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ELECTION IN JAPAN

Takaichi set for a big victory: exit polls

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CASTE ENUMERATION

Language and culture key for survey, says Professor Devy

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TALKS WITH U.S.

Won't stop uranium enrichment: Araghchi

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DATA POINT

The Centre and the margins

An analysis of regional distribution of national majorities in Lok Sabhas

OPINION » PAGE 9



MOMENTOUS DAY
Dhakshineswar puts India among the Elite

SPORT » PAGE 17

NEARBY



Centre is creating a financial crisis in T.N., says Stalin

CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Sunday the Centre was creating a financial crisis in the State, but his government had been overcoming it politically and administratively. » PAGE 6

'Stand-off with DMK over seats may split Cong'

TIRUCHI

AIADMK chief Edappadi. K. Palaniswami has said the stand-off between the DMK and Congress over sharing of seats and power might lead to a split in the national party at the State level. » PAGE 6

EDUCATIONPLUS » PAGE 4

Each Minister handles his responsibility, says Goyal on trade deal, Russian oil

Varghese K. George
Nistula Hebbar
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI



Piyush Goyal

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday denied allegations of friction between him and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and that Ministers other than him did not know the contours of the trade deal with the U.S., telling *The Hindu* in an interview that "people have mixed up two different issues".

In an interview, as well as in previous press conferences, Mr. Goyal said the External Affairs Ministry would answer questions on whether India would stop its Russian oil imports, as U.S. President Donald Trump has claimed.

Citing an interview that the External Affairs Minister had given during his

"If you ask the Agriculture Minister about the trade deal, he won't answer," he added. "If you ask me about what's happening with, let's say, the oil mission, I wouldn't be able to respond. I would have a general idea, but I would not like to make a statement on record without full knowledge of facts. Each person handles his own responsibility."

He sought to address the concerns of farmers' unions, asserting that "not a single farmer had anything to worry about" as sensitive items have been excluded from the deal, while others have been dealt with through quotas, phased duty eliminations, and margins of preference.

INTERVIEW ON
» PAGE 11
CONG., CPI(M) ON DEAL
» PAGE 11

India, Malaysia ink pacts to expand strategic ties

The countries sign agreements in key areas, including security and semiconductors; during talks in Kuala Lumpur, Modi and Malaysian PM highlight efforts to promote trade in local currencies

Press Trust of India
KUALA LUMPUR

India and Malaysia on Sunday vowed to expand their ties in the high-priority sectors of trade and investment, defence, energy, advanced manufacturing and semiconductors with Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserting that both sides are committed to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Following his wide-ranging talks with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, Mr. Modi reiterated



Bidding adieu: Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves to the gathering before his departure from Malaysia on Sunday. PTI/PMO

India's position on combating terrorism as he said: "Our message on terrorism is clear; no double standard, no compromise."

The two sides inked a total of 11 agreements and documents to expand cooperation in a range of key areas, including a framework

pact for deeper engagement in the semiconductor sector.

Mr. Modi, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, and Mr. Ibrahim appreciated efforts to promote the usage of local currencies – the Indian rupee and Malaysian ringgit – for trade settlement.

"We will pave the way for economic transformation through strategic trust," Mr. Modi said, describing the India-Malaysia relationship as "special".

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

India will soon be free from Naxalism: Shah

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

The country will soon be free from Naxalism, Union Minister Amit Shah said after chairing a high-level security review meeting here on Sunday.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 10

es) midway, causing distress to thousands of aspirants. The main examination was postponed to an unscheduled date. The State government on Sunday night shifted TNPSC Controller of Examination Shannumagundaram. In his place, it appointed Venkatapriya. Chaos prevailed in the

morning as hundreds of candidates at the D.G. Vaishnav College in Arumbakkam, mentioned as an examination centre in their hall tickets, were not allowed to write the test, as their names did not figure in the list.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 6

In a dubious first, TNPSC cancels Group II and IIA exam midway

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

In an unprecedented development, a mix-up in the examination centre allotment in Chennai forced the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) to cancel Sunday's Combined Civil Services Examination-II (Group II and IIA Servic-

BJP deletes Himanta video after wide condemnation

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Assam unit of the BJP has deleted a video released on social media platforms showing Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma appearing to shoot at Muslims in framed photos on a wall displaying the words "No mercy".

One of the persons targeted appeared to be Assam Congress chief and Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi wearing a white skull cap.

The video, uploaded late on Saturday, garnered more than 5,00,000 views and drew condemnation from Opposition leaders, activists, and professionals for allegedly promoting hate against Muslims.

The BJP deleted the video, captioned "point blank shot" and ending with the Chief Minister dressed as a gunslunging cowboy, on Sunday. Neither the Chief Minister nor the party issued an explanation.

The video, posted ahead of the Assam Assembly election amid the party's campaign against "illegal immigrants", a softer term for Bengali-speaking or Bengal-origin settlers in Assam, was criticised widely.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

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CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

IN BRIEF



Deputy CM opens 'Mudhalvar Thirumana Maaligai' in city

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sunday inaugurated the 'Mudhalvar Thirumana Maaligai' (Chief Minister Marriage Hall), constructed with modern facilities at a cost of ₹13.56 crore, on Wall Tax Road in the city. He also presided over the wedding of 10 couples and presented them with gift items. The air-conditioned premises was constructed with funds sanctioned by Greater Chennai Corporation, Chennai Central MP Dayanidhi Maran under the Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, and Harbour MLA and Minister for Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department P.K. Sekarbabu under the Member of Legislative Assembly Local Area Development Scheme. Mr. Udhayanidhi said this was the first time a marriage hall was being opened in the name of the Chief Minister. He said priority was accorded to infrastructure development in North Chennai through the 'Vada Chennai Valarchi Thittam'. Mayor R. Priya, MLAs, and officials took part in the event.

Text & Context and Science

Weekday features on *The Hindu* epaper ([thehindu.com](#)) carries explainers, special articles and quizzes. In the latest issue (February 9, Monday), the following explainers are available:

- Why did Anthropic's Claude Cowork plug-ins spook markets [newsthrive.live/claudieplugginexp](#)
- Budget may cut reliance on foreign telescopes [newsthrive.spacebudget](#)

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Three men arrested for assaulting passers-by

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Basin Bridge police arrested three persons for assaulting four persons during a birthday celebration on Saturday night.

Police said friends of K. Naveen, a resident of Gandhi Nagar in Puliyantope, including Achu and Tamil Kumaran, celebrated Naveen's birthday by consuming alcohol on Powder Mills Road.

The trio assaulted four passers-by, including a boy, and created ruckus in the locality. The injured were sent to Government Stanley Hospital for treatment. After filing a case, the police arrested Naveen, Achu, and Tamil Kumaran.

THE HINDU
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The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Fourth Indian Library Congress will be held in the city on February 16 and 17 at Anna Centenary Library in Kotturpuram. Earlier, the Indian Library Congress was organised in Kerala, Bengaluru and New Delhi with an aim to strengthen libraries which help the poor and marginalised sections of society.

