 10.8%, given 10% long-term capital gains tax. Also suppose you expect to earn pre-tax return of 7% on your bank deposits, translating into post-tax returns of 4.9%, assuming 30% tax rate on interest income.

You can use a spreadsheet to calculate the required return to achieve your goal. This post-tax compounded annual return is referred to as the minimum acceptable return (MAR). The weighted average returns of equity and bonds must equal the goal's MAR. Solving this equation will give you the asset allocation. Note that your asset allocation will be different for each goal. Now consider a hybrid fund. Such a fund will typically have two portfolio managers to manage the equity component and the bond component. Both components are typically actively managed. Importantly, fund will engage in tactical asset allocation; the proportion of equity and bonds in the fund will vary each year within a mandated range based on the portfolio managers' return expectations of both markets.

Hybrid funds have benefits. Internal rebalancing (shifting between equity and bonds within the fund) will not trigger tax incidence for you. Also, if the fund holds more than 65% in equity, even the bond returns in the fund will attract only 10% long term capital gains tax when you redeem your units.

They are, however, two important issues to consider. One, the fund will generate capital appreciation from bonds whereas it is preferable to earn income returns for goal-based investments. And two, the fund's asset allocation may not align with your asset allocation requirement.

(The author offers training programmes for individuals to manage their personal investments)

### Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
<b>Small Finance Banks</b>				
AU Small Finance Bank	8.00	6.75	7.50	7.25
Capital Small Finance Bank	7.60	7.50	7.15	7.10
Equitas Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.20	8.00	7.25
ESAF Small Finance Bank	8.25	6.00	6.75	6.25
Fincare Small Finance Bank	8.61	7.65	8.11	8.00
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.50	7.25	7.25
Suroday Small Finance Bank	8.65	6.85	8.60	8.25
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	8.25	8.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	8.50	8.00	8.50	7.50
<b>Private Sector Banks</b>				
Axis Bank	7.10	6.70	7.10	7.00
Bandhan Bank	7.85	7.25	7.25	5.85
City Union Bank	7.00	6.75	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.75	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	7.50	7.00	6.50	6.50
DCB Bank	8.00	7.15	7.60	7.40
Federal Bank	7.75	6.80	7.00	6.60
HDFC Bank	7.20	6.60	7.00	7.00
ICICI Bank	7.10	6.70	7.00	7.00
IDFC First Bank	7.75	6.50	7.25	7.00
IndusInd Bank	7.50	7.50	7.25	7.25

### Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
(In %)			
Public Sector Banks			
State Bank of India	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.05	8.40-10.05
Bank of Baroda	8.40-10.65	8.40-10.65	8.40-10.90
Union Bank of India	8.35-10.75	8.35-10.90	8.35-10.90
Punjab National Bank	8.45-10.25	8.40-10.15	8.40-10.15
RBIL Bank	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75	8.30-10.75
Canara Bank	8.50-11.25	8.45-11.25	8.40-11.15
UCO Bank	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30	8.45-10.30
Bank of Maharashtra	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15	8.35-11.15
Punjab and Sind Bank*	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00	8.50-10.00
Indian Overseas Bank	8.40*	8.40*	8.40*
Central Bank of India	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80	8.45-9.80
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
LIC Housing Finance	8.35-10.35	8.35-10.55	8.35-10.75
Bajaj Housing Finance	8.50*	8.50*	8.50*
Tata Capital			

**WINDHEOK**

Namibia President Geingob, veteran of freedom struggle, dies



Namibia's President Hage Geingob, a veteran of the country's liberation struggle and its first post-independence Prime Minister, died on Sunday. Geingob, who was serving his second term as President, revealed last month that he was being treated for cancer. He had supported South Africa's case against Israel at the ICJ. AFP

28 killed as Ukraine shells areas held by Russia

**Associated Press**

Moscow-installed officials say Ukrainian shelling killed at least 28 people at a bakery in the Russian-occupied city of Lysychansk.

At least one child was among the dead on Saturday. A further 10 persons were rescued from under the rubble by emergency services.

Ukrainian officials in Kyiv did not comment on the incident.

Both Moscow and Kyiv have increasingly relied on longer-range attacks this winter amid largely unchanged positions on the 1,500-km front line in the nearly 2-year-old war.

However, Ukrainian forces have come under intense Russian attack over the past 24 hours, with continuous assaults along the front line, Ukraine's General Staff said in a statement Sunday.

**VÍA DEL MAR**

Chile wildfires kill at least 51 in 'unprecedented catastrophe'



Wildfires blazing across Chile have killed at least 51 people with flames continuing to spread on Sunday. President Gabriel Boric has declared a state of emergency in the central and southern parts of the country "due to catastrophe," as dry conditions and temperatures soaring to 40 degrees Celsius worsened the crisis. AFP

**ISLAMABAD**

Qureshi barred from contesting Pakistan elections for five years



Pakistan's Election Commission has disqualified Shah Mahmood Qureshi, a close aide of jailed ex-Prime Minister Imran Khan, from contesting elections for five years after the former Foreign Minister was sentenced to 10 years in prison for leaking state secrets. The move comes five days before the February 8 general elections. PTI

**MOSCOW**

Russian cosmonaut sets new record for the most time in space



Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko has broken the world record for the most cumulative time spent in space, Russia's space agency Roscosmos reported Sunday. The 59-year-old has now spent more than 878 days and 12 hours in space. Kononenko has made five journeys to the International Space Station, dating back to 2008. AP

**After U.S. strikes, Iran warns against threatening ships**

The ships have loitered for years in the Red Sea off Yemen, suspected of serving as spy positions for Iran's Revolutionary Guard; U.S. and U.K. call for an end to Houthi attacks on vessels

**Associated Press**

JERUSALEM

Iran issued a warning on Sunday to the U.S. over potentially targeting two cargo ships in West Asia long suspected of serving as forward operating base for Iranian commandos, just after America and the United Kingdom launched a massive airstrike campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The video statement from Iran on the *Behshad* and *Saviz* ships appeared to signal Tehran's growing unease over the U.S. strikes in recent days in Iraq, Syria and Yemen targeting militias backed by the Islamic Republic.

Those attacks, themselves a retaliatory campaign for the killing of three U.S. soldiers and



**United front:** Houthis gather to show defiance, after U.S. and UK air strikes, near Sanaa in Yemen on Sunday. REUTERS

wounding of dozens of others in Jordan.

"These attacks will not discourage Yemeni forces and the nation from maintaining their support for Palestinians in the face of the Zionist occupation and crimes," Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Ya-

hya Saree said. "The aggressors' airstrikes will not go unanswered."

