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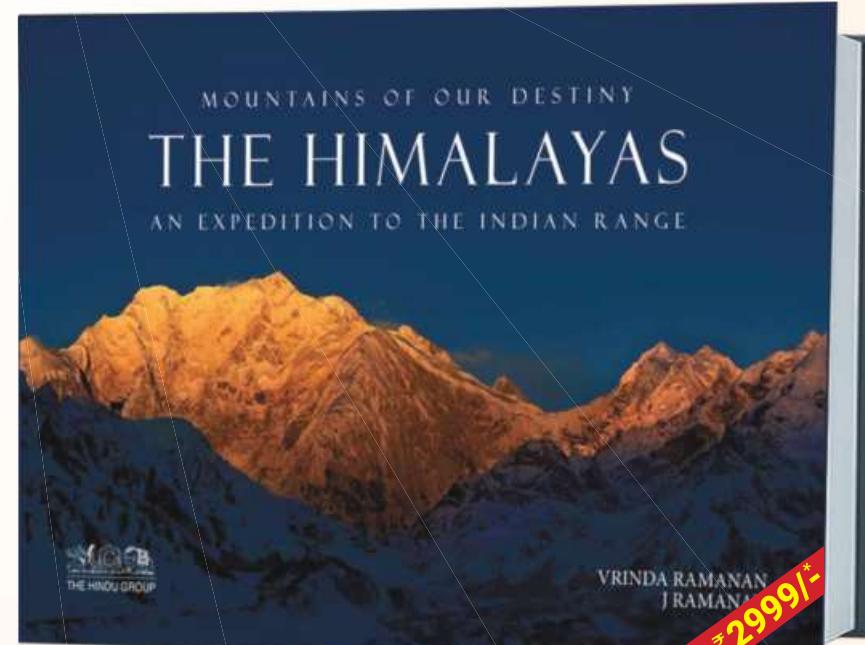
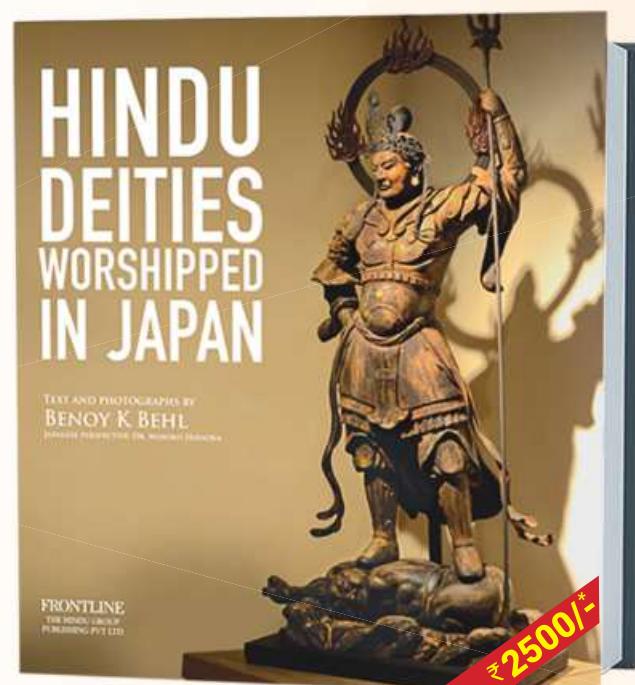
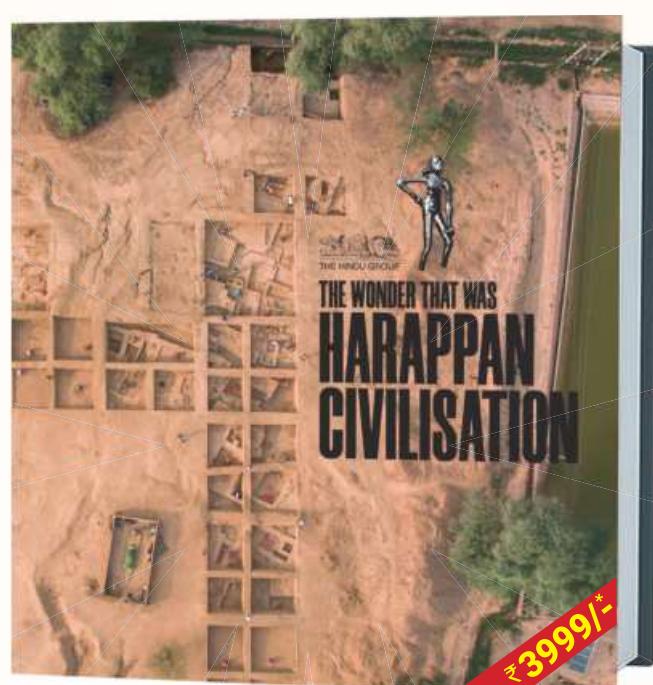
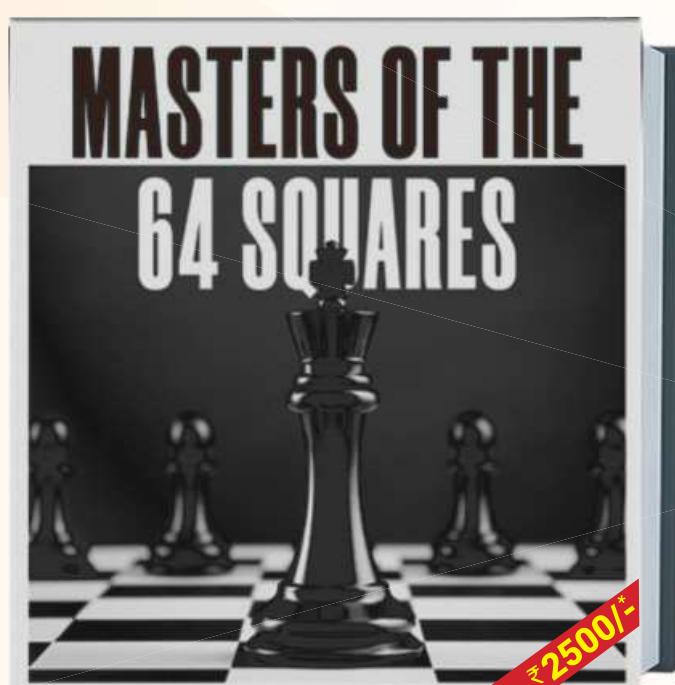
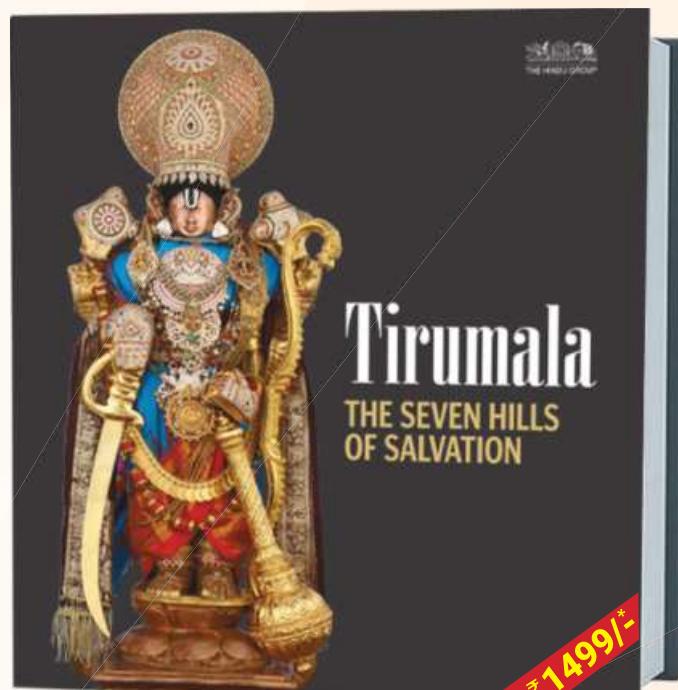
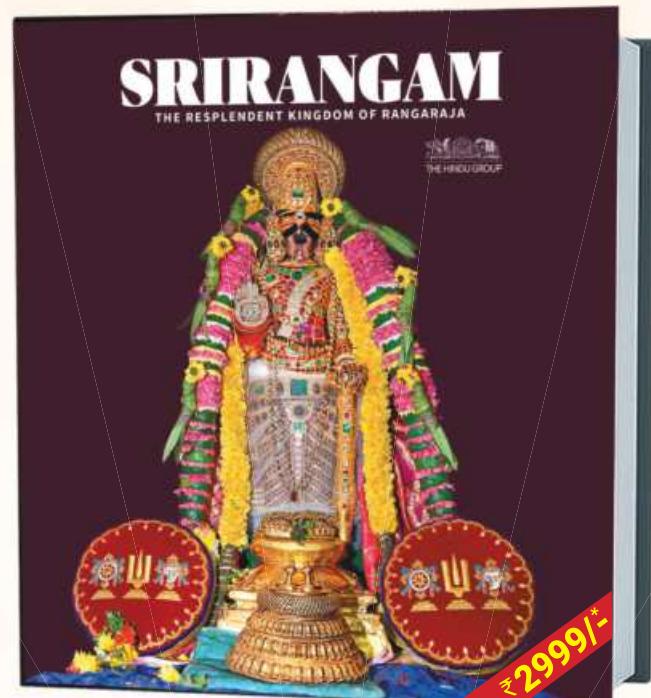
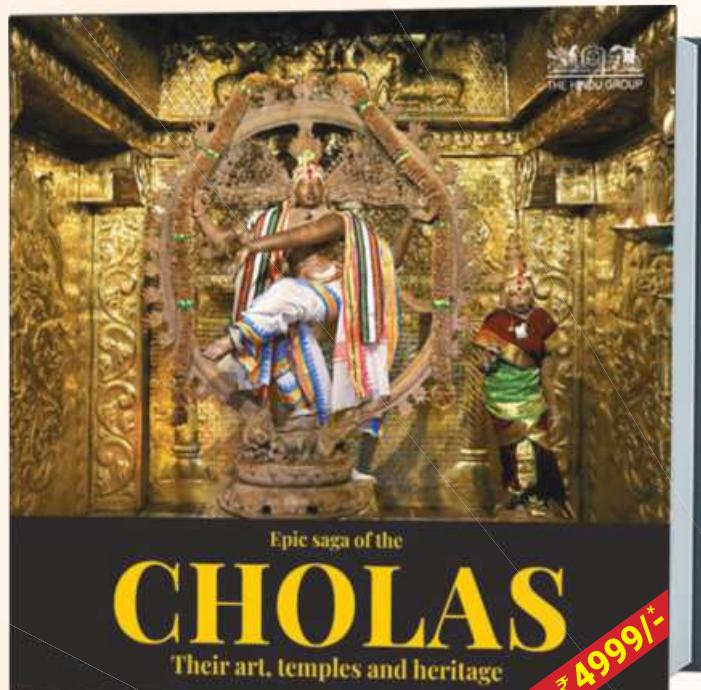
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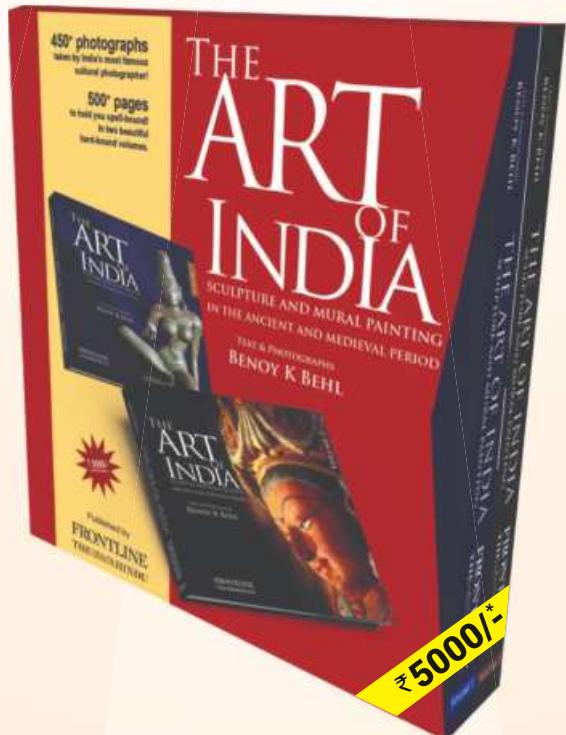
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### IN BRIEF



**BJP reaches out to RLD with an eye on west U.P.**

**GHAZIABAD**  
Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh leg of the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the BJP has reached out to RLD chief Chaudhary Jayant Singh with an offer he will find difficult to refuse. » Page 4

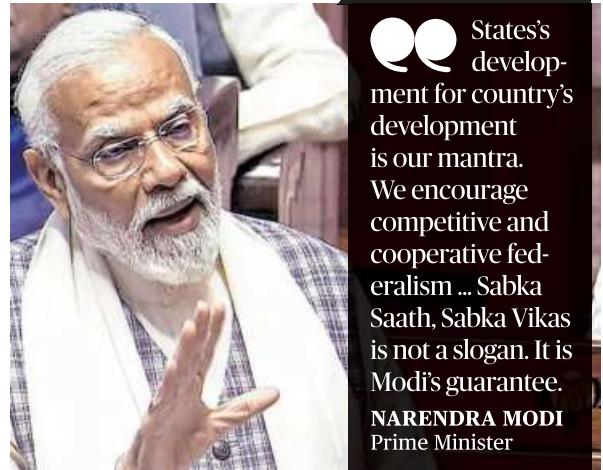
**3 reach Mumbai from Kuwait by boat, arrested**

**MUMBAI**  
The police on Wednesday arrested three fishermen who were detained on Tuesday night after reaching Mumbai in a Kuwaiti fishing vessel. The three claimed their employer had allegedly taken all their identity proofs. » Page 5

## Opposition is creating a 'North-South' divide: PM

An entire State is speaking this language, nothing can be worse than this. It is painful that such language is emerging from a national party, says Modi, asking Congress to stop 'divisive' politics

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



States's development for country's development is our mantra. We encourage competitive and cooperative federalism ... Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas is not a slogan. It is Modi's guarantee.  
**NARENDRA MODI**  
Prime Minister

voured competitive and cooperative federalism. He said "States's development for country's development" is the mantra of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. Mr. Modi said that during his term as Gujarat Chief Minister, the UPA government tried to create many obstacles, but his government's policies fa-

Opposition, Mr. Modi said it was speaking the language of breaking the country. "Stop these new narratives... an entire State is speaking this language, nothing can be worse for the country than this... And it is very painful that

such language is emerging from a national party, it is very sad," he said.

On complaints that taxes are not disbursed to the States in a proper manner, Mr. Modi said 'our tax, our money' should not be the language to demand States' rights. "This nation is not just a piece of land for us. It is like the human body," he said and added that if there is pain anywhere in this country, it should be felt by everyone.

He said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, he chaired 20 meetings with the Chief Ministers of all States and credited the entire machinery for tackling the challenge head-on.

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» PAGE 10  
**BJP HITS BACK**  
» PAGE 11

## Karnataka leaders hit out at Centre as they stage protest in Delhi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI/BENGALURU



Accusing the Union government of discriminating against Karnataka and the other southern States with regard to the devolution of taxes, the entire leadership of the State, led by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, staged a protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Wednesday.

Terming the protest a "movement to protect the interests of Karnataka and Kannadigas" and against "step-motherly" treatment by the Centre, Mr. Siddaramaiah dismissed the BJP allegation that the protest was aimed at creating a North-South divide.

The Congress wants the country to be united, but there should be no discrimination against the southern States, the Chief Minister said.

"We are asking for our

Siddaramaiah, D.K. Shivakumar and other leaders protesting in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

rights," said Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar who took part in the protest, along with several MPs, Ministers and MLAs from the State.

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**MINISTER'S DEFENCE**  
» PAGE 5

All States are neglected by Modi regime, says Pinarayi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Denying the BJP stand that the protests by Opposition-ruled States against the Centre were politically motivated to create a "North-South" divide, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said here on Wednesday that all States were suffering owing to the Centre's "anti-federal" attitude.

He said the BJP-ruled States would naturally not join the protests, but States such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Punjab and Delhi had voiced their concerns. Mr. Vijayan is in Delhi to participate in a protest against the Centre on Thursday. He said he had extended invitations to Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and the Chief Ministers of all States not ruled by the NDA.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 10

## 30 killed in twin blasts on the eve of Pakistan polls

**Press Trust of India**  
KARACHI

At least 30 people were killed and more than 40 others injured on Wednesday in twin blasts targeting election offices in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, a day before the general elections in the country.

In the first incident, a powerful blast outside the office of an independent candidate in Pishin district killed 20 people and wounded 30 others.

Less than an hour later, another blast took place outside the election office of a Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan in the Killa Abdullah area claiming the lives of 10 people and injuring 22 others, officials said.

No group or individual claimed responsibility for the twin blasts.

Abdullah Zehri, a senior

police official in Balochistan Panjgur, said: "Terrorists are targeting candidates to deter people from going to the polling stations but security personnel are being increased to ensure the elections go ahead on schedule."

**Elections as scheduled**  
Balochistan's Home Minister Jan Achakzai condemned the attacks and said polls would be held as per schedule.

Pakistanis will vote on Thursday to elect a new government to rule the cash-strapped country. The front runner is former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who is said to have the backing of the military. With former Prime Minister Imran Khan in jail, Mr. Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz is tipped to emerge as the single largest party in the elections.



Rattled residents: People gather at the site of a blast outside the office of an independent candidate in Pishin district in Pakistan. AFP

## Bihar Speaker refuses to quit until Nitish faces floor test in Assembly on Feb. 12

**Amit Bhelari**  
PATNA

Bihar Assembly Speaker Awadh Bihari Choudhary made it clear on Wednesday that he would not step down from his post until the Assembly session begins on February 12, when Chief Minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar is set to face the floor test.

The newly formed National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in the State had moved a no-confidence motion against Mr. Choudhary, who belongs to the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

"Why should I resign? I will run the House accord-



side the Assembly.

It was on January 28 that BJP leader Nand Kishore Yadav gave a notice of no-confidence against the Speaker to the Secretary. The NDA's leaders want to remove the Speaker before the floor test.

Mr. Choudhary said he came to know of the no-confidence motion against him only on Wednesday. He added that the Assembly was governed by the Constitution and rules. "As per the rules, a no-confidence motion can be brought after 14 days [of giving notice to the Secretary] or on the 14th day. Till then, the Speaker is there," he added.

He was speaking after addressing a press advisory committee meeting in

## Sharad Pawar faction gets a longer name, day after Ajit retained NCP, clock symbol

**Shoumojit Banerjee**  
Sreeparna Chakraborty

PUNE/NEW DELHI

The Election Commission has approved a new name – the 'Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar' – for NCP chief Sharad Pawar's faction a day after it awarded the party's original name and clock symbol to the rival NCP faction headed by Mr. Pawar's nephew and Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar.

If the NCP patriarch's decision came after Mr. Sharad Pawar's faction was asked to submit three names for their political group by 4 p.m. on Wednesday for the



Sharad Pawar

purposes of the Rajya Sabha polls slated to be held on February 27.

If the NCP patriarch's faction had failed to give any alternatives, then the EC would have treated all its MLAs as Independents.

Accordingly, the group had suggested three names in order of preference – Na-

tionalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar, Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadrao Pawar, and NCP-Sharad Pawar – to the EC. It also sought 'banyan tree' as its election symbol.

The Commission acceded to the first name preference as a one-time option for the purpose of the elections to six Rajya Sabha seats in Maharashtra.

**'Unconstitutional move'**  
While BJP leader and Deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis called the EC decision on the NCP split a victory of democracy, leaders of the Sharad Pawar faction vehemently criticised it, with MLA Rohit Pawar, Mr.

Sharad Pawar's grand-nephew, dubbing the EC "a political wing of the BJP".

"There were not many expectations from the EC that unconstitutionally awarded the party symbol and name to the breakaway NCP group. However, we are not worried at all as the founder of the party, Sharad Pawar, is with us. Our trust is in his deeds throughout his long career and in the faith the people of Maharashtra reposed in him. The BJP and the splinter NCP group should be wary of a wounded tiger," warned Mr. Rohit Pawar.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 10

## Draft Notice Inviting Tender

**Himachal Pradesh**  
**Jal Shakti Vibhag**

**NOTICE INVITING E-PROCUREMENT BID**

Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division Bharmour on behalf of the Governor of Himachal Pradesh invites the online item rate Contract bids on turnkey basis from the eligible Bidders of Indian entity through online bidding system on or before 15.02.2024 at 1200 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:30 Hrs) on the site <http://hptenders.gov.in>

Sr. No.	Description	Estimated Cost	Bid security	Time	Cost of Bid
1.	Augmentation of existing water supply schemes with antifreeze technology for freezing prone areas of G.K. Kugti and Poolan in Tehsil- Bharmour Dist-Chamba H.P.(Kugti)	4,41,67,152/-	4,74,172/-	12 months (One Year)	Rupees 2500/-
1. Bid documents and other instructions can be downloaded or viewed online from the portal <a href="http://hptenders.gov.in">http://hptenders.gov.in</a> by the Bidders registered on the website which is free of cost.					
2. Accordingly, the bidder/firm must make all necessary provisions for required qualified resource personnel, their time and other costs, and appropriate engineering/technical considerations in re-survey, design, construction, erection, execution, commissioning process and trial & testing run for the project; including necessary documentation and inspections.					
3. Competitive Bidding for bidder shall be conducted in accordance with "Two Stage Two Envelope" Bidding Procedure, Eligibility information, Technical Bid and Financial bid should be uploaded online as per procurement method. The bids shall be submitted online electronically only.					
4. Bid evaluation criteria: - Eligible Technically Qualified lowest evaluated bidder(1) shall be considered as a successful bidder. However, the acceptance of the proposal shall rest with the EMPLOYER who does not bind itself to accept the lowest proposal and reserves the right to accept/reject any or all of the proposals received without assigning any reason.					
5. As the bids are to be submitted online, they are required to be encrypted and digitally signed. The bidders are advised to obtain Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from suitable vendors or from any authorized agency at the earliest.					
6. <b>KEY DATES SHALL BE AS UNDER:-</b>					

A	Date of online publication	06.02.2024 at GMT+(3:30 PM)
B	Downloading of e-bid Documents	From 06.02.2024 at (GMT + 3:30 Hrs) To 15.02.2024 at 17:00 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:00 Hrs).
C	Date of submission of e-bid	From 06.02.2024 at (GMT + 3:30 Hrs) To 15.02.2024 at 17:00 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:00 Hrs).
D	Physical Submission of Original Bid Security (in case offline deposit of Bid security)	Upto 11:30 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:00 Hrs) on 15.02.2024.
E	Date of opening of bids:-	
1)	Cover-1: Eligibility Criteria and Technical bid	On 16.02.2024 at 11:30 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:30 Hrs)
2)	Cover-2: Financial Bid	Shall be intimated separately
F	Site Visit	Between 11:00 Hrs IST (GMT + 5:30 Hrs) dated 06.02.2024 to 1700 Hr IST (GMT + 5:00 Hrs) dated 10.02.2024 alongwith the Assistant Engineer/ concerned Junior Engineer, Jal Shakti Sub-Division Bharmour.

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-**

1. The e-bid documents shall be uploaded online in 2 (two) covers:-
  - Stage-I (a) Cover-1 shall contain scanned copies of "Eligibility Information" and "Technical Bid".
  - Stage-II (b) Cover-2 shall contain "Financial bid" on the prescribed form.
2. Cover-1 shall contain scanned legible copies of following "Eligibility Information". (Scanned legible copies to be uploaded in pdf file):-
  - (i) The Bid security in favor of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division Bharmour, shall be submitted through online mode(e-payment) or offline mode in the form of NSC/Time deposit receipt/Demand draft of any Nationalized bank duly pledged in favor of Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division Bharmour. Exemption of Bid security shall not be allowed.
  - (ii) The cost of bid form as shown above shall be submitted by online mode (e-payment) or through offline mode in the Shape of demand in favor of "Executive Engineer" Jal Shakti Division, Bharmour. Exemption of cost of bid form shall not be allowed.
  - (iii) Copy of Certificate of registration with Jal Shakti Vibhag or any other State/Central Govt. department or Govt. Undertakings in appropriate class. In case the successful bidder is not registered with HP Jal Shakti Vibhag then successful bidder should get himself registered in appropriate class with HP Jal Shakti Vibhag before the award of work.
  - (iv) Copy of Certificate of EPF registration, If not registered, then the successful bidder should get registered within one month after acceptance of the bid by the Employer.
  - (v) Annual Turnover of last three years.
  - (vi) Bid Form as per Chapter-IV of PWD Form-12, duly accepted.
  - (vii) Pre-qualification criteria proof:-
    - (a) A bidder/firm shall be considered pre-qualified for the work if he has:-
      - a) Financial Qualification: -Bidder must have achieved minimum average annual financial turn over from contract receipt of works (all classes of civil engineering construction works only) of 30% of estimated cost in the last three (3) financial years i.e. from year 2019-2020 to year 2022-2023.
      - b) Similar Nature of Work: -Bidder must have Experience of having completed similar work during last Seven years ending last day of month previous to the one in which applications are invited, of either of the following values. Three similar completed works costing not less than 40% of the estimated cost.

Or  
Two similar completed works each costing not less than 50% of the estimated cost.

Or  
One similar completed work costing not less than amount equal to 80% of estimated cost.

**Definition of Similar work shall be as under:-**

Similar work means "Water Related Project" comprising of water retaining structure, piping work/ water conveyance system and Pumping Machinery. A certificate to this effect from the Engineer-in-Charge not below the rank of Executive Engineer of a State/ Semi Govt. Deptt./Central Govt. Deptt. or Govt Undertaking of India is mandatorily required. The bidder shall upload the award letter or related agreement to collaborate the experience certificate submitted.

- c) The value of executed work shall be brought to current costing level by enhancing the actual value of work at simple rate of interest 7% per annum, calculated from the date of completion to previous day of the last date of submission of tender.
- NOTE: Completed work means either completed or completed to the extent of minimum 90 % of award amount including unpaid amount on account of paucity of funds).
- (d) Joint venture is not allowed. However the firm / bidder shall be free to engage any number of specialist firms (for execution of specialized components of the project).

## (e) Bid capacity = (A\*N\*M-B)

where:-  
A= Maximum value of civil engineering works executed in any one year during the last 5 years (updated to the price level of the financial year in which bids are received at simple rate of 7 percent a year) taking into account the completed as well as works in progress.

N = Number of years prescribed for completion of the works for which bids are invited (period up to 6 months to be taken as half-year and more than 6 months as one year).

M = 1.5

B = Value, at the current price level, of existing commitments and ongoing works to be completed during the period of completion of the works for which bids are invited.

Note:-1.The bidder shall submit statement showing the values of existing commitments and ongoing works and as well as the stipulated period of completion remaining for each of the works listed should be countersigned by the Engineer-in-Charge, not below the rank of an Executive Engineer or equivalent or shall be submitted in a shape of affidavit.

2. The bidder shall calculate and online submit his Bid Capacity as given in above of Pre qualification documents. The financial offer of the bidder shall not be opened, whose bid capacity is exhausted or is lower than the probable amount of contract given in the NIT.