A brochure for the event was released on Sunday. While speaking at the

Goschen Library in city attracts readers again after restoration works by PWD

Sahana Mira
CHENNAI

At the newly-restored Goschen Library, Padmavathi, an elderly resident of Chintadripet, stood browsing through the rows of Tamil novels with two other books in her arm that she planned to borrow. With visible fascination, she told the librarian how she used to visit the library many decades ago before it fell into dilapidation, and how she finally gets to walk through its doors again.

Another visitor Saravanam N., said the library engulfed him in childhood nostalgia from nearly two decades ago when he used to visit the place right after school.

Opened to visitors last month by Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, the librarian-in-charge Dhinakaran D.P., says around 50 visitors now make use of the library every day.

The library, which marked its 100th year on January 23, was restored and renovated by the Public Works Department at a cost of ₹2.36 crore.



District Library Officer Kavitha M. said that Goschen Library has long been a landmark for holding heritage walks. M. SRINATH

non fiction, and works written by women.

Beyond newspapers and magazines, the lending section includes literature, history, medicine, and fiction in Tamil largely, with a row for English that has contemporary authors such as Madeline Miller, John Green alongside many classics.

"We have a total of 18,000 books along with full facilities for preparing for competitive exams. There are dedicated reading materials, a separate space with three compu-

The 100-year-old library was renovated by the department at a cost of ₹2.36 crore

ters, WiFi access for those bringing their own laptops and the halls are fitted with seven air-conditioners," said Mr. Dhinakaran.

The library also has refurbished toilets and an airy backyard space for readers.

"We are in discussion with a nearby school to bring middle-school students to the children's section for a dedicated library hour every week. Many such initiatives will take shape in future," he added.

District Library Officer Kavitha M., said that Goschen Library has long been the landmark for many holding heritage walks, since it is a complete heritage structure with Indo-Saracenic style of architecture on the outside with a Madras terrace roof within.

The membership fee is ₹30, with ₹10 as yearly subscription to borrow books.

Something that stands out at Goschen Library today is its exclusive reading room for women with nearly 3,000 books on women empowerment, fiction,

treating libraries as a tool for social progress, and the State today had over 4,500 public libraries.

Former Madras High Court Judge K. Chandru said, there were efforts to convert the Anna Centenary Library into a hospital. Today, the library sees a footfall of 10,000 people.

School Education Secretary B. Chandra Mohan said, with changing times, libraries are being reimagined and re-positioned as a hub for learning. General Convenor, In-

dian Library Congress, Chennai, and MP V. Sivadasan said that around 500 delegates would attend the event, and the delegates would discuss the importance of libraries and the future of library movement. School Education Minister Anbil Mahesh Poyyamozhi, DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group, Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan, Mr. Chandru, writers, academics, activists and many others will also participate.

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Gate Residents' Association, the upmarket crowd that shops at KNK Road is different from those visiting T. Nagar, which was already a fully commercial area. There will be more cars arriving at KNK Road, but there is no multi-level parking or a proper system to regularly charge motorists. "We are taking the legal route to resolve matters. KNK Road used to accommodate nearly 600 cars a day. Where will residents park these vehicles now?" asked a member.

used for paid parallel or perpendicular parking which will ease traffic flow," he said.

He also suggested a separate system to collect and manage commercial and food waste and to temporarily suspend the CMDA rule that permits unrestricted commercial approvals in mixed residential areas until infrastructure issues are resolved.

"The vehicles parked on the pavements and bays are not charged by the police. There is only one traffic police to control the one-way traffic. More personnel are needed to keep a check on all issues", said Udhaya, a worker at one of the shops on KNK Road.

"There are over 10 police personnel assigned around this area so far. Two to three more police personnel will soon be deployed for this road alone to regulate vehicle movement, make parking provisions, and levy charges regularly.

According to officials, there was an issue with one of the underground pipelines due to nearby Metro Rail work, which would be fixed within four days. Mr. Krishnan said that a complete overhaul or project reversal is not possible now. He suggested identifying clearly marked parking slots along interior lanes, with signage displaying parking charges.

"Towing is not the solution and preventive measures are needed. Open spaces in Wallace Garden and Rutland



Unseen impact: Residents said haphazard parking of vehicles on KNK Road leads to conflicts between motorists, traffic jams and constant honking. R. AISHWARYAA

CMDA said that, with special permission, the limitations on commercial use could be waived allowing for unlimited commercial floor space in a single building, there has been rapid commercialisation of many buildings," he said.

Parking allocation for a residential complex differs from that of commercial and mixed-use buildings. Unregulated on-street parking by a transient population has increased due to rampant commercialisation. "Many existing residential building owners have converted their houses, partly or fully, into shops and cafes without catering to the revised parking requirements. Residents have been flagging these problems with

GCC during the project's inception. The report stated that infrastructure in these two localities needed strengthening "to cater to the KNK Road development and to enable easy movement of all modes of transport".

Now, vehicles are diverted towards the smaller streets of Wallace Garden and Rutland Gate to reach Greaves Road and Nungambakkam, since the KNK Road allows only one-way traffic towards Uttamar Gandhi Salai.

Adding to this, the visiting population of KNK Road park their vehicles haphazardly on the already narrow roads, reducing the width of the carriageway. This leads to conflicts between motorists, traffic jams and constant honking, residents said. They cited a report prepared by private consultants for

GCC during the project's inception.

A security guard at one of the stores on KNK Road said two small portions of a lane were opened up two days ago, and work is now on to fix the issues, further reducing the carriageway.

However, in the Government Order dated March 29, 2023, this requirement was excluded, the locals alleged.

"Cafés and restaurants remain open till 11 p.m., and late-night activities go on unchecked. Permitting such operations should have been done after consulting the people who have been living there for decades, especially the elderly," said Mr. Krishnan.

According to the Wallace Garden and Rutland

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Marina's new toilets shut at night due to infrastructure issues

Workers say toilets are closed as they are unable to pump water due to power cuts. GCC explores keeping toilets open 24X7 in crowded areas

Aloysius Xavier Lopez
CHENNAI

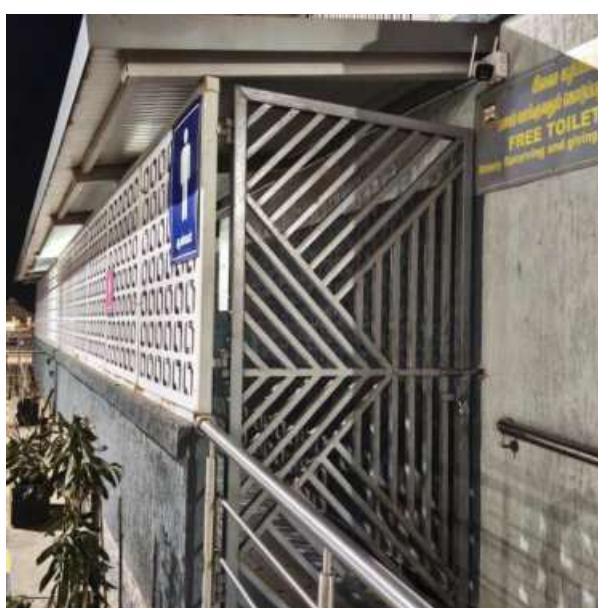
Modern toilets constructed by the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) in public spaces such as Marina beach remain closed, especially during the nights, due to infrastructural deficiencies.