**Looming strikes**

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin warned the Houthis after the strikes that "they will continue to bear further consequences

if they do not end their illegal attacks on international shipping and naval vessels." That message was echoed by British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, who said: "The Houthi attacks must stop."

The *Behshad* and *Saviz* are registered as commercial cargo ships with a Tehran-based company that the U.S. Treasury has sanctioned as a front for the state-run Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines. The *Saviz*, then later the *Behshad*, have loitered for years in the Red Sea off Yemen, suspected of serving as spy positions for Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Iran's statement ends with a warning overlaid with a montage of footage of U.S. warships and an American flag.

**Biden sweeps South Carolina; vows to make Trump a 'loser'**

**Agence France-Presse**

CHARLESTON

U.S. President Joe Biden cruised to victory in the South Carolina Democratic primary, vowing afterwards that he would make Republican rival Donald Trump a loser for a second time in the November 2024 election.

Democrats will now pore over the results to see how well the 81-year-old incumbent mobilised the Black voters who helped propel him to the White House four years ago against Mr. Trump.

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Minnesota congressman Dean Phillips, who won 1.6%, U.S. news organisations said.

As the results came in Mr. Biden was at a campaign event in California, as he turns his attention to the next steps in his fight for reelection.

"Now in 2024, the people of South Carolina have spoken again and I have no doubt that you have set us on the path to winning the presidency again – and making Donald Trump a loser – again," Mr. Biden said in a statement.

He urged people to get out and vote in November, saying the stakes for the U.S. could not be higher if Mr. Trump manages a sensational comeback to the Oval Office.

**Hoping for a repeat**

Mr. Biden had said he was counting on South Carolina to repeat the feat when it launched his bid for the White House in 2020 after a series of stumbles.

Despite South Carolina being likely to remain in Republican hands in November, as it has done since 1980, Mr. Biden also regards the southern state as important as a proving ground for his support among Black voters.

A number of recent polls have however shown their support slipping, especially among young Black men, amid frustration that he has not addressed their priorities despite them backing him four years ago.

**Russian Minister visits South Korea following diplomatic tussle**

**Agence France-Presse**

SEOUL

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko visited South Korea to discuss the Ukrainian war and bilateral ties, Seoul's Foreign Ministry said on Sunday, as the two countries trade increasingly heated rhetoric over the nuclear-armed North.

Mr. Rudenko met his South Korean counterpart

**Sri Lanka's JVP-led alliance invited for talks to New Delhi for the first time**

**Meera Srinivasan**

COLOMBO

The Indian government has invited a delegation led by Anura Kumara Dissanayake, leader of Sri Lanka's leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front,

to New Delhi, in a significant outreach to the island nation's most popular politician at the moment.

"We leave tomorrow [Monday] morning and will be there for five days

for meetings," JVP legislator Vijitha Herath, who is part of the delegation, told *The Hindu* on Sunday night. This is the first time that the JVP leader, who helms the National People's Power [NPP] alliance, has received an official invitation from the Government of India.

Sources at the Indian High Commission said the delegation is scheduled to visit three cities – New Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Thiruvananthapuram – and

hold meetings with government officials, members of the business community, in addition to visiting centres of excellence in agriculture and industry.

**Popular leader**

The development assumes significance in the wake of Mr. Dissanayake's soaring popularity, after the historic人民's movement in 2022 that dislodged former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa amid a crushing financial meltdown. Accord-

ing to the latest survey conducted by the Institute for Health Policy, a Colombo-based research institution, he is the most preferred candidate in a likely presidential election this year. 50% of respondents said they would vote for him, while 33% of the respondents chose Leader of Opposition Sajith Premadasa and only 9% chose President Ranil Wickremesinghe, findings released this January showed.

"Throughout this journey, challenges will gradually dissipate, life's burdens will lighten, the

**Sri Lanka President says financial crisis is 'gradually' easing**

**Agence France-Presse**

COLOMBO

economy will fortify," Mr. Wickremesinghe said in a brief statement.

Prices spiked more than 6% last month after the government increased the country's taxes in line with IMF conditions to maintain the bailout loan, according to Central Bank of Sri Lanka data.

The 6.4% reading was well up from the 4.0% seen in December, according to the bank.

**Sport**

**India bests Pakistan, punches its World Group I ticket**

**DAVIS CUP****Agence France-Presse**

ISLAMABAD

India eased past Pakistan 4-0 in their World Group I play-off tie on Sunday, proving superior in both doubles and singles on the grass courts here.

A dominant India never looked back after winning both singles matches on Saturday, taking its overall record to 8-0 in the Davis Cup against Pakistan.

The Indian pair of Saketh Myneni and Yuki Bhambri was too good for the Pakistani duo of Aqeel Khan and Muzammil Murtaza, winning 6-2, 7-6(5).



**Domination:** Saketh and Yuki were in complete control. AFP

will figure in a World Group I tie in September.

**The results:**

**India bt Pakistan 4-0** (Saketh Myneni & Yuki Bhambri bt Aqeel Khan & Muzammil Murtaza 6-2, 7-6(5); Niki Poonacha bt Muhammad Shoaib 6-3, 6-4; Ramkumar, Balaji won their singles on Sunday.)

Having recovered from a knee injury, Anshu, a World championships silver medallist in 57kg, staved off a strong challenge to beat Sarita, a Worlds bronze medallist in 59kg, 8-3 in the final.

Before Anshu's travel to Japan and Sarita's trip to the United States for training, the title clash assumed importance as both wrestlers are eyeing the 57kg spot in the upcoming Olympic qualifiers in April and May.

Anshu, mostly out of action after the Asian championships in April, where she landed a bronze in 57kg, came dominating per-

formances – claiming two bouts with technical superiority and one by pinning her opponent – to reach the final.

Sarita, who missed out on the Goa National Games due to fever, won her opening bout 'by fall' and the next two by an identical 10-0 margin.

In the summit clash, Anshu led 2-0 before Sarita narrowed the margin to 2-1 at the break.

Anshu exhibited her swiftness to effect a takedown and followed it with two spectacular two-pointers to go 8-1 up early in the second period.

When Sarita showed aggression, Anshu's knee withstood the pressure and she defended well to emerge victorious.

Double Worlds medalist Vinesh Phogat made a successful return to competition after a knee surgery to win the 55kg gold medal.

A cautious Vinesh, barring her 3-0 win over Lalita in the quarterfinal, recorded commanding wins to overcome a mental barrier.