(f) The bidder shall submit a list of works which are in progress or in hand on the Performa as below:-

Sr. No.	Name & Particulars of Division where works are being executed.	Amount of work	Position of works in progress	Remarks
(g) The work done certificate regarding the similar works as per PWD-6 from the Engineer-in-Charge not below the rank of Executive Engineer of a State/Semi Govt. Deptt. / Central Govt. Dept. or Govt. undertaking, of India is mandatorily required. The bidder shall upload the award letter or related agreement to collaborate the experience certificate submitted.				
(vii) Copy of PAN (Permanent Account No.) & GST registration.				
(x) Work done, Experience Certificates as per Pre-qualification criteria.				
(xi) The authorization letter regarding digital signature certificate (DSC) of the person authorized by the registered bidder to upload the bid, be uploaded along with the other documents online.				
(xi) A scanned copy of undertaking (as per Chapter IV of Form – 12) that I have carefully studied all the terms and conditions stipulated in the contract document before quoting the rates.				
2. (B) (i) Cover-1 shall contain "Technical bid" which shall be opened along with Eligibility Information"Cover-1" and Cover 01 (Part-II) shall contain the following:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The contractor / firm must upload calculations and size of various components of WTP along with their filament on the uploaded contour plan of site.</li> <li>b) The technical bid should contain make and model of energy efficient pumping machinery along with pump characteristic curves indicating thereon HP required for head at duty point, +10 % and – 15 % range of total head for required discharge.</li> <li>c) The Bids not satisfying technical requirements shall be summarily rejected.</li> </ul>				
3. Cover-2 shall contain "Financial Bid" which shall be opened at a later date to be notified separately & shall be opened only of those Bidders/Firms whose documents as per the eligibility Information and technical bid "Cover-1" will be found in order. The Financial Bids shall contain only Financial Bid/Offer on departmental Schedule of quantity/BOQ where bidder/firms shall quote his/their offer for each item. The Non BOQ Items shall be paid as per Clause 59 of the PWD Form-12 and GCC & SCC.				
4. Rates quoted must be in INR(Indian Rupee) and shall be inclusive of all taxes applicable at the time of opening of the bids.				
5. The bidder shall not be permitted to bid for the work in the HPJAL SHAKTI Circle (responsible for award and execution of the contract) in which his near relative is posted as Divisional Accountant or as an officer in any capacity between the grades of Superintendent Engineer & Junior Engineer (both Inclusive). He shall also intimate the name of the persons who are working with him in any capacity or are subsequently employed by him who are near relative to any gazetted officer in the JST department.				
Any breach of this condition by the bidder would render him liable to be removed from the approved list of bidders of this department.				
6. Bid security of L1, L2 and L3 shall be retained till the finalization of the offer of the lowest bidder or 180 days, whichever is earlier.				
7. No subletting of work as a whole by the bidder is permissible, however the bidder may sub-contract the specialized components of the work e.g., Designs& Drawings, Pumping Machinery, Automation but not more than 25% of the total contract amount.				
8. In case, opening day is a holiday, the bids shall be opened on next working day at the same time.				
9. The validity of the bid shall be kept open for 120 days from the date of opening financial bid. The validity of the bid can be extended by mutual consent in writing.				
10. Ambiguous/telegraphic/Conditional bids or bids by Fax/E-mail shall not be entertained/considered in any case.				
11. Conditional bids are liable to be rejected without assigning any reasons.				
12. The Executive Engineer, reserves the right to reject/cancel any or all the bids without assigning any reason(s).				
13. Any enquiry regarding bids can be obtained on e-mail of the divisional officer under the e-mail address eejsv@bharmour.gov.in				
14. Rates quoted should be quoted both in figures as well as in words in Indian Rupee(INR)				
15. Quoted rates shall be inclusive of all taxes (including GST).				

**Executive Engineer  
Jal Shakti Division  
Bharmour**

Timings			
DELDI	THURSDAY, FEB. 08		
RISE	07:06	SET 18:06	
RISE	05:53	SET 16:13	
FRIDAY, FEB. 09			
RISE	07:05	SET 18:07	
RISE	06:44	SET 17:27	
SATURDAY, FEB. 10			
RISE	07:04	SET 18:07	
RISE	07:30	SET 18:39	

**Delhi Weather** max min  
Delhi City 21 07

Safdarjung 21 07

Palam 19 09

**Delhi Palam Today**

20°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be cold with shallow fog and mist. The day will be cool with moderate cool winds.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**

21°C A dry weather to prevail. Morning will be cold with shallow fog & mist. Day will be pleasant with moderate cool breeze. Night will be cold.

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# DJB bribes partially passed on to AAP as poll funds: ED; party junks charge

₹3 crore bribe was paid to a senior DJB official to award a contract to an ineligible company, of which a portion was then given to AAP, alleges ED; probe agency had carried out searches at several locations, including premises of Arvind Kejriwal's PA and party's Rajya Sabha member N.D. Gupta

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

**A** day after searching the premises of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal assistant and others, the Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday alleged that part of the bribe paid to award a Delhi Jal Board (DJB) contract to an ineligible company was passed on to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as "election funds".

On Tuesday, the agency had searched the premises of Mr. Kejriwal's PA Bibhav Kumar, AAP treasurer and Rajya Sabha MP N.D. Gupta, and former DJB member Shalabh Kumar.

Some locations in Varanasi and Chandigarh were also searched. The development came days after the arrest of former DJB Chief Engineer Jagdish Kumar Arora and businessman Anil Kumar Aggarwal.

AAP denied the agency



Security personnel during the ED raid on the premises of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's personal secretary, Bibhav Kumar, in New Delhi. FILE PHOTO

cy's allegations.

### 'No evidence'

"We condemn any kind of wrongdoing done by DJB officials or its contractors, if proven true. We also condemn the ED's blatantly false allegation that AAP or its leaders have anything to do with this case. Not a sin-

gle penny or piece of evidence has been recovered from the AAP leaders who were raided yesterday by the ED," the party said in a statement.

The ED probe is based on a first information report (FIR) registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on complaints

of corruption within the DJB.

It was alleged that Mr. Arora had awarded a contract worth ₹38 crore to NKG Infrastructure Limited even though it did not meet the technical eligibility criteria.

Based on its findings, the agency alleged on Wed-

nesday that NKG Infrastructure had bagged the contract using bogus documents. The tender was for the supply, installation, testing and commissioning of electromagnetic flowmeters. Mr. Arora was allegedly aware of the fact that the company did not technically qualify for the bid.

As earlier alleged, NKG Infrastructure subcontracted the work to Integral Screws, a proprietorship firm of Mr. Aggarwal. After receiving the funds, he purportedly transferred about ₹3 crore to Mr. Arora in the form of cash and through various bank accounts.

Investigations and digital evidence show that Jagdish Kumar Arora passed on the bribe funds to various persons connected with managing the affairs of the Delhi Jal Board, including persons connected with AAP. Bribe amounts were also passed on as

election funds to AAP," the agency statement said.

### Inflated rates

The ED added that the DJB contract had been awarded at highly inflated rates so that bribes could be collected from the contractors out of the inflated cost.

"As against the contract value of ₹38 crore, only about ₹17 crore was spent towards the contract and the remaining amounts were siphoned off in the guise of various fake expenses. Such fake expenses were booked for bribes and election funds," the Central agency said.

During the searches, the agency seized incriminating documents and digital evidence, apart from valuables amounting to ₹1.97 crore, as well as ₹4 lakh in foreign currency.

The ED had conducted searches on July 24 and November 17 last year in the same case.

'ED mouthpiece of BJP, will take legal action against it'

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

**The party said probe agencies have filed more than 230 cases against its leaders till now but couldn't prove any of them**

personal secretary, ED officials did not conduct any thorough search, nor did they provide any explanation regarding the purpose of the raid. They just sat in his living room," senior AAP leader Atishi alleged.

### 'Corrupt government'

Reacting to the allegations, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said Ms. Atishi was wasting time in defending the corruption by her party.

He said AAP leaders have claimed that nothing has been found in ED investigations, but their leaders are not getting bail.

"People are now fed up with the corrupt Arvind Kejriwal government and want to see the CM behind bars," he added.

## Militants kill Sikh man in J&K in first targeted attack of the year

### Press Trust of India

SRINAGAR

In the first targeted killing of the year, militants on Wednesday shot dead a worker from Punjab while another sustained injuries in Srinagar's Habba Kadal, said officials.

Amritpal Singh, a resident of Amritsar, was shot by the militants at point-

blank range in Habba Kadal at 7 p.m., officials said.

They added that Singh died on the spot, while another worker hailing from Amritsar, identified as Rohit, 25, sustained injuries in the incident. He was hit by bullets in the abdomen and is undergoing treatment at the SMHS Hospital in Srinagar, officials said.

The Peoples Democratic Party and People's Conference, too, condemned the attack.

## HC stays order to form SIT to probe attack on ED team

### The Hindu Bureau

KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court on Wednesday stayed a single-judge Bench order for forming a joint special investigation team (SIT) comprising the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the West Bengal police to probe an attack on Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials on January 5.

A Division Bench of Chief Jus-

tice T.S. Sivagnanam and Justice Supratim Bhattacharya stayed the order, saying that till the appeals are decided, the direction for the constitution of the SIT must remain and the State police shall also not investigate the matter.

On January 5, an ED team was attacked at Sandeshkhali when it went to conduct searches at the house of Trinamool Congress leader Shahjahan Sheikh.

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**WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY E-TENDER NOTICE**  
E-Tenders [Single packet system] are invited on behalf of the President of India acting through Dy. Chief Engineer -III [Construction], West Central Railway, Bhopal for the following work. (1) Tender No.: DYCCE-III-BP1-01-2024, Date 02.02.2024 Description of work: AT welding work of between NSZ-D(277.00) to Shyampur (235.00) section in state of Madhya Pradesh in connection with Ramganjandi-Bhopal New BG Rail Line Project. Approx. cost of tender: ₹ 61.85 Lacs. Earnest Money: ₹ 1,23,800/- Date of opening of tender: 02.02.2024 at 15.00 hrs. Completion period: 18 months including harvest & monsoon period. The Complete information of above E-Tender is available on website IREPS ([www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)) and also placed on the notice board of the office of Dy CE/CBPL. Tenders other than in the form of e-bids shall not be accepted against the above tender.  
Dy. Chief Engineer (Const-III), West Central Railway, Bhopal

स्वच्छ भारत अभियान को आरंभ

**Water Resources Department ADVANCED CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT(ACIWRM)**  
# 1/1, First Floor, KSFC Bhavan, Thimmiaah Road, Bengaluru-560052  
Phone no: 080 22262042 / 43 e-mail: [registrar@aciwrm.org](mailto:registrar@aciwrm.org)  
Notification No: ACIWRM/R-CE/KERS-Pkg2/2023-24/825 Date: 05/02/2024

**INVITATION FOR TENDER**

On behalf of Government of Karnataka, WRD, The Registrar /Chief Engineer, (ACIWRM), invites Tender from eligible contractors through KPP Portal for the work of "Providing Avocation and Scullery Facilities along with Upgradation of Existing Engineering Staff College and Associated Infrastructure at KERS, Krishnarajasagara, Mandya"-Amount put to Tender (APT) Rs.409.00 Lakhs

The above tender is invited in Two cover system, Downloading tender documents through KPP-Portal <http://kpp.karnataka.gov.in> is available from Dt: 06.02.2024 from 17.00 hours onwards till 15.03.2024 up to 17:00 hours. Any changes/updates will be notified through KPP-Portal <http://kpp.karnataka.gov.in>. For more details contact the office of the undersigned on working days during office hours and also through mail [registrar@aciwrn.org](mailto:registrar@aciwrn.org).

Sd/-  
Registrar/Chief Engineer  
ACIWRM Bengaluru

**SOUTHERN RAILWAY CHENNAI DIVISION-ENHM WING (MECHANICAL BRANCH) GEM BID NO. GEM/2024/B/4510324 DATED 29.01.2024**  
Divisional Railway Manager/Enhm Wing/Mechanical Branch/Chennai Division, Chennai 600003, for and on behalf of President of India invites ONLINE Tenders for the following work as per tender notice given in the e-tender GEM portal. The tenderer(s)/contractor(s) intending to apply for e-tender for outsourcing of Collection, Transportation, and disposal of garbage from MBM Station & colony, PER Station, ANNR Colony, RPM Station & Colony, WST Station & Colony and SO Colony for a period of two years (730 days) in Chennai Division, need to get enrolled in the e-tender through GEM portal and only online tenders will be accepted. The cost of tender form & EMD can also be paid online in GEM portal as per bid document.

Description: Collection, Transportation, and disposal of garbage from MBM Station & colony, PER Station, ANNR Colony, RPM Station & Colony, WST Station & Colony and SO Colony for a period of two years (730 days) in Chennai Division

Location: MBM Station & colony, PER Station, ANNR Colony, RPM Station & Colony, WST Station & Colony and SO Colony, Chennai

Value (₹)	Earnest Money Deposit (₹)	Period of completion
47,20,030.35/-	94,410/-	730 days

Tender closing date and time: 01/02/2024 at 19.00 hrs.  
Tender opening date and time: 19/02/2024 at 19.30 hrs.  
Details of value of tender, tender form cost, EMD are given in GEM e-portal. For bid submission please refer to GeM web portal.

Divisional Environment & Housekeeping Manager, For Divisional Railway Manager/ Mechanical- EnHM Chennai Division, Southern Railway - 600003

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**New Okhla Industrial Development Authority**  
Main Administrative Building, Sector-6, Noida, G.B. Nagar, (U.P.) Website: [www.okhlaauthorityonline.in](http://www.okhlaauthorityonline.in)

**सार्वजनिक सुधारना**

सर्वजनिक कार्यक्रम को सुधारना किया जाता है कि प्राप्तिकरण वोर्ड की 92वीं बैठक दिनांक 7.01.1998 में लिये गये निर्णय के अनुसार में ग्राम मोमनाश्वल में अपीली सम्बोधित के आधार पर बैठकों द्वारा कर की गयी भूमि के साथें प्रतिशत विकरित कृषकों की अनियम सूची में अंकित कृषकों का विवरण निम्नवत है -

KR	कृषक का नाम व पता	खाता राञ्चाया
1.	श्री अजीत सिंह पुरुष दीप सिंह उर्जा जरन सिंह निवासी ग्राम मसौता, जनपद गौतमबुद्धनगर।	77 81

उपरोक्त सूची में वर्णित किसी भी विवरण के संबंध में लिखित आपत्ति प्रकाशन के अन्तर्गत से 15 दिनों के अंदर कार्यालय विशेष कार्यपालिकारी (डीपीओ) द्वारा विभागीय प्रशासनिक भवन, रोडटर-6, नैएडा जिला गौतमबुद्धनगर-201301 में प्रत्युत्तर की जा सकती है।

विशेष कार्यपालिकारी (डीपीओ) नैएडा

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**PUNE MUNICIPAL CORPORATION Solid Waste Management ReTender**

Due to minimum bids not received for the below mentioned work of Pune Municipal Corporation, retendering is being done. Tender terms and conditions regarding the said work, all the details are mentioned in the tender package and the tender set is available to view online for free.

Tender Sale Period dt. 08/02/2024 to 17/02/2024 upto 2:30 PM  
Tender Acceptance dt. 08/02/2024 to 17/02/2024 upto 3:00 PM  
Technical Tender Opening Procedure dt. 20/02/2024 at 3:00 PM

Sr. No.	Department Name	Tender Number	Name of the Work
1)	Solid Waste Management	PM/SWM/2023-24/53	Selection of Contractor for Mechanized Reject Transportation from Wet waste Processing Plant located at Sus Road, Pashan to Sanitary Landfill (B1 Type)

1. Sale and acceptance of the above tenders is online only through the website [www.mahatenders.gov.in](http://www.mahatenders.gov.in)  
2. Apart from the above changes all other content will remain as published earlier.

Sd/-  
Deputy Commissioner  
Solid Waste Management  
Pune Municipal Corporation

Advt No. 3/177  
Date : 07/02/2024

**NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY**  
Open E-Tender Notice No.: SRDEE/G/ Gati Shakti/IZN/Elec/02/2024, Dt. 05-02-2024

E-Tender are invited by Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer (G) N.E. Railway/ Izzatnagar & on behalf of the President of India for the following work:-  
S.No-1, Description of work: Electrical work in connection with provision of Escalators for (Kasganj, Farrukhabad, Kannauj, Izzatnagar, Bareilly City, Kathgodam, Tanakpur, Kashipur, Pilibhit and Lalkuan) Railways Stations in connection of ABSS of Izzatnagar Division. Details: Approximate tender value in Rs.: ₹ 67,23,168.01, Earnest Money in Rs.: ₹ 1,34,264.00, Cost of tender paper in Rs.: Nil. Date & time of closing E-tender: 29-02-2024 at 11:00 hours, Completion time from the date of issue of letter of Acceptance: Four Months. S.No-2, Description of work: Electrical work in connection with provision of 12 meter wide second F.O.B. at Farrukhabad & Kasganj and development of roof plaza with FOB Lalkuan station under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Details: Approximate tender value in Rs.: ₹ 41,83,884.90, Earnest Money in Rs.: ₹ 83,700/-, Cost of tender paper in Rs.: Nil. Date & time of closing E-tender: 29-02-2024 at 11:00 hours, Completion time from the date of issue of letter of Acceptance: Four Months. • Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and such manual offer received shall be ignored. • The tender can be viewed at website <http://www.ireps.gov.in> • The tender/bidders must have Class-III Digital signature certificate & must have registered on IREPS Portal • Only registered tenderer/bidders can participate in e-tendering. • All relevant papers must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-tendering. Sr. Divisional Elect. Engineer (G/S) CP/RD/VIDYUT-264 Izzatnagar

Never travel on roof and foot boards.

&lt;div style="background-color: #000080; color:

## IN BRIEF



**'Krishna won't be dissuaded':  
U.P. CM on Mathura, Varanasi**

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday hailed the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya while highlighting the need to resolve similar long-standing disputes over places of worship in Mathura and Varanasi. "While Lord Krishna demanded five villages for the Pandavas from Duryodhan 5,000 years ago, we are only asking for three places of our faith," he said in the Assembly, referring to the ongoing disputes over the origins of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and the Shahi Idgah in Mathura, besides the already-constructed Ram Temple. "Our Lord Krishna won't be dissuaded," he said.

### Gujarat passes resolution to teach Bhagavad Gita in schools

The Gujarat Assembly on Wednesday unanimously passed a resolution requesting the BJP government in the State to take necessary steps for the effective implementation of the Education Department's recent decision to teach the holy Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, in schools. While the AAP State unit welcomed the resolution and extended its support to it, Congress MLAs initially protested, but later supported it when the resolution was put to a vote, allowing it to be passed unanimously by the House. The resolution states that the scripture must be taught in schools to students from Classes 6 to 12 from the next academic year. PTI

**17 ex-MLAs, including 12 from AIADMK, join BJP in T.N.**

#### The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

The BJP in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday inducted into the party 17 former MLAs and a former MP, most of whom belonged to its former ally, the AIADMK.

Twelve out of the 18 persons who crossed over to the national party were elected as legislators of the AIADMK at different points in time. The lone former parliamentarian was V. K. Landaivelu, who won from the Chidambaram Lok Sabha constituency (SC) in 1980 on a DMK ticket.

Reacting to the development, senior AIADMK leader C. Ponnaiyan described his former colleagues as those who were "rejected by the rank and file of the party years ago".

AIADMK deputy general secretary K.P. Munusamy termed the development "insignificant".

### 'BJP's duty to safeguard OBC quota, Kunbi status for Marathas may hurt party in polls'

Move has created unnecessary rift between OBCs and Marathas in rural areas, supporters have suggested that I should float a party but I feel it will divert my focus, says OBC leader from NCP

#### INTERVIEW **Chhagan Bhujbal**

**Abhinay Deshpande**



Chhagan Bhujbal.  
EMMANUEL YOGINI

**M**aharashtra Minister and prominent OBC leader Chhagan Bhujbal has been the strongest critic of the Maharashtra government's move to grant Kunbi caste certificates to Marathas with proofs of belonging to the agrarian community that enjoys OBC benefits in the State. Speaking to *The Hindu*, the 76-year-old leader from the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) said he had tendered his resignation as a Minister on November 16 but the Chief Minister is yet to accept it.

Reacting to the development, senior AIADMK leader C. Ponnaiyan described his former colleagues as those who were "rejected by the rank and file of the party years ago".

AIADMK deputy general secretary K.P. Munusamy termed the development "insignificant".

ment functions. It won't stand legal scrutiny.

#### Why did you submit your resignation?

Being part of the government, I can't speak against its decisions but my conscience said I can't keep quiet. So, a day before my public meeting at Ambad (in Jalna district), I tendered my resignation, but it is yet to be accepted by the Chief Minister.

#### Why are OBC leaders from other parties not speaking on the issue?

While announcing benefits for Marathas under the OBC category, the government did not adhere to the rulebook or the previous reports/orders of the High Court or Supreme Court. Reservation can't be given overnight just because someone is pressuring you. This is not how a govern-

#### How are OBC groups

#### looking at the decision, and how will it impact the elections?

I can't speak for everyone, but yes, there's an undercurrent. Many feel betrayed. I don't know why the BJP's central leadership has not intervened as electorally it could have consequences for them. It is their responsibility to safeguard OBC quota. This has created an unnecessary rift between OBCs and Marathas in rural areas.

#### There are reports of you planning to join BJP to lead a nationwide stir.

Neither has the BJP approached me with such a proposal nor am I in two minds. I'm happy here. People are suggesting that I should float a party, but I feel it will divert my focus.

### Tripura board allows Kokborok in Roman script in examinations

#### Syed Sajjad Ali AGARTALA

accepted any other script in the upcoming school-leaving and higher secondary exams this year.

The move was condemned by several tribal forums and opposition parties, which staged protests at the TBSE office.

Sources said the BJP-led State government made a request to the TBSE to reconsider its decision and put an end to the controversy.

The debate over which script to use for Kokborok, spoken by the majority of tribes in Tripura, has been raging for a long time. State governments in the past have appointed commissions to resolve the issue, but to no avail.

While some academics have held that the Bangla script is more practical, indigenous forums and parties prefer the Roman script in a bid to maintain a distinct identity.

### End Aadhaar hurdle of NRC rejects in Assam: AIUDF

#### The Hindu Bureau GUWAHATI

The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) on Wednesday sought an end to the ordeal of more than 26.57 lakh people who have been unable to acquire Aadhaar cards after their biometrics were frozen during the exercise to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam.

A total of 26,57,784 people were rejected in two NRC drafts published on December 31, 2017, and July 30, 2018, for failing to produce documents that could have established their citizenship. "These people have been unable to apply for jobs and acquire ration cards and voter cards for which Aadhaar is mandatory. They have been deprived of their rights," AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam said.

### BJP eyes pact with RLD to shore up prospects in western U.P.; SP reposes faith in partner

#### Anuj Kumar GHAZIABAD

Ahead of the Uttar Pradesh leg of the Congress's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has reached out to Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) chief Chaudhary Jayant Singh with an offer that he will find difficult to refuse. For now, according to party sources, Mr. Singh is weighing his options. For the BJP, the RLD used to be a 'parivarvadi' (dynastic) party but to neutralise the Jat-Muslim vote bank in western U.P. and checkmate the Samajwadi Party (SP), the principal Opposition in the State, it needs the grandson of former Prime Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh by its side.

No wonder, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, party leader

Shivpal Yadav, and Mainpuri MP Dimple Yadav on Wednesday invoked Mr. Singh and his family's secular credentials and showed faith in his political sagacity to protect the interests of farmers and workers.

**Poor track record**  
The BJP's track record in Saharanpur and Moradabad divisions and pockets of Meerut, Aligarh, and Agra of western U.P., which constitute at least 18 Lok Sabha seats, has not been convincing. It pushed Muzaffarnagar MP Sanjeev Balyan to the Union Cabinet and made Bhupendra Chaudhary, who hails from Moradabad, the State party president but could not knock off Mr. Singh as the foremost leader of farmers in the region.

According to sources,



**Poll pact:** The SP announced on January 19 that it had allocated seven Lok Sabha seats to the RLD in Uttar Pradesh. FILE PHOTO

this time the BJP is playing on the discontent among the RLD's Jat supporters, who are feeling cheated by the SP's unilateral decision to have its candidates contest on the RLD's symbol on three out of the seven seats it was allocated on January 19. This includes Muzaffarnagar, a prestige seat for the party. Things came to a brink when the SP pushed the party to cede

weathered the government machinery during the farmer protests and wretlers' agitation," he said, stressing the oft-repeated history of trust deficit between the late RLD and the SP patriarchs: Ajit Singh and Mulayam Singh Yadav.

**Ideological fig leaf**  
The BJP's new-found love for the champion of social justice has given a section of Jats, who don't want the community's vote to be divided between the BJP and the RLD, an ideological fig leaf to return to the NDA.

"If Karpoori Thakur could get the Bharat Ratna, why not Chaudhary Charan Singh, who was his mentor?" said senior RLD leader Ajay Tomar.

Keeping in mind Mr. Singh's reservations on how the present BJP lea-

dership treated its alliance partners, this time, the party is offering Mr. Singh long-term residency in the NDA. Apart from promises of a berth in the next Union and the present State Cabinets, the BJP, sources say, is giving hints of Jat reservation in Central government jobs, something the SP that cares for Yadav interests has been against, and a possible Haryana Pradesh, again a no-go area for the SP, where a Jat could be the CM.

"In the BJP's bid to secure 400 seats, Jayant could play a role," said Sohan Veer Singh, former BJP MP from Muzaffarnagar. "We are ready to give the RLD four seats: Baghpat, Kairana, Mathura, and Amroha. With us, they can easily win all four. With Akhilesh, they can only give us

a good fight," he said.

Mr. Sohan Veer said there can't be a compromise on the Muzaffarnagar seat, where RLD founder Ajit Singh worked to build bridges between Jats and Muslims after the riots of 2013, and lost the 2019 election to Mr. Balyan by a small margin. While the BJP sources deny that RLD has staked a claim to it, sources in the RLD say there can't be any compromise on the seat.

"When we are not ready to cede it to the SP, how can we let it go to the BJP?" said Mr. Tomar. In the five Assembly seats of Muzaffarnagar, the SP and the RLD hold two each, while the BJP has one.

It is this bigger ideological dissonance between the RLD and the BJP that gives non-Jat leaders of the

RLD hope that Mr. Singh would hold on to his anti-BJP stance despite fissures in the alliance with the SP. Recalling the 'Sadhbhava Yatra' that Mr. Singh took out in villages of western U.P., national general secretary Mairajuddin Ahmed said Muslims and farmers of the region were looking to the RLD chief to make the right choice. "If he switches sides, there won't be anybody left to raise their issues," he said.

"Even those Jats who are feeling suffocated in the BJP feel that if Mr. Singh switches allegiance, Jat farmers would become toothless," said a khap leader seeking anonymity.

Insiders in both parties say by February 12, the birth anniversary of Ajit Singh, it will be clear if an alliance has been forged.

### Mixed reactions in NE to Centre's move to fence India-Myanmar border

While the CMs of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur have welcomed the decision, their Mizoram and Nagaland counterparts are against putting up the fence between the two countries



Border pillar no.79 on the Indo-Myanmar border in Moreh, a town in Manipur bordering Myanmar's Tamu town. FILE PHOTO

and Nagaland.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu also expressed confidence that the fencing project would "check the movement of unscrupulous elements" between his State and Myanmar.

Based primarily in Manipur and Nagaland, the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN has opposed the fencing plan that it said would cut off Nagas living on either side of the border. Similarly, the Myanmar-based Khaplang-Yung Aung faction is against the fencing.

Mr. Shah had written on X in support of the move.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also said fencing would reduce incidents of cross-border insurgency and infiltration.

Members of extremist groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) have been carrying out hit-and-run operations in Assam from Myanmar by travelling through a mostly jungle stretch of hilly land straddling Arunachal Pradesh

### Protests in Harda as M.P. CM fails to meet victims' kin

#### Mehul Malpani HARDA

by the administration that the Chief Minister will meet us. We had been waiting in a camp without eating anything since morning. He came till the factory site and left. We feel cheated," said Pinky Chauhan, who lost her sister-in-law in the tragedy. She said several houses were also robbed when residents fled to safety.