As the number of persons visiting Marina beach has increased after the announcement of the Blue Flag certification project, the footfall at GCC toilets in and around the beach have increased. Workers said the toilets had to be closed as they were unable to pump water, owing to disruption of power supply to the toilets.

An unpleasant odour emanated from the toilet block recently constructed by the GCC near the swimming pool, with sewage overflowing onto the beach. Women who visited the new toilet block said the facility remained locked in the evening.

As many toilets were closed by 8.30 p.m., there is a demand among the public to ensure these remained open for visitors till 10 p.m.

Following complaints from residents, the Corporation has started sensitising the workers to proper



Poor maintenance: As most toilets were closed by 8.30 p.m., there is a demand among the public to ensure these remained open till 10 p.m. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

maintenance of the toilets. Corporation officials said they were exploring the feasibility of keeping the toilets open 24X7 in crowded areas. In some locations, GCC is planning to keep the toilets open until 11 p.m., based on suggestions from visitors and inputs from the police.

The Corporation started giving a makeover to public toilets in 2022, after film personalities campaigned on social media about them, emphasising the importance of sanitation for women in public

spaces. Residents have been requested to complain to the civic authorities about problems pertaining to public toilets.

QR codes provided
QR codes have been provided for complaining about poor maintenance of the toilets.

The Corporation will take action against those responsible for poor maintenance of toilets. Residents could call the GCC helpline 1913 to report civic issues pertaining to toilets, an official said.

MMA's annual convention on February 11

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Madras Management Association (MMA) will host its annual convention 2026 on February 11, on the theme 'India@2035: Driving Progress in a Changing Global Paradigm' at Taj Coromandel in the city.

Lakshminarayanan D., president, MMA, and managing director, Sundaram Home Finance Ltd., said CEOs, members of the senior and middle level management, academicians, and management students would benefit from this convention. There will be sessions on the theme 'Growth Arenas for India' by C. Rangarajan, former RBI Governor and Chairman, Economic Advisory Council; and four special sessions with industry experts alongside Q&A rounds.

The sessions are on 'Talent and skills for the future', 'Building resilient foundations for the future', 'R&D and innovation', 'DNA of future leaders.'

Gopal Srinivasan, chairman and managing director, TVS Capital Funds (P) Limited, would deliver the inaugural address. Lt. Gen (Retd.) Shokin Chauhan, former DG, Assam Rifles, will deliver the keynote address. Group Captain (Retd.) R. Vijayakumar, Executive Director, MMA, said over 600 delegates would take part.

The Hindu and *The Hindu BusinessLine* are the media partners for the convention. McKinsey & Company is the knowledge partner.

Kennel Club of India secretary Sudarsan passes away at 77

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

C.V. Sudarsan, secretary and treasurer of The Kennel Club of India, passed away in Chennai on Sunday. He was 77.

Mr. Sudarsan was also the president of The Madras Canine Club.

He is survived by his wife, Rukmani Sudarsan; son, Siddhartha Sudarsan; daughter-in-law, Vaishnavi; daughter, Roopa Balaji; son-in-law, B.V. Balaji; and grandchildren.

He was the International All Breeds Judge and was widely respected for his strong advocacy of Indian native breeds, including the Rajapalayam.

According to details on the Madras Canine Club website, the club was started in the year 1976 with late Mrs. Leela Ratnam as its founder-president and Mr. Sudarsan as the founder-secretary.



C.V. Sudarsan

After the demise of Mrs. Ratnam, Mr. Sudarsan was elected as the president and Mrs. Shyama Murgesan as its founder-treasurer along with a band of devoted hardcore dog lovers, most of whom still continue to be with the club in some capacity or the other. Mr. Sudarsan was a Chartered Accountant too and served as the Chief Editor of the Indian Kennel Gazette, the official publication of the Kennel Club of India.

Suryavanshi-a-lifetime talent!



daCunha/AB/1033

Chennai Weather	max	min
Tiruvallur	32	16
Chennai Airport	31	21
Chennai City	33	22

Timings CHENNAI

MONDAY, FEB. 09
RISE 06:34 SET 18:13
RISE 00:00 SET 11:24
TUESDAY, FEB. 10
RISE 06:33 SET 18:13
RISE 00:34 SET 12:07
WEDNESDAY, FEB. 11
RISE 06:33 SET 18:14
RISE 01:26 SET 12:54

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APPOINTMENT

THE KERALA INDUSTRIAL CORRIDOR DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED (KICDC)
(A SPECIAL PURPOSE VEHICLE OF GOVT. OF INDIA & GOVT. OF KERALA)

APPLICATIONS INVITED

Online applications are invited from eligible applicants for appointment to the following positions in The Kerala Industrial Corridor Development Corporation Limited (KICDC):

- CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER (01 NO.)
- DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER – INFRASTRUCTURE (01 NO.)
- SENIOR EXECUTIVE – FINANCE (01 NO.)

Start Date for Online Application Submission : 09/02/2026 (10.00 AM)
Last Date for Online Application Submission : 20/02/2026 (05.00 PM)

For more details, visit www.kicdc.org. Printout or hard copy of the applications will not be accepted.



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Real estate dealer held for defrauding film company

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI
The Tambaram police have arrested real estate dealer E.V.P. Santosh Reddy for allegedly defrauding Vels Film International of approximately ₹22 crore.

Tambaram Police said a complaint was filed by Vels Film International against Santosh Reddy of the EVP group and his associates.

The complainant alleged that they entered into an agreement regarding the management of approximately 34.75 acres of land in Sholinganallur, concerning the Vels Trade and Convention Center property, which comprises the studios, theatres, and guesthouses located there.

The Vels company paid ₹15 crore and again ₹6.81 crore. Later, upon examining the documents provided by Santosh Reddy, they were found to be without proper completion certificates or necessary permits. Based on the complaint, the Tambaram Central Crime Branch police arrested Santosh Reddy.

THE HINDU

Air Surcharge as applicable:
New Delhi - Rs. 15/-;
Port Blair - Rs. 20/-

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ब-१-निविदा मुच्चना क्र. ७३ सन - २०२५-२६

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टिप :- सदर निविदा सुचनेमध्ये ३६ कामे प्रस्तावित करण्यात आली आहेत.

जा.क्र. का.अ/छासंविवि/निविदा/३६२/२०२६ दि. ५/२/२०२६

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DGIPR/2025-26/5621

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PHONE: 0663-29507210, 2950765(R), E-Mail: srgmhp_burla@yahoo.co.in

CIN : U40101OR1995SC003963
No.HHEP/Tech-W/52/Vol-XI/985 Date: 06.02.2026

TENDER CALL NOTICE NO.HHEP-19/2026

Sealed tenders are invited in two part i.e.(i) Techno-commercial bid & (ii) price bid from the registered travel agencies / vehicle owners having commercial registration and having valid IT PAN, GST Regd. Certificate and experience of supplying hired vehicles to any Govt organization/ PSU / Industrial units in last 03 years.