The medalists:

2. Neelam (RSPB), 3. Sonia Choudhary (Raj), Anju (Goa).

**59kg:** 1. Ankush (RSPB), 2. Jyoti (Har), 3. Kavita Mai (Raj), Swati (Mah).

**57kg:** 1. Anju (RSPB), 2. Tapasya (Har), 3. Shilpa (Pud), Bhana (UP).

**59kg:** 1. Anshu Malik (Har), 2. Sarita Mor (RSPB), 3. Deekshi (Del), Anjali (Chd).

**62kg:** 1. Mansi Ahlawat (RSPB), 2. Sonika Kumari (HP), Savita (Har), Seema (Pun).

**65kg:** 1. Sonali (Mah), 2. Diksha Malik (Pud), 3. Bhateri (SSCB), Priyanka (Guj).

**68kg:** 1. Nisha Dahiya (RSPB), 2. Radhika (Har), 3. Priyanka (SSCB), Annu (Guj).

**72kg:** 1. Jyoti (Har), Nikki (RSPB), 3. Jashanbir Kaur (SSCB), Priyanka (Guj).

**76kg:** 1. Reetika (SSCB), 2. Sunena (Har), 3. Manju (Goa), Hashita (Hindi).



**Intense:** Anshu battling it out with Sarita. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

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**SPECIAL FAN**

**My father is the only constant when I play at home, says Gill**



Shubman Gill's father was in the stands when he scored his third Test hundred, which came after a disappointing run. "He comes for all my games in India," Gill said. "He has seen me not scoring and scoring runs. He is the only constant when I play at home; it is very satisfying to score runs in front of him."

**FINGERS CROSSED**

**Anderson expects teammate Root to bat in the second innings**



James Anderson indicated Joe Root, who left the field after injuring his finger, would be fit to bat during England's chase against India in the second Test. "It's just making sure that it is as good as it can be for when he bats," said Anderson. "Hopefully, he will turn up at the ground and be okay to hold a bat."

**NOT EASY**

**Visakhapatnam pitch is definitely doing something, says Gill**



Shubman Gill, who bailed India out with a superb century, said the Visakhapatnam wicket wasn't easy to score runs on. "It will have variable bounce as the game goes on and we saw that today," he said. "It is not turning as much as the other pitches but it is definitely doing something."

**GETTING THROUGH**

**Bulls prevail over U Mumba in a tight clash; Giants beat Thalaivas**



Bengaluru Bulls secured a 42-37 win over U Mumba in the Pro Kabaddi League in New Delhi on Sunday. For Bulls, Sushil registered a Super 10, Akshit got eight points, and Ran Singh completed a High Five. U Mumba raider Jai Bhagwan also got a Super 10. In the second match, Gujarat Giants beat Tamil Thalaivas 42-30.



Axar forged a valuable stand with Gill. K. R. DEEPAK

**Very satisfying to score runs at No. 3: Gill**

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**

VISAKHAPATNAM

Shubman Gill is glad he could make a significant contribution at No. 3. "I think it was very satisfying for me to be able to score runs at No. 3," he said at the end of day three. "It felt pretty good, especially in the situation, after losing two quick wickets. It was important for us to get as many runs as possible."

About his tentative start, Gill said: "I was just taking one ball at a time and obviously there was a lot happening around the crease. A couple of wickets fell early and then Shreyas and I had a good partnership."

He said he received a lot of support from the captain, coach Rahul Dravid and batting coach Vikram Rathour. "They are the ones who have always kept me motivated," he said. "I think it is very important to stay true to who you are and how you have gotten there. Sometimes if you get over-defensive or over-aggressive and try to be someone you are not, you will not be able to get out of that shell."

# Gill finds his rhythm as India sets a target of 399 on absorbing day

His third Test hundred, after a string of poor scores, helps Rohit's men reach 255 in the second innings; England 67 for one at stumps

**ENGLAND IN INDIA****P.K. Ajith Kumar**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

**S**hubman Gill had more lives than a cat on Sunday. He is too good a player to have missed out on a day like that.

He scored a hundred when he – and India – badly needed it. His third Test century (104, 147b, 11x4, 2x6) has given India an excellent chance for a series-leveling win in the second Test at the Y.S. Rajasekhar Reddy Stadium. No other batter got to 50, as India was bowled out for 255.

That left the Englishmen to chase a record target of 399. They ended the third day at 67 for one, after Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett provided another quick-fire fifty-run stand for the first wicket. It should be a fascinating fourth – and possibly the final – day on Monday.

England will be chasing history: the highest score chased down in a Test in India is 387, by India against England, in 2008. Expect this Bazballing England to have a go at it.

Earlier, India resumed at 28 for no wicket, but both the openers were back in the dressing room within 20 minutes of play. James Anderson yet again belied his 41 years, steaming in and making life difficult for the batters.

He moved the ball a shade away to beat the de-



**Stepping up to the plate:** Gill's temperament and skill came to the fore as he revived the Indian innings. K. R. DEEPAK

fensive bat of Rohit and pegged back his off stump.

In the following over, he had the first-innings hero Yashasvi Jaiswal edging to Joe Root at first slip. His first spell of the morning read 41-6-2.

At 30 for two, it was a challenging situation for India, but it presented an opportunity to Gill.

The move from the opening slot to No. 3 hadn't seemed to work, and his last score of over 40 in

Tests was the 128 against Australia at Ahmedabad in March last year.

**Slices of luck**

This morning there were signs that Gill's wait for a major innings could get longer. He was on four when he was given lbw to Tom Hartley and he reviewed the decision only after consulting with the non-striker Shreyas Iyer.

He survived: the ultra-edge technology suggested the

bat was involved.

He survived again: in the very next over, England reviewed when Anderson's appeal for lbw was turned down by the umpire. And it proved the umpire's call on DRS.

Before long, though, the real Gill made an appearance. He began to use his feet beautifully against the spinners, the timing became better.

He stepped out to hit Shoaib Bashir over his head

for a six, swept Tom Hartley for a four and there was a scorching straight drive off Rehan Ahmed as well.

But for his partnerships with Shreyas – 81 for the third wicket – and Axar Patel (45, 84b, 6x4) – 89 for the fifth wicket – India may have struggled.

Some of the Indian batters were guilty of soft dismissals once again. Ben Stokes deserves credit, though, for creating chances with his clever field

**SCOREBOARD****INDIA — 1ST INNINGS**  
396 in 112 overs**ENGLAND — 1ST INNINGS**  
253 in 55.5 overs**INDIA — 2ND INNINGS**

Yashasvi Jaiswal c Root b Anderson 17 (27b, 3x4), Rohit Sharma b Anderson 13 (21b, 3x4), Shubman Gill c Foakes b Bashir 104 (147b, 11x4, 2x6), Shreyas Iyer c Stokes b Hartley 29 (52b, 2x4), Rajat Patidar c Foakes b Rehan 9 (19b, 1x4), Axar Patel lbw b Hartley 45 (84b, 6x4), K.S. Bharat c Stokes b Rehan 6 (28b, 1x4), R. Ashwin c Foakes b Rehan 29 (61b, 2x4, 1x6), Kuldeep Yadav c Duckett b Hartley 0 (5b), Jasprit Bumrah c Bairstow b Hartley 0 (26b), Mukesh Kumar (not out) 0 (2b); Extras (lb-2, nb-1): 3; Total (in 78.3 overs): 255.