**Collector, SP transferred**  
Taking strict action, the State government transferred Harda Collector Rishi Garg and Superintendent of Police Sanjeev Kanchan. While Mr. Garg was made Deputy Secretary with the State administration with no department assigned yet, Mr. Kanchan was moved to the State Police Headquarters as Assistant Inspector General.

"We had been promised



**Taking stock:** Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Wednesday at the site where a blaze erupted in Harda, killing 11 people. A.M. FARUQUI

A.P. presents ₹2.86 lakh crore interim Budget for 2024-25

**G.V.R. Subba Rao**  
VIJAYAWADA

Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister Buggana Rajendranath Reddy on Wednesday presented an interim Budget of ₹2,86,389.27 crore for the financial year 2024-25.

Presenting the Budget in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Rajendranath Reddy said that the revenue expenditure was estimated at ₹2,30,110.41 crore and capital expenditure at ₹30,530.18 crore.

Mr. Rajendranath Reddy said the government harangued several path-breaking initiatives. The initiatives through Navaratnam, manifesto schemes, and strategic interventions were in close alignment with the intent of Sustainable Development Goals.

He said Andhra Pradesh secured 4th position in 2022-23 with a GSDP growth of 16.2%.

## 390-year-old lamp post in Nalgonda unravels trade links of Telangana

**Serish Nanisetti**  
HYDERABAD

A newly-discovered 390-year-old Deepastambham (lamp post) on the edge of River Krishna in Nalgonda district of Telangana casts a fresh light on trade ties in the region in early medieval times. Archaeologists working in the area found the 20-foot tall pillar with hollows for lamps and a multi-lingual inscription in Mudimani-kyam village of Nalgonda.

"The pillar and a small flat roofed structure near it was found by Ashok Kumar of Public Research Institute for History, Archaeology & Heritage. It is on a slope from the village leading to the river bank. We have not found anything like this in the Krishna river valley. Nor are there records of similar structures," says Sriniwasan who found the pillar along with Ashok Kumar.

While Dhvajasthambam (flag pole) is part of temple architecture, lamp posts are rare in the Deccan while they are common in temples in the west coast, including Goa.

"Based on the inscription engraved on the lamp post near the ruined Siva temple, the pillar can be



The 20-foot-tall lamp post on the edge of river Krishna in Nalgonda, Telangana.

## Dramatic scenes in Idukki during drive to remove structures

**The Hindu Bureau**  
IDUKKI

Poopara town in Idukki witnessed dramatic scenes on Wednesday after Kerala Revenue Department officials reached there to evict 89 encroachments on the banks of the Panniyar river. According to the officials, the Kerala HC on January 17 ordered the eviction within six weeks.

Based on the court order, the revenue team led by Idukki Subcollector Arun S. Nair, Udumbanchola tahsildar A.V. Jose, and Udumbanchola Land Records tahsildar Seema

Joseph completed the eviction process on Wednesday. Idukki Collector Sheeba George issued prohibitory orders in Wards 4, 11, and 13 in Santhanpara grama panchayat to complete the eviction process.

The town witnessed dramatic scenes after the officials started the eviction drive at 10 a.m. Traders demanded that the process be postponed for seven days. However, the officials continued the process. A group of traders tried to prevent the drive and took out protest marches. The police arrested seven protesters.

C.M.Y.K

M.N.D-N.D.E

## No discrimination in tax sharing with States: Finance Minister

Nirmala Sitharaman terms Karnataka govt's charges about inadequate tax devolutions mischievous; 'Centre has followed 15th Finance Commission's recommendations to the last word'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



**Dismissing allegations:** Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

Finance Commission's recommendations on tax sharing with States to "the last word".

The Centre has, in fact, done more than what the Finance Commission asked it to do, including releasing an amount of ₹81,470 crore to States that had been lying utilised since 1996, she asserted. Karnataka received ₹2,671 crore of that amount as

well as ₹6,280 crore as a 50-year interest-free loan under the scheme to support capital expenditure by States.

Briefing media on Karnataka's charges earlier in Parliament, Ms. Sitharaman had pointed out that the State also received ₹6,196 crore of Central funding towards disaster relief so far during the award period governed by

the 15th Finance Commission, which began in 2020-21 and concludes in 2025-26.

### 'Will be getting more'

"Despite the exceptional circumstances arising from the pandemic which depressed Central revenues, Karnataka will be getting substantially more as devolution during the first five years of the 15th FC period than in the 14th FC period," the Minister said. To "inflate its false claim of losses", the State government has "even included shortfalls for the next two financial years", Ms. Sitharaman said.

"Even according to these baseless figures asserted by the Karnataka government, the actual tax devolution percentage has increased since 2015-16, contradicting the claim of mistreatment by the Centre," she emphasised.

## Three men held after reaching Mumbai from Kuwait by boat



Police personnel producing two of the three fishermen who were arrested at the Killa court in Mumbai on Wednesday. PTI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MUMBAI

The Mumbai police arrested three fishermen on Wednesday who had been detained on Tuesday night after reaching the city in a Kuwaiti fishing vessel. The trio said they had escaped from their employer, who had allegedly taken all their identity proofs.

They were presented in a court and a case was registered against them under Section 3 (a) with penal Section 6 (a) of the Passport (Entry into India) Rules for not following due procedures required for crossing international borders and entering India without passports.

The fishermen, identified as Vijay Vinod Anthony, 29; Nidiso Ditto, 31; and Sahaya Anthony Anish, 29, claimed that they hail from Tamil Nadu. "Nothing suspicious was found in the boat. The three said that two years ago, an agent had offered them jobs as fishermen in Kuwait. On reaching there, the employer seized all their documents. They were neither given pay nor enough food," the police said.

NIA court finds alleged ISIS activist Riyas guilty

**The Hindu Bureau**  
KOCHI

The Special Court for NIA has found Riyas Aboobacker, the alleged ISIS activist, guilty of attempting to recruit youth to the proscribed organisation and planning to carry out explosions in Kerala.

Special Judge Mini S. Das found him guilty of the offences charged against him on Wednesday.

The NIA had arrested him on April 29, 2019. It had alleged that Aboobacker had organised meetings in Kochi, where he had decided to launch suicide attacks for furthering the activities of IS in the country.

He had also motivated and sought support from others for carrying out extremist acts, the agency had alleged.

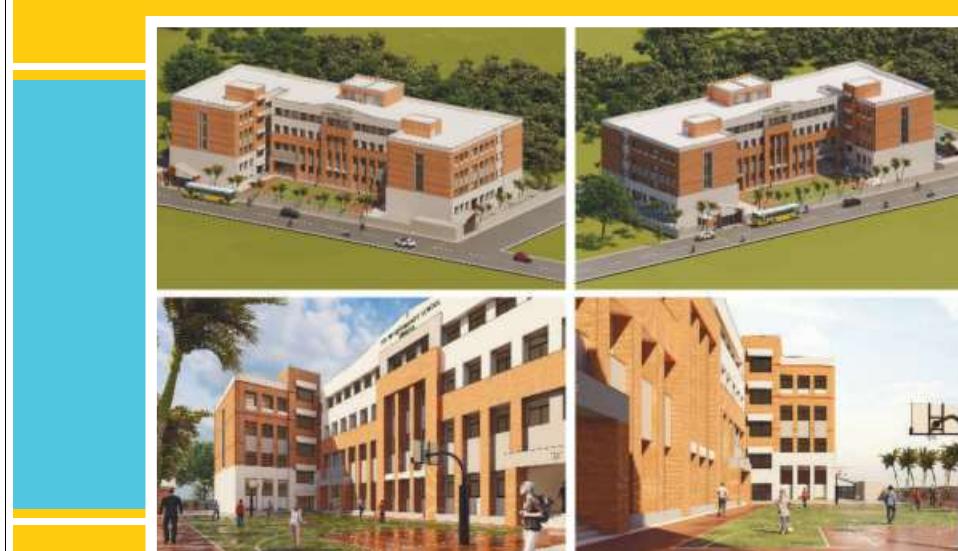
The court will decide on the quantum of punishment after hearing the investigation agency and the counsel of the convict on Thursday.

**Laying the foundation stone of**

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Artistic impression of proposed school building



**TO BENEFIT CHILDREN OF DENSELY POPULATED AREAS OF PALAM IN SOUTH WEST DELHI**

Thursday, 8th February 2024

**Chief Guest**

**Arvind Kejriwal**

Chief Minister, Delhi

**Guest of Honour**

**Atishi**

Education Minister, Delhi





## Winning trust

JMM and its allies found a viable way out of the Hemant Soren arrest ordeal

**B**y nominating Champai Soren to the position of Chief Minister and ensuring a convincing win in the trust vote, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and its allies, the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal, did well to weather the storm after the resignation of Hemant Soren over corruption charges. The predominantly tribal populated Jharkhand remains one of just a few States that have not been wrested by the Bharatiya Janata Party ever since the beginning of what political scientists call the era of the BJP-dominated party system in northern India. It is to the JMM's leadership's credit that it sought to elevate a leader who played a major role in the State's formation (after its bifurcation from Bihar) rather than appointing another family member, even if this was a decision taken under duress, and avoiding the impression that it was the Shibu and Hemant Soren-led family that would rule by proxy. This, in a way, bucked the trend in most regional parties, where power tends to concentrate in the families of its most popular leaders, either due to the fact that this allows party finances to be controlled by those closest to the leadership or because such parties are unable to evolve into cadre-based, ideology-driven units.

By catapulting Champai Soren to the helm of governance, the JMM signalled a return to its past when it was more a movement and less a typical party. Yet, two issues should worry the party. His appointment was also made possible because of a family rift over the possible candidature of Kalpana Soren, Hemant Soren's wife. And, second, the unifying sight of MLAs being transported to Congress-ruled Telangana suggests that the ruling alliance was not so sure of ideological leanings acting as a glue to keep its flock together – a phenomenon that has become sadly true of many politicians in India. Hemant Soren's resignation would also have been welcomed in normal circumstances where anyone in government should give up power if they face serious corruption charges as he did in a purported land scam. But the fact that the Union government has used its law enforcement agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate less as weapons against corruption and more as a tool to browbeat any opposition, gives cause for pause. Regardless of this, Mr. Soren's case must be thoroughly investigated and should not be subject to the vagaries of political outcomes such as the retention of power by the JMM and its allies. In a way, the developments should compel the JMM-led government to reorient its focus on governance in one of India's most mineral-rich, but materially poor, States, and that will be its best answer to the questions raised about it following the arrest.

## Music without borders

The Grammys were a celebration of women singers, past and present

**T**ime stood still twice at the 66th annual Grammy Awards on Sunday when iconic singer-songwriters Joni Mitchell and Tracy Chapman took the stage to tell stories one more time through music. While the 80-year-old Mitchell, who had suffered a life-threatening aneurysm some years ago, performed her 1968 song, 'Both Sides Now', Tracy Chapman, 59, accompanied by her guitar and Luke Combs, belted out her classic hit, 'Fast Car' – both numbers powerful markers of the human experience and still speaking to the times. As if on cue, Annie Lennox, who paid tribute to Sinead O'Connor by reprising her haunting song, 'Nothing Compares 2 U', shouted at the end of her performance: 'Artists for ceasefire. Peace in the world'. After that, two ongoing wars and other social crises appeared forgotten for the most part of the show, though the super indie group, boygenius, who won for 'best rock performance', advocated for a ceasefire through red pins on their attire. After years of being pulled up for not celebrating female, black, Hispanic artists enough, the Grammys made amends this time by honouring a host of young women musicians. 'Swifties' were duly acknowledged by helping Taylor Swift make history with her record-setting fourth album of the year award for 'Midnights', surpassing Frank Sinatra, Stevie Wonder and Paul Simon, who won the award three times.

Miley Cyrus ('Flowers'), Billie Eilish ('What Was I Made For?'), a melancholic melody for Greta Gerwig's 'Barbie') and SZA all got their moment in the spotlight. India made a mark too with a belated nod coming in for one of the country's best-known fusion bands, Shakti, which bagged the Best Global Music Album for 'This Moment', a studio album they released after four decades. The band, formed in the 1970s to critical acclaim and fame, later regrouped and brought out an album in 2023 with founding members, guitarist John McLaughlin and tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, joining vocalist Shankar Mahadevan, percussionist V. Selvaganesh and violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan. Zakir Hussain won two more Grammys, one with flutist Rakesh Chaurasia, and two other performers, for their song 'Pashto' which won in the Best Global Music Performance category. In the past, the Grammys have honoured and celebrated the music of Pandit Ravi Shankar, Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, A. R. Rahman and others. But Indian artists of today, who play a mind-boggling array of instruments, from the sitar, sarod and veena to the flute, mridangam and violin, can now aspire to claim their rightful place on the global stage and be open to collaborations which have brought musicians such as Zakir Hussain accolades and recognition.

# Downloading child pornography is an offence

**R**ecently, the Madras High Court, in *Harish vs Inspector of Police*, quashed the judicial proceedings and held that downloading child pornography was not an offence under Section 67B of the Information Technology (IT) Act, 2000. The High Court categorically said that watching child pornography *per se* was not an offence as the accused had merely downloaded it onto his electronic gadget and had watched it in private.

The High Court also referred to a case decided by the Kerala High Court where it had been held that watching pornography in private space was not an offence under Section 292 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). This case related to the quashing a criminal case registered against a youth in 2016 by the Aluva police as he had been watching pornographic material on his mobile phone on the roadside at night.

In this case, after investigation, the police had filed the final report and cognisance had been taken by the High Court under Section 14(1) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 and Section 67B of the IT Act.

Section 67B(b) of the IT Act says that 'whoever, creates text or digital images, collects, seeks, browses, downloads, advertises, promotes, exchanges or distributes material in any electronic form depicting children in obscene or indecent or sexually explicit manner' shall be punished on first conviction with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years and with fine which may extend to ten lakh rupees....'

### Reading into a sub-clause

It is undisputed that two files pertaining to child pornography were downloaded and available on the mobile phone of the accused. The forensic science report also corroborated the presence of the two files. These facts are sufficient to attract the application of Section 67B(b) of the IT Act, but the High Court held that in order to constitute an offence, the accused must have published, transmitted, created material depicting children in sexually explicit act or conduct.

The High Court did not reproduce Section 67B in its judgment for justification. Section 67B has five sub-clauses, from (a) to (e). While sub-clause



R.K. Vij  
is a former Indian Police Service officer

(a) talks about publishing or transmitting material depicting children engaged in sexually explicit act or conduct, sub-clause (b) deals with acts including downloading of child pornography material. Sub-clause (c) talks about cultivating, enticing or inducing children to [an] online sexually explicit relationship. Sub-clause (d) talks about facilitating abuse of children online and sub-clause (e) talks about recording abuse/a sexually explicit act with children.

Thus, the High Court reached its judgment without analysing all of Section 67B, and reading into sub-clause (b), which clearly delineates the act of the accused.

### The flaw in citing a precedent

The High Court referred to a precedent, without mentioning details, i.e., title or year, of that case, where the High Court of Kerala dealt with the scope of Section 292 of the IPC and held that watching an obscene photograph or obscene videos by a person by itself was not an offence. The ratio of this case does not apply to the cases of child pornography, particularly the one under consideration.

A case decided by the High Court of Kerala in September 2023 (*Aneesh vs State of Kerala*) did not pertain to child pornography. While watching adult pornography in privacy has been held as not to be an offence under Section 292 of the IPC (both by the High Court of Kerala and the Supreme Court of India), downloading sexually explicit material pertaining to children is clearly an offence under the IT Act. In none of the cases so far has the constitutionality of Section 67B(b) been challenged and its *vires* held unconstitutional.

The Madras High Court used its inherent powers under Section 482 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to prevent misuse of the process of court and quashed the judicial proceedings. The Supreme Court has laid down certain guidelines in *State of Haryana vs Bhajan Lal* (1992) to exercise powers under Section 482 of the CrPC (or extraordinary powers under Article 226) including that such powers could be used where the allegations made in the first information report or the complaint, even if taken at face value and accepted in their entirety

do not, *prima facie*, constitute an offence or make out a case against the accused. Therefore, under the given facts and circumstances of the case, the Madras High Court could not in its wisdom quash the judicial proceeding when an offence was clearly made out under Section 67B(b) of the IT Act. However, it is agreed that the police had wrongly applied Section 14 of the POCSO Act as there was no evidence pertaining to the use of any child or children for pornographic purposes by the accused himself. Also, Section 15 of the POCSO Act punishes storage or the possession of child pornographic material only if it is done with an intent to share or transmit, or display or distribute, or for commercial purpose.

### Remove the inconsistency

It is important to mention here that Section 67 read with Sections 67A and 67B of the IT Act are a complete code and the given acts are exclusively punishable under this code. This section was amended in October 2009 and, *inter alia*, even seeking or downloading child pornography made a specific offence. The purpose of enacting special Acts such as the POCSO Act and making special provisions in the IT Act is to protect children from sexual exploitation and punish people involved in different forms of exploitation.

The National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, under an agreement with the American National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, regularly gets geo-tagged CyberTipLine reports to prosecute those who upload the child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) from anywhere in India. The use of the term CSAM is preferred because the term pornography implies consent which a child is not capable of giving. Therefore, it will be better if the term 'child pornography' is replaced with the term 'CSAM' in Indian laws. Similarly, the POCSO Act may also be amended and mere possession of CSAM be made a separate offence to remove inconsistency between the provisions of the POCSO Act and the IT Act. Finally, the State government must appeal against this judgment of the Madras High Court. Otherwise, it will set a bad precedent for the State.

*The views expressed are personal*

# Equity concerns in banning fossil fuel extraction

**T**he inadequate response from governments and corporations in dealing with the issue of climate change is leading to not only a dramatic rise in climate change litigation in many parts of the world but is also resulting in growing momentum that is in favour of phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies and the banning of the extraction of fossil fuel itself.

Momentum is also growing in favour of a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty. There is a proposal in academic literature which sets out the case for a coal elimination treaty by 2030 with the aim of phasing out the mining and the burning of coal.

The rationale behind this is linked to the Production Gap (Production Gap Report, or PGR 2023) that exists between the plans by fossil fuel producing countries to produce 110% more fossil fuels by 2030 and their incompatibility with the goal of the Paris Agreement 2015 to keep warming below 1.5°Celsius as compared to pre-industrial levels.

The element of phasing out fossil fuel emerged for the first time in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) at COP26 in Glasgow, in 2021, which made a reference to phasing down unabated coal power and phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. In fact, there was a call by many to phase out coal and fossil fuel subsidies. COP28 in Dubai in 2023, in Dubai, also adopted a decision relating to the transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, so as to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 in keeping with the science. It appears logical that to achieve the long-term temperature goal set at Paris and avert climate disruption, fossil fuel production cannot continue unabated. The question that remains to be answered is how to align these proposals with the anchor sheet principles of the climate change regime – the Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC) and Nationally determined contributions (NDC).

### Equitable phasing out of fossil fuels

The UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement are aimed at the reduction of greenhouse gases and removal by sinks in



Anwar Sadat  
is a Senior Assistant Professor in International Law at the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi

India and other like-minded developing countries need to call out the hypocrisy of some of the developed countries

conformity with the CBDR-RC. The latter, governed by the criteria of per capita emissions, historic emissions made by a developed country party and the financial and technological resources (which a developed country commands as compared to a developing country), faces serious challenges when applied in the context of fossil fuel extraction.

Those countries that are heavily dependent on revenues and employment in the fossil fuel sector are likely to experience serious difficulties in transitioning away from fossil fuel.

For instance, there are countries such as Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom which are less dependent on revenues from fossil fuel, as they have a more diversified economy (non-fossil fuel income to cope with transitional costs) together with higher per capita income, and thereby greater capacity to transition away from fossil fuels. In contrast, there are countries such as Azerbaijan, Congo, Iraq, Nigeria, Oman, and Timor Leste that are heavily dependent on fossil fuels for government revenue and with economies that are relatively less diversified, thereby giving them limited capacity to transit. These countries cannot be expected to take the lead in phasing out fossil fuel.

### International law and fossil fuel

In the international legal system, a state is within its rights to use natural resources lying within its territory for its economic development. But this is accompanied by a caveat not to cause significant harm to another state when a natural resource is trans-boundary in nature. The prevention of harm to another is a due diligence obligation, and a state has to undertake all appropriate measures in light of the magnitude of the proposed project having trans-boundary consequences.

The obligation has been largely tested in international water course situations and the International Court of Justice (ICJ, 2010) in the Pulp Mills Case described conducting trans-boundary environmental impact assessment (EIA) as part of customary international law. This duty is linked to a bilateral

situation and its application in the context of a global commons is so far unclear, which amounts to saying that a state cannot be expected to undertake EIA for extraction of fossil fuel for its effects on the global environment other than local.

Scholars from the West are taking a legally ill-founded plea that states are required to conduct an EIA for their fossil fuel extraction to prevent global warming. They are also propagating the human rights consequences of fossil fuel extraction on the local population and indigenous people in the tribal areas of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha in violation of the UN Declaration envisaging free prior informed consent of the tribal people. The basis of the Paris Agreement is NDCs, which does not bind a state to prohibit fossil fuel extraction.

### India's situation

Despite India's notable progress in renewable energy systems, fossil fuel continues to dominate India's power sector. Nearly 3.6 million people in 159 districts are rooted in the fossil fuel economy through direct or indirect jobs related to the coal mining and power sector. A country such as India, which is facing serious unemployment concerns, cannot afford to transit towards cleaner fuel without adequate transition support and creation of suitable economic opportunities and livelihoods for those affected. India's subsidies on kerosene oil have come under scrutiny in the West as it is found to be inconsistent with Article 20(1) of the Paris Agreement and is also considered as inefficient subsidies.

In line with the CBDR-RC, India has given a clear hint of a differential time-frame at COP26 when it intervened and succeeded in toning down the language from "phasing out" to "phasing down" unabated coal. India must lean on its coalition building strategy with like-minded developing country parties in opposing the hypocrisy of developed country parties since most major fossil fuel producers plan to increase production (this includes Australia, Canada, and the U.S. (as per the PGR) while expecting developing countries to radically shift their economies, with limited support.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Uttarakhand takes the lead

The tabling of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the Uttarakhand Assembly is a clear sign of what the Bharatiya Janata Party plans to do after the dilution of Article 370 and the consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya. These three issues are what define the BJP from the other mainstream political parties. Though contentious, the Bill is sure to be implemented in the hill State, providing an impetus to the BJP's prospects in terms of election results. But, opposition to the UCC

is bound to decrease the number of votes from the general public even if the Muslim vote share fades for the BJP.

**Jai Prakash Gupta,**  
Ambala Cantonment, Haryana  
  
It will be an uphill task to ensure the implementation of a uniform civil code in India. Though there seems to be political support for it, there will be hurdles. The minorities are being oppressed even as we come across narrow-minded political statements every single day.

**Manas Agarwal,**  
New Delhi

### Respect past contributions

We seem to be getting back to 'silly season' again with the Lok Sabha election approaching and the top leader of the land in 'attack mode' by misinterpreting and misquoting his favourite target – the Nehru-Gandhi family. Being the top leader, people are forced to listen to him and take note of it. If the speeches of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi did not instil confidence in the people, India would not have got to the position it was in 2014, when the leader came to power. It is not that all development in

India began from 2014. The leader has to acknowledge the efforts of his predecessors who have made India a great nation. One believes respect too to be a 'Hindutva value'.

**S. Kamat,**  
Mysuru

**Arrests and politics**  
Several non-BJP leaders have faced arrest under various laws and by agencies. The haste behind some arrests, amid a media spectacle, raises questions about the motive. Courts need to scrutinise such cases more closely, as many appear to be primarily

designed to disgrace and harass the accused and break his/her spirit by leveraging legal processes as weapons.

Bureaucrats and law officers too must introspect on the implications for our democracy when there are clear political motives.

**G.G. Menon,**  
Tripunithura, Kerala

### Iconic eatery

The news report, on the Spirit of Mylapore Award being conferred on Rayar's Mess in Chennai (Chennai, February 7), made me nostalgic as this was a place I used to frequent with my

colleagues in the 1970s. The cafe had its army of fans who made it a point to visit it at least once a week. The wonderful taste of eatables in this humble and simple eatery was attributed to the wood fire they were cooked on.

**M.R. Anand,**  
Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh



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# Road map for fiscal consolidation

The interim Budget or 'vote on account' for 2024-25 was presented on February 1, 2024. In keeping with the best traditions, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced that she was not proposing to make any changes in the tax rates either for direct taxes or indirect taxes. Nevertheless, a few things stand out in the Budget. First, there is a continued emphasis on increasing capital expenditures of the Union government and second, there is a continued emphasis on fiscal correction and consolidation.

#### Not overstretched

In some sense, the Budget is not overstretched. The buoyancy of tax revenue comes to 1.33, if the base is taken as Budget Estimates of the present year and using nominal GDP growth for 2023-24 as per the National Statistics Organisation's (NSO) first advance estimates. The buoyancy comes down to 1.09 if the base is taken as Revised Estimates. The nominal GDP growth for 2024-25 is conservatively estimated at 10.5%. This means an implicit price deflator-based inflation of 3.3% if we assume a 7% real growth. Thus, the revenue projections provide a buffer that can be used to increase expenditures or reduce deficit later. That will be known only when the regular Budget is presented later.

One important feature of the Budgets presented in recent years is an increase in capital expenditures of the Central government. In the context of COVID-19 and other global developments, perhaps it was felt that the investment climate could be improved only by the government raising its own investment. It could act as a catalyst for private investment. The interim Budget has maintained this trend and has provided for an increase of 11.1% in capital expenditures when a comparison is made with the 2023-24 Budget Estimates.

The growth rate of capital expenditure is higher at 16.9%



**C. Rangarajan**

is former Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and a former Governor, Reserve Bank of India



**D.K. Srivastav**

is Chief Policy Advisor, EY India and formerly Director, Madras School of Economics

when compared with the Revised Estimates of 2023-24. It is implied that capital expenditure growth is lower than what was budgeted in 2023-24.

In fact, as per the Revised Estimates, the growth in capital expenditure is 28.4% instead of the budgeted growth of 37.4%. This lower capital expenditure growth is associated with a real GDP growth of 7.3% in 2023-24. Thus, it may be possible for a 17% capital expenditure growth in 2024-25 to enable a real GDP growth of 7% provided private sector investment picks up and the momentum of capital expenditure growth of State governments is maintained as in the current year. This would be feasible as the government has extended the interest-free loan facility for the State governments. The lower fiscal deficit might also facilitate a lowering of interest rates later during the year. It is important to remember that the capital expenditures of the government are not identical with gross fixed capital formation. However, it contributes to increasing capital formation. It is worth noting that the capital expenditures of the Central government in 2024-25 as a proportion of GDP are budgeted to increase marginally from 3.2% in 2023-24 to 3.4% in 2024-25. In developing economies, growth is driven by investment. For the continued growth of the economy at 7%, we need an investment rate of 35%. This is on the assumption of an Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) of 5.

As per NSO's first advance estimates for 2023-24, the gross fixed capital formation to GDP ratio at constant prices is 34.9%. If in 2024-25, government capital formation falls, correspondingly private sector investment may have to increase.

#### Fiscal deficit target

The fiscal deficit for 2024-25 is expected to go down to 5.1%, a decline of 0.7 percentage points from the previous year. This is in accord with what the Finance

Minister had earlier stated. While this bold step in a Budget before the election is welcome, we need to have a good road map to achieve what our target is.