Description of type of Vehicle	Estimated Cost in Rs.	Cost of Tender paper (non-refundable) in Rs.	EMD (Refundable) in Rs.
Deployment of different categories of hire vehicles to HHEP, Burla & GSPCL site office, Rourkela for a period of two years on 24 hours basis	2,28,80,240/-	Rs.11,800/- (Rs.10,000 + GST @18%)	2,28,850/-

* Sale of tender paper : 09.02.2026 (10:00 AM) to 23.02.2026 upto 05.00PM
* Receipt of tender paper : 24.02.2026 upto 03.00PM
* Date & time of opening of tender: 24.02.2026 at 04.00PM
Further details like tender documents / terms & conditions (corrigendum/errata/addendum,if any), please visit our official website www.ohpccltd.com Unit Head, HHEP, Burla
OIPR-4001/4007/1/25-26/0001

NOTICE INVITING TENDER CPD/177 -2025-26

Tenders are invited through e-Tendering in SRM Two Bid system from the registered vendors for Supply of:

Tender No. & Description of Material	Estimated Amount (in Rs. Lakhs)	Due Date & Time (Hrs.) Submission & Opening of Tender
SP/IT-0610/0226 [2nd Call] RFx No. : 7000038784 for Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Nagpur islanding scheme under EHV O&M Zone, Nagpur and ALDC Ambazari in MSETCL	Rs. 2459.33 Lakhs	20.02.2026 18:00 Hrs

Contact Person: Office of the Executive Engineer (Gr-VI)
Email: 1)C.E.(CPA) 2)C.E(O&M) 3)S.E.(CPA) 4)E.E. (VI) 5)E.E. (P&C)
CPA, C.O. MSETCL, 1st Floor, Prakashgad Building, Bandra (E), Mumbai Tel. No.: 022-69852720
Email id: ceepa@mahatransco.in, ceom@mahatransco.in, secpa@gmail.in, eegrp@mahatransco.in, eepco@mahatransco.in
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IN BRIEF



Corporation conducts meet to discuss upkeep of its toilets

A community consultation meeting on the theme 'Our Toilet, Our Responsibility' was held on Sunday at 437 locations, where the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has established its toilet facilities. According to a press release, the consultations brought together residents from areas where the facilities are located to discuss public rights and responsibilities related to the use, upkeep, and protection of the toilets. Participants were briefed on safety and operational features, including the installation of surveillance cameras outside the facilities, handwashing arrangements, mirrors, sanitation charts for cleaning staff and supervisors, and mechanisms for carrying out minor and major repairs. Measures to prevent pollution in urinals, cleaning practices, rotational deployment of sanitation workers, ventilation, and periodic testing of water tanks and water quality were also discussed. The release added that users were informed about proper disposal of waste and sanitary napkins in designated bins. Public representatives, officials, volunteers and local residents participated in the meetings.

Artists perform at cultural event on Blue Flag beach

More than 70 artistes performed at the weekly cultural events on the Marina Blue Flag beach on Sunday. It featured folk artists from various parts of Tamil Nadu, and many people thronged the beach to witness the performances, according to a press release. Performances during the three-hour programme, held from 5.30 p.m., included multi-genre dance, instrumental music, folk games and items such as Punjabi bhangra, beatboxing and *gaana* music, the release said. The Greater Chennai Corporation has been conducting weekly cultural events at the Blue Flag beach since September 21, 2025, with programmes scheduled every Sunday evening.

Pre-feasibility report for Rameswaram airport submitted to T.N. government

Sunitha Sekar
CHENNAI

The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has found a site closer to Keelakarai, favourable for building the greenfield airport at Rameswaram in Ramanathapuram district.

The pre-feasibility report was submitted to the Tamil Nadu government recently, and the site near Keelakarai, near Manikareri and Mayakulam villages, has been found to be technically feasible for constructing the airport, AAI sources said.

In September last year, the Tamil Nadu government sent a letter to the AAI to examine and inspect two sites – one near Uchipuli and another near Keelakarai.

Field inspection
Following this, a joint team from the AAI and the Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO) conducted a field inspection of both sites in October last year.

The site near Keelakarai has a few high-tension lines and waterbodies. When compared to the site near Uchipuli, which has a lot of trees, paddy fields, groundwater wells, and residents, the site close to Keelakarai has lesser obstacles and residents as seen from the initial inspection.

The high-tension lines will have to be re-routed should the airport come up at this site, the AAI said.

The pre-feasibility report says the site is about 10 km from the Rama-

CM seeks timely release of funds for land acquisition

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Stalin alleges that "factually incorrect information" is being spread in the media with regard to land acquisition for railway projects in Tamil Nadu

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, detailing the status of land acquisition for railway projects in the State, and sought his intervention for their speedy execution. He called for timely release of funds for land acquisition and revival of projects kept in abeyance.

Mr. Stalin said he was constrained to write the letter in light of some "factually incorrect information" being spread in the media. Administrative sanction had been accorded for acquisition of 2,500.61.06 hectares of land for implementation of railway projects. Of this, the Railways had not sanctioned funds for 931.52.96 hectares.

Administrative sanction was being processed for acquisition of 296.02.95 hectares of private land for two projects – for which the revised land plan schedule (LPS) was received recently from the Railways – and will be issued shortly. Of the balance of 1,273.05.15 hectares for 19 major ongoing projects, 1,198.02.34 hectares had been acquired and handed over to the Railways. However, in respect of five projects, the LPS was yet to be given by the Railways, he said.

Land acquisition had

been fully completed in respect of major projects such as Tindivanam-Nagari broad gauge line, Madurai-Thoothukudi broad gauge line, Maniyachi-Nagercoil broad gauge line, Kanniyakumari-Nagercoil broad gauge line doubling, Nagercoil-Eranji broad gauge line doubling, a new broad gauge line between Chinnaalem and Kallakurichi, a broad gauge line between Mayiladuthurai and Tiruvarur, the four junction point at Pattukkottai, a new broad gauge line from Salem to Karur (track formation), a broad gauge line between Mannargudi and Needamangalam, the Chennai Beach-Korukkupet 3/4th line, and the Vilupuram-Dindigul broad gauge line. For the remaining projects, the land was being acquired expeditiously, Mr. Stalin said.

"I wish to highlight that timely payment of compensation to landowners is an essential prerequisite

for completing the land acquisition process. Regrettably, delays in the release of funds by the Ministry of Railways have hampered the progress of the land acquisition process. This has led to disruptions, uncertainty for the landowners, and delays in project execution," Mr. Stalin said.

According to him, the State government had accorded the highest priority to railway projects and established a robust monitoring mechanism. The Chief Secretary and the Transport Secretary regularly convene monthly coordination meetings with railway officials to remove bottlenecks and expedite land acquisition for the pending projects, he said.

"At this juncture, I would also like to express concern over the relatively limited allocation of new railway projects to Tamil Nadu in recent years. As the second largest economy in the country and a major hub for manufacturing and industrial growth, Tamil Nadu continues to make substantial contributions to the national GDP and exports. The State possesses immense potential to further bolster the nation's economic progress through enhanced rail connectivity and infrastructure," he said.