**FALL OF WICKETS**

1-29 (Rohit, 6.4 overs), 2-30 (Jaiswal, 8.3), 3-111 (Shreyas, 27.1), 4-122 (Patidar, 30.6), 5-211 (Gill, 55.6), 6-220 (Axar, 59.6), 7-228 (Bharat, 64.4), 8-229 (Kuldeep, 65.5), 9-255 (Bumrah, 77.4).

**ENGLAND BOWLING**

Anderson 10-1-29-2, Bashir 15-0-58-1, Rehan 24.3-5-88-3, Root 2-1-1-0, Hartley 27-3-77-4.

**ENGLAND — 2ND INNINGS**

Zak Crawley (batting) 29 (50b, 3x4, 1x6), Ben Duckett c Bharat b Ashwin 28 (27b, 6x4), Rehan Ahmed (batting) 9 (8b, 2x4); Extras (nb-1): 1; Total (for one wkt. in 14 overs): 67.

**FALL OF WICKET**

1-50 (Duckett, 10.5).

**INDIA BOWLING**

Bumrah 5-1-9-0, Mukesh 2-0-19-0, Kuldeep 4-0-21-0, Ashwin 2-0-8-1, Axar 1-0-10-0.



Anderson. K. R. DEEPAK

**'Will try to do it in 70 overs, that's the way we play'**

**Sports Bureau**

VISAKHAPATNAM

James Anderson didn't surprise anyone when he said England would be ready to chase even 600. The target in the second Test is a lot less than that – 399, to be precise.

"The chat last night from the coach (Brendon McCullum) was that if they get 600, we were going to go for it," said Anderson, who has produced some fabulous age-defying spells to take five wickets in the match. "We will try to do it tomorrow. I know there are 180 overs left in the game, but we will try to do it in 60 or 70. That's the way we play."

He felt India was not sure of the kind of target it wanted to set for England. "I think the nerves were there to see, the way they batted," said the 41-year-old. "I think they didn't know how many was enough. There have been moments throughout the last two years, particularly in the last 12 months, that make us think we're doing something well."

Some of the Indian batters were guilty of soft dismissals once again. Ben Stokes deserves credit, though, for creating chances with his clever field

changes. He also brought off a spectacular running catch to send Shreyas back.

England will be looking to the captain fantastic for more magic.

# Chance for Indian stars to showcase their prowess

**MUMBAI OPEN****Kamesh Srinivasan**  
MUMBAI

It will be a big opportunity for Ankita Raina and Indian women's tennis to excel as the L&T Mumbai Open WTA tennis tournament returns to the financial capital of the country after a gap of six years.

Ankita recalled the confidence she had gained by making the quarterfinals of the 2017 edition at the CCI courts where a precocious Arina Sabalenka won her maiden WTA title.

"It is great that we have the WTA event here again. I have been looking forward to this event. This tournament did a world of good to me. After the quarterfinal here in 2017, I made it to the Grand Slam qualifying events next year."

"Won the Asian Games medal, and thereafter played doubles in all Grand Slams. It was not just



A relaxed Ankita Raina on the eve of the event. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

handled the match despite a brief lapse in focus in the second set. I started strong in the third set and played well, despite missing a few shots, to make it", said Shrivalli who will challenge second seed Nao Hibino of Japan.

The field has several strong players including the exciting Alina Kornieva. The 16-year-old was junior World No.1 last year when she won the Australian Open and French Open titles apart from making the Wimbledon semifinals. She also won the World Junior Finals.

For sure, it is going to be a lively week of action. Tournament Director Sunder Iyer said that fans had to download the tournament app to get their entry ticket for the event.

**The seedings:** 1. Kayla Day (USA), 2. Nao Hibino (Jpn), 3. Tamara Zidansek (Slo), 4. Arina Rodionova (Aus), 5. Laura Pigossi (Bra), 6. Darja Semenitaja (Lat), 7. Kimberly Birrell (Aus), 8. Katie Volpert (USA).

"I am excited the way I

# Arsenal thrashes Liverpool at home

**EURO LEAGUES****Agencies**  
MANCHESTER

Arsenal beat Liverpool 3-1 on Sunday to close the gap at the top of the Premier League to just two points. Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli, and Leandro Trossard struck for the Gunners as Liverpool succumbed to just a second league defeat of the season. Manchester United defeated West Ham 3-0 while Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea crashed to a dismal 2-4 defeat against Wolves.

In LaLiga, 10-man Barcelona beat Alaves 3-1 away on Saturday. Second-placed Girona missed the chance to retake the lead after being held 0-0 at home by Real Sociedad. **The results: Premier League:** Bournemouth 1 (Kluivert 5) drew with Nottingham Forest 1 (Hudson-Odoi 45); Chelsea 2 (Silva 81); Fulham 1 (Silva 10);



Trossard. AFP

Wolves 4 (Cunha 22, 63, 82-pen, Disasi 43-og); Manchester United 3 (Hojlund 23, Garnacho 49, 84) bt West Ham 0; Arsenal 3 (Saka 14, Martinelli 67, Trossard 90+2) bt Liverpool 1 (Gabriel 45+3-og). **LaLiga:** Villarreal 0 drew with Cadiz 0; Granada 1 (Mendez 43) drew with Las Palmas 1 (Pejino 68); Alaves 1 (Ormordion 51) lost to Barcelona 3 (Lewandowski 22, Gundogan 49, Roque 63); Girona 0 drew with Real Sociedad 0. **Serie A:** Torino 0 drew with Salernitana 0; Bologna 4 (Viti 24-og, Fabbri 73, Ferguson 83, Saalemekers 86) bt Sassuolo 2 (Thorstvedt 17, Volpati 34); Napoli 2 (Ngome 79, Kvaratskhelia 87) bt Hellas Verona 1 (Caputo 10).

**The results: Pro League:** Bologna 4 (Viti 24-og, Fabbri 73, Ferguson 83, Saalemekers 86) bt Hellas Verona 1 (Caputo 10).

# India puts up a better display but loses again

**PRO LEAGUE****Sports Bureau**  
BHUBANESWAR

India lost its second game on the trot in the women's FIH Pro League with a 3-1 defeat to World No. 1 Netherlands at the Kalinga Stadium on Sunday.

To their credit, the hosts put up a much better display compared to their opening game but the result remained the same. India wasted six penalty corners, an area that has been a concern.