This has to be 3% of GDP for the Central government and not 4.5% of GDP. Together with State governments, the target fiscal deficit can be 6% of GDP. We need to understand the logic behind this number. It is linked to household savings in financial assets and a net inflow of resources from abroad. The household sector is the only surplus sector in the economy. The surplus of this sector needs to feed the public sector as well as the private corporate sector. If the household savings in financial assets were increasing, it may be possible to make some adjustments to the desired level of fiscal deficit.

However, recent numbers show household savings in financial assets going down. The committee that was appointed to look at the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 wanted that the debt-GDP ratio of the Centre and States taken together should not exceed 60%. For the Centre, the target level was indicated at 40%. There is no clear logic for this number if the Centre's target fiscal deficit is kept at 3% of GDP.

The corresponding level of Centre's debt would be 30% of GDP with an underlying nominal growth of 11%. Simulations indicate that given the current consolidation path, if a 3% fiscal deficit is reached by 2028-29 and maintained at this level thereafter while sustaining a nominal GDP growth of 11%, a 40% debt-GDP ratio for the Centre would be reached by 2034-35. Any fiscal deficit of the Centre and States taken together substantially above 6% of GDP can only lead to inflation. We need to set a target fiscal deficit relative to GDP and the time horizon over which this target is achieved. The goal must be to get to a fiscal deficit of 3% of GDP each for the Centre and the States.

# VCK: the uncompromising Dalit party

Despite its growth in stature, the party has to settle for a minor role in the alliance

#### STATE OF PLAY

**Udhav Naig**

udhav.naig@thehindu.co.in



cond rung leaders contend that the VCK is the only Dalit party in the country to not compromise with the BJP despite, according to them, being offered an olive branch to join the Central government in their attempt to reach out.

The party recently organised a public rally, which happened to be INDIA bloc's first major event in Tamil Nadu. It witnessed the participation of DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, CPI (M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury, CPI General Secretary D. Raja and other leaders of the alliance in the State along with an unprecedented crowd. The VCK has positioned itself as a party that consistently punches above its weight.

For a party that rejected electoral politics for a decade until contesting Lok Sabha elections in 1999, the VCK has come a long way: it has two Members of Parliament and four Members of the Legislative Assembly.

The VCK has managed to become an ideological bulwark of secularism and social justice in Tamil Nadu against Hindutva political forces and has played a key role in shaping the political stance of the Opposition alliance despite being a smaller player in the alliance in recent times. Helped majorly by the charisma of Mr. Thirumavalavan, and the Scheduled Caste community's need for a party to fight for their rights, the party has weathered many electoral and political setbacks. Its se-

solid vote bank by mobilising Dalit communities.

The flip side of this growth in stature in electoral politics has meant the party has had to sometimes tone down its criticism of how inadequate the response of mainstream political parties and State government have been, to issues of discrimination and violence faced by Dalits. Since 2021, when DMK came to power in the State whose alliance the party is a part of, the VCK has not, according to many Dalit activists, satisfactorily raised the issues of violence against Dalits with the State government.

In December 2022, human faeces were found in the drinking water overhead tank used by the Dalits in Vengayal in Pudukkottai district.

The VCK had organised several protests, but still, the State government has been unable to nab the culprits in Vengayal issue after more than a year. Mr. Thirumavalavan has criticised the police department for the delay. Sympathisers have often said the party ought to carve out an independent space and voice without worrying about whether it would affect their alliance prospects in the upcoming elections.

The criticism against the party is that they are unable to articulate the perspective of Dalits on various political issues and when they face instances of violence and discrimination due to the fear of being edged out of the alliance. This, in turn, has resulted in the loss of confidence among its own supporters.

If the party wants to move on to the next stage of its evolution, it should do well to resolve this political dilemma it finds itself in, which will enable it to play a much bigger role in Tamil Nadu politics.

# Over 20,000 FCRA licences cancelled, most from T.N.

If cancellations are expressed as a share of FCRA licences given, then Uttar Pradesh tops the list

#### DATA POINT

**Jasmin Nihalani**  
**Neetika Jha**  
**Vignesh Radhakrishnan**

Last week, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) registered a case of alleged Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) violation against human rights activist Harsh Mander and his NGO Centre for Equity Studies (CES). FIRs were registered based on a complaint from the Union Home Ministry. The agency allegedly found that the NGO transferred some amount to certain individuals from the FCRA account, apart from salary/wages/remuneration, which is a violation of the Act.

The action against CES is the latest incident in a series of measures against civil society and NGOs. Last month, FCRA registrations of Delhi-based Centre for Policy Research (CPR) and World Vision India were cancelled. In 2023, the Home Ministry had recommended a CBI investigation into Oxfam India for allegedly violating FCRA provisions. CBI also conducted searches and registered a case against news portal NewsClick for violating FCRA in December 2023.

The government uses FCRA to regulate the foreign funds received by NGOs "to prevent any possible diversion for activities detrimental to national interest." Organisations have to compulsorily register under the Act if they wish to receive foreign funding. Over 20,000 FCRA licences have been cancelled till February 4.

Chart 1 shows the year-wise break-up of cancellations. It shows that cancellations have spiked in certain years – 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019. Especially in 2015, over 10,000 cancellations were recorded. In other years, cancellations rarely crossed into the double digits. It is important to note that not all cancellations were due to violations, as many were also done to

remove multiple registrations for the same organisation.

Cancellation of licences is not the only way in which organisations are denied foreign money. Changes in the law meant that FCRA registration is not permanent and needs renewal once in five years. Data from Lok Sabha show that 783 renewal applications were denied between 2019 and 2021.

Chart 2 shows the State-wise number of active, expired and cancelled FCRA licences. Tamil Nadu leads the list with 2,580 FCRA licences of organisations registered in the State getting cancelled to date. Close to 1,576 licences expired in the State, also the highest among States. Notably, the State still has over 2,500 FCRA licences active, again the highest among States. Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Karnataka are other States with a high number of cancellations. If cancellations are expressed as a share of all FCRA licences given, then Uttar Pradesh tops the list, with over 50% cancellations followed by Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal with over 40% cancellations. A break-up of organisations with an active FCRA licence shows that most of them are engaged in educational and social service, while religious NGOs – most dominated by those registered as Christian organisations – also form a significant share, as shown in table 3.

While Tamil Nadu has the largest number of organisations with an active FCRA licence, they received the third highest amount (2,507 crore) of foreign contribution in this route in FY22 (Chart 4). Organisations registered in Delhi received ₹5,809 crore in the period, the highest among all States/UTs, followed by Karnataka (3,140 crore). Organisations in Gujarat and Telangana have received over ₹1,000 crore.

Neetika Jha is a student at Asian College of Journalism

# Denying foreign funding

The data for charts and tables were sourced from Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act portal maintained by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rajya Sabha answers



Chart 2: The chart shows the State-wise number of active, expired and cancelled FCRA licences till date

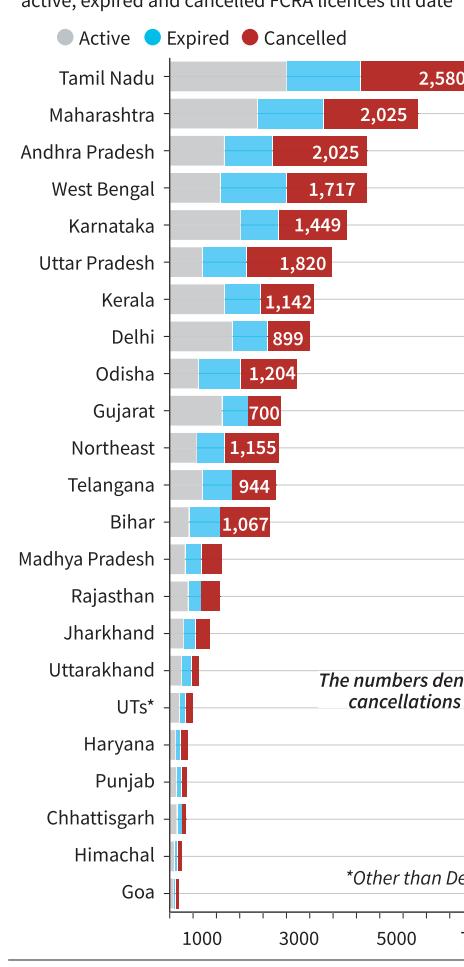


Chart 1: The chart shows the year-wise break-up of licence cancellations

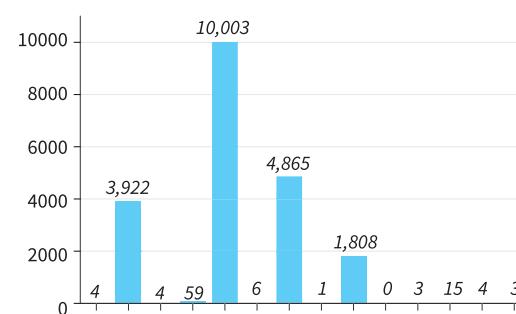
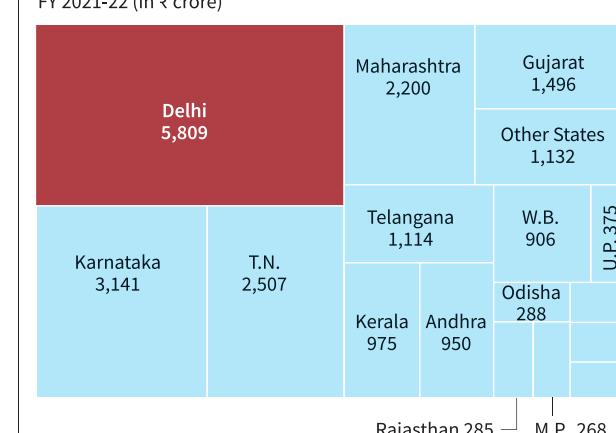


Table 3: The table shows the break-up of organisations with an active FCRA licence

State	Religious (non-christian)	Religious (Christian)	Educational	Social
T.N.	95	515	1,680	2,174
Maharashtra	65	213	1,295	1,489
Karnataka	83	448	1,020	1,215
Delhi	44	115	783	1,114
Kerala	28	619	603	856
Andhra	27	326	811	1,094
Gujarat	127	153	845	863
W.B.	92	128	739	956
Telangana	20	149	465	628
U.P.	63	98	417	595

Chart 4: The chart shows State-wise foreign contribution received in FY 2021-22 (in ₹ crore)



#### FROM THE ARCHIVES

**The Hindu**

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 8, 1974

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

**The number of Vande Bharat trains operational at present**

**82** Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav informed Parliament that work is underway to increase the speed of Vande Bharat trains to 160 kilometres per hour on the New Delhi-Mumbai and New Delhi-Howrah routes. PTI

**India's coal export to neighbouring nations from April-November**

**0.78** in million tonnes. Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi informed Parliament that India exported 2,945 million tonnes (MT) in 2020-21, 1,316 MT in 2021-22 and 1,166 MT in 2022-23. India exports coal to Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. PTI

**Amount developing nations need by 2030 in climate finance**

**6** in \$ trillion. COP-29 will prioritise climate finance, aiming to establish new post-2025 funding targets to assist developing nations in climate adaptation. Last year, the G-20 highlighted the need for \$5.9 trillion before 2030 to implement national climate plans. PTI

**Funds earmarked to boost India's defence space capabilities**

**25,000** in ₹ crore. Indian armed forces have kept aside funds for its defence space requirements, such as building a constellation of surveillance satellites, Chief of Defence Staff said. PTI

**The UN seeks funds to help civilians and refugees from Sudan**

**4.1** in \$ billion. The UN appealed for funds for embattled civilians in Sudan amid signs that some may be dying of starvation after nearly a year of war. About half of Sudan's people require support and protection. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## A history of the Northern Ireland conflict

What is the significance of the First Minister of Ireland being from the Sinn Fein? How did the two-year long political deadlock come to an end? What were 'The Troubles'? What were the main provisions of the Good Friday Agreement?

### EXPLAINER

**Joan Sony Cherian**

**The story so far:**

In February 3, pro-Irish unity politician Michelle O'Neill from the Sinn Fein party made history by becoming the first Nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland, after the opposition Democratic Union Party (DUP), the largest pro-U.K. party, returned to government ending a two-year long political deadlock in Northern Ireland.

**What led to the political deadlock?**

Northern Ireland is governed by a power-sharing agreement known as consociationalism as laid down in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. This system believes that power should be shared equally between the various sectarian groups in a state, in this case, between the pro-Irish unity faction, called the Nationalists or Republicans, and the pro-U.K. faction, which are the Loyalists or the Unionists. Sinn Fein is the largest Nationalist political party (also left-wing), while the DUP is of the latter. The party that wins the largest vote-share will hold the First Minister position while the party with the second largest vote share will keep the post of Deputy First Minister. Of these two posts, one must be a Unionist and the other a Nationalist. Both positions hold equal weight and one cannot exist without the other.

In the 2022 elections, Sinn Fein finished first with a 29% vote share, while the DUP secured the second position with a 21.3% vote share. However, a government was not formed as the DUP exited Stormont (Northern Ireland's Parliament) because it objected to the new border controls between Britain and the Island of Ireland, which came in the aftermath of Brexit. When the U.K. exited the EU, Northern Ireland became the only province to share a land border with an EU country (Republic of Ireland). The U.K. and the EU then came up with the Northern Ireland Protocol, which stipulated that the trade border, where goods are checked for compliance, would be shifted to the Irish ports, essentially making it a sea border. However, this was rejected by the DUP, which held that this was against the Good Friday agreement which sanctioned free movement of goods and people across borders. In protest, they exited the government and the political deadlock set in.

The U.K. and the EU then drew up fresh rules, called the Windsor Framework, which stated that on arrival at the border of Northern Ireland, goods will be demarcated into two. The ones which were entering the region would go into the 'green lane' with no inspections while those entering the Republic of Ireland (EU territory) would go to the 'red lane' for compliance checks. After assurance from the U.K. of Northern Ireland's place in its internal market, the DUP has agreed to return to government.

**How did Northern Ireland come into being?**

Northern Ireland was the site of a 30-year civil war (1968-1998) known as 'The Troubles' between the Republicans and the Unionists, which killed over 3,500 people. It also had a religious aspect to it with the Republicans being mostly Catholic and the Unionists being largely Protestants.

Northern Ireland was formerly part of the Ulster province, which lies to the north of modern-day Ireland. Conflict



**Another term:** First Minister of Northern Ireland, Michelle O'Neill, and Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, Emma Little-Pengelly, greet U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak as he arrives at Stormont Castle on February 5, in Belfast, Northern Ireland. GETTY IMAGES

between the Protestants and the Irish Catholics goes all the way back to 1609, when King James I started an official policy of migration wherein people from England and Scotland were encouraged to move to Ulster to work in his various plantations there. The religious war that was being waged in much of Europe at the time, between the Protestants and the Catholics, made its presence felt in Ulster as well. However, a much stronger resistance was brewing. Ireland at the time was under the rule of England. The growing resistance against the colonial English rule, especially after the Potato Famine of 1845 where over 1 million Irish people died due to disease and starvation, cemented these sectarian and religious differences. Finally, in 1916, in the middle of the First World War, during Easter week, Ireland rose up in arms against colonial rule under the leadership of the Irish Republican Army (IRA). After a bloody war, it was able to gain independence from England with the Anglo-Irish treaty of 1921.

However, Ireland was split into two territories. As there was a protestant majority in Ulster, out of the 32 counties in Ireland, six remained with the U.K., forming the region of Northern Ireland.

**What led to the Good Friday agreement?**

Peace did not come easy in Northern Ireland. The years that followed were rife with discrimination and instances of sectarian violence. The Irish Republicans being the minority were often victims of discrimination when it came to housing and public service jobs. Moreover, there have also been claims that elections were heavily skewed towards the Unionists due to gerrymandering practices. In the late 1960s, various protests against the Northern Ireland government descended into violence with the IRA and the

Unionist paramilitary forces taking up arms.

The Troubles had officially started and the British Army was deployed to maintain peace. The Army was often accused of colluding with the Unionists against the Republicans. Walls were built between communities to segregate them, curfews were implemented and dissidents were being arrested without trial. However, violence continued and in 1972, in an incident known as Bloody Sunday, the British Army shot and killed at least 13 unarmed civilians during a protest march in the Bogside area of Derry. In its aftermath, the war spread to the mainland of the U.K. and Ireland, with attacks and bombings orchestrated in London and Dublin.

In the backdrop of the ever-increasing tit-for-tat violence between the IRA and the Unionists, in the 1980s, IRA's political wing Sinn Fein started taking a more active role in the political landscape of Northern Ireland. It contested elections and played a part in governance. At the same time, peace talks were also being negotiated with the U.S. acting as a mediator. The 1990s brought about a significant shift in the war. The public was weary of violence and wanted peace. Both parties agreed to a ceasefire and peace talks were in full swing. While the decommissioning of arms was heavily pushed by the U.K., both the IRA and the Unionists at the time refused to give up their arms entirely. Therefore, talks took the 'twin approach' wherein peace and decommissioning was to happen in parallel as a treaty was being reached.

Finally, on April 10, 1998, the Good Friday Agreement was signed in Belfast bringing to an end the 30-year-old civil war in Northern Ireland.

**What is the Good Friday Agreement?** The Good Friday Agreement is a unique

peace treaty in that it conceded to most of the demands from both sides of the conflict. The treaty had three main aspects – that the Northern Ireland government would be formed on the sovereign wishes of both Republicans and the Unionists and that they would share governance equally; that the people of Northern Ireland could seek reunification with Ireland any time subject to a referendum; and that the citizens of Northern Ireland can seek Irish or British nationality or both. It also abolished border checks and encouraged the freedom of movement of people across the U.K. and Ireland.

However, tensions of the conflict still linger in the region. The power sharing system has not been smooth. Stormont has fallen multiple times before the completion of a term.

The Assembly was suspended in 2000, in 2001, from 2002-2007 when Unionists withdrew from the executive and from 2017-2020.

In February 2022, the government again collapsed as Unionists withdrew over border controls between the U.K. and Northern Ireland.

**What next?**

The significance of a Nationalist First Minister cannot be understated. Ms. O'Neill said as much when she remarked that "we are in a decade of opportunity" indicating the possibility of a referendum on the reunification of the region with Ireland in the next 10 years.

However, in a paper released by the U.K. government, it said that it "sees no realistic prospect of a border poll leading to a united Ireland," citing recent polling. In a similar vein, Irish premier Leo Varadkar, whose government in principle supports a united Ireland, also said the question of reunification was "not for today."

### THE GIST

Northern Ireland is governed by a power-sharing agreement which believes that power should be shared equally between the various sectarian groups in a state — in this case, between the pro-Irish unity faction, called the Nationalists or Republicans, and the pro-U.K. faction, which are the Loyalists or the Unionists.

Northern Ireland was the site of a 30-year civil war (1968-1998) known as 'The Troubles' between the Republicans and the Unionists, which killed over 3,500 people. The war finally ended in 1998 with signing of the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast.

The Good Friday Agreement is a unique peace treaty in that it conceded to most of the demands from both sides of the conflict. The treaty had three main aspects – that the Northern Ireland government would be formed on the sovereign wishes of both Republicans and the Unionists and that they would share governance equally; that the people of Northern Ireland could seek reunification with Ireland any time subject to a referendum; and that the citizens of Northern Ireland can seek Irish or British nationality or both. It also abolished border checks and encouraged the freedom of movement of people across the U.K. and Ireland.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Strike a fine balance, have a just civil code

The Law Commission of India should aim to eliminate only those practices that do not meet the benchmarks set by the Constitution of India

**Faizan Mustafa**  
**Anant Sangal**

On February 7, Uttarakhand passed the Uniform Civil Code. In this article, dated June 24, 2023, Faizan Mustafa and Anant Sangal argue that the proposed UCC must be emblematic of India's 'mosaic model' of multiculturalism.

**I**n June 14, the Law Commission of India decided to solicit views and proposals from the public about the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). After a hiatus of just five years, when the Commission had concluded that the 'UCC is neither necessary nor desirable', the move now is one that keeps the pot boiling on one of India's most ideologically as well as politically rivalled issue. Though we believe that the enactment of the UCC in piecemeal manner would be in tune with the spirit of Article 44, the attempt here is to invite attention to one particular consideration that must weigh with the Commission as it undertakes this exercise de novo.

**Autonomy versus authority**  
The question of personal laws is basically the question of personal and religious autonomy versus the state's authority to reform familial relations. Since each religious group has cultural autonomy, it is thus being argued that the community should itself come forward to seek reforms. This is the justification for the adoption of internal law reform or voluntary UCC. In fact, the Special Marriage Act, 1954 and the Indian Succession Act, 1925 are nothing but examples of voluntary adoption of the UCC though the recently enacted love jihad laws by prohibiting inter-faith marriages basically violate the spirit of Special Marriage Act.

There are also regional differences, i.e. Kerala had abolished the Hindu Joint Family in 1975; Muslim marriage and divorces are to be registered in Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, Jharkhand under the 1976 law, and in Assam under 1935 law, and adoption was permissible to Kashmiri Muslims.

At present, not just Muslims but even Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews are governed by their own personal laws. Accordingly, believe it or not, it is the religious identity that determines which personal law would apply to a group of individuals. Even reformed Hindu Personal Law under the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 does insist on solemnisation of marriage, through saptapadi (seven steps around fire) and datta (invocation before fire). Section 7(2) of the Act, just like Manusmriti (8.227), provides that marriage is completed on the seventh step. Sapinda relationship, adoption and Hindu Joint Family rules too are based on the Hindu Personal Law.

Surprisingly when two Hindus marry under the Special Marriage Act, 1954 (Section 21A inserted in 1976), they continue to be governed by Hindu Personal Law, but if two Muslims marry under this legislation, the Muslim Personal Law (MPL) would no longer govern them. Interestingly, a person who renounces Hinduism too continues to be governed by the Hindu Personal Law.



GETTY IMAGES

The Constitution was not the starting point but a mere culmination of India's long-standing integrative traditions. In addition to the provisions that outlaw discrimination in all its forms, the Indian Constitution's commitment to cultural accommodation is visible through a near-absolute fundamental right in Article 29(1) dedicated exclusively to conserving the distinctive culture of all citizens. However, do Muslims of India have the courage to argue that polygamy or arbitrary unilateral divorce even in anger or while in an intoxicated state could be considered a part of their culture?

**Unity more than uniformity**  
That said, the Commission must bear in its recommendation that for a diverse and multicultural polity such as India, the proposed UCC must be emblematic of India's 'mosaic model' of multiculturalism. The logic is invariably obvious – a homogenising lithification of identities must not become a mirage for flourishing diversity (something that has consistently remained peculiar to the American model of multiculturalism). After all, unity is far more important than

uniformity. The British brought homogeneity amongst Hindus and Muslims by grossly undermining heterogeneity within the two religious communities.

Under the Indian Constitution, the right to cultural autonomy defends the Indian model of multiculturalism. Prominent scholars on multiculturalism such as Rochana Bajpai suggest that the Indian Constitution offers two major approaches with respect to accommodation of difference – integrationist and restricted multicultural. While the affirmative action policies largely land in the first approach's camp, for Ms. Bajpai, "state assistance to minority cultures has been seen as an illegitimate concession [...]" and is often termed as 'appeasement of minorities'.

This, as Ms. Bajpai furthers, leaves cultural difference without any robust constitutional normative underpinnings. In short, it is through these two approaches that the Constitution makes way for cultural accommodation and a celebration of group differences. Accordingly, the 21st Law Commission (2015-18) had boldly favoured equality

between men and women in communities rather than aiming for equality between communities. A just code should be the primary goal as just laws are more important than a mere one uniform law.

Having this discussion as the backdrop, India's tryst with preserving its multicultural diversity is often found at the crossroads with values such as secularism. Despite secularism being a fundamental tenet governing the Indian polity, India decided not to adopt the French model of *laïcité*, which strictly prohibits bearing any religious outfit or marker in public; that considers religion in public as a threat (and not a prominent promoter) to the nation's secular fabric – thus pushing it within only the four walls of the domestic household. Indian society, therefore, 'accommodates' and not just 'tolerates' the wide array of group and ethnic differences.

When groups claim and effectuate their multi-ethnic traditions without impinging on the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens, their traditions and values acquire the status of social mores for they fulfil a much broader purpose of social and national integration.

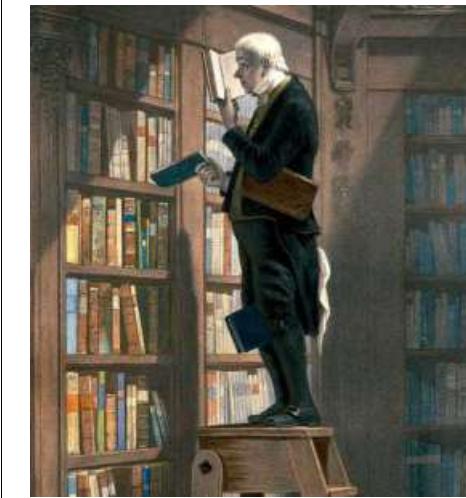
However, a claim of such broad nature invites limitations inherent – in the name of personal laws and practices, what deserves legal protection and promotion and what does not. Right to cultural-relativism cannot justify continuation of unjust and discriminatory personal laws. Such provisions of the personal laws must be made consistent with substantive equality and gender justice goals espoused in the Constitution.

#### Hurdles on the path ahead

Simultaneously, we must understand that when a community feels threatened in any way, whether rightly or wrongly so, the collective esteem of its members becomes woven to the community, and community allegiance becomes much stronger. Therefore, one hopes that the Law Commission of India would not contribute to the rise of reactive culturalism amongst different communities in India, including Muslims. The Muslim community too must understand that the MPL and Islam are not one and the same. The MPL is a jurist given law and is not entirely divine. In fact, it is more appropriate to call it Anglo-Muhammadan law that was derived in certain matters from the erroneously translated secondary sources rather than the Koran and Sunna of the Prophet. British courts treated juristic opinions in the MPL on a par with statutory laws enacted by the legislature and by insisting on the British doctrine of precedent, they further brought in a lot of rigidity in the MPL. If MPL reforms that rely on inter-school borrowing could be accepted by the Ulema way back in 1939, why cannot this be done today? Let the Muslim clergy come forward and lead the MPL reform process by identifying the discriminatory and oppressive issues and adopt the views of progressive jurists.

As the Commission proposes an overhauling secularisation of various socio-religious-cultural practices that have been the mainstay of thousands of religious and ethnic communities since times immemorial, the path ahead is not going to be free from hurdles. In the words of political philosopher Iris Young, as the value of social difference is more relational and is itself a product of social processes, we believe that it will be incumbent upon the Commission to strike a fine balance as it should aim to eliminate only those practices that do not meet the benchmarks set by the Constitution.

*Faizan Mustafa is an expert in constitutional law. Anant Sangal is an advocate practising law before the Supreme Court of India*



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

# Know your English

**K. Subrahmanian**

"Dr. S. Ramanujam, Defence Food Research Laboratory, Mysore wants to know whether 'put up' is correctly used in the sentence 'Put up the letter at the next meeting'."

"'Put up' in this sentence is correctly used. 'Put up' here means 'present an idea etc. for discussion or consideration'.

*You must put up a specific proposal for the project.*

'Put up' has several meanings. 'Put up' means 'to build or raise into position'.

*Who has put up this tent here?*

*Put up your hand if you want to attend the party.*

It also means 'to show, give in a fight or competition'.

*They put up a stiff fight.*

*They put up a good show at the function.*

'Put up' also means 'to fix or fasten something in a place where it can be seen, display something'.

*Please put up the notice in a prominent place.*

Another meaning of 'put up' is 'to raise or increase'.