He urged Mr. Modi to direct the Railways Ministry to release the required funds for the sanctioned projects without delay, preferably in full and on a priority basis, to facilitate smooth land acquisition and compensation. The State government was fully committed to extending cooperation for the speedy execution of the railway projects, he said.

A lumpsum and timely allocation of funds for land acquisition, rather than piecemeal allocation, would facilitate uninterrupted and expeditious

M.K. STALIN
Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

Justice R. Mahadevan of the Supreme Court (4th right) and Director of Kasturi and Sons Ltd. N. Ravi (right) with the recipients of Rajasthani-Tamil Seva Award 2026 at an event held by Rajasthani Association Tamil Nadu in the city on Sunday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Rajasthani-Tamil Seva Awards presented

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Two institutions and three personalities who contributed to the social and cultural development of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry received the Rajasthani-Tamil Seva Awards 2026 on Sunday.

The recipients of the awards include Sudha Seshayyan (Academic leader, physician, and cultural polymath), B. Sargunam (Chief Othuvar and custodian of saivite musical heritage), Payir Trust (Pioneer in Holistic Rural Transformation), K. R. Raja (Advocate, Reformer, and Social Architect) and Public Health Centre, West Mambalam (An Enduring Legacy of Community-Driven Healthcare).

Speaking at the event, Supreme Court Judge R. Mahadevan, who was the chief guest, said the society which honours its citizens for extraordinary services would be acclaimed globally.

Pointing to the efforts of awardees to serve the society, Justice Mahadevan said: "It is a good idea to focus on strengthening the villages for national growth and development. It is an

honour for the Rajasthani Association to recognise institutions that seek to conserve 800 water bodies, protects indigenous crops, and provides nutrition for 35,000 children."

This year, the jury panel screened over 200 nominations to select five awardees which included individuals and institutions, who embody integrity, commitment, and sustained social impact. Each recipient of the award was honoured with a citation, a medal, and a cash prize of ₹2 lakh each.

Jury panel
The distinguished Jury Panel included: Chairman: S. Gurumurthy (Editor, *Thuglak*), N. Ravi (Director, Kasturi and Sons Ltd.), Padma Vibhushan Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam (Renowned Bharatanatyam Exponent), Prof. E. Balagurusamy (Former Vice-Chancellor, Anna University), Sugalchand Jain (Eminent Philanthropist, and Founder-Chairman, Bhagwan Mahaveer Foundation).

Narendra Srisimal, president of the association, also spoke. The Rajasthani Association Tamil Nadu was established in 1967.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

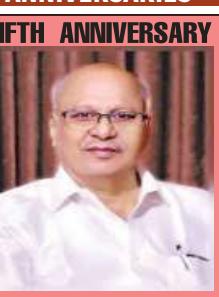
DEATH



COM. S V SRINIVASAN
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DOD: 07.02.2026

Chairman, AIBRF & AICBRF All India Canara Bank Retirees' Federation dips its banner and pays respectful homage. Contact No 9444547264

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES



FIFTH ANNIVERSARY
N.P.L. SEKAR
(s/o N.PLOGANATHA NAIKER Nonmangalam)
D.O.B. 09.06.1947 D.O.D: 09.02.2021
Fondly Remembered by his wife
S. Thirulochini
D/o. R.Arumugam Ex. Mayor Chennai
98412 65151

3rd ANNIVERSARY



1ST DEATH ANNIVERSARY
K.G. LALITHA
Retd. Teacher of
Asan Memorial Sr. Sec. School
Fondly remembered by
Husband: V.S.Subramanian, M.A.B.
Advocate, Chennai High Court
Sons & Family. Mob: 944918150

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CIN : U40101OR1995SGC003963
NHEP/Tech-W-2022/9855
e- TENDER CALL NOTICE No.HHEP-11/2026

Date: 04.02.2026

Unit Head, HHEP, Burla invites percentage rate e-tender in double cover system from the eligible class of contractor registered with the Govt. of Odisha and contractor of equivalent grade/ class registered with Central Govt./ MES / Railway to be received online mode only for the following work in the portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>.

Name of work	Approx. tender value of work (in Rs.) excluding GST, EPF & ESIs	Cost of tender paper (Non-Refundable)	EMD in Rs.	Class of contractor
Construction of Counterfort Retaining wall near Power channel bank at RD-10500 ft of HHEP, Burla	1,02,53,474/-	Rs.11,800/- (Rs.10,000/- + GST @18%)	102600/-	'B & A'

• Sale of tender paper : 09.02.2026 (11.00 AM) to 26.02.2026 upto 03.00 PM
• Receipt of tender paper : 26.02.2026 upto 03.00 PM
• Date & time of opening of tender: 26.02.2026 at 04.00 PM
• Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>, Unit Head, HHEP, Burla
QIPR-4001/4071/25-26/0002

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Samrat Rana
Shooting

Shubman Gill
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Scan the QR code or visit sstar.news/SAA26PA to vote!

SPORTSTAR ACES
2026 #IndiaTriumphs

From Page One

TNPSC cancels Group II and IIA exam midway

The candidates staged a protest on EVR Periyar Salai. A senior TNPSC official arrived later and said that owing to an automation error, the centre was allocated to these candidates who were actually supposed to write the exam at Government Arts College, Nandanam, and Presidency College.

The TNPSC said the examination was cancelled owing to "technical issues" and the re-exam date would be announced soon.

Initially, officials said the exam would be cancelled in Chennai alone. However, as the protests intensified, the TNPSC announced the cancellation of the exam all over the State.

The exam was being conducted for posts such as Assistant Inspector in the Department of Labour; Junior Employment Officer in the Department of Employment and Training; Probation Officer in the Department of Children Welfare and Special Services; Sub-Registrar, Grade-II, in the Department of Registration; Special Branch Assistant in the Tamil Nadu Ministerial Service in the Greater Chennai Police; and Forester in the Department of Forests.

The cancellation surprised the candidates who were midway through their examination in the rest of the State. At Yadava College in Madurai, candidates were shocked when informed about the cancellation in the last 10 minutes of the forenoon session. A woman said she had come to write the exam just two days after her wedding and was mentally stressed.

In Coimbatore's St. Michael's Higher Secondary School, the examination continued for about 20 minutes before it was stopped. A shocked Prithviraj, a visually impaired candidate, said he had travelled about 15 km to the centre.

In Tiruchi, officials said they received instructions from Chennai midway to immediately collect the question papers and answer-sheets from all candidates. P. Priyadarshini, who appeared for the examination at Thanthai Periyar Government Arts and Science College, said she was able to attempt 150 of the 200 questions before the candidates were informed of the cancellation at 11.45 a.m. She had been preparing for the examination for the past five years.

In Nagapattinam, candidates were asked to leave within an hour of the start of the examination. S. Selvam, who travelled from Vedaranyam, a journey of nearly two hours, said the cancellation had rendered the effort futile.

S. Gopinath of Alangudi in Pudukkottai district said he wrote the exam for one-and-a-half hours before officials informed the candidates of the cancellation. "The paper was easy, and I thought I would clear it," he said, adding that he had cleared the preliminary examination in September and had been preparing since then. His brother, Indra S., who has been preparing for competitive examinations since 2022, said he began writing the examination at 9.30 a.m. and was asked to stop at 11 a.m.