In contrast, Netherlands, the reigning Olympic and World champion, scored two of its three goals through PCs. Drag-flicker Yibbi Jansen continued her brilliant form in the Pro League to open the scoring in the third minute.

She has nine goals in five outings and leads the scoring. Let that encapsulate by



**Best foot forward:** Up against the formidable Netherlands, India had its moments before suffering a 1-3 reverse. BISWARANJAN ROUT

her compatriots (top six). India managed to level soon after through Navneet Kaur, but the Dutch were never in trouble. A goal in each of the next two quarters saw them go 3-1 up and Yibbi could have added a third to her name but her powerful shot from the top of the circle rebounded off the post.

**IN BRIEF**

**Ravindra, Williamson tons help NZ call the shots**

Rachin Ravindra scored his first Test century (118 batting, 211b, 13x4, 1x6) and Kane Williamson his 10th (112, 259b, 15x4) in an unbroken stand of 219 as New Zealand put on 258 for two on the opening day of the first Test against South Africa at Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Sunday.

**The scores:** New Zealand 258/2 in 86 overs (Williamson 112 batting, Ravindra 118 batting) vs. South Africa. **Toss:** S.Africa.

**LIVE TELECAST**

**India vs England:** 2nd Test, day 4, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.

**Ranji Trophy:** Jio Cinema App, 9.30 a.m.

**Sri Lanka vs Afghanistan:** Only Test, day 4, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 5 a.m.

**ISL:** Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 p.m.

**PKL:** Star Sports 2 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 8 p.m.

**Premier League:** SS Select 1 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1.30 a.m. (Tuesday)

**RANJI TROPHY**

**Rakesh Rao**

NEW DELHI

**B**ad light proved the bright spot for Delhi as a truncated day's play saved the host from further embarrassment against Baroda on the third day of their Ranji Trophy league match here on Sunday.

Early morning rains and poor visibility for the better part of the day ensured only 44.2 overs of action and gave Delhi a chance to escape with a draw on the final day.



**Fighting knock:** Jonty Sidhu sparked a brief revival for Delhi but could not see out the day's play. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

As things stand, Baroda resumed its first innings at 400 for five and declared at 435 for nine after 8.5 overs of batting. Opener Jyoti-

snil Singh remained unbeaten at 234 after Delhi thwarted Baroda's bid to trade wickets for quick runs. Bad light interfered

to keep Delhi's innings restricted to just 35.3 overs as it reached 113 for four – 322 behind Baroda's first innings tally.

Delhi openers Arpit Rana and Shivank Vashishtha fell for single-digit scores and skipper Himmat Singh followed soon to make it 48 for three.

But Jonty Sidhu (40) and Ayush Badoni raised 60 runs to give the innings some semblance of respectability. However, Sidhu could not last the day and was bowled by seasoned left-arm spinner Bhargav Bhatt.

On the last day, Delhi can at best keep Baroda to

**Fall of wicket:** 1-3, 2-204, 3-219, 4-300, 5-359, 6-410, 7-420, 8-435, 9-435.

**Delhi bowling:** Ishant 19-6-43-2, Himanshu 21-6-47-0, Pranshu 27-3-113-4, Hritik 47.5-136-2, Shivank 24-3-67-0, Badoni 3-0-9-0, Himmat 4-0-10-1, Arpit Rana 1-0-2-0.

**Delhi – 1st innings:** Arpit Ranab Sopariya 8, Shivank Vashishtha c Mitesh b Sheth 9, Jonty Sidhu b Bhatt 40, Himmat Singh b Sheth 5, Ayush Badoni (batting) 37, Lakshay b Himmat 22, Atit Seth c Pithiya c Chauhan b Vijayraj 2, Bhargav Bhatt lbw b Shokeen 7, Soyeb Sopariya b Shokeen 0; Extras (b-12, nb-2): 14; Total (for four wickets in 35.3 overs): 113.

**Fall of wickets:** 1-12, 2-35, 3-48, 4-108.

**Baroda bowling:** Sheth 10-0-34-2, Sopariya 9-1-22-1, Pithiya 9-3-20-0, Pathan 5-0-18-0, Bhatt 2.3-0-7-1.

**RANJI TROPHY SCORES, ROUND 5, DAY 3**

**Elite: Group A: At Jamshedpur:** Manipur 170 & 221/5 (Ronald Longjam 41, L.M. Keishangbam 85 batting) vs. Jharkhand 504/5 decl. in 119.1 overs (Utkarsh Singh 116, Vikash Vishal 48, Virat Singh 48, Saurobh Tiwary 114 n.o., Anukul Roy 119 n.o.).

**Rohtak:** Services 108 & 140 in 38.3 overs (Rajat Paliwal 86, Rahul Tewaria 4/11) bt Haryana 103 & 144 in 41.2 overs (Ankit Kumar 41, Arjun Sharma 5/45, Pukit Narang 5/55). **Services 6 (15), Haryana 0 (17).**

**Solapur:** Saurashtra 202 & 169 bt Maharashtra 159 & 164 in 51.4 overs (Parth Bhut 7/44).

**Saurashtra 6 (16), Maharashtra 0 (11).**

**Jaipur:** Rajasthan 432 vs. Vidarbha 190/3 in 64 overs (Yash Rathod 81, Karun Nair 40 batting).

**Group B: Kolkata:** Mumbai 412 bt Bengal 199 & 209 in 59.4 overs (Abishek Porel 82, Mohit Avasthi 7/52). **Mumbai 7 (27), Bengal 0 (12).**

**Patna:** Bihar 182 & 111/8 in 47 overs (Lalith Mohan 4/27) vs.

(Siddharth Desai 47). **Tripura 6 (14), Gujarat 0 (13).**

**Surat:** Railways 155 & 244 in 72 overs (Mohammed Saif 82, Suraj Ahuja 48, Vijaykumar Vyshak 5/67) lost to Karnataka 174 & 229/9 in 82.4 overs (Manish Pandey 67 n.o., Akash Pandey 5/94). **Karnataka 6 (21), Railways 0 (12).**

**Chandigarh:** Punjab 477/2 in 107 overs vs. Chandigarh. (No play).

**Porvorim:** Goa 241 & 168 in 65.5 overs (Surayash Prabhudesai 79, Sai Kishore 4/82, Ajith Ram 4/36) vs. Tamil Nadu 273 & 61/1 in 26 overs.

**Group D: Cuttack:** Odisha 322 & 122/4 in 40 overs vs. Pondicherry 284 in 86.2 overs (K.B. Arun Karthick 110, Krishna Pandey 42). **Delhi:** Baroda 435/9 decl. in 146.5 overs (Jyotsnil Singh 234 n.o., Shashwat Rawat 72, Shivalik Sharma 45, Pranshu Vijayan 4/112) vs. Delhi 113/4 in 35.3 overs (Jonty Sidhu 40).