*Vegetable vendors put up the price of vegetables the day the curfew was lifted.*

It also means 'to provide food and lodging for'.

*I am sorry I can't put you up in my place as I have a lot of guests.*

*I put up at an ordinary hotel when I went to Pune.*

'Put up for something' means 'to suggest as being suitable for a job, etc.'

*I am planning to put her up for the post of Secretary of the Club.*

'Put somebody up to something' means 'urge or encourage someone to do something mischievous or illegal'.

*He is a nice chap. But what he has done is unbelievable. Somebody must have put him up to it.*

'To put up with something or some one' is 'to tolerate or bear'.

*I don't know how she puts up with her husband.*

*We have to put up with the situation.*

*There is no way out.*

'A put-up job' is 'a scheme to cheat or deceive someone'.

*I didn't realise it was a put-up job.*

'Put upon' means 'badly treated, misused or exploited'. This is used as an adjective.

*I feel rather put-upon when I am treated like that.*

*Everyone is sorry that she is a put-upon person.*

'Put up' has so many meanings. You have to put up with them."

"Mr. B. N. Prasanna, Second Mail Road, Vyalikaval, Bangalore, wants to know whether there is a general term for words like breathalyser (breath plus analyser), brunch (breakfast plus lunch), exploitation (sex plus exploitation)."

"These words have been formed by combining parts of two words and their meanings. Such words are called portmanteau words. Some more words: motel, guesstimate, sexticing."

*Published in The Hindu on January 14, 1991.*

## THE DAILY QUIZ

The Grammy Awards 2024 ended on a high note with female artists making history. Here is a quiz on the winners of the coveted musical accolades

**Abhinaya. K**

**QUESTION 1**  
Singer Tyla took home a Grammy for her hit song "Water". She won the award for a category that was inaugurated this year. Name the category.

**QUESTION 2**  
Meryl Streep, William Shatner, Bernie Sanders, and Michelle Obama were all nominated for a Grammy. The former first lady won the accolade. Identify the category under which they were all nominated.

**QUESTION 3**  
This R&B artist was nominated for seven Grammys and won three of them. Her two-year-old daughter made history as the Grammy's youngest

nominee as she was nominated along with her mother for best traditional R&B performance. Identify the artist.

**QUESTION 4**  
American singer-songwriter Olivia Rodrigo won the Grammy for Best New Artist this year for her hit album 'Guts'. Is the statement true or false?

**QUESTION 5**  
This comedian hosted the show again this year, marking his fourth consecutive turn at the helm of the ceremony. He was also nominated for a Grammy. Name the comedian and the winner of the category.

**QUESTION 6**  
Apart from a song from *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, all the other songs in this category including the winner, were from the same movie. Identify the movie.



**Visual question:**  
This artist won the most awards at Grammys 2024. She won three awards as a member of a rock band. Name the band. AP

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. The name of the collection of short pieces Dickens originally published in various newspapers. **Ans:** Sketches by Boz

2. The term used to describe something reminiscent of Dickens and his writings. **Ans:** Dickensian

3. This Dickens' character is a wealthy spinster who insists on wearing her wedding dress for the rest of her life. **Ans:** Miss Havisham

4. This writer remarked that *Great Expectations* was more seductive than the Das Kapital. **Ans:** George Bernard Shaw

5. This word is most associated with Scrooge. It is referred to in the novella *A Christmas Carol* like this. **Ans:** Humbug, "Bah! Humbug!"

6. Name the two cities in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*. **Ans:** London, Paris

7. Identify the character and the novel. **Ans:** Samuel Pickwick; *The Pickwick Papers*

**Early Birds:** Varghese Joseph| C. Saravanan| Dipankar Baidya| Vasudha A. S.| Sadhan Kumar Panda

## Word of the day

**Kvetch:**

express complaints, discontent, displeasure, or unhappiness

**Synonyms:** kick, sound off, plain, complain

**Usage:** She's kvetching all the time about her new job.

**Pronunciation:** bit.ly/kvetchpro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /kvɛtʃ/

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

## From Page One

## Opposition is creating a 'North-South' divide: PM

Attacking the erstwhile governments of the Congress, Mr. Modi said the country had crossed over from 'fragile five' and 'policy paralysis' in the last 10 years and now it is among the top five economies in the world. "That is how the world talks about us today," he said.

Countering Opposition leader Mallikarjun Kharge's arguments that the Centre is denying jobs to the SC, ST and OBC youth by not filling vacancies in the government and PSUs, Mr. Modi said his government took steps to ensure education and employment for the marginalised people. He said abrogation of Article 370 ensured that these communities in Jammu and Kashmir get the same rights as the rest of the country. "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas is not just a slogan, it is Modi's guarantee," Mr. Modi said, adding that the number of PSUs in the country increased from 234 in 2014 to 254 today, and most of them were giving record returns drawing the attention of investors.

The Prime Minister expressed confidence that the NDA would retain power with 400 seats and listed the agenda for the next five years. "Modi 3.0 will leave no stone unturned to strengthen the foundations of developed India," he said.

## Karnataka leaders hit out at Centre in Delhi

Mr. Siddaramaiah asserted that they were protesting the "gross injustice" perpetrated by the Union government in the devolution of taxes, grant-in-aid, non-release of drought relief and denial of permissions to take up water resources projects for the past few years.

Stating that Karnataka ranks second in Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection and is the biggest contributor to the country's revenue, Mr. Shrivakumar said, "We are asking for our rights, we are asking for our share".

Mr. Siddaramaiah demanded that the Centre set right the losses to the tune of ₹1.87 lakh crore since 2017 allegedly incurred by Karnataka under the 15th Finance Commission.

He claimed that the Centre has been providing ₹2.80 lakh crore to Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan are also given grants, even though these States have not taken any step to control population growth.

"We have no objection in allocating more funds to the northern States. But our request is not to commit injustice to our State", the CM said.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said top leaders from Karnataka protested at the Jantar Mantar to safeguard the interests of the whole State.

## All States neglected by Modi regime: Pinarayi

Addressing presspersons at Kerala House here, Mr. Vijayan said he was hopeful that many of the leaders of the Opposition's INDIA bloc would participate in the protests. He said that if every party came together, the BJP would be defeated.

Kerala Finance Minister K.N. Balagopal said the protest was not a "political drama". "States are facing arbitrary reduction from their revenue dues. It is not just an issue of southern States," Mr. Balagopal said, adding that the State government would protest against this decrease in allocations legally and politically.

Mr. Vijayan said Ministers, legislators, and parliamentarians from the State would actively participate in the protest. "We have had to resort to such an unprecedented struggle as it is essential for Kerala's survival and advancement. This agitation is intended to safeguard the Constitutional rights of all States, not merely Kerala's. The aim of this struggle is not to triumph over anyone, but to secure what we rightfully deserve instead of surrendering. We believe that the entire country will stand with Kerala in support," he said.

## Sharad Pawar's faction gets a longer name

Congratulating his ally Ajit Pawar, Mr. Fadnavis said the EC decision "was along expected lines" as had happened with the Samajwadi Party in 2017 and the Shiv Sena in 2022.

**'Stabbed democracy in the back'**  
Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut – an ally of Sharad Pawar's group in the MVA coalition – alleged that the Election Commission had "stabbed democracy in the back" through its decision to recognise Ajit Pawar's faction as the real NCP.

Speaking in New Delhi, Mr. Raut said both the Shiv Sena and the NCP had been weakened because these were the only two parties that protected Marathi 'asmita' (identity) and raised their voices against injustice being done to Maharashtra. He dared both Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and Deputy CM Ajit Pawar to form their own respective parties and face the people before the elections.

Meanwhile, Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar said that his decision on the NCP split, which is expected next week, would be solely based on merit and would have no relation with the EC's decision.

## Uttarakhand Assembly passes Uniform Civil Code

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami terms it a 'historic moment'; Congress MLAs say they are not against the Bill, but that its provisions need to be examined in detail so that flaws can be removed

Ishita Mishra  
NEW DELHI

The Uttarakhand Assembly passed the Uniform Civil Code on Wednesday, despite the Opposition's demand that the Bill be handed over to the House's select committee first.

Terming it a "historic moment", Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami said the Assembly had become the first legislature in Independent India to pass a Bill that imposes common rules for all communities – except Scheduled Tribes – on marriage, divorce, inheritances, and live-in relationships.

In his final address before Speaker Ritu Khanduri Bhushan called for a voice vote on the UCC Bill, Mr. Dhami said that the legislation would end the injustice faced by women for centuries. Mentioning the Shah Bano and Saira Bano cases, the Chief Minister said that anti-social elements wanted to keep different communities divided for political benefits.

Referencing B.R. Ambedkar, Mr. Dhami claimed that certain clauses mentioned in the Constitution were misused from time to time by certain anti-social, anti-national people. "Certain mistakes were done in the Indian Constitution which now need to be corrected," he said, listing other countries such as Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Japan, the United States, Canada, Bangladesh and Indonesia that have implemented a uniform civil code.

**'Not opposing'**

Congress MLAs said they were not opposing the UCC Bill, but claimed that its provisions need to be examined in detail so that any flaws can be removed before it is passed. Tilak Raj Behar, the Congress MLA from Kichcha, said that Article 44 of the Constitution, which is the basis of the Bill, refers to the UCC in the context of the whole country and not just one State.

Pointing out a contradiction in the Bill, Adesh Singh Chauhan, the Congress MLA from Jaspur, said the Bill leaves the tribal population out of its



BJP supporters greet Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami in Dehradun after the passage of the Uniform Civil Code Bill. PTI

ambit, even while claiming that it would apply to the whole of the State.

The UCC is based on a draft submitted by a committee formed by the Uttarakhand government under the chairmanship of retired Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai. The Bill was one of the BJP's poll promises during the 2022 Assembly election campaign in Uttarakhand.

Asaduddin Owaisi, president of All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen, said the Bill was nothing but a Hindu Code made applicable for all. "Firstly, Hindu undivided family has not been touched. Why? If you want a uniform law for succession and inheritance, why are Hindus kept out of it? Can a law be uniform if it doesn't apply to the majority of your State?" he asked.

One contentious aspect highlighted by the spokesperson was the equalisation of inheritance rights between genders, which conflicts with the principles of Islamic law, clearly categorised by the Koran.

Nothing more than political propaganda, says AIMPLB

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has dismissed the Bill as "mere eyewash and nothing more than political propaganda".

"The Bill is inappropriate, unnecessary, and against diversity. Its real target is only Muslims as even the Scheduled Tribes have been exempted. It has been rushed to gain political advantage. This legislation, rushed through in a hurried manner, deals only with three aspects – the sphere of marriage and divorce in a cursory manner; and thereafter deals with succession laws; and finally live-in relationships, which undoubtedly will impinge on moral values of all the religions," S.Q.R. Ilyas, the spokesperson of the Board, said.

One contentious aspect highlighted by the spokesperson was the equalisation of inheritance rights between genders, which conflicts with the principles of Islamic law, clearly categorised by the Koran.

adults to form legitimate "intimate associations".

The Chief Justice said the right to intimate associations came within the ambit of free speech and expression enshrined as a fundamental right under Article 19(c) of the Constitution. The CJI observed that the freedom of speech and expression was not limited to expressive words and included other forms of expression like that of sexual identity, choice of partner, and the expression of sexual desire to a consenting party.

**Freedom to choose**  
The Chief Justice noted that courts have traditionally not permitted the state to interfere in certain kinds of personal relationships.

The CJI had cautioned how the state could directly or indirectly infringe on the right of a person to enjoy the society of one's partner. This could be done directly through a law prohibiting such relationships or by "refusing sufficient space to exercise that freedom".

Live-in relationships are not prohibited in law. In fact, the Supreme Court, in *S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal*, had held that live-in relationships come within the ambit of right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 states that a live-in relationship fell within the ambit of a domestic relationship.

## Opposition uproar over coal mine project in Chhattisgarh

Subhomoy Sikdar  
RAIPUR

Arguing that tree felling for a coal mine project in the Hasdeo-Arand area of Chhattisgarh would have detrimental effects on the region's flora, fauna, and tribal communities, the Opposition on Wednesday caused an uproar in the State Assembly.

Leader of the Opposition Charan Das Mahant moved an adjournment motion notice seeking discussion on the issue and dissatisfied with the chair's decision to disallow the same, Congress MLAs stormed into the well of the House, leading to their automatic suspension. However, the Speaker revoked their suspension later.

**'No action taken'**  
Moving the motion during the Zero Hour, Mr. Mahant highlighted that the Assembly had unanimously passed a private member resolution urging the Centre to cancel all coal blocks in the Hasdeo area in July 2022. He noted that despite the government's subsequent communication with the Centre regarding this, no action had been taken.

Claiming that ahead of Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sa's oath-taking ceremony, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests issued an order on December 11 last year to fell 15,307 trees on 91.3 hectares of forest land for the project, he wondered how could such an order be issued when the Assembly had already passed the aforementioned resolution.

Former CM Bhupesh Baghel said the matter was a serious issue.

## Puja in the southern cellar of Gyanvapi mosque to continue

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

The puja in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi will continue as of now as the Allahabad High Court has adjourned for next week the hearing on the plea filed by the mosque committee challenging the January 31 order of the Varanasi district court permitting Hindus to offer prayers there.

During the hearing that took place before Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal on Tuesday and Wednesday, senior advocate S.F.A. Naqvi, counsel for the Anjum Intezamia Mosque Committee, which runs the Gyanvapi mosque, maintained that Muslims always had the possession of the mosque and no puja had ever been offered there.

Advocate Harishankar Jain and Vishnu Jain, appearing for the Hindu side, claimed that it was in 1993 when the puja was stopped in this particular cellar on

## The court posted the matter for Feb. 12 as the arguments could not conclude due to paucity of time

the orders of the then Samajwadi Party-led State government. Prior to it, Somnath Vyas and his family were doing regular pujas inside the cellar, they said.

Justice Agarwal orally remarked that neither the Vyas family nor the mosque committee could *pri-ma facie* prove that they were in possession of the southern cellar of the mosque. He posted the matter for February 12.

The Varanasi district court on Wednesday allowed prayers to be offered inside the 'Yas Ka Tehkhan' (sealed basement) area of the Gyanvapi mosque complex. The district administration broke the barricades outside the basement within hours of the court order, and puja was performed soon after.

## 'BJP and BJD are operating in partnership in Odisha'

The Hindu Bureau  
BHUBANESWAR

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday targeted the Naveen Patnaik government in Odisha, saying that it was operating in "partnership" with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Addressing a rally at Rourkela during the second day of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the State, Mr. Gandhi said Mr. Patnaik had always supported the saffron party and that the Congress was fighting a lone battle against the "BJP-JD(B)-BJP partnership" in Odisha.

As part of its strategy, the State Congress unit has tried to position itself as the principal Opposition in Odisha while projecting the BJP as an undeclared partner of the ruling BJD.

To drive its point, it had recently organised a mock wedding between the BJD and the BJP.

Since 2017, the Congress has slipped to a distant third in local body, As-

## Uttarakhand code challenges right to 'intimate associations'

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) passed in Uttarakhand, which requires consenting adults who intend to enter a live-in relationship to submit a "joint statement" to that effect before a "Registrar", dares individuals' freedom to form "intimate associations" without state monitoring or regulation.

Section 381 of the Uttarakhand's common civil code empowers the Registrar to examine the statement submitted by prospective live-in partners, conduct an "enquiry" to check if the relationship between the couple is not a "prohibited" one and even summon them. A 30-day time is given for the State authority to enter the statement in a register and issue the couple a "registration certificate" which clears them to enter into a live-in relationship.

Asaduddin Owaisi, president of All India Majlis-E-Ittehadul Muslimeen, said the Bill was nothing but a Hindu Code made applicable for all. "Firstly, Hindu undivided family has not been touched. Why? If you want a uniform law for succession and inheritance, why are Hindus kept out of it? Can a law be uniform if it doesn't apply to the majority of your State?" he asked.

One contentious aspect highlighted by the spokesperson was the equalisation of inheritance rights between genders, which conflicts with the principles of Islamic law, clearly categorised by the Koran.

Rahul Gandhi waves at supporters during the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in Rourkela on Wednesday. PTI

sembly and Lok Sabha elections.

Mr. Gandhi also raised the issue of labour migration indicating that it reflected the failure of governance in the State. "While 30 lakh people have migrated to other States in search of jobs, the State's resources are being allowed to be plundered by 30 crorepati industrialists from outside Odisha," said the Congress leader.

On the issue of unemployment, Mr. Gandhi said the country was facing its worst-ever unemployment crisis in the past 40 years

and Odisha was a leading State with high unemployment.

He alleged that tribal people, Dalit, and backward people in the State were subjected to oppression and torture.

During a press meet, senior Congress leader and former Union Minister Jairam Ramesh also targeted the "unholy" nexus between the BJD and the BJP.

Mr. Gandhi is expected to complete his Odisha leg of Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra on Thursday when he would enter Chhattisgarh through Jharsuguda district of Odisha.

## Kuki-Zo delegation meets Home Ministry officials

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

A nine-member delegation of Kuki-Zo groups met a team of officials from the Union Home Ministry on Wednesday, where they raised the scrapping of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with Myanmar, and the January 24 Kangla Fort incident in Imphal when Arambai Tengol, a radical Meitei group, administered oath to elected representatives to "protect the integrity of Manipur".

The meeting that was led by A.K. Mishra, Adviser, attended the meeting said that the demand for a separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people still exists and that they would continue to press for it.

The meeting comes after Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh met Mr. Shah in Delhi on February 3.

## Issues raised include scrapping of FMR, Kangla Fort incident and power outages in hill districts

said that the government had decided to construct a fence along the 1,643-km border with Myanmar, effectively ending the FMR.

Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar, residing within 16 km of either side of the border, can cross the border on the production of a border pass, usually valid for a year, and can stay up to two weeks per visit.

India and Myanmar share an unfenced border and people on either side, including the Kuki-Zo peo-

ple, have familial and ethnic ties that prompted the arrangement in the 1970s.

The Free Movement Regime was last revised in 2016.

**Continued violence**  
Mr. Singh has on several occasions in the past attributed the ongoing ethnic violence in the State to the unregulated movement of people from across the border.

Manipur has been affected by ethnic violence between the tribal Kuki-Zo people and the Meitei community since May 2023.

## PM's address did not touch upon key issues: Opposition

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



In spite of spending a decade in power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is still going on about the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said, reacting to Mr. Modi's reply in the Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address. Other parties too pointed out that the Prime Minister's speech did not touch upon any relevant issues.

Mr. Kharge, in a post on X, also listed out the "falsehoods" in the speech on the UPA years.

Unemployment rate in the UPA years was at 2.2% but under the BJP regime, it has hit the highest in 45 years, Mr. Kharge said.

In the UPA's decade, Mr. Kharge said, the average GDP growth rate was 8.13% but in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) years, it was only 5.6%. "We brought 14 crore people out of poverty in 10 years. By truncating our speeches, you are spreading confusion and lies," he added.

"It is heartbreaking that the gap between our exports and imports has increased three times in the last 10 years and despite knowing this fact, the government does not accept

Mallikarjun Kharge

it as a problem and does not do anything about it," he said.

Mr. Kharge said that Mr. Modi's speech in both Houses was centred around criticism of the Congress. "Even today he did not talk about inflation, employment or economic situation," he said.

Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien called Mr. Modi's speech a "long Mann Ki Baat". "His government has converted Parliament into a deep, dark chamber. No guarantees about employment, price rise, Manipur. Hollow words about federalism from a man who has blood on his hands for butchering federalism," Mr. O'Brien said in a post on X.

CPI MP Binoy Viswam, said the speech was replete with propaganda. "He was playing to the gallery with an eye on elections," he said.

He said that in 2014, the total debt of the government was a little above ₹55 lakh crore but in 10 years,

## Modi govt. is all talk and no action, says Shashi Tharoor

He accuses Centre of playing a game of smoke and mirrors during a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the interim Budget; BJP MP hits back, says 'Ram Rajya' has been ushered in India under Modi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



Leading the Opposition charge in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday when the House took up discussion on the interim Budget, Congress leader Shashi Tharoor asked the Narendra Modi government "kiska saath aur kiska viwas" when poor, women, youth, and farmers were among the "worst-performing groups" economically.

He accused the government of playing a game of "smoke and mirrors" and claimed that it was "all talk and no action".

Separately, opening the discussion on the Finance Bill, Congress leader Manish Tewari raised the issue of fiscal deficit to the tune of ₹17 lakh crore-₹18 lakh crore every year since 2021. "If the government is borrowing ₹17 lakh crore to ₹18 lakh crore every year, the access of the private sector to market finance, therefore, gets restricted. That is why your investment to GDP ratio is restricted to 29.02%," Mr. Tewari said.

He said that in 2014, the total debt of the government was a little above ₹55 lakh crore but in 10 years,

Hitting back: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor speaking in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament on Wednesday. ANI

the debt had trebled to over ₹168 lakh crore.

In a sharp retort to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's remarks describing GDP as governance, development and performance, Mr. Tharoor said that G stands for governmental intrusion and tax terrorism under the current regime", D for "demographic betrayal", and P for "poverty continuing".

"This actual 'GDP' also jettisons the trinity of 'demography, democracy and diversity' that the government claims to be serving. The demographic dividend is on the cusp of becoming a demographic disaster with the unemployment crisis, K-shaped growth,

and the ever-widening schism between the rich and poor," he said.

Mr. Tharoor claimed democracy is suffering through the government's "arrogant contempt" for institutions and cited the suspension of 146 MPs in the Winter Session.

Hitting back, BJP MP Nishikant Dubey accused the Congress of trying to create a "North-South divide" in the country and asserted that "Ram Rajya" has been ushered in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "We are poor, our people go there to work. The entire country knows that more than 80% of the mines are in Jharkhand, Odisha, Ben-

### Lok Sabha clears Finance Bill

**NEW DELHI**  
The Lok Sabha on Wednesday cleared the Finance Bill, 2024 after Union Minister Pankaj Chaudhary addressed issues raised during the debate and moved it for passage. Congress leader Manickam Tagore termed the debate "another low in Parliament" and said he had "never seen a Finance Bill without" the Finance Minister's reply.

gal, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh... Did we say we are rich? Did we say South India should not be developed?" he asked.

Union Minister Smriti Irani, who represents Amethi, said for 48 years her constituency had a Congress MP but there was no development. "Only when Mr. Modi came to power, 10 lakh Jan Dhan bank accounts were opened," she said.

NCP MP Supriya Sule said the majority of the wealth in the country was in the hands of top 1% of the population. If the government's claims of reducing poverty were true, the why was it not showing the numbers, she asked.

### IN BRIEF



### Budget Session extended by a day, White Paper to be tabled

The Budget Session will be extended by a day and will sit on Saturday, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla informed the House on Wednesday. Earlier, the session was slated to end on February 9. Mr. Birla said Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi informed him of one day of extra sitting because of urgent government business. Though he did not specify the urgent business, the Centre is set to table a White Paper on economy that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced on February 1 while presenting the interim Budget. She had said it would bring out the state of the economy before and after 2014.

### Former SC judge Khanwilkar likely to be the new Lokpal

Former Supreme Court judge A.M. Khanwilkar is likely to be appointed the next Lokpal of India after a high-level committee comprising Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, and Leader of the single largest Opposition party, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury of the Congress, met on Wednesday to discuss the shortlisted names. A separate meeting was held to fill up a vacancy in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) which was attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Mr. Modi and Mr. Chowdhury. Sources said A.S. Rajeev, Managing Director of Bank of Maharashtra, has been selected, while Mr. Chowdhury submitted a dissent note. Another meeting to fill up an upcoming vacancy in the Election Commission was deferred.

## Will remain with NDA: Nitish after meeting PM

**Amar Nath Tewary**  
PATNA

nister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda.



The Janata Dal(U) leader had joined hands with the BJP again on January 28 after severing ties with the Mahagatbandhan (grand alliance) which was then in power in the State.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Congress, and the Left parties are part of the grand alliance.

He then took oath as the Chief Minister for the ninth time, along with two Deputy CMs from the BJP and six Ministers.

On February 12, the new NDA government will seek a vote of confidence in the State Assembly.

On the question of seat-

sharing arrangements for the upcoming Lok Sabha poll, Mr. Kumar said, "These things will be discussed later."

Of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar, the BJP and the JD(U) had each contested 17 in the 2019 election, leaving six seats for their other ally, the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas). The BJP won all 17 seats, while the JD(U) won 16 seats.

This time round, both parties will find it hard to spare seats as their other allies – the Hindustani

Awam Morcha (Secular) led by former Chief Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi and the Upendra Kushwaha-led Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal – will also have to be given some seats.

Mr. Kumar's agenda for his meet with the top leadership was likely to have included his demand for a special package to Bihar; the upcoming Rajya Sabha election scheduled to be held on February 27, and the six seats becoming vacant from the State; and the floor test.

## Dhankhar rejects Kharge's request to restore expunged parts of speech

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday objected to Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar's decision to expunge significant portions of his speech during the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address.

In a late evening ruling, Mr. Dhankhar declined Mr. Kharge's request.

Mr. Kharge said that truncating his address created a perception that he supported the government's claim of winning more than 400 seats.

Raising the issue during the Zero Hour, Mr. Kharge said two pages from his February 2 speech were removed, leading to distortion of intent. "I had raised certain points... they have been removed from the record," he said, and emphasised that he had not taken anybody's name nor violated any rules.

Mr. Dhankhar declined Mr. Kharge's request arguing that the Leader of the Opposition concluded his address nearly 50 minutes after making the said remarks and he had "sufficient time to revisit his thoughts". "The perceptual impact of any observation made in the House cannot be a premise for taking a different view as per Rules," he said.

## BJP hits back as Opposition parties raise issue of 'North-South divide'

### NEWS ANALYSIS

**Nistula Hebbar**  
NEW DELHI



Countermeasures: BJP leader Tejasvi Surya addresses a press conference at the party headquarters in Delhi on Wednesday. ANI

On Wednesday, the BJP appeared to hit back. A number of leaders from Tamil Nadu, including 15 former MLAs and one former MP, joined the BJP in New Delhi at noon, amid cries of "Bharat Mata ki Jai". Most of these leaders were from the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), a former BJP ally, and their entry into the party took place in the presence of Union Ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar and L. Murugan and State BJP president K. Annamalai.

**Impact of new entries**  
With their arrival in the party's fold, party feels its acceptability will be increased in Tamil Nadu, where it has had limited success.

Meanwhile, BJP MPs from Karnataka addressed a press meet at the party headquarters in New Delhi, lashing out at the Congress government over its claim that Karnataka was not receiving funds from the Central pool proportionate to its contribution.

Tejasvi Surya, BJP MP from Bangalore South, alleged that the protest by the Karnataka Congress was an "alibi" for the State government, which was finding that it could not fulfil unrealistic promises made during the Assembly election.

Mr. Surya said the Con-

gress had promised 10 kg free rice to the poor before the election but realised after coming to power that the State could not procure enough rice, and began blaming the Centre.

He added that the total tax devolution to the State during the 2004-2014 rule of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was ₹8,795 crore while it jumped by 250% to ₹2,85,452 crore during the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government. The grant-in-aids during the corresponding periods were ₹60,779 crore and ₹2,08,832 crore, respectively, he said.

Union Minister V. Muraleedharan and BJP Kerala in-charge Prakash Javadekar took on the Congress government over its plan to protest in New Delhi on Thursday, again over the question of insufficient Central funds to the State. The statement said that it was the financial profligacy demonstrated by both the Left Democratic Front and United Democratic Fund governments in Kerala, and not the Centre, that had left the State in a bad financial condition.