IN BRIEF

Boy bitten by snake at school in Tiruvarur, dies at hospital

A 17-year-old Class XI student of a government school at Arithuvaramangalam in Tiruvarur district, who was undergoing treatment after being bitten by a Russell's Viper on the school premises, died on Sunday. The deceased was identified as Sivaprakash, son of Muruganandam and Radha of Sethanur. According to the police, the Russell's Viper had sneaked into the boy's lunch bag. However, the boy's relatives alleged that Sivaprakash was bitten by the snake in another room where he had gone to take some books. He was rushed to the Thanjavur Medical College and Hospital, but died despite treatment.

Madras HC to hear income tax appeals against DMK today

Mohamed Imranullah S.
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court is set to hear on Monday three writ appeals filed by the Income Tax (IT) Department for transferring DMK and DMK Charitable Trust's income tax files to an official probing the seizure of ₹11.48 crore from a premises reportedly connected with the party's general secretary and Water Resources Minister, Duraimurugan, in 2019.

The appeals have been listed before Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice G. Arul Murugan. They had been preferred against Justice C. Saravanan's May 9, 2025 order through which the single judge had quashed the transfer orders and remitted the matter to the Commissioner of Income Tax (Exemptions) for passing fresh orders after granting an opportunity of hearing to the party and the trust.



The appeals were for transferring DMK and DMK Charitable Trust's income tax files to an official probing the seizure of ₹11.48 crore from a premises allegedly linked to Minister Duraimurugan in 2019.

ed with printed labels of the names of Assembly segments and wards.

Since Mr. Duraimurugan was the general secretary of the DMK and a permanent trustee of the DMK Charitable Trust, the Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax, Central Circle-I(3), sent a proposal to the Director-General of Income Tax (Investigations) on January 13, 2021 for transferring the income

tax files, of the political party as well as the charitable trust, to him so that a "coordinated investigation" could be conducted.

The DGIT accepted the proposal and issued a direction to the Commissioner of Income Tax (Exemptions) to transfer the files. Accordingly, the Commissioner passed two individual orders on January 19, 2021, transferring the files of the DMK and the trust from the Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax (Exemptions) and the Income Tax Officer (Exemptions) Ward-I respectively to the Assistant Commissioner of Income Tax, Central Circle-I(3).

Immediately, the party and the trust filed two individual writ petitions challenging the transfer orders. After the court ordered notices to the IT Department in those two cases, the Assistant Commissioner issued notices to the

charitable trust alone on February 26, 2021 and March 4, 2021, calling upon it to furnish certain details related to the assessment year 2018-19.

Therefore, the trust filed a third writ petition challenging the two assessment notices and impleaded Assistant Commissioner Jayaraman Saravanan by name. It accused him of acting with a malicious intent "in order to please the political party in power at the Centre and to tarnish the image of DMK". It contended that there was absolutely no need for a coordinated investigation.

The trust also highlighted the timing of the transfer and said that though the seizure was made in 2019, the transfer order was passed just before the Assembly election in Tamil Nadu in 2021. Even when Justice Saravanan took up all three writ petitions together for the final hearing

in 2025, senior counsel P. Wilson had contended, "A similar situation prevails even now as the State is all set to face the next Assembly election in 2026."

On the other hand, the IT Department argued in its writ appeals that the order passed by the single judge was in contravention of the settled principles of law and opposed to the facts of the case. It said the judge had not given any valid reason for quashing the transfer orders and had decided the three writ petitions "on mere conjectures and surmises rather than considering the facts of the case and applicable law".

It also said the transfer of income tax files from one officer to another was an administrative act meant for centralised assessment and there was no need to give an opportunity of hearing to the assesses as they will not be prejudiced by such transfer.

Fascists, their slaves should be defeated, says Udhayanidhi

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Sunday said the unity of minorities and DMK was turning the "Sanghis" uncomfortable.

He accused the AIADMK and its leader Edappadi K. Palaniswami of becoming slaves of the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Participating in the silver jubilee celebrations of the student wing of Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) at Valuvan Kottam in Chennai, Mr. Udhayanidhi said the "fascists and their slaves should be defeated" to ensure that the rights of the minorities are protected in Tamil Nadu.

"You [TMMK student wing] have participated in

all protests organised by the DMK for the sake of education. Our unity is making the Sanghis uncomfortable," he said.

"The UGC brought in some regulations (equity) to prevent discrimination based on caste and religion. The BJP government opposed it and got a stay in the court," Mr. Udhayanidhi said, adding, "Our Chief Minister wanted it to be implemented."

Lauding the TMMK volunteers for their social service during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, he said, "The DMK grew because of the power of the students."

MMK president M.H. Jahanullah said they must work to ensure that the DMK-led alliance wins the upcoming election.

Opposition parties hit out at government for cancelling TNPSC Group II, IIA exams

The exam was rescheduled following a mix-up in the allotment of centres in Chennai. The DMK govt. is an 'incompetent administration' that lacks the ability to conduct even an examination; it is trying to shirk its responsibility by hiding behind the excuse of a 'technical fault', says Palaniswami

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Opposition parties hit out at the DMK government for cancelling Sunday's Combined Civil Services Examination-II (Group II and IIA Services) following a mix-up in the allotment of centres in Chennai.

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami termed the DMK government an "incompetent administration" that lacks the ability to conduct even an important examination.

Mr. Palaniswami said in a statement that the postponement had exposed the true state of the administration in Tamil Nadu, and that this was the first time a major examination had been postponed on the very day it was scheduled, owing to problems related to hall tickets and confusion at examination centres.

"What is even more

shocking are the reports emerging from several places that the candidates were unaware of the postponement and actually wrote the examination. The DMK administration is trying to shirk its responsibility by hiding behind the vague excuse of a 'technical fault'. Do not forget how important the Group II examination is, and that behind that so-called 'fault' lies the shattered hopes and years of hard work of countless young aspirants," he said.

Recalling the DMK's 2021 election promise to provide 5.5 lakh jobs, which he said has "already vanished into thin air", Mr. Palaniswami told candidates to continue their efforts with hope and confidence. "In 2026, the AIADMK government will fulfil the dreams of the youth," he added.

'No basic arrangements'
PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss said the govern-



Lashing out: Candidates staging a protest on EVR Periyar Salai after they were not allowed to appear for the exam on Sunday.

ment had failed to make even the "basic arrangements" required to conduct the TNPSC Group II main examinations.

He said that 9,223 candidates were scheduled to appear for the examination in the morning session and 9,244 candidates in the evening session.

In a statement, Dr. Anbumani said allocating examination centres and as-

signing candidates were tasks that even a junior assistant-level employee at the TNPSC could carry out accurately.

"Yet, despite supervision by the TNPSC Chairman, Secretary, and Controller of Examinations – three IAS officers – and six commission members, such large-scale confusion has occurred. This clearly shows the extent to which

the TNPSC administration has deteriorated," he said.