**Dharamshala:** Himachal 169 vs. MP 68/4 in 27 overs. (No play).

**Jammu:** J&K 168/2 in 39 overs vs. Uttarakhand. (No play).

**Group C: Ahmedabad:** Tripura 146 & 343 in 82 overs (Bikramkumar Das 82, Sudip Chatterjee 46, Manisankar Murasingh 72, Sankar Paul 60, Siddharth Desai 6/108) bt Gujarat 172 & 161 in 52.3 overs

**SNAPSHOTS****Australia seal ODI series**

Sean Abbott grabbed three wickets after slamming an entertaining 69 as Australia cruised to an 83-run victory over the West Indies in the second one-day international to seal the three-match series in Sydney on Sunday.

**The scores:** Australia 258/9 in 50 overs (Abbott 69, Short 41, Green 33, Motie 3/28) bt West Indies 175 in 43.3 overs (Carty 40, Abbott 3/40, Hazlewood 3/43). **Australia leads three-match series 2-0.**

**Ibrahim Zadran leads Afghanistan's fightback**

A maiden Test hundred by Ibrahim Zadran (101 batting, 217b, 11x4), and his 106-run stand for the first wicket with Noor Ali Zadran (47), helped

Afghanistan reach 199 for one in its second innings, after conceding a lead of

241, in the one-off Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo on Sunday.

**The scores:** Afghanistan 198 & 199/1 in 75 overs (Noor Ali 47, Ibrahim Zadran 101 batting, Rahmat Shah 46 batting) vs. Sri Lanka 439 in 109.2 overs (Karunaratne 77, Mathews 141, Chandimal 107, Naveed Zadran 4/83).

**TN boys begin with a narrow win in jr. National basketball**

Tamil Nadu boys began their campaign with a 78-75 win over Karnataka in the 73rd junior National basketball championships in Bhubaneswar on Sunday.

**The results:** Boys: Chandigarh 92 bt Andhra Pradesh 72; U.P. 79 bt Kerala 63; TN 78 bt Karnataka 75.

**Girls:** Kerala 65 bt Chandigarh 58; Gujarat 69 bt Delhi 63.



**Victorious:** The triumphant Noida Educational Academy.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**Double for Prachi Malik**

Prachi Malik won a doubles crown in the Asian under-16 tennis at the Tennis Project in Baliawas on Sunday.

**The results (finals): Boys:**

Hruthik Katakar bt Om Patel 6-2, 6-1.

**Doubles:** Varad Santosh & Ayush Poojary bt Prateek Sheoran & Ranvir Singh 2-6, 6-4, [10-6].

**Girls:** Prachi Malik bt Anandita Upadhyay 6-4, 6-4.

**Doubles:** Akansha Ghosh & Prachi Malik bt Asmi Raghuwanshi & Avisha Rathod 6-2, 6-4.

**Anika and Harsh voted best**

Anika Gupta of Springdale School, Dhaula Kuan, and Harsh Kumar of Manava Bhawna Public School, Nathupura, emerged the golden girl and golden boy in the

Sports For All (SFA) schools championship that concluded on Sunday.

Anika won gold medals in chess and carrom, while Harsh took the honours in athletics and kho kho.

Noida Educational Academy was declared the team champion with 119 points ahead of Pathways World School, Gurugram (II), and Manava Bhawna Public School, Nathupura (III).

The inaugural edition of the championships in the National Capital Region (NCR) featured about 6200 students. They competed in athletics, badminton, basketball, carrom, chess, football, kabaddi, karate, koh koh, shooting, squash, skating, swimming, table tennis, tennis, volleyball and yogasana.

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# To be adventurous or safe – the Mercedes conundrum after Hamilton's shock exit

Replacing arguably one of the greatest drivers in the sport's history is not going to be an easy task for the German marque; who it selects could indicate how the team looks to build its post-Hamilton future



REUTERS

## S. Dipak Ragav

The Formula One 'Silly Season' looked like it would be sedate this year when two key drivers, Charles Leclerc and Lando Norris, signed long-term deals with Ferrari and McLaren, respectively. Little did anyone in the F1 world expect a bombshell that dropped on February 1 when it was announced Lewis Hamilton was set to join Ferrari in 2025. While there had been rumours about Hamilton taking a swing in the red car, it appeared the door had been shut when the seven-time world champion signed a two-year extension with Mercedes last year, taking him till the end of 2025.

At the end of 2024, Hamilton would have spent 12 years at Mercedes, a team he joined in 2013 and has had incredible success, winning six world titles. With his decision to activate a clause in a contract that allowed him to leave in 2025, the most successful driver in F1 has put his team in a bind as it scurries for a replacement.

With most top drivers tied up already, Mercedes does not have a lot of A-listers to replace one of the greatest drivers the sport has ever seen. *The Hindu* looks at the possible options who could step into Hamilton's shoes next year in the Silver Arrows.

**Carlos Sainz:** Apart from Mercedes, Sainz is one of the biggest losers in Hamilton's move to Ferrari. The incumbent Ferrari driver had hoped to sort his contract

before the start of the season and was angling for a long-term deal from the Scuderia. Instead, the Spaniard is out of a drive for next season and is not in the greatest bargaining position when he sits down to speak to other teams. Though Sainz is not the quickest driver on the grid, especially over a single lap, he has also held himself admirably going against Leclerc, who is one of the fastest drivers on the grid.

The 29-year-old was the only non-Red Bull driver to win a race in 2023 and brings with him lots of experience and a great work ethic. He has managed to keep the gap to Leclerc at a respectable margin and has been assertive enough to overrule some questionable calls from his team, showing his race awareness. At times in 2023, he even looked quicker when the car was less suited to Leclerc. In Sainz, Mercedes will get a solid driver who is quick enough to win races in the right circumstances, keep Russell on his toes, and bank the points for the team in the constructors' championship.

**Fernando Alonso:** The double World Champion will be 43 when the 2025 season starts and it might not make sense to hire a driver in the last phase of his career. But never count against the wily Alonso to spring a surprise, and he will be craving for one last dance with a factory team as he still chases a third world title, nearly two decades after his first. The Spaniard is still operating at an extremely high level, as he showed with his regular podium finishes when the Aston Martin

was competitive at the start of 2023. What he lacks in outright qualifying pace, he makes up for it in his racecraft and opportunism, especially on the opening laps. He has loads of experience and can hold his own against anybody on the current grid on a Sunday over a race distance. At the same time, his baggage of being a divisive personality who can destabilise the harmony inside the team has dissuaded big teams from hiring him in the past. But if Mercedes chooses this route, it would be fascinating to see what the old fox could do.