TAMIL NADU TRANSMISSION CORPORATION LTD Notice Inviting Tenders (E-Tendering Process)			
Sl.No	Tender Inviting Authority	Specification No	Total
1	SE/TRANSMISSION-II	T-2301	1
2	CE/P&C/Chennai	P&C-1089	1

For details of Works / Procurement / Due date of submission / opening, viewing and downloading of e-tenders, please visit websites: [www.tantransco.gov.in](http://www.tantransco.gov.in), [www.tenders.in.gov.in](http://www.tenders.in.gov.in), [www.intenders.gov.in/nicgcp/app](http://www.intenders.gov.in/nicgcp/app)

DIPR/738/Tender/2024

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## IN BRIEF



## Court extends ED remand of Hemant Soren for five days

A special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court on Wednesday extended the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) remand of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren in alleged land scam case for five more days. The ED on Wednesday produced Mr. Soren before the court and sought seven days' remand. However, special court judge Dinesh Rai granted only five days' remand after hearing the arguments from both sides. The ED had arrested Mr. Soren on January 31 after questioning him for over seven hours. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader then went to the Raj Bhavan and resigned from the State's top post.

## Over 2,000 suffer from food poisoning at event in Nanded

Over 2,000 people suffered from food poisoning after consuming food during a religious gathering held at a village in Maharashtra's Nanded district. The event took place on Tuesday, attracting locals from Sawargaon, Postwadi, Risangaon, and Maski villages, who consumed food. Sources said people started complaining of vomiting, headache, and loose motion in the early hours of Wednesday. Initially, 150 affected individuals were admitted to the sub-district hospital at Loha, and later, an additional 850 patients sought treatment at various health facilities. No fatalities occurred and all admitted patients are in stable condition, a senior official said.

## HC reserves order on bail plea of NewsClick's HR chief

NewsClick's Human Resources Department chief Amit Chakravarty on Wednesday urged the Delhi High Court to grant him bail in a case lodged against the news portal over allegations that it received money to spread "pro-China propaganda." The High Court reserved its order on the bail petition by Mr. Chakravarty, who turned an approver in the case last month, after the police said it has no objections if the relief is granted to him. Mr. Chakravarty's counsel said that he has been granted pardon in the case by the trial court and was also cooperating in the investigation.

## Arunachal centre rewilds 60 bear cubs in over two decades

India's only rehabilitation facility for the Asiatic bear has rewilded 60 bear cubs since its inception in 2001. Situated at the Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh's Pakke-Kessang district, the Centre for Bear Rehabilitation and Conservation (CBRC) is a joint venture of the State's Environment, Forest, and Climate Change Department and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). Of the total 60, four were rehabilitated from 2022 to 2023, the centre's head Panjiti Basumatary said. "A fourth cub died during rehabilitation during this period," he said. Apart from bear cubs, the CBRC has also been rescuing other wildlife species from different parts of the State. It recorded 23 rescue cases in 2023.

## Can't treat SCs as homogenous group, observes CJI-led Bench

The status of every caste may not be same in social hierarchy, says CJI; Centre says it is 'committed' to reservation policy; T.N. says the policy should evolve with the times or would get 'fossilised'

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

A seven-judge Constitution Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, on Tuesday observed that Scheduled Castes cannot be treated as a "homogenous group" for granting reservation as some may have advanced in society while others continue to remain "particularly underprivileged".

Meanwhile, the Centre assured the court it was "committed" to the reservation policy. The Tamil Nadu government, in its turn, said the reservation policy should evolve with the times or would get "fossilised".

The Constitution Bench is examining the question whether individual States could identify and sub-classify backward classes within the Scheduled Caste category in order to give them more preference in reservation.

The court said the diverse groups, clubbed together in the Presidential list under Article 341 of the Constitution as "Scheduled Castes", cannot be treated alike.

"What we have in the Presidential list is various



QQ The status of every caste may not be the same in the social hierarchy  
**D.Y. CHANDRACHUD**  
Chief Justice of India

castes who have suffered humiliation and dehumanisation put together... *Sapera* [snake charmer], *Bazigar* [acrobat], *Batwal* [watchman]... all with different occupations... The heterogeneity is clear from the Presidential list itself," senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for a petitioner, highlighted.

The Chief Justice agreed they were heterogeneous in terms of their pre-existing occupations, social status, and social indicators of backwardness or development. Over the decades, some of them had advanced while others continued to remain "particularly underprivileged", senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for a petitioner, highlighted.

In this verdict, 20 years ago, a five-judge Bench had held that Scheduled Castes were a "homogenous group" and sub-classification would be a violation of the right to equality.

**Social indicators**  
The Chief Justice said social indicators like infant mortality, maternal mor-

tality, and fertility rates would also broadly show whether there had been progress.

"The status of every caste may not be the same in the social hierarchy," the CJI noted.

The debate revealed that the Bench was exploring a diametrically opposite view from that held in a 2004 Constitution Bench judgment in the *E.V. Chinnaiah* case.

In this verdict, 20 years ago, a five-judge Bench had held that Scheduled Castes were a "homogenous group" and sub-classification would be a violation of the right to equality.

**Duty of States**  
Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Centre, acknowledged it was the duty of the State to remove barriers for the uplift of the backward classes. Mr. Meh-

ta said it was for a State to identify and recommend a backward group. The Parliament enacts the legislation, including declaring the group in the Scheduled Caste category. The State concerned has to implement the reservation, he explained.

**Weakest of the week**  
Senior advocate Shekhar Naphade, for Tamil Nadu, said it was within the prerogative of a State government to identify and sub-classify groups within the Scheduled Caste category in order to aid the "weakest of the weak".

"It has been the consistent policy of the Government of Tamil Nadu to ensure the upliftment of the lowest-rung sections of the society," Mr. Naphade, assisted by advocates Purnima Krishna and M.F. Philip, submitted in court.

The State was referring to the Tamil Nadu Arunthathiyars (Special Reservation) Act of 2009.

The Act had been brought into force to provide preferential reservation for the Arunthathiyar community, a historically oppressed class within Tamil Nadu, to get them on a par with other Scheduled Castes.

## Satellite-based toll collection may roll out before LS polls

**Jagriti Chandra**  
NEW DELHI



The government plans to implement satellite-based toll collection on highways before the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha election kicks in, Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari told the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

"We are trying to implement satellite-based toll system very soon, perhaps before the Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha election," Mr. Gadkari said.

The technology, which has been under the government's consideration for the past three years, will allow barrier-free movement of vehicles and they will not be required to stop for toll payments, the Minister said.

**Will replace FASTags**  
He explained that the photo of the registration plate of the vehicle will be captured and the toll amount will be debited based on the actual length of the highway traversed by the vehicle.

This will replace the radio frequency identification-based FASTag system that was rolled out in 2016 and made mandatory from January 2021.

A total of 8.13 crore FASTags have been issued and a penetration of 98% has

been achieved, according to the Minister.

While the government is in a rush to implement the new toll collection system before the election, an official of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways said on condition of anonymity that the concept for the technology being used was not yet finalised and was still in various stages of development.

An official of the National Highways Authority of India, which will be implementing the technology, said it has been tested in Delhi and Gurugram and a trial will soon be conducted in Bengaluru too. This will involve every vehicle registering for the Global Navigation Satellite System of toll collection to be equipped with an on-board unit (OBU) that will be linked to a constellation of satellites. The OBU will also be linked with a wallet from which the toll amount will be deducted.

## Lalit Kala Kendra case: V-C urged to file counter-complaint

**Maitri Porecha**  
NEW DELHI

**A faculty member and five students were arrested after an FIR was lodged against them for a play at SPPU**

Around 150 faculty members of Savitribai Phule Pune University (SPPU) met the university's Vice-Chancellor, Suresh Gosavi, on Wednesday to seek assurance that the university will file a counter-complaint against vandals allegedly associated with Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) who attacked a group of theatre students belonging to the Centre for Performing Arts, also known as the Lalit Kala Kendra.

Pravin Bhole, the theatre department head at Lalit Kala Kendra, and five students were arrested on February 3 and released on bail the same day after an FIR was registered against them based on a complaint by ABVP members for a play where a

male artiste portraying Sita was shown smoking a cigarette and allegedly using abusive language.

The play was enacted on February 2 as part of a practical exam assignment for which the MA Integrated (Theatre) course students were performing in an open-air auditorium on the campus.

A faculty member, who did not wish to be named, said, "One of our student's hands has been fractured. Some vandals stepped on another student's shoulder. Yet another student's right leg ligament has been stretched. Some girls also

sustained injuries in the scuffle."

The 15-minute play was a re-enactment of the backstage lives of Ramlila characters.

The faculty members have made five demands in a written representation to the V-C, accessed by *The Hindu*. They pressed upon the university to file a counter-complaint to the FIR filed by ABVP.

They have also asked the university to bear the entire legal fees for the arrested teachers and students. The teachers have sought strict action against the "vandals who sought to destroy the peace of the campus". The final demand was that the V-C take measures to prevent such untoward incidents.

Despite repeated follow-ups, SPPU Vice-Chancellor Suresh Gosavi refused to comment on the issue.

## CDS urges industry to work on counter-space capabilities

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



Calling upon industry to work on counter-space capabilities as a deterrent for safeguarding India's space assets, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan emphasised that the government is encouraging all the stakeholders, including start-ups, for the development of a dependable space ecosystem within the country.

"We probably had one start-up in 2014 which has grown to 204 start-ups in the space sector with 54 additions in 2023 itself. In 2023, we as a nation invested \$123 million in the sector, bringing the total funding to \$380.25 million," Gen. Chauhan said on Wednesday, addressing the three-day seminar and exhibition DEFSAT-2024, organised jointly by the

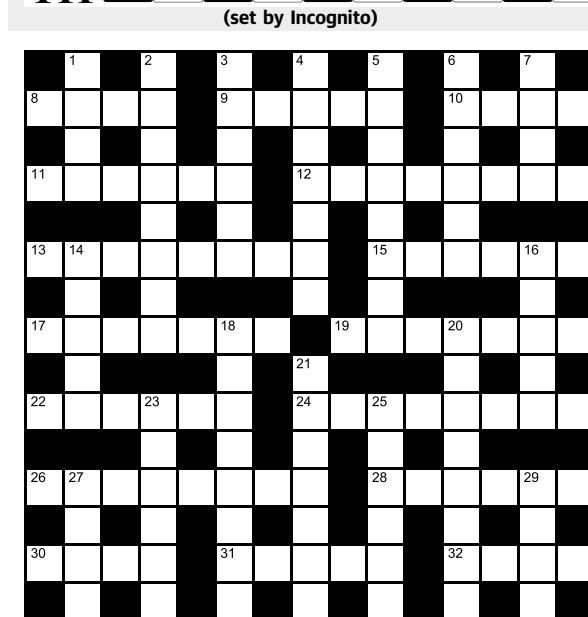
technology transfer have provided the rightful support to the private industry. This framework along with alignment of demands and funding support provide the right environment for the private sector to grow."

Mentioning the government's major initiatives in the space domain towards strengthening the capabilities of the armed forces, the CDS referred to the 75 space-related challenges as part of Mission Def-Space-2022 under the iDEX initiative.

"Under this initiative, a total of five contracts have been signed and an additional four contracts are at various stages of documentation. In similar timelines, a feasibility study of 12 Make-I (Make In India) challenges is also being progressed," Gen. Chauhan added.

"The government initiatives like seed fund scheme, 0% GST regime, sharing of testing facilities,

## TH CROSSWORD + 14092 (set by Incognito)



## Across

- 8 Males follow Twitter's movie (1-3)
- 9 Outstanding due (5)
- 10 Greek god rose awkwardly (4)
- 11 Pitroda gets nothing with South African snack (6)
- 12 Excitedly dating.. prancing around old prince and taking as one's own (8)
- 13 Satanic preparation of fine item of food (8)

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



## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

No. 526 Distribution: www.knightfeathers.com

Solution to previous puzzle

M	K	S	E	S	I	T
L	A	M	U	N	D	E
D	S	M	I	E	O	
F	A	T	H	O	M	
G	M	I	A	A		
P	A	K	I	N	T	
S	R	O	K	A		
A	C	A	T			
T	R	Y	O			
L	I	V	R			
E	V	U	T			
D	A	R	E			
R	S	S	P			

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

DUBAI

Yemen's Houthi rebels launch new attacks on two ships in Red Sea



Yemen's Houthi rebels launched six missiles toward two merchant ships on Tuesday, reportedly causing light damage to one of the vessels, the U.S. military said. The Iran-backed rebels, who control much of Yemen, have been harassing shipping in a campaign they say is in solidarity with Palestinians in the Israel-Hamas war. AFP

BEIRUT

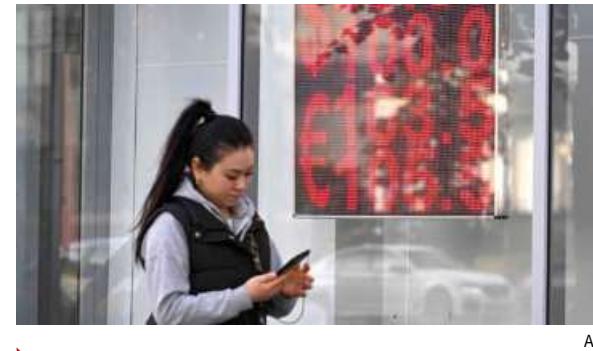
Six civilians among 10 dead in Israel strikes on Syria: war monitor



Six civilians were among 10 people killed in Israeli air strikes on the Syrian city of Homs early on Wednesday, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said. Three students and a woman were among the dead while Two Hezbollah fighters were also among the casualties, a source to the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group said. AFP

MOSCOW

Russia admits to encountering 'problems' with China payments



The Kremlin on Wednesday acknowledged that Russian companies faced problems with Chinese banks after a major Chinese lender had blocked payment settlements with Russian firms. Beijing has become Moscow's crucial economic partner since the start of Ukraine war. AFP

TAIPEI

Taiwan halts tourist groups to China after change to flight path



Taiwan ordered on Wednesday travel agencies to stop organising group tours to China following Beijing's adjustment of an aviation route that drew ire on the self-ruled island. It cited Beijing's "unilateral" decision to adjust the M503 route through the Taiwan Strait which "would impact aviation safety". AFP

# Israel PM rejects Hamas truce terms, vows to fight until 'absolute victory'

Benjamin Netanyahu's comments come shortly after meeting the visiting U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; he says surrendering to Hamas' delusional demands will not lead to freeing the captives, it will just invite another massacre

Associated Press  
TEL AVIV

Israel Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 7 rejected Hamas' terms for a ceasefire and hostage-release agreement, calling them "delusional," a position that complicates efforts to strike deal between the sides. Mr. Netanyahu vowed to press ahead with Israel's war against Hamas until achieving "absolute victory."

Mr. Netanyahu made the comments shortly after meeting the visiting U.S. Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, who has been traveling the region in hopes of securing a cease-fire agreement.



Grim reminder: A woman looks at a placard with photos of Israelis killed in Hamas's attack of October 7, in Jerusalem. GETTY IMAGES

## Saudi wants Palestinian state before Israel ties

Agence France-Presse  
RIYADH

Saudi Arabia has told Washington it will not establish ties with Israel until an independent Palestinian state "is recognised", the Gulf

kingdom's Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

Israeli "aggression" in Gaza must also stop and all Israeli forces must withdraw from the besieged territory, the statement said.

rangement that leaves Hamas in full or partial control of Gaza.

Hamas laid out a detailed, three-phase plan to unfold over 4 1/2 months, responding to a proposal drawn up by the United

States, Israel, Qatar and Egypt. The plan stipulates that all hostages would be released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, including senior militants, and an end to the war.

# Despite post-pandemic growth, Maldives at high risk of debt distress, warns IMF

Meera Srinivasan  
COLOMBO

Despite strong post-pandemic growth, the Maldives remains at high risk of debt distress, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned.

"Without significant policy changes, the overall fiscal deficits and public debt are projected to stay elevated, and the Maldives remains at high risk of external and overall debt distress," the IMF said, calling for "urgent policy adjustment".

The assessment echoed the World Bank's earlier assessment of the fiscal strain facing the Indian Ocean archipelago.

Acknowledging the challenge, President Mohamed Muizzu recently told parliament that his go-

vernment would adopt reform policy to improve the country's finances and bring debt and fiscal conditions to sustainable standards.

### Without significant policy changes, the overall fiscal deficits and public debt are projected to stay elevated, IMF said

Further, the expansion of the Velana airport terminal and likely increase in hotel accommodation capacities is projected to boost growth potential, it said.

**Chinese aid**  
During his visit to China in January this year, Mr. Muizzu sought Beijing's assistance in the second phase of the airport's expansion.

On the other hand, China has "agreed" to discuss a possible deferment of the debt the Maldives owes the Asian giant, Mr. Muizzu announced on his return.

China is the Maldives's largest bilateral creditor, and the island owes about \$1.4 billion to Beijing. The World Bank has estimated that the Maldives's debt to GDP ratio will remain over 115% this year.

## Haley loses to 'none of these candidates' option in Nevada

Associated Press  
LAS VEGAS



Nikki Haley

Nikki Haley was swamped in Nevada's symbolic Republican presidential primary as GOP voters resoundingly picked the "none of these candidates" option on the ballot in a repudiation of the former UN Ambassador who is the last remaining major rival to front-runner Donald Trump.

Mr. Trump did not compete in Tuesday's primary, which does not award any delegates needed to win the GOP nomination.

The former President is instead focused on caucuses that will be held on Thursday and will help him move closer to becoming the Republican standard-bearer.

**Meaningless results**  
That leaves the results on Tuesday as technically meaningless in the Republican race. But they still amount to an embarrass-

## Conflict in Myanmar is worrying India and Bangladesh: Dhaka

Kallol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

### So far 388 people have entered Bangladesh and the country has given them shelter, says Foreign Minister

The escalating conflict between Myanmar's military and ethnic armed organisations (EAO) is a matter of concern for both India and Bangladesh as both countries share borders with Myanmar, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh Hasan Mahmud said in New Delhi on Wednesday. Speaking to the media after meeting National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, the visiting Minister said the two sides were working on ensuring stability and regional security, and assured that new connectivity projects were likely to take off between India and Bangladesh in the coming months.

"We discussed the situation in Myanmar because the situation is getting worse day by day. So far, until today – this morning – 388 people, mostly border security guards of Myanmar, and Army per-

sonnel, have entered Bangladesh. We have given them shelter. We are in consultation with them so that they take them back," Mr. Mahmud said.

Mr. Mahmud is on his first visit abroad after taking charge as the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh on January 11.

"Our Ambassador in Myanmar has met with the Foreign Minister of Myanmar and they have agreed to take them back. How they will take them back – by ship or by air – that is a question of discussion," Mr. Mahmud said. Myanmar border guards and military personnel who are in Bangladesh featured in the talks with Mr. Doval, he said.

## EU and Hungary at odds once again over country's new 'sovereignty' law

Sriram Lakshman  
LONDON

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, launched an 'infringement procedure' into Hungary's new Defence of National Sovereignty law, setting Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on a collision course with the bloc. Under the controversial law, Hungarian author-

ties will be able to use the intelligence services to investigate individuals and organisations involved in the democratic and electoral process and allegedly receiving foreign funds.

**Violation of EU values**  
The Commission said the law, which came into effect in December, violated the democratic values of the EU and the right to privacy

of its citizens and the freedom of association among other concerns. Mr. Orbán claims the law is intended to curb foreign influence in Hungary.

Mr. Orbán, whose Fidesz party has a parliamentary majority, is no stranger to being isolated from his EU and Western allies. The Hungarian leader was initially an outlier blocking a \$54 billion EU

aid package for Ukraine announced on February 1. Mr. Orbán eventually lifted his veto.

He has also been holding out on a parliamentary vote to ratify Sweden's membership to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

The Hungarian government will have two months to respond to the EU's infringement notice.

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## IN BRIEF



## HDFC Bank raises \$750 mn through Regulation S Bonds

HDFC Bank said it had raised \$300 million through its first ever sustainable finance bond issue. This is part of an overall fund raising of \$750 million through Regulation S Bonds. While \$300 million has been raised for a tenure of three years with a 95 basis points spread over comparable U.S. Treasury notes, another \$450 million has been raised for a tenure of 5 years, with a spread of 108 basis points over U.S. Treasury notes, the private sector lender said.

## HUL announces key management changes

Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL) on Wednesday announced key changes to its management committee, effective April 1. Shiva Krishnamurthy (49) will join the committee as executive director, Foods and Refreshment. Srinandan Sundaram, currently executive director, Foods and Refreshment, will take over as the executive director, Homecare. Deepak Subramanian, executive director, Homecare, will be moving on to a new role overseas.

## IGL signs MoUs to set up 19 CBG plants in four States

Indraprastha Gas Ltd. (IGL) signed MoUs with two technology partners during 'India Energy Week 2024' to establish Compressed Biogas (CBG) plants in Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and U.P. The biogas produced from these 19 plants would be fed into IGL's City Gas Distribution (CGD) network. The partnership aims to produce 0.45 million metric standard cubic metres per day of biogas from waste, equivalent to 5% of IGL's daily requirements, the company said.

## Nadella's sales pitch for AI in India: start adopting fast or risk being left behind

**Aroon Deep**  
MUMBAI

Microsoft Corp's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella kicked off his India visit with a straightforward Artificial Intelligence (AI) pitch to Indian businesses: start deploying AI systems quickly, or fall behind. "The first [imperative] is to just adopt some of these products like Copilot fast," Mr. Nadella told an audience of business and technology executives here on Wednesday, referring to the company's interactive chatbot product.

Mr. Nadella compared the AI wave to Great Britain's massive investments in rail transportation, arguing that investments in the technology could boost India's GDP.

"In India's case ... this is one of the highest growth markets, you see the buoyancy of it, the government and all of you have high ambitions for what's going to happen even by 2025," Mr. Nadella noted.

Mr. Nadella's visit comes as firms such as Microsoft and Google's parent Alphabet Inc. see India as a promising market both as a source for AI talent, as well as in terms of a market where big corporate firms can buy AI products for their own businesses.

## AI skilling

Mr. Nadella also announced that the firm would provide AI skilling opportunities to 20 lakh Indians by 2025. "Making sure that [the Indian workforce has] the skills in order to be able to thrive in this new age is the most im-



**Wooing India:** The cost curves of AI are only going to come down, says Microsoft's Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella. AP

The only consistent agenda we have is that... you can only offer AI that is safe and trusted in India

**RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR**  
Minister of State, MeitY

portant thing that any of us can be doing," he said.

Puneet Chandok, who recently joined as the India president at Microsoft, expressed optimism that AI talent from India would make a significant contribution to the sector. "Every sixth AI researcher and technologist in the world is coming from India," he said, adding that a quarter of the new workforce in coming years would be from India.

Mr. Nadella referred to 'Moore's law,' which essentially amounts to the principle that computing power constantly increases at lower cost. "Moore's law is very much alive when it comes to AI," Mr. Nadella said, seeking to assuage concerns on the resource-intensiveness (and high

## Retail inflation likely eased in Jan'

Vegetable thali cost increased 5% year-on-year in January compared with 12% in December, as per Crisil's monthly food plate assessments; Bank of Baroda economists said they foresee price rise for essential commodities slowing to 3.9%

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

**E**asing food prices may help cool India's consumer price inflation (CPI) in January from the four-month high of 5.7% recorded in December, price trends for food plates and essential commodities for the last month indicate.

## Significant drop

Food inflation had hit 9.5% in December, with urban consumers facing a 10.4% uptick in prices. Bank of Baroda (BoB) economists said they expect retail inflation, official data for which is due on Monday, to ease to 4.7% in January,



**Affordable bite:** 'Easing vegetable prices played a huge role in the consumer price index's likely moderation in January'. AFP

with the pace of price rise for essential commodities slowing to 3.9%.

Moreover, vegetable thali costs rose 5% year-on-

year in January compared with 12% in December, as per Crisil's monthly food plate assessments, while a non-vegetarian plate's cost

declined 13% on a sharp drop in broiler prices.

"The cost of vegetarian thali increased due to a surge of 35% and 20% year-on-year in the prices of onion and tomato, respectively. Price of rice (accounting for 12% of vegetarian thali cost) and pulses (9%) also increased 14% and 21% year-on-year, respectively," Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics wrote in a note. But compared with December 2023 levels, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian plate costs slid 6% and 8%.

As many as 17 of the 20 commodities tracked in BoB's Essential Commodity Index registered a softening of prices, including

onions, tomatoes, and pulses such as arhar, the bank's economist Dipanwita Mazumdar wrote in a note. On a month-on-month basis, the index fell 1% in January, the sharpest drop since September.

"We expect the headline CPI to settle at around 4.7% in January, and a favourable base would also provide the desired cushion to this number. However, what needs to be closely watched is the evolution of these numbers, especially vegetable prices," she said.

While easing vegetable prices played a big role in the index's moderation for January, some of the prices have begun showing an up-tick in the past week.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,152	-0.04
US Dollar	82.96	0.10
Gold	63,370	0.26
Brent oil	78.85	0.45

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	3229.85	+26.10
Adani Ports	1255.65	-17.45
Apollo Hosp	6177.95	-19.35
Asian Paints	2981.15	+50.20
Axis Bank	1069.10	+19.05
Bajaj Auto	7701.90	-18.50
Bajaj Finserv	1596.20	-0.85
Bajaj Finance	6709.20	+11.05
Bharti Airtel	1134.30	+0.25
BPCL	602.05	-7.25
Britannia Ind	5078.25	+71.20
Cipla	1438.75	+13.30
Coal India	152.65	+4.00
Divis Lab	3731.80	+5.30
Dixons Lab	6179.75	+13.15
Eicher Motors	3927.65	-16.95
Grimson Ind	2111.50	+45.50
HCL Tech	1615.35	+8.40
HFDC Life	605.15	+12.40
Hero MotoCorp	4793.35	+9.90
Hindalco	592.25	+7.35
Hindustan Unilever	2425.45	+0.90
ICICI Bank	1022.15	+4.25
IndusInd Bank	1515.35	+3.95
Infosys	1693.75	+35.70
ITC	431.80	+0.40
JSW Steel	836.60	+17.85
Kotak Bank	1792.60	+5.60
L&T	3394.70	+29.55
LTIMindtree Ltd.	5447.90	+22.40
M&M	1721.00	+6.65
Maruti Suzuki	10935.70	+90.85
NestleIndia	2499.60	+42.95
NTPC	330.70	+3.50
ONGC	271.90	+0.40
PowerGrid Corp	267.95	+6.30
Reliance Ind	2884.30	+28.70
SBI Life	1469.45	+5.45
State Bank	675.25	+25.00
Sun Pharma	1496.20	+21.10
TataConsumerPro-	1166.20	+2.65
Tata Motors	933.75	+5.75
Tata Steel	144.40	+0.25
TCS	4083.40	+52.60
Tech Mahindra	1318.00	+33.05
Titan	3576.50	+17.35
UltraTech Cement	10226.50	+177.75
UPL	477.80	+4.05
Wipro	495.20	+4.45

## EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	82.77	83.09
Euro	89.11	89.46
British Pound	104.57	104.98
Japanese Yen (100)	55.94	56.16
Chinese Yuan	11.51	11.56
Swiss Franc	94.92	95.30
Singapore Dollar	61.61	61.86
Canadian Dollar	61.41	61.65
Malaysian Ringgit	17.37	17.45
Australian Dollar	54.01	54.23

Source: Indian Bank

## Energy reforms kept fuel prices affordable'

**Lalatendu Mishra**

BETUL, GOA

Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas Hardeep S. Puri said India's reforms in the energy sector, including diversification of sources of imports and changes in gas-pricing mechanism, had ensured prices of petrol and diesel in India declined while global prices were surging.