"The DMK government is functioning in a state where it is unable to conduct even the most basic competitive examination without chaos," he said.

BJP Tamil Nadu president Nainar Nagenthiran said the cancellation of the examination at the last minute showed the administrative failure of the DMK government.

He also raised suspicion whether such discrepancies were a coincidence or if the government was hatching a conspiracy to cancel the exams. He demanded an explanation from Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.

Call for strict action

The ruling DMK's ally, CPI (M) State secretary P. Shanmugam said the cancellation of the TNPSC Group II and IIA examinations had shocked the aspirants who had worked hard for years. He called for strict action

against the officials responsible for it.

In a statement, Mr. Shanmugam said, "The Tamil Nadu government must take immediate action against the irresponsible officials who handled the conduct of the exam.

The TNPSC administration should announce the date for the re-exam with adequate notice. The government must ensure that such mistakes do not recur in the future."

Vijay's accusation

TVK president Vijay accused the DMK government of shattering the hopes of thousands of aspirants.

He said many young aspirants had been spending several years preparing for the competitive exam with the hope of entering government service.

The last-minute cancellation of the exams exposed the government's lack of administrative ability, Mr. Vijay added.

Despite challenges, T.N. met demands of govt. employees'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said on Sunday that the Union government was creating a financial crisis in a planned manner for the State, and his government had been overcoming it not only politically but also administratively, even while fulfilling the demands of government employees.

He was speaking at a ceremony organised by the Joint Action Council of Tamil Nadu Teachers' Organisation and Government Employees' Organisation (JACTTO-GEO) to thank him for considering the demands of government employees.

Mr. Stalin said the Tamil Nadu Assured Pension Scheme (TAPS) was implemented at a crucial juncture when the Centre had been consistently reducing the State's share of tax revenue and was not releasing even the allocated funds properly. Changes in the Goods and Services Tax regime had reduced the State's tax revenue, he said.

Mr. Stalin said the government employees play a crucial role in delivering welfare schemes formulat-



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin being felicitated at a function by JACTTO-GEO for considering the demands of its members.

ed by the government to the people. Calling the work done by the teachers a noble service to society, he said that because of them, Tamil Nadu stands as one of the best States in education in India.

He said the credit for the implementation of the DMK government's flagship schemes since 2021 goes to the government employees. The Chief Minister said the Old Pension Scheme was stopped when the AIADMK was in power. This made the hard-working government employees suffer. But the DMK government was compassionate and inclusive, he said.

Asked whether the AIADMK alliance would be formed before the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was slated to address a meeting in

EPS says stand-off with DMK over seats may split T.N. Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUCHI/MADRAS

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Sunday said the stand-off between the DMK and the Congress over seat-sharing for the coming Assembly election and the latter's demand for a share in power indicated that the situation might lead to yet another split in the national party at the State level.

When asked if differences in the Congress over choosing an alliance partner (between the DMK and the TVK) would lead to a split similar to how it chose to align with the AIADMK for the 1996 Assembly election, Mr. Palaniswami said reports from various quarters suggested the same.

"The views of the Congress leaders on various demands and the contesting views expressed by the second-rung leaders of the DMK indicate the same. DMK MP Kanimozi met Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in New Delhi recently. But, they could not find a solution. The Congress formed a committee



Edappadi K. Palaniswami to discuss seat-sharing with the DMK. But the seat-sharing talk is yet to begin," he told reporters at the Tiruchi airport.

On Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's assertion that the NDA would get nothing in the Assembly election, Mr. Palaniswami said it was for the people to decide the winners and losers, which will be known only after the counting of votes. But they had already decided to dethrone the DMK, and the AIADMK would form the government with an absolute majority, he said.

Asked whether the AIADMK alliance would be formed before the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was slated to address a meeting in

Madurai on March 1, Mr. Palaniswami said the alliance led by his party had already taken shape with the inclusion of the PMK (Anbumani faction) and the AMMK, and that talks were underway with more parties. Their inclusion would take place in the run-up to the election.

'Waiting for 36 days'
Congress MP Manickam Tagore, who has of late been criticising the DMK, said the national party had been patiently waiting for the Tiruchi airport.

On Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's assertion that the NDA would get nothing in the Assembly election, Mr. Palaniswami said it was for the people to decide the winners and losers, which will be known only after the counting of votes. But they had already decided to dethrone the DMK, and the AIADMK would form the government with an absolute majority, he said.

However, TNCC president K. Selvaperumal played down the remarks saying the process of seat-sharing talks with the DMK was in progress, as in past elections. The talks would begin soon and the Congress has put forth its demands in a friendly manner, he added.

Asked whether the AIADMK alliance would be formed before the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was slated to address a meeting in

the Tiruchi airport, Mr. Palaniswami said it was for the people to decide the winners and losers, which will be known only after the counting of votes. But they had already decided to dethrone the DMK, and the AIADMK would form the government with an absolute majority, he said.

Lauding the TMMK volunteers for their social service during the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, he said, "The DMK grew because of the power of the students."

MMK president M.H. Jahanullah said they must work to ensure that the DMK-led alliance wins the upcoming election.

M CH-CHE

IN BRIEF



Ghee adulteration an assault on Hindu faith: TDP leader

TDP State president Palla Srinivasa Rao has lashed out at the previous YSRCP government for using adulterated ghee, synthetic substitutes, and chemical substances in the preparation of the sacred Tirumala laddu prasadam. "It is nothing but betrayal of the Hindu faith. To adulterate the prasadam of Lord Venkateswara... is among the most disgraceful acts witnessed under the YSRCP dispensation," Mr Srinivasa Rao said at a press conference on Saturday.

Bird flu confirmed at two villages in Andhra Pradesh

The Animal Husbandry Department on Sunday confirmed the outbreak of avian influenza (commonly called bird flu) at Ammagaripalli and Puttavarpalli villages in Annamayya district of Andhra Pradesh. The National Institute of High Security Animal Diseases confirmed presence of the virus in samples. In a release, the Department of Animal Husbandry said Rapid Response Teams were deployed in the affected villages and culling was initiated.

Comment on Kerala CM's diet choice spark a discussion

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's dietary preferences became a subject of social media discussion on Sunday. Communist Party of India leader C. Divakaran sparked the debate by quipping that Mr. Vijayan preferred pricey fish to the day's common place catch. He signalled that the anecdote about Mr. Vijayan's food habits was part of his upcoming autobiography. Mr. Divakaran said his "jocular comments" were no judgment on Mr. Vijayan's proletarian past.

Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi slams 'wrong' portrayal of Gandhiji in advertisements

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURUCong. and BJP issued advertisements depicting Gandhiji to air their views on the VB-G RAM G Act

As Karnataka recently witnessed a high-pitch media campaign by the Congress and the BJP using Mahatma Gandhi to air their views on the VB-G RAM G Act, the Gandhi Smaraka Nidhi has taken exception to the use of Mahatma Gandhi to serve political purposes and has expressed concern that the Mahatma was depicted in a bad manner.

The Congress and the BJP had issued advertisements in media that centred on Gandhi.