**Alexander Albon:** The Williams driver was one of the best performers last year despite being in a car that was in lower midfield. The British-Thai driver finished in points seven times in one of the slowest cars on the grid and helped his team finish seventh in the standings. After being beaten comprehensively by Max Verstappen at Red Bull in 2020, Albon's stock was at an all-time low and had to sit out one season before landing at Williams in 2022. Since then, he has rediscovered himself and become the de-facto team leader. He is fast, doesn't make many mistakes and has been able to grab points on weekends where Williams was remotely in contention to fight for points. The 27-year-old could be a good option for Mercedes to play the perfect rear-gunner to Russell.

**Esteban Ocon:** The Alpine driver could be another low-key contender for the second Mercedes drive, considering he was part of the Mercedes family and

doesn't have a contract with the French team for next year. Toto Wolff still manages Ocon and was a reserve driver for the team in 2019. He was seen as a future driver for the German team before Russell's efforts in the junior category saw him get ahead on the pecking order. Ocon hasn't set the stage on fire, but he is still a Grand Prix winner, and Mercedes knows enough about him, which takes the unpredictability out of the equation. He could be a decent stop-gap solution for a year or two. What will count against him is that his teammate Pierre Gasly - in his first season at Alpine - seemed to get the better of him towards the end of the last season.

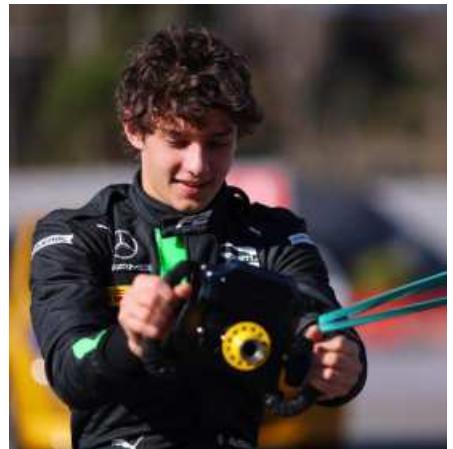
**Andrea Kimi Antonelli:** This is a name that F1 fans might start hearing more regularly in the years to come. The 17-year-old Italian has been part of the Mercedes Young Driver Academy since 2019 and won the Formula Regional European Championship last year. Widely considered a generational talent like Max Verstappen, Antonelli will debut in Formula Two this year and could be a courageous but realistic move for Mercedes. While team boss Wolff recently said he wants the youngster to focus only on F2 this year, he also hinted that the team has the option to go for a bold choice. The Italian will have a steep learning curve this year in F2, having been deemed good enough to skip F3, and a promising rookie season in the feeder category could well propel him into a full-time race seat with Mercedes.

## THE GIST

Hamilton tasted incredible success at Mercedes, winning six drivers' crowns

Due to the late announcement, Wolff will have to prey on rivals to find a suitable replacement as most top drivers are locked in contracts

With the legendary Brit moving to archrival Ferrari, it gives an opportunity for Russell to take the team forward



## SCIENCE

# The scientists in Japan who scared flies to understand fear

To understand fear, researchers built a mini theatre for flies fit with lights, cameras, screens, and a scary movie. This study sought to find ways to treat psychiatric problems which have their root in exaggerated fear, such as phobias and anxiety disorders

**Ravindra Palavalli Nettimi**

Masato Tsuji has been observing insects since he was a child. He loves studying flies, so much so that he shows them horror movies and scares them - all to understand what happens in their brain when they're afraid.

"Our discovery may provide a clue to treat psychiatric diseases stemming from exaggerated fear, such as phobia and anxiety disorders," Dr. Tsuji, an assistant professor at the University of Tokyo, told this writer.

**Do flies feel fear like we do?**  
It's easy to question our understanding of a fly's feelings. After all, the fly's brain and evolutionary history differ from ours. Fear is also a humanised emotional state. So we can't say for sure whether flies have feelings.

However, previous research has shown that flies exhibit defensive responses that resemble fear-like emotional states. The response leads to changes in the internal brain state. So flies offer an opportunity to study the neural and molecular basis of a fear-like state.

#### A horror movie for flies

To understand fear, researchers Dr. Tsuji, Yuto Nishizuka, and Kazuo Emoto built a virtual reality arena - a mini theatre for flies - fit with lights, cameras, screens, and a scary action scene.

What scares flies? A puff of air and a small black dot the size of a spider, their natural predator, moving around.

But first, the researchers had to get tiny fruit flies (*Drosophila melanogaster*) one by one into the mini theatre. It was a delicate task.

First, Dr. Tsuji tethered a sedated fly to a small rod with a dribble of glue on its back. Once it woke up, it would find itself on a small Styrofoam ball suspended over a thin layer of air created using an air compressor. The fly could rest or walk around on the ball.

After the fly became acquainted with the setup, the movie began on an LED screen in front. While the dot moved on the screen, a small nozzle over the fly blew puffs of air.

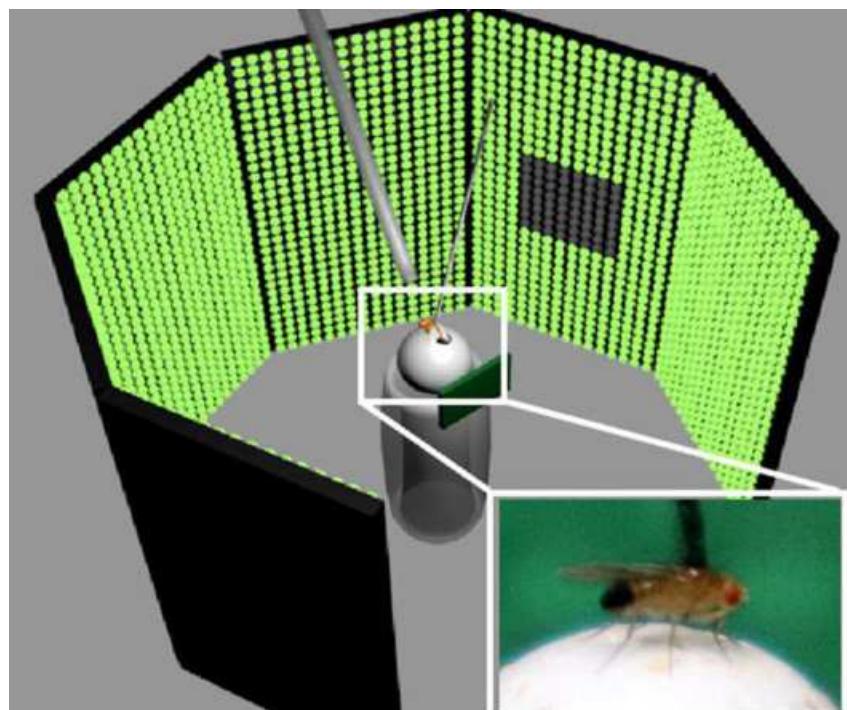
#### Flies avert their gaze

As the dot moved after an air puff, the flies started to walk on the ball, turning away from the dot. All flies responded to the dot only when paired with an air puff as well.