He spoke at the India Energy Week 2024.

(The writer is in Goa at Federation of Indian Petroleum Industry's invitation)

inbound shipments despite the continuing bilateral tensions over the military standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

"Over the past year, China-India relations have shown a positive momentum of improvement," Ms. Ma said, addressing guests at a reception held at the Chinese Embassy on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in August. In 2022, bilateral trade had reached a record \$135.98, with imports from China surpassing \$100 billion driven by a 21% rise in

Bilateral trade volume

reached \$136.2 billion last year, with a year-on-year growth of 1.5%. India's exports to China also increased by 6%," she added, indicating that the bilateral trade deficit, which India has been seeking to shrink, could also be lower, according to the figures that were announced officially for the first time.

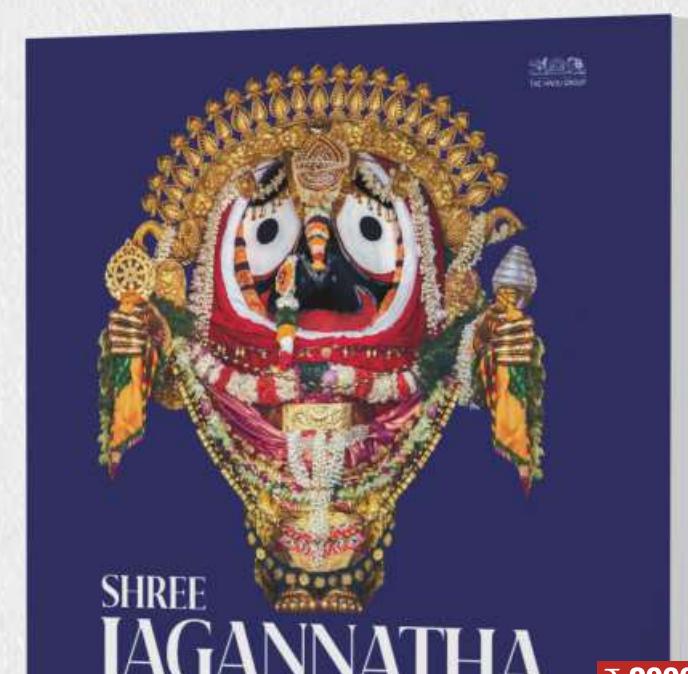
Despite the increased engagement, China has not appointed an Ambassador in over 16 months, the longest period so far, and the two countries have also not resumed direct flights between them.

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CM YK

**Sport****TRIAL BY FIRE**

We got taste of a close game, which will be good in final: Saharan



GETTY IMAGES

Captain Uday Saharan said that winning a close semifinal clash against South Africa will benefit India in the ICC U-19 World Cup title clash. "We got a taste of close games and that will be good in the final. We don't let the morale get low in the dressing room at all. The environment and coaches are superb," Saharan said.

**BAZBALL EFFECT**

Botham credits England for infusing life into Test cricket



K.R. DEEPAK

Ian Botham feels England's Bazball approach has infused new life into Test cricket. "Playing against India 20-30 years ago in India, the grounds were heaving. Suddenly, the IPL came along and so did ODI cricket and the crowds then plummeted. People are now coming back and wanting to see Bazball," Botham said.

**READY**

Pant confident of playing entire IPL: Capitals head coach Ponting



FILE PHOTO

Rishabh Pant is confident of playing the entire IPL but could only be available as a batter and not behind the stumps, Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting said. "Rishabh is very confident that he's going to play. In what capacity we're not quite sure yet. We're not sure if we'll get wicketkeeping out of him this year," Ponting said.

**NEW ROUTE**

We don't do team meetings anymore: Root on Bazball culture



K.R. DEEPAK

England under Ben Stokes prefers organic conversations about the game, said Joe Root. "We don't do team meetings. That's one of the great things about how we do conversations away from the game... we don't have to sit in a meeting room, and I think it's more authentic when you can have it around a dinner table," he said.

# India in free fall as it loses again, this time to Australia

Grace, Tatum, and Kaitlin find the net for the visitors; China returns to winning ways with a 3-1 result against the USA and remains second in the points table



Unstoppable: Australia's players celebrate after a lacklustre India failed to mount a decent challenge. BISWARANJAN ROUT

**FIH PRO LEAGUE**

**Uthra Ganesan**  
BHUBANESWAR

The Indian women's hockey team continued its downward spiral, losing its third consecutive match in the FIH Pro League 3-0 against Australia at the Kalinga Stadium on Wednesday.

An aggressive start and a wasted early penalty corner was the lone bright spot for the team that has been struggling to get anything going for it.

Nothing seems to be working for the team, with every player in every department appearing more desperate than decisive on the field.

Nobbs got one of her own later, again all alone in a one-on-one situation with the goalkeeper and an absent defence.

In between, India earned a few PCs, but Gurjot Kaur's flicks had no power to cause any trouble even as Australia made its lone one count. The Indian forwards also struggled to get shots on target as the host looked like a team playing out of its league.

Earlier in the day, China could back-pedal into defence. Grace Stewart, again left unmarked, only had to deflect it in.

Grace Stewart, again left unmarked, only had to deflect it in.

Grace Stewart, again left unmarked, only had to deflect it in.

Grace Stewart, again left unmarked, only had to deflect it in.

Grace Stewart, again left unmarked, only had to deflect it in.

# Bumrah the best in the world across formats: Harmison

**ENGLAND IN INDIA**

**P.K. Ajith Kumar**  
VISAKHAPATNAM

It has been 20 years since Steve Harmison blew away a formidable West Indies batting line-up at Kingston. In a furious spell of pace and bounce, he took seven for 12 to bowl the West Indians out for 47, its lowest Test total.

England won that match by 10 wickets and went on to clinch its first series in the West Indies since 1968; the series had been decided before Brian Lara made 400 not out in the final Test. Harmison believes what England achieved against India in the first Test at Hyderabad is more remarkable.

"It is England's greatest win overseas I have seen in isolation," Harmison, who is doing radio commentary for listeners of talkSport back home, told *The Hindu*.

"England's wins here in India in 2012 and in Australia in 2010-11 have been the best series victories. And this England side has a chance to emulate that. To play the way it did in Hyderabad I thought it was the greatest win I ever saw."

Ollie Pope's 196 in the second innings played a key role in that victory. "He was concise with his movements and his shot selection and execution were brilliant," Harmison, who took 226 wickets from 63 Tests, said.

"And he has nailed down the No. 3 position, which has always been a problem for England."



Special one: Harmison said Bumrah's spell in the second Test was unbelievable. KVS GIRI

Harmison said the current series has produced some splendid cricket. "It has been a brilliant series," he said.

"I think both sides have played positively and tried to win, and that has made for better cricket. India will be favourite in its own backyard but England has given it something to think about."

He said people would not have expected a seamer to take five wickets but spin to be dominant.

"We got to watch Bumrah and Anderson, who at 41, is the greatest fast bowler the world has ever seen," he said. "It was a joy to watch them bowl."



Kohli likely to miss the next two Tests, doubtful for final one too

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Virat Kohli is likely to miss the third and fourth Tests too against England due to personal reasons, a BCCI source said on Wednesday.

The chances of him playing in the final Test in Dharamshala (March 7-11) are also remote, but the board isn't looking that far as the match is still a month away.

The third Test will be held in Rajkot from February 15-19, while the fourth game is in Ranchi from February 23-27.

"The BCCI has time and again made it clear that when it comes to family matters, it stands firmly behind the cricketer. It will be Virat's call when he is ready to make a comeback. As of now, it looks unlikely that he will play in the series," said a BCCI source.

In other team news, K.L. Rahul is likely to return to the playing XI and Rajat Patidar is set to make way for him.

# Korneeva stops a fighting Shrivalli, books a spot in the quarterfinals

**MUMBAI OPEN**

**Kamesh Srinivasan**  
MUMBAI

Shrivalli Bhamidipaty matched the 16-year-old Russian sensation Alina Korneeva for nearly two hours and 30 minutes before losing 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 in the pre-quarterfinals of the L&T Mumbai Open WTA tennis at the CCI on Wednesday.

Shrivalli got off to a flier with an early break and hitting her strokes with conviction. She won the first set after Korneeva failed to serve it out at 5-4.

Shrivalli fought well in the second set also after trailing 1-4. She hit fluently on both flanks and was able to get to the drops and place them nicely beyond Korneeva's reach.

In the climax of the third set, Shrivalli did not let the 134th-ranked Korneeva convert two match

points at 5-2. But the strong-built Russian – who was world No. 1 junior last year, having won two Junior Grand Slams – was able to serve it out on the next chance.

The two other Indians in the second round, Rutuja Bhosale and Sahaja Yamalapalli, will play their matches on Thursday.

**The results:**  
Pre-quarterfinals: Darja Semenistaja (Lat) bt Amandine Hesse (Fra) 2-6, 6-4, 6-4; Arianne Hartono (Ned) bt Arina Rodionova (Aus) 6-4, 6-4; Storm Hunter (Aus) bt Laura Pigossi (Bra) 6-3, 6-3; Alina Korneeva bt Shrivalli Bhamidipaty 5-7, 6-4, 6-4.

**Doubles:** Quarterfinals: Zhikib Kulambayeva (Kaz) & Sohyun Park (Kor) bt Carole Monnet & Ekaterina Yashina 7-6(4), 6-1; Pre-quarterfinals: Natalia Dzalamidze (Geo) & Panna Udvardy (Hun) bt En-Shuo Liang & Chia Yi Tsao (Tpe) 4-6, 6-4, [10-7]; Dalila Jakupovic (Slo) & Sabrina Santamaria (USA) bt Vaishnavi Adkar & Sahaja Yamalapalli 6-3, 7-6(1).



Plugging away: Korneeva brushed aside an early challenge from Shrivalli. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

# Bumrah becomes first Indian pace bowler to top the ICC Test rankings

**CRICKET**

**Press Trust of India**  
DUBAI

Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday became the first Indian pacer to top the ICC Test rankings after a stellar performance against England in Visakhapatnam.

The 30-year-old's nine-wicket haul has helped him leapfrog Pat Cummins, Kagiso Rabada and R. Ashwin, making him only the fourth from his country to attain number one position.

Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Bishan Singh Bedi are the other Indians who have been at the top of the charts. Bumrah, who was named Player-of-the-Match after helping India level the five-match series with a 106-run victory, ended Ashwin's 11-month long reign. Ashwin, on 499 Test wickets, is now third in the



Numero Uno: Bumrah's stellar performances at Visakhapatnam took him to the top. K.R. DEEPAK

standings.

Bumrah now has 881 rating points with Ashwin (904) and Jadeja (899) the only India bowlers to have aggregated more rating points. Ashwin and Jadeja also have the unique distinction of being jointly top-ranked in March 2017.

The batting rankings see left-handed opener Yashasvi Jaiswal progress 37 places to 29th after completing a fine double-century in the first innings and Shubman Gill go up 14 places to a career-best 38th.

Zak Crawley is another player to gain after the Visakhapatnam Test, moving up eight places to a career-best 22nd position after scores of 76 and 73.

The latest rankings have also factored in performances in the one-off Test between Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in Colombo. Prabhath Jayasuriya has moved up to three places to a career-best sixth position after his eight-wicket haul helped the home side win by 10 wickets.

CM YK

## IN BRIEF



## Inamdar guides Paltan to big win over Bulls

Having already qualified for the playoffs, Puneri Paltan was in great form as it secured a 31-40 win over the Bengaluru Bulls at the Thyagaraj Indoor Stadium in Delhi on Wednesday.

## Rajeshwari misses women's trap final by one point

Rajeshwari Kumari shot 113 and missed making the women's trap final by one point in the shotgun World Cup in Rabat on Wednesday. Bhavya Tripathi (109) and Manisha Keer (106) were placed 19th and 24th respectively. In men's trap, Bhowneesh Mendiratta and Zoravar Sandhu shot identical 118 for the 17th and 23rd spots respectively.

## Punjab men rally to put it across Kerala

Punjab beat Kerala 72-63, after trailing till third quarter, in a men's league match of the junior National basketball in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

**The results:** Men: Chandigarh 65 (Ravinder Kaushik 23, Himanshu Hooda 18) bt Karnataka 50 (Avinash Nayak 22, N.M. Vishnu 10, Prithvi Samaresh 10); Punjab 72 (Jessajam Singh 27, Bhanu Pratap Singh 20) bt Kerala 63 (Muhammed Sahal 19, Mohammed Irfan 16, Jims K. Joby 16).

Rajasthan 92 (Muhammad Ishan 29, Akshith Hooda 21, Banti Choudhary 20) bt Madhya Pradesh 69 (Ajay 16, Goutham Pal 16) bt Karnataka 61 (Avinash Nayak 22, N.M. Vishnu 12); Tamil Nadu 85 (S. Deepak 14, Pralahadhan 13, Karan J. Jayamurugan 10) bt Andhra Pradesh 58 (Satyendra Prakash Gandodi 21, Anil Kumar 12).

**Women:** Maharashtra 76 (Sanika Phule 19, Bhumika Sarje 16, Mansi Nirmal 11) bt Chandigarh 45 (Arpita Dey 12, Anshu 10); Kerala 68 (K.A. Abhirami 24, P.A. Alka 16, S.P. Ankamol 13) bt Karnataka 45; Punjab 79 (Manmeet Kaur 23, Komal Preet Kaur 20, Mahip Kaur 14, Anchal 10, Nadar Dhilon 12) bt Uttar Pradesh 69 (Ruby Rajput 25, Nancy Gupta 18); Madhya Pradesh 56 (Ananya Maheswari 12, Kushi Pal Singh 11) bt Harayana 38 (Anjali Suresh Kumar 13).

## Bikramjeet advances after top seed Atharva concedes

Bikramjeet Chawla advanced to the semifinals after top seed Atharva Sharma retired in the second set of their men's quarterfinals clash in the ₹200,000 AITA ranking tennis in Chandigarh.

**The results (quarterfinals):** Men: Bikramjeet Chawla bt Atharva Sharma 6-3, 3-2 (conceded); Paramveer Bajwa bt Rakshit Tarun 6-2, 6-1; Aditya Mor bt Bhicky Sagolshe 6-3, 7-5; Arjun Rathi bt Dalwinder Singh 7-6(5), 1-1 (conceded).

**Women:** Anjali Rathi bt Ritu Rai 7-5, 6-3; Mahika Khanna bt Ruma Gaikaiwan 7-6(2), 6-3; Ishwari Matere bt Saily Thakkar 6-3, 2-6, 6-2; Sahira Singh bt Snigdha Ruhil 6-2, 6-1.

## LIVE TELECAST

**Men's U-19 CWC:** 2nd semifinal, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 1.30 p.m.

## Kerkar enjoying his stint with Chhattisgarh

## M.R. Praveen Chandran

RAIPUR

Wicketkeeper-batter Eknath Kerkar has been a cricketing nomad for the last few seasons. The diminutive Kerkar learnt his craft in Mumbai and even made his First Class debut for the former Ranji champion during the 2018 season. But his career hit a roadblock as he was starved of opportunities and was forced to try his luck elsewhere.

A chance to represent Goa came calling after the Covid-19 pandemic and he jumped at the opportunity.

"I made a decent start to my First Class career. I scored an unbeaten fifty on my debut for Mumbai. But as you know, the competition for places is tough in Mumbai and I didn't get many chances to prove myself. I thought it was better to seek opportunities in other States."

"I got a chance to represent Goa and I played as a



Kerkar

professional for three seasons and did well. But down the line, I wanted to challenge myself and it was then I got a chance to represent Chhattisgarh. I was impressed with the vision of the State association.

## Young team

"It was a young team and I thought I could contribute more as a senior. The dressing room atmosphere is great and youngsters

look up to you. This is the sort of team which I always wanted to be part of," Kerkar, who was the player-of-the-match in the Kerala-Chhattisgarh Ranji Trophy match, said.

On his century that thwarted Kerala, Kerkar said the plan was to occupy the crease and play as the situation demanded. He grafted early, wore down the bowlers and punished them with his wide repertoire of strokes.

"It was a good knock under pressure. I always thought I had the game to excel at this level. I concentrated on my strengths and it came good," said Kerkar, who has been scoring consistently for Chhattisgarh this season.

"We are improving as a team but we still have a bit of catching up to do. We believe in the process and the results will follow," he said even while looking forward to the match against his former team Mumbai on Friday.

## National under-15 and 20 wrestling postponed

## Sports Bureau

KOLKATA

The ad-hoc committee running the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) on Wednesday decided to postpone the National under-15 and under-20 championships, scheduled in Gwalior from February 11 to 17, to allow the state units more time to get ready for the event.

Following requests from some state associations to reschedule the event, the panel took the decision.

"They have urged that in such a short duration, they are unable to send the teams as trials for the same have not been conducted till date.

"Also, they are facing problems in necessary arrangements like travelling (and arranging) playing kit," said the committee in a statement.

The new dates will be decided later.

from the baseline.

In the last singles match of the day, Dominik Palan of the Czech Republic beat back a tough challenge from Samuel Vincent Ruggeri of Italy before winning 6-2, 2-6, 6-4. Palan will challenge Nagal in the quarterfinals.

Nardi struggled in the first set, but was able to break Tomic in the 12th game with a good finish at the net to pocket the set. Tomic looked uninterested in the second as the Italian raced to a 3-0 and 4-1 lead. From thereon, there wasn't much of a fight from the Australian.

**The results (second round):** Lucas Nardi (Ita) bt Bernard Tomic (Aus) 7-5, 6-3; Sumit Nagal bt Giovanni Fioni (Ita) 7-5, 6-2; Stefano Napolitano (Ita) bt Dan Added (Fra) 6-2, 6-1; Dominik Palan (Cze) bt Samuel Vincent Ruggeri (Ita) 6-2, 2-6, 6-4.



Working hard: Luca Nardi in action against Bernard Tomic. R. RAVINDRAN.

# Second seed Nagal eases past Fioni, marches into the quarterfinals

The Indian will face Dominik Palan who beat back a tough challenge from Samuel Vincent Ruggeri; Nardi defeats Tomic to also advance

## CHENNAI OPEN

## K. Keerthivasan

CHENNAI

**P**laying on Centre Court at 2 in the afternoon, second seed Sumit Nagal made light of the hot and humid conditions, attacked well from the baseline and volleyed when it mattered to script a facile 7-5, 6-2 win over Giovanni Fioni of Italy in the second round of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger tennis here on Wednesday.

Luca Nardi of Italy, the top seed, huffed and puffed before overcoming Bernard Tomic of Australia 7-5, 6-3. Nardi will next take on Stefano Napolitano of Italy, the fifth seed, who put it across Dan Added of France 6-2, 6-1.

Fioni is an attacking player much like Nagal except that he has a one-handed backhand unlike his Indian opponent. There was little to separate the two in the first set, as both confidently held their serves. Fioni held his serve at love in the 10th game as the score was tied at 5-5. So did Nagal in the next game.

In the 12th game, the Italian, ranked 270 in the world, was broken at 15 when he put a routine backhand shot from the baseline straight into the net.

Nagal, the highest ranked Indian in the world at 121, raced to a 3-0 lead in the second set with some attractive forehand cross-court winners and strong first serves. Fioni's game started to fall apart as he continued to commit far too many unforced errors

## Jamieson and Santner bowl New Zealand to massive win

## SA IN NZ

## Agence France-Presse

MOUNT MAUNGANUI

Black Caps seamer Kyle Jamieson claimed four wickets on Wednesday to drive New Zealand to a 281-run win over South Africa with a day to spare in the first Test.

Dogged resistance from the tourists ended with their dismissal for 247 at Mount Maunganui as the Black Caps notched their second-biggest Test victory by runs.

New Zealand is a step closer to a maiden series win over South Africa after 17 previous failed attempts, dating back to 1931.

Given their struggles at Bay Oval, the vastly inexperienced Proteas will need a dramatic turnaround to win the second and final Test, starting on Tuesday in Hamilton.

New Zealand took control with 511 in its first innings and never looked like losing when the tourists – fielding six debutants – were dismissed for 162.



**Enforcer:** Jamieson who used the bouncer intelligently is congratulated by Henry and Southee for snaring Bedingham. AP

soon after tea.

It ended a 105-run stand with Keegan Petersen, who also failed to control a Jamieson short ball on 16.

A resolute 63-run stand for the third wicket was broken by Jamieson, who snared Raynard van Tonder at first slip for 31 before Zubayr Hamza's attempted pull shot on 36 flew gently to mid-on.

Mitchell Santner finished with three for 59.

## The scores:

New Zealand 511 & 179/4 dec, beat South Africa 162 & 247 in 80 overs (David Bedingham 87, Zubayr Hamza 36, Ruan de Swardt 34 n.o. Raynard van Tonder 31, Jamieson 4/58, Santner 3/59). New Zealand won by 281 runs to lead two-match Player-of-the-Match: R. Ravindra.

## Manasi, Mandeep and Palak eye Paralympics berth

## PARA BADMINTON WORLDS

## Press Trust of India

MUMBAI

Indian para badminton players Manasi Joshi, Mandeep Kaur and Palak Kohli have set sights on excelling in the World Championships to be held in Pattaya from February 20 to 25, as success there would propel them to the Paralympics later this year.

India won 21 medals in badminton from a historic total of 111 at the Hangzhou Para Asian Games last year, with Manasi and Mandeep clinching a bronze each in singles.

There was further success in store for both in the women's doubles SL3-SU5 event, with Manasi bagging a silver with Thulasimathi Murugesan and Mandeep winning a bronze with Manisha Ramdas.

"We all are going to be playing in the World Championships for which we are travelling on February 17. This is the final; this is the end of the Paralympics



qualification year," Manasi said. "The qualification process ends on March 31, from that day our rankings and the race to Paris will be frozen and that is why this World Championship tournament is important for all of us," she added.

Mandeep said training for two months before the tournament in Pattaya would help the shuttlers. The 21-year-old Palak, who has recovered from bone tumour, said she is more confident of overcoming the challenges ahead. "My main target this year is Paris; I am not looking at anything lesser than a podium there," she added.

"We all are going to be playing in the World Championships for which we are travelling on February 17. This is the final; this is the end of the Paralympics

## From Beed to Benoni— the incredible journey of Sachin

## M.R. Praveen Chandran

RAIPUR

Wicketkeeper-batter Eknath Kerkar has been a cricketing nomad for the last few seasons. The diminutive Kerkar learnt his craft in Mumbai and even made his First Class debut for the former Ranji champion during the 2018 season. But his career hit a roadblock as he was starved of opportunities and was forced to try his luck elsewhere.

A chance to represent Goa came calling after the Covid-19 pandemic and he jumped at the opportunity.

"I made a decent start to my First Class career. I scored an unbeaten fifty on my debut for Mumbai. But as you know, the competition for places is tough in Mumbai and I didn't get many chances to prove myself. I thought it was better to seek opportunities in other States."

"I got a chance to represent Goa and I played as a

cricket, Sachin is a fan of Virat Kohli, the modern great he has perhaps seen more closely although he wears the number 10 jersey."



**Making heads turn:** Sachin has been one of the finds from this edition of the U-19 World Cup. GETTY IMAGES

area's most famous coach who shaped Dhas' early years. Named after the iconic Mumbaikar, who is synonymous with Indian

cricket, Sachin is a fan of Virat Kohli, the modern great he has perhaps seen more closely although he wears the number 10 jersey."

"I named him after Sachin Tendulkar when he was born in 2005 because I was a huge fan but he also likes Virat Kohli a lot," declared his father Sanjay.

Asked about his practice hours, Dhas senior revealed, "Four hours in the morning and three and half hours in the evening, including gym work. It's seven and half hours per day. I must give credit to Azhar, his coach. Without him, we wouldn't have seen this day."

"The training part in Beed was certainly tough but not the selection part in age group state teams. Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) has been fair to my son. He performed at every level and he was always picked on merit."

Sachin's journey won't stop at the U-19 level and a tough initiation to senior cricket is waiting for him.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER: PWD: BUILDING: ASSAM: CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3.					
No. T/TB-I/64/2023/ GLOBAL SPECIFIC E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE					
The Chief Engineer, P.W.D (Bldg.), Assam on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Global Open Tender bids through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-I of contract(Single stage two-part bidding system) for the work detailed in the table below, from national and international contractors having experience in similar nature of works. Details of bid may be seen at e-procurement portal website <a href="http://www.assamtenders.gov.in">www.assamtenders.gov.in</a>					
<b>Sl. No.</b> <b>Name of Work</b> <b>Approx. bid Value</b> <b>Time of completion</b> <b>Bid Security</b> <b>Tender Cost</b>					
1	"Modernization of Assam State Zoo cum Botanical Garden, Guwahati," on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-I.	Rs. 278,08,19,660.25 Or US\$ 33488131.99	24 (twenty four months)	(2% on bid value for General & 1% for Reserved Category)	Rs. 30,000.00 Or US\$ 361.28
<b>Note:</b> 1. Value of work may vary during uploading of DNT for which no claim will be entertained. 2. The Press Notice will form a part of the Bidding Document. 3. The work order will be issued after receipt of Administrative Approval from Govt.					
Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Bldg.), Janasanyog /C/15902/ 23/7-Feb-24 Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati-3					

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JBVNL invites online e-tender from reputed, technically experienced and financially sound manufacturers/ authorized supplier only for supply of following Material through rate contract :-						
<b>Sr</b>	<b>NIT/Tender notice No. and description of item</b>	<b>Tender fee</b>	<b>Date of publication of tender on website</b>	<b>Document download start date &amp; time</b>	<b>Online Bid Submission start date</b>	<b>Online Bid Submission end date</b>
1	<u>426/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 33 KV 3 Pin Type AB Switch 630 Amp.	Rs 10000/- + GST	09/02/2024 from 13:00 Hrs.	09/02/2024 from 13:10 Hrs.	04/03/2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05/03/2024 at 18: 00 Hrs.
2	<u>427/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 11 KV 3 Pin Type AB Switch 400 Amp.	Rs 10000/- + GST	09/02/2024 from 13:00 Hrs.	09/02/2024 from 13:10 Hrs.	04/03/2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05/03/2024 at 18: 00 Hrs.
3	<u>428/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 11 KV 3 Pin Type AB Switch 630 Amp.	Rs 10000/- + GST	09/02/2024 from 13:00 Hrs.	09/02/2024 from 13:10 Hrs.	04/03/2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05/03/2024 at 18: 00 Hrs.
<b>NOTE:-</b> (i) Only e-tenders will be accepted. Further details can be seen on website <a href="http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in">http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in</a> and may be contacted on Mobile No. 9431135523/9430348596, NIC helpline No. 0651-2400178 (ii) Tender fee & EMD must be paid through online mode. (iii) Tender fee is non-refundable.						
Sd/- General Manager (S&P) स्वाहित एवं राशिहित में ऊर्जा बचावे   कृपया अपनी शिक्षकर्ता को टॉल फ़ो नं 1800 345 6570 पर दर्ज कराये।						
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NOTICE INVITING TENDER NO 08 Dated: 06/02/2024									
Tenders (Pre-qualification and or commercial offers) through e-procurement portal <a href="http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in">http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in</a> are invited for supply of the following Goods/ Services/ Equipments:									
<b>Tender Nos. as per E-portal</b>	<b>Nomenclature of Items/ Services/ Equipment</b>	<b>Tender Value in Crores Rs. (Approx)</b>	<b>Last date for submission of documents</b>						
KSRTC/2023-24/SE0743	Selection of Technology Solution Provider for Supply, Commissioning and Maintenance of SMART ELECTRONIC TICKETING MACHINES on rental basis (Short Term Tender).	37.24	12/02/2024						
KSRTC/2023-24/IND0069	Maplitho Paper	0.20	21/02/2024						
Further any addendum / corrigendum in respect of change in calendar of events, specification, scope, other tender terms and conditions etc, will be uploaded/ published through e-portal only.									
NOTE:- Interested suppliers need to register in the e-procurement portal. For further information log into <a href="http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in">http://kppp.karnataka.gov.in</a> In case of further assistance, contact e-procurement cell (Phone. No. 0802230960, 080-22234115). Interested suppliers may also contact e-procurement cell for training on bid submission. Mail to support@eprocelpdesk.com for further information if required. In case bidders need assistance from KSRTC, can communicate at <a href="mailto:cosp@ksrtc.org">cosp@ksrtc.org</a> (contact: 7760990225, 7760990224)									
Sd/- Controller of Stores & Purchases (Tender Inviting Authority)									
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1 <sup>st</sup> Time Extension Notice								
Last date of uploading of bid documents, last date of physical submission of tender fee and bid opening date of following tender notice no. is hereby extended as below :-								
<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>NITs No.</b>	<b>Extended online bid upload/ submission end date</b>	<b>Last date of online submission of tender fee and EMD</b>	<b>Technical bid opening date and time</b>				
1	<u>344/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 33/11 KV, 5 MVA Cu. Wd. CRGO Core Power Transformer	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	20.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.				
2	<u>345/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 33/11 KV, 10 MVA Cu. Wd. CRGO Core Power Transformer	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	20.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.				
3	<u>346/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 11/0.4 KV, BIS level-1, 500 KVa Cu. Wd. CRGO CORE, Distribution Transformer	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	20.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.				
4	<u>347/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> Trolley mounted distribution sub-station with 250 KVA DTR along with all accessories & equipment.	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	19.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	20.02.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.				
Further details against the above NIT can be seen on website <a href="http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in">http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in</a> and may be contacted on Mobile No. 9431135523/9430348596, NIC helpline No. 0651-2400178. Submission of tender fee/EMD will not be accepted by courier/Regd. Post.								
PR No. 315779								
Sd/- DGM (Purchases)								
स्वाहित एवं राशिहित में ऊर्जा बचावे   कृपया अपनी शिक्षकर्ता को टॉल फ़ो नं 1800 345 6570 पर दर्ज कराये।								
PR 318143 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd (23-24)_D								

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Notice inviting tender for procurement through rate contract						
JBVNL invites online e-tender from reputed, technically experienced and financially sound manufacturers/ authorized supplier only for supply of following Material through rate contract :-						
<b>Sr</b>	<b>NIT/Tender notice No. and description of item</b>	<b>Tender fee</b>	<b>Date of publication of tender on website</b>	<b>Document download start date &amp; time</b>	<b>Online Bid Submission start date</b>	<b>Online Bid Submission end date</b>
1	<u>422/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 11 KV, 1250 Amp. Outdoor type VCB with CT, PT & CRP	Rs 10000/- + GST	12/02/2024 from 13:00 Hrs.	12/02/2024 from 13:10 Hrs.	06/03/2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	07/03/2024 at 18: 00 Hrs.
2	<u>423/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> 33 KV, 1250 Amp. Outdoor type VCB with CT, PT & CRP	Rs 10000/- + GST	12/02/2024 from 13:00 Hrs.	12/02/2024 from 13:10 Hrs.	06/03/2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	07/03/2024 at 18: 00 Hrs.
3	<u>424/PR/JBVNL/2023-24</u> <br					

# 2024 Sportstar Aces Awards to be presented today

There are 24 categories, among them five Popular Choice and 16 Jury Awards; there were more than two lakh votes for the Popular Choice Awards this year, breaking all previous records



Sports Bureau  
MUMBAI

The 2024 Sportstar Aces Awards will be held from 6 p.m. here on Thursday.