Some flies froze or jumped, but most turned and ran away from the threat.



Masato Tsuji, assistant professor at the University of Tokyo. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT. On right is the virtual reality arena to study fly behaviour. MASATO SUJI.



According to Dr. Tsuji and his team's paper, published in the journal *Nature Communications* in July, a cluster of 20-30 neurons in the visual regions of the fly's brain is responsible for this behaviour.

#### The fear neurochemical

Dr. Tsuji's team took advantage of the variety of tools to genetically modify and study fruit flies to isolate a set of mutant flies. By manipulating and recording the activity of their neurons, they found that a neurochemical called tachykinin activated the flies' aversion behaviour.

That is, flies that had a mutation that deprived them of neurons that could release tachykinin didn't display the threat avoidance behaviour, even if they retained other visual and motor responses.

"This molecule causes anxiety-like symptoms in mice and humans," Dr. Tsuji said. "At the level of molecules or genes, perhaps the fear-like mechanism is preserved across animal species."

That could explain why we may look away from scary scenes in films or animals like snakes.

#### A neurochemical wave of fear?

Dr. Tsuji focused further on the finer details of the activity of tachykinin-releasing neurons.

Normally, an influx of calcium ions coincides with the electrical activity of neurons. More calcium in the neurons indicates an active neuron; less calcium shows an inactive neuron.



Flies exhibit defensive responses that resemble fear-like emotional states. The response leads to changes in the brain. So flies offer an opportunity to study the neural and molecular basis of a fear-like state

So a microscopy technique called calcium imaging helped Dr. Tsuji's team visualise how neural activity in fearful flies changes with time.

To their surprise, they found that the activity of the tachykinin-releasing neurons increased and decreased rapidly, as the amount of calcium in their neurons went up and down like a wave.

Such oscillating neural activity is rare for *Drosophila melanogaster*, though the evidence has been accumulating as the technology has developed to record such small and fast neural activity fluctuations.

When the team artificially generated the wave-like calcium activity patterns in their neurons, flies turned away from the stimulus. "That wave signal, we believe, is functioning as a fear-like command that drives the escape behaviour," Dr. Tsuji said.

#### An application

Neural activity oscillation occurs in the fly brain only during a fear-like emotional state. However, Dr. Tsuji speculated that

in the brains of the people with phobias and anxiety, the wave-like neural activity pattern could occur even in response to a neutral stimulus.

He expressed hope that their work would cast light on why phobic patients overreact to usually non-frightening stimuli. "If I can be speculative, one possibility is that humans have similar neural circuitry that drives the escape behaviour in the brain."

"If this possibility is true, perhaps we can intervene with such activity patterns in a targeted way to help alleviate the fearful symptoms," Dr. Tsuji added.

#### Mapping the fear circuit

The neurons regulating the aversion behaviour are in the visual region of the fly's brain, so the team wants to understand how they regulate vision. That is, how is visual information transmitted to elicit the fear response?

They are now working to reveal further details of fear and its effects on vision in flies. "We want to build a complete circuit diagram of how fear regulates vision," Dr. Tsuji said.

His curiosity as a child observing insects in his garden might one day help discover the intricate workings of their little brains sensing fear, and potentially benefit many patients suffering from phobic disorders.

(Ravindra Palavalli Nettimi is a project specialist at the Office of Research Strategy and Development at the University of Tokyo.)

## THE GIST

Researchers found that a neurochemical called tachykinin activated aversion behaviour in flies

Flies that had a mutation that deprived them of neurons that could release tachykinin didn't display the threat avoidance behaviour, even if they retained other visual and motor responses

Neurons regulating aversion behaviour are in the visual region of the fly's brain, so scientists want to understand how visual information is transmitted to elicit the fear response

## BIG SHOT



A resident flees an encroaching forest fire in Vina del Mar, Chile, on Saturday. Officials say intense forest fires burning around a densely populated area of central Chile have left several people dead and destroyed hundreds of homes. Chile's capital and other regions are also facing a heat wave, as meteorologists have warned extremely hot weather will become increasingly frequent in the country's arid north.

## WHAT IS IT?

### Ergosphere: making a black hole work

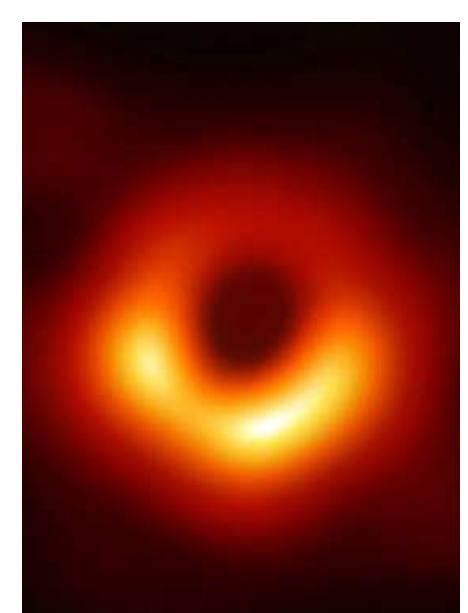
**Vasudevan Mukunth**

Rotating black holes (a.k.a. Kerr black holes) have a unique feature: a region outside their outer event horizon called the ergosphere. A black hole is formed when a really massive star runs out of fuel to fuse, blows up, leaving its core to implode under its weight to form a black hole.

The centre of a black hole is a gravitational singularity, a point where the general theory of relativity breaks down, i.e. where its predictions don't apply. A black hole's great gravitational pull emerges as if from the singularity. The event horizon describes a sphere around the singularity: when anything enters this sphere, it can't escape unless it travels faster than light (which is impossible). Just beyond this sphere, a rotating black hole will also have an ergosphere - a bigger sphere that an object can enter and then leave if it's moving fast enough, but still less than the speed of light.

The label 'ergosphere' comes from 'ergon', the Greek word for 'work'. It is so named because it is possible to extract matter and energy from the ergosphere, but not from beyond the event horizon.

Some scientists have suggested using this possibility to send an object into the ergosphere and allow it to accelerate there all



An image of the black hole at the centre of the M87 galaxy, captured by the Event Horizon Telescope in 2017. EUROPEAN SOUTHERN OBSERVATORY

the black hole's direction of rotation, so that it comes out moving faster. This energy 'gain' will translate to the black hole losing some angular momentum.

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