This year, there are 24 categories of awards, among them five Popular Choice and 16 Jury Awards. The five Popular Choice Awards are Sportsman of the Year, Sportswoman of the Year, National Team of the Year, Club Team of the Year, and Sporting Movement of the Year.

There were more than two lakh votes for the Popular Choice Awards, breaking all previous records.

The Jury Awards are Sportsman of the Year (Individual Sports, Track and Field, Team Sports, Paraports), Sportswoman of the Year (Individual Sports, Track and Field, Team Sports, Paraports), Coach of the Year, Best State for Promotion of Sports, Best Corporate for



**Tales of wit:** Bindra, right, and the other jury members Somaya, Gavaskar and Aparna share a light moment at an Aces Awards meeting. FILE PHOTO: NAGARA GOPAL

Promotion of Sports, Best PSU for Promotion of Sports, Best College/University for Promotion of Sports, Lifetime Achievement Award, Young Achiever of the Year (Boy), and Young Achiever of the Year (Girl).

There will be a Chairperson's Award for Sports for Social Good, honouring those who have used sports to make the world a better place. Besides this,

there will be two special awards as well: International Icon and Ace of Aces.

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

The associate partners are LIC India, State Bank of India, Greyon Cosmetic, India Cements, United India Insurance, NTPC, Ramaiyah University. The real-

ty partner is Casagrand, with online grocery partner Big Basket, colour partner Nippon Paint and education partner Christ University. The co-sponsors are Pratiyogita Darpan, SSVM and PSG. Additionally, Signpost is the Digital OOH Partner, NDTV is the Broadcast Partner, Dailyhunt is the Online Streaming Partner and Wordswork is the PR Partner.

## IN A WORLD OF LIMITS, TONIGHT IS ABOUT THOSE WHO DEFY THEM.

The Sportstar ACES Awards celebrate India's biggest sporting champions every year. The ones that go above and beyond, hoist our flag the highest and create new milestones. Join us to cheer for the legends. Watch and applaud them as they receive the accolades they truly deserve.

Date: February 8, 2024

Time: 6 PM onwards



Visit the link: [sstar.news/AcesLive](http://sstar.news/AcesLive) to watch the event live on the day.

# Sportstar Aces Awards a fossil record of Indian sports: Anand

## Sports Bureau

From being the man who put India on the global chess map to now seeing players slowly overtake his milestones and cement India's reputation as a chess superpower, Viswanathan Anand is a content man. The chess Grandmaster, also a member of the jury for the Sportstar Aces Awards, is elated by the kind of year 2023 turned out to be for the sport in the country.

"From the point of view

of our chess players rising to the top, we have five people qualifying for the Candidates [April 3-22, 2024]. The FIDE World Cup and FIDE Grand Swiss were some of the most followed events in India because of the possibility of our players qualifying. On top of that, we had multiple good results as well. So, a big year for the sport in general," Anand said.

This abundance of talent poses a "problem" to the Aces jury, too, while deciding winners for Sportstar's annual sports honours.

"The 'problem' is a very pleasant one to have. In every category, we have to



Viswanathan Anand.

surprising in new sports. The slate is getting bigger and bigger. It's a sports person's dream to be sitting with others from different areas of sports and discussing it all. But there are times when we wish more than one player could be honoured," Anand explained.

"The Sportstar Aces Awards becomes a fossil record, almost, to look back and see how far we've come. I enjoy these jury meetings a lot because you get a quick snapshot of everything that is happening in the ecosystem," he said.

## Williams' strike does it for BFC

### ISL-10

**Ashwin Achal**  
BENGALURU

A second-half strike from Ryan Williams helped Bengaluru FC take a giant leap in the Indian Super League here on Wednesday. Williams' goal gave the home side a 1-0 win over Chennaiyin FC at the Sree Kanterevara Stadium, and powered BFC (14 points) from eleventh to sixth on the points table.

Williams came good after several chances went abegging for his side. Denmark striker Oliver Drost, making his first appearance for BFC, won the ball in midfield and made a short pass to Halicharan Narzary. With a silken through ball, Narzary sent Williams on a run. The



**Making a difference:** Williams shrugged off his marker and found the net. K. MURALI KUMAR

Australian shrugged off his marker and slotted it into the net.

The introduction of Drost and Narzary – the duo came on together as

substitutes – provided impetus to the BFC attack.

A lacklustre Chennaiyin (12 points) dropped one spot to tenth.

The visitor, returning to

the field after a two-week break, looked rusty.

BFC dominated possession and created better chances. Chennaiyin's best opportunity came in the 49th minute, when Connor Shields had only the custodian to beat. A rushed side-footed effort, however, sailed over the bar.

The first half belonged to BFC, even if its finishing skills left a lot to be desired.

Sunil Chhetri and Williams linked well to make the defenders sweat. Chhetri would be disappointed to fluff a sitter inside the box, when he missed a perfectly weighted pass served on a platter. In general, players from both units struggled with their first touch, cutting short most promising advances.

**The result:** BFC 1 (Ryan Williams 62) bt Chennaiyin FC 0.



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# Politics is always going to trump sports, says Vijay Amritraj

India had decided to forfeit the 1974 Davis Cup final against South Africa in protest against the latter's apartheid policies

Nihit Sachdeva  
CHENNAI

**A**fter its foray into football and golf, Saudi Arabia's tennis ambitions have become one of the biggest talking points in the world of sport.

The country successfully hosted the Next Gen ATP Finals in Jeddah last year and will continue to do so till 2027 as per the contract.

On Tuesday, an exhibition tournament - 6 Kings Slam - was announced where Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic, Jannik Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz, Holger Rune, and Daniil Medvedev will play in Riyadh. It has also shown interest in hosting the WTA Finals, something which legends like Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert opposed in a recent op-ed for *The Washington Post*.

"There should be a healthy debate over whether 'progress' and 'engagement' is really possible or whether staging a Saudi crown-jewel tournament would involve players in an act of sportswashing merely for the sake of a cash influx," wrote the duo.

Saudi has been accused of using sportswashing to hide the issues such as gender discrimination and homosexuality. In such a scenario, the debate on whether tennis should make a move and take the top-tier events to the Middle East continues.

Indian tennis legend Vijay Amritraj feels Saudi's interest cannot be simply ignored.

"There has been a huge push by Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert not to allow women's tennis to go to Saudi. It's their viewpoint and there are several ways to look at it," said the 70-year-old on the sidelines of an event at the Madras Cricket Club on Monday, celebrating the 50th anniversary of India reaching the Davis Cup Final for the first time in the Open era in 1974.

"When you look at someone committing a ton of money to sports and a portion of that money can go for the development of juniors in various



B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

countries, you have to give it a second look because the kids that are coming along, if they are going to miss out on all of that support, we'll be doing a disservice."

"But let us keep in mind where the world needs to go and how far we are willing to push that to the next generation. It's a very fine line," he added.

#### The final that never happened

Vijay, his elder brother Anand, Jasjit Singh and Sashi Menon, along with Ramanathan Krishnan, the non-playing captain, had created history by beating giants like Australia and the Soviet Union to reach the summit clash of the 'World Cup of Tennis' in 1974.

However, their opponent for the final was South Africa, and in protest against the apartheid policies, India decided to forfeit the match.



As an athlete, we were disappointed because what are we playing for? We're playing to win, and this was an opportunity to put India's name on the Davis Cup for the first time

VIJAY AMRITRAJ

Even after 50 years, Anand and Vijay both have different takes on whether it was the right call to not play against South Africa. "I don't think it was the right decision (not to play) because what would be better than two non-white boys from a country that people never thought of to ever be in a Davis Cup final to go to South Africa and beat them in Ellis Park, which is in Johannesburg," said Anand, who came back from two sets-to-one down to

beat the Soviet Union's Teimuraz Kakulia and sealed India's place in the summit clash.

"We had a good chance of winning 4-1 or 3-2, and it was a shame we didn't get that opportunity because we would have liked to have that huge Davis Cup trophy here at the MCC."

Vijay, on the other hand, puts forward the perspective of the bigger picture.

"As an athlete, we were disappointed because what are we playing for? We're playing to win, and this was an opportunity to put India's name on the Davis Cup for the first time but as human beings, we were trying to change the system that the rest of the world took for granted," he said.

"Politics is always going to trump sports because it is ahead and we have to look at the global picture, but sport, I believe, can bring countries together."



The Jordan players have clicked big-time in Doha. GETTY IMAGES

From Asian Cup final to Premier League? Jordan's coach hopes so

Agence France-Presse  
DOHA

Jordan coach Hussein Ammouta hopes the team's surprise run to the Asian Cup final will spark broader development in the country's football and propel the Jordanian players into the Premier League.

Second-half goals from the impressive attacking duo of Yazan al-Naimat and Mousa al-Tamari sent Jordan into the summit clash for the first time with a 2-0 win over South Korea.

South Korea's coach Jurgen Klinsmann and skipper Son Heung-min admitted that Jordan, the lowest-ranked team left in the tournament, fully deserved its semifinal victory.

"The players delivered a heroic performance," said Moroccan Ammouta after taking Jordan into the final for the first time at its fifth Asian Cup.

No matter what happens on Saturday, the widely admired Ammouta says the landmark achievement must be the spark for something long-lasting in Jordanian football.

#### Invest in infrastructure

"We need to invest in infrastructure, in the training and formation of our players to reach higher levels," he said. "We need to pay attention to age categories."

Ammouta says that change is already afoot, citing the example of the impressive Tamari who, together with Naimat, terrorised South Korea's shell-shocked defence.

Tamari, who set Naimat up for the opening goal in the 53rd minute before slicing through the Korean defence for a second 13 minutes later, left Jordan's domestic league in 2018.

First came a move to Cypriot giant APOEL, before leaving for Belgian football two years later with Oud-Heverlee Leuven.

Last summer, after 10 goals and nine assists for the top-flight Belgian side, Tamari sealed a free transfer to Montpellier in France.

Tamari is the only member of Jordan's Asian Cup squad playing in Europe and Ammouta says for the national side to build on its success in Qatar more need to follow in his footsteps.

"What you saw today was the fruit of several years of work," Ammouta said after the South Korea triumph.

"We have Mousa al-Tamari in the French league and, hopefully, we will have four or five Jordanian players in the French league or the English Premier League."

#### Great value

"When you look at Japan or Korea, you see players who are playing abroad have great value to their national teams."

"This is what we should start planning for – how will we produce players who will play in the world's biggest leagues."

"This is a building block that's part of a bigger plan."

First, Jordan must upset the odds once again in the final in Doha. Ranked 87th in the world by FIFA, it will be the underdog in the summit clash.

Tamari afterwards attempted to deflect from his own Player-of-the-Match performance against South Korea.

"This victory started with the fans, not us," said Tamari, who was seated at the post-match press conference with Ammouta.

"This man told us to have fun – yes, it was a semifinal. 'He instilled in us a winning culture. We want to dedicate this victory to the people of Morocco and the coach.'

## With focus on improving fitness, gymnast Pranati Nayak hopes for better performances



Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

With a specific aim on improving her fitness, Indian gymnast Pranati Nayak is hoping to garner success in four World Cup events and an Asian Championship to seal her berth in the Paris Olympics.

The 28-year-old Pranati, who represented India at the Tokyo Olympics, will take part in the FIG Apparatus World Cup (Qualifying OG) in Cairo from February 15-18, followed by

two similar events in Baku from March 7-10 and in Doha from April 17-20.

"I am heading for the World Cup on Tuesday (February 13) as qualification for the Olympics is starting with it. There is a World Cup in February and one each in March and April," Pranati said.

"I am going especially for vault since two quotas are left from it. If I am able to win medals in at least two of the four World Cups,

"I have a chance to qual-

ify (for the Olympics)," she said.

"At the Asian Championships in May, there is one quota from an Asian country on the all-round basis. I will try (to qualify) from both the ways," Pranati added.

Pranati said she has spent last two months training under an overseas coach who has brought about significant change in her methods.

"I have been training at the Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar under a fo-

reign coach Amani (from Egypt) for the last two months. I am confident of doing well because earlier the fitness levels were also not high," she said.

"I would attend just a camp one month before any competition which is not enough. I am hoping to do well, who does not want to compete in the Olympics?"

"The coach felt I was lacking in fitness, so he made me work on it for one month at a stretch, even though the perfor-

mances were there. For us it all depends on exhibition, improvement in fitness would reflect in performances," she added.

**Keep pushing**  
Pranati said her focus has been on her favourite discipline vault but she has to keep pushing to better her all-round score.

"I have to push because all-round score can be achieved only with the four apparatus. In World Cup or in Games, the focus is mainly on vault but over-

all, both vault and all-round are important," she said.

#### Enjoyment, pressure

"There is both, enjoyment and pressure. Sometimes I go for events alone and hope that I would get at least one medal. I focus on giving my best. It is not that one can clinch the gold easily; your results depend on your performances."

"But it is also very difficult to end the competition with the Chinese and Japanese gymnasts," she said.

# SCIENCE

## In breakthrough, neural network 'explains' how it found new antibiotic

A study has reported making deep-learning approaches to drug discovery 'explainable', a significant step; scientists have reported discovering a new class of antibiotics. The last known structural class of antibiotics was reported in 2000. Their work has thus ended a decades-long wait

Sayantan Datta

**W**hat connects ChatGPT and antibiotics? History has a curious answer: 1944. In that year, scientists proposed the first artificial neural network, a technology that later led to the birth of deep-learning and artificially intelligent systems like ChatGPT. The same year, biologists discovered streptomycin, the world's first aminoglycoside antibiotic. It would soon revolutionise the treatment of life-threatening diseases like tuberculosis.

Today, we have a deeper connection between deep-learning and antibiotics. In a December 2023 paper in *Nature*, scientists have reported discovering a new class of antibiotics using a form of deep-learning that has been gaining more attention.

According to their paper, the last known structural class of antibiotics was reported in 2000. Their work has thus ended a decades-long wait for a new class.

The researchers were from the Broad Institute, Integrated Biosciences Inc., the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering, and the Leibniz Institute of Polymer Research.

### Enhancing drug development

Unlike previous approaches that used deep-learning to discover new drugs, the researchers said they were able to identify the chemical motifs - technically called substructures - their model used to check whether a given compound could be an antibiotic. This, they wrote, made their model "explainable".

The team also demonstrated the efficacy of two compounds from this novel class of antibiotics in mice infected with methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). MRSA infections were responsible for more than 100,000 human deaths in 2019.

Amitesh Anand, a biologist who studies bacterial metabolism at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, lauded the study for advancing "our understanding in specific antibiotic research" and providing "a broader model for enhancing drug development strategies".

AI researcher Vineeth Balasubramanian, a computer science and engineering professor at IIT Hyderabad, called the study "impressive". "Being able to isolate substructures that have a certain tested property may be critical in scientific understanding as well as expediting drug discovery efforts," he said.

### Deep-learning, explain yourself

All artificial neural networks are made of artificial 'neurons'. These are algorithms that receive an input, perform a computation, and relay the output. Deep-learning neural networks have three or more layers of such 'neurons'.

Using these neural networks to make predictions has two steps: training and testing. In training, the network is provided with a large amount of annotated inputs. For example, if the network is being trained to identify pictures of cats, it is provided with many such pictures labelled 'cat'.

During testing, the network is shown images outside the input dataset, e.g. one



Artificial neural networks is a circuit of artificial neurons that is organised like neurons are in the brain. Representative image. STEVE JOHNSON/UNSPLASH

of a cat the network hasn't encountered during training and another of a dog. If the network is able to accurately classify the former as 'cat' and the latter as 'not cat', the network is said to have 'learnt'.

With most deep-learning networks, researchers have not been able to identify which aspects of the novel input the network used to make its evaluation. This renders most deep learning models a black box.

On the other hand, the network reported in the new study was explainable, which is the opposite. According to Prof. Balasubramanian, this would be like "a deep learning model predicting an image as that of a cat and then explaining which pixels in the image helped the model make this prediction".

This is considered significant in antibiotic discovery. If deep-learning can identify potential antibiotics and also *explain* what substructures may contribute to its antibiotic activity, scientists can synthesise and test compounds with these substructures faster.

### Predictions and rationales

Inspired to open up the 'black box', Felix Wong, a researcher at the Broad Institute, co-founder of Integrated Biosciences, and lead author of the paper, started by experimentally screening more than 39,000 compounds for their ability to inhibit the growth of *S. aureus*. These contained "most known antibiotics, natural products, and structurally diverse molecules," the authors wrote. They finally shortlisted 512 compounds.

Then the team trained a graph neural network (GNN) on this dataset. A GNN represents atoms as "nodes" and the bonds between them as "edges" on a mathematical graph.

While searching for antibiotics, researchers are careful to choose compounds that don't harm human cells. Testing the 512 active compounds on lab-grown human cells, the researchers found 306 compounds to fit this criterion. The team also trained other GNNs to identify cytotoxic compounds.

In the testing phase, the GNNs were exposed to a database of more than 1.2 crore compounds, and the networks



With most deep-learning networks, researchers have not been able to identify which aspects of the novel input the network used to make its evaluation. This renders most deep learning models a black box

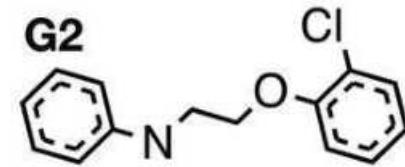
identified 3,646 compounds that could be antibiotic.

The researchers hypothesised that the GNNs made their predictions based on a molecule's substructures. (For example, several antibiotics have substructures called beta-lactam rings.) The team dubbed those substructures directly responsible for a compound's antibiotic property 'rationales'.

Using a different algorithm, the team determined the rationales of the 3,646 compounds - including previously known ones like beta-lactam rings, cephalosporin, and quinolone bicyclic rings.

### Against MRSA and VRE

While determining the rationales for 380 compounds from the set of 3,646, the team found some that had not been previously reported and which the GNNs predicted could confer antibiotic



properties to molecules. One such rationale was *N*-[2-(2-chlorophenoxy)ethyl]aniline (shown above). On further tests, two compounds containing this rationale were found to inhibit the growth of MRSA cultures by changing the concentration of hydrogen ions across the bacterial cell

membrane.

Notably, the compounds were also effective against vancomycin-resistant enterococci (VRE), a bacteria responsible for more than 5,400 deaths in the U.S. in 2017.

Finally, the team tested one compound in mouse models of MRSA-related skin and thigh infections and found that it effectively reduced the extent of infection.

The results mean the team can conduct more tests to ascertain their potential as antibiotics against MRSA. According to Prof. Balasubramanian, "there are many more studies and steps before a drug actually gets translated to use".

### A lacuna

The study's key contribution lies in making deep-learning approaches to drug discovery explainable. This, Prof. Balasubramanian said, is significant "especially if the method is reproducible across drug categories".

Dr. Wong said the team is now applying substructure rationales to design new antibiotics. It is also applying the approach to other drugs, including those that selectively kill ageing cells and thus prevent the onset of several age-related disorders.

Prof. Balasubramanian also flagged one lacuna in the new study: that the researchers had assessed the explainability of their system *after* they had predicted the antibiotic property of certain compounds.

As a result, any error in the explainability analysis would lead to "one never [knowing] whether the original deep-learning method focused on the wrong substructures or if the follow-up analysis was incorrect," Prof. Balasubramanian explained.

As an alternative, he suggested the researchers could incorporate explainability implicitly in their deep-learning models - a direction that his group at IIT Hyderabad has been exploring. According to him, this would be akin to "teaching the model to learn to predict via reasoning, which is more robust".

(Sayantan Datta is a science journalist and a faculty member at Krea University. Tweets at @queersprings.)

## THE SCIENCE QUIZ

### The end of the Skylab 4 mission and its 'incident'

Vasudevan Mukunth

#### QUESTION 1

On February 8, 1974, the crew of the fourth mission to the NASA space station Skylab returned to ground, ending the mission. Name the three astronauts of the crew, all of whom were on their first space mission.

#### QUESTION 2

The Skylab 4 mission became famous for a particular incident (see Q3). But it was also notable for being the first mission to record a \_\_\_\_\_ as it took shape from a space-borne camera. Fill in the blanks.

#### QUESTION 3

Near the mission's midpoint, the three crew members were

overworked and stressed out. For a planned radio meeting with ground control, they decided one of the crew would attend while the other two caught up on pending tasks. However, during the meeting, the crew forgot to turn on their radios, so ground control received no updates for the meeting. This incident acquired mythical overtones in the press as the first what in space?

#### QUESTION 4

Following the meeting incident, NASA officials made many changes to improve the relationship between ground control and astronauts in space. One of them was that at least one astronaut with the \_\_\_\_\_ would have to be a veteran, not a first-timer. Fill in the blank.

#### QUESTION 5

Name the record the Skylab 4 mission set that the Soviet Salyut 6 EO-1 mission broke in March 1978.

#### Answers to February 6 quiz:

- Third plate of the Maras Triple Junction - **Ans: African plate**
  - Fault that runs from Maras Triple Junction to Karlova Triple Junction - **Ans: East Anatolian Fault**
  - Common name for transcurrent fault - **Ans: Strike-slip fault**
  - Scale used to measure magnitude of the aftershocks - **Ans: Body-wave magnitude**
  - Scale on which the Turkey-Syria quakes had the highest magnitude - **Ans: Modified Mercalli Intensity scale**
- First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Shamim Mondal



Visual: Name this watch. One of the Skylab 4 crew wore it, making it the first automatic chronograph in space. DNALOR 01 (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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



Reducing fine particle matter could prevent thousands of premature deaths. AP

## Biden govt. sets tighter standards for soot pollution

Associated Press

The Biden administration is setting tougher standards for deadly soot pollution, saying that reducing fine particle matter from tailpipes, smokestacks and other industrial sources could prevent thousands of premature deaths a year.

Environmental and public health groups hailed the new Environmental Protection Agency rule finalised Wednesday as a major step in improving the health of Americans, including future generations. Industry groups warned it could lead to loss of manufacturing jobs and even shut down power plants or refineries.

EPA Administrator Michael Regan said the rule would have \$46 billion in net health benefits by 2032, including prevention of up to 800,000 asthma attacks and 4,500 premature deaths. He said the rule will especially benefit children, older adults and those with heart and lung conditions, as well as people in low-income and minority communities adversely affected by decades of industrial pollution.

The rule "really does represent what the Biden-Harris administration is all about, which is understanding that healthy people equal a healthy economy," he told reporters Tuesday. "We do not have to sacrifice people to have a prosperous and booming economy."

The rule sets maximum levels of 9 micrograms of fine particle pollution per cubic meter of air, down from 12 micrograms established a decade ago

**There would be \$46 billion in net health benefits by 2032, including prevention of up to 800,000 asthma attacks**

under the Obama administration.

The rule sets an air quality level that states and counties must achieve in the coming years to reduce pollution from power plants, vehicles, industrial sites and wildfires. The rule comes as Democratic President Joe Biden seeks reelection, and some Democrats have warned that a tough soot standard could harm his chances in key industrial states such as Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin.

Administration officials brushed aside those concerns, saying the industry has used technical improvements to meet previous soot standards and will be able to adapt to meet the new standard as well. Soot pollution has declined sharply in the past two decades, even as the U.S. gross domestic product has increased by more than 50%, Regan said.

"So we've heard this argument before, but the facts are well-established that these standards really will increase the quality of life for so many people, especially those who are disproportionately impacted," he said.

Industry groups and Republican officials said before the rule-making that a limit of 9 micrograms per cubic meter could sharply increase the number of U.S. counties in violation of the soot standard. Companies in those places would have difficulty obtaining permits to build or expand industrial plants.

Significantly lowering the standard for soot emissions "would threaten or prevent modernisation projects and other major improvements to paper mills," the American Forest and Paper Association said in a statement.

"As our industry modernises paper mills, we're improving air quality," including reductions in particulate matter, the group said. The paper lobby and other industry groups said in a letter to the White House that a lower soot standard could force companies to locate new facilities in foreign countries with weaker air-quality standards, thereby undermining the Biden administration's economic and environmental goals.

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