The Congress advertisements used a fictional con-

'No critical evidence lost in Telangana forensic lab fire'

Laboratory Director says no material on 2015 cash-for-vote or 2024 phone-tapping case was destroyed in the blaze; BJP leader alleges attempt to derail probe into case involving BRS leaders

Lavpreet Kaur
HYDERABAD

Telangana Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) Director Shikha Goel on Sunday clarified that evidence linked to two high-profile cases at the centre of widespread rumours on social media remains safe and intact, following the fire that broke out at the laboratory in Nampally a day earlier.

Addressing a press conference, Ms. Goel said no material connected to the 2015 cash-for-vote case or the 2024 phone-tapping case had been destroyed in the fire, countering speculation and "misinformation" circulating online since the fire.



Dousing the flames: A fire broke out at the Forensic Science Laboratory at Nampally in Hyderabad on Saturday. RAMAKRISHNA G.

She said the fire affected the computer forensics laboratory, a training room and the library. A complaint has been lodged and a case registered at the Nampally police station.

Referring to the cash-

for-vote case investigated by the Anti-Corruption Bureau, she said the FSL had received 16 material objects in 2015. "All 16 items were returned to the court in 2021, and no material related to this case was pre-

sent in the FSL at the time of the fire," she added.

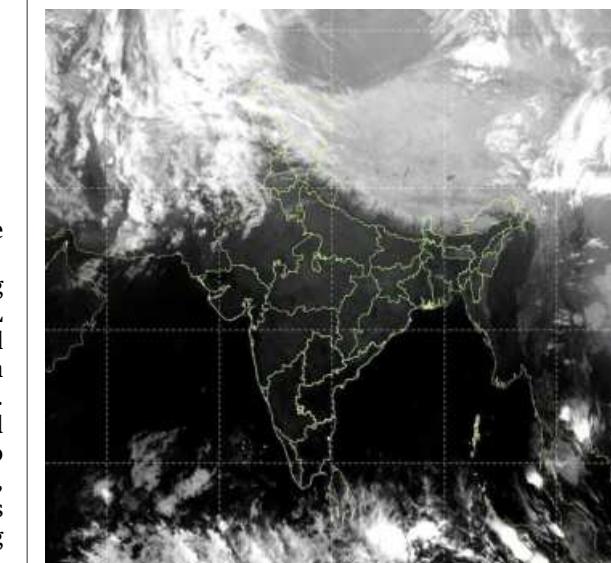
On the phone-tapping case, Ms. Goel said the FSL had received 136 material objects between March 2024 and January 2026. She said several items had already been returned to the authority concerned, while all material that was present at the FSL during the fire had been safely returned and secured.

Meanwhile, the BJP has demanded an independent and impartial probe into the accident.

BJP State unit president N. Ramchander Rao said that the fire was a "deliberate attempt" to derail the investigation into the phone tapping case involving BRS leaders.

WEATHER WATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD; POLLUTION DATA: CPCB; MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 17.00 HRS)

Forecast for Monday: Dense Fog very likely at isolated places over Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Karaikal and Uttarakhand. Dense to very dense fog very likely at isolated places over Uttar Pradesh

CITY RAIN MAX MIN CITY RAIN MAX MIN

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	26.6	11.4	Kozhikode	—	35.2	23.7
Ahmedabad	—	32.5	—	Kurnool	—	34.0	19.2
Aizawl	—	26.4	12.0	Lucknow	—	25.8	11.1
Allahabad	—	26.6	10.6	Madurai	—	33.7	20.1
Bengaluru	—	30.1	17.0	Mangaluru	—	34.6	21.2
Bhopal	—	27.4	14.0	Mumbai	—	33.4	22.0
Bhubaneswar	—	32.3	16.4	Mysuru	—	31.2	17.0
Chandigarh	—	24.0	14.0	New Delhi	—	24.4	9.6
Chennai	—	31.2	21.4	Patna	—	25.5	13.4
Coimbatore	—	32.0	17.8	Port Blair	—	29.8	21.4
Dehradun	—	25.9	9.2	Puducherry	—	29.8	20.4
Gangtok	—	13.6	7.5	Pune	—	33.1	17.4
Goa	—	25.6	14.6	Raipur	—	29.4	10.5
Guwahati	—	27.0	14.4	Ranchi	—	24.6	10.0
Hubballi	—	32.7	14.4	Shillong	—	18.0	5.5
Hyderabad	—	31.7	15.5	Shimla	—	18.0	6.4
Imphal	—	25.2	6.7	Srinagar	—	12.1	1.0
Jaipur	—	27.8	11.7	Thiruvananthapuram	—	31.7	23.4
Kochi	—	30.4	24.2	Tiruchi	—	31.5	20.4
Kohima	—	19.8	8.8	Vijayawada	—	34.0	19.8
Kolkata	—	26.2	14.5	Visakhapatnam	—	30.2	20.4

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO ₂	NO ₂	CO	PM _{2.5}	PM ₁₀	CODE
Ahmedabad	...8	.66	20	125	167	■
Bengaluru	—24	.98	18	84	135	■
Chennai	—5	.13	—	137	124	■
Delhi	—68	26	11.7	125	125	■
Hyderabad	—18	.73	42	75	138	■
Kolkata	—19	.51	28	11.7	174	■
Lucknow	—6	.28	50	81	123	■
Mumbai	—34	10	150	24.2	174	■
Pune	—84	43	230	—	—	■
Visakhapatnam	—19	.67	18	150	194	■

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Charkhi Dadri, Haryana recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 266 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Shillong, Meghalaya recorded a healthy AQI score of 33.

Air Quality Code: ■ Poor ■ Moderate ■ Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO₂: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO₂: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion and even death.

PM_{2.5} & PM₁₀: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Pilot, trainee injured after aircraft crashes in field in Karnataka village

injuries and were recovering. The two-seater plane, belonging to the Red Bird Academy, was flying from Kalaburagi to Belagavi.

Eye-witnesses told police officers that the aircraft nose-dived into the field and overturned. However, the two occupants had ejected themselves before the crash.

The police recorded the statements of farmers at the spot.



Close shave: People gather around the wreckage of a private aircraft that crashed in Vijayapura on Sunday. PTI

Church leader condemns 'rising attacks' on minorities

The Hindu Bureau
PATHANAMTHITTA

Theodosius Mar Thoma, Metropolitan of the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, has called upon the Christian community to uphold an ethical form of politics that makes no compromise with intolerance or communalism.

Inaugurating the 131st Maramon Convention in Pathanamthitta on Sunday, the annual Christian religious gathering held on the riverbed of the Pampa at Maramon, the Metropolitan also expressed concern over the alarming rise in attacks on religious minorities in the country.

Samastha passes resolution against Jamaat's ideology

The Hindu Bureau
KASARAGOD

The Samastha Kerala Jamiatul Ulama has passed a resolution strongly opposing the theocratic ideology propagated by the Jamaat-e-Islami, asserting that extremist modes of religious preaching are not in line with the organisation's path.

The resolution, adopted at the Samastha centenary conference which concluded here on Sunday, called for vigilance against pan-Islamist extremist ideologies that "seek to undermine Islam's peaceful tradition of propagation and deviate from the path shown by revered predecessors". It

Fresh pick



First of the season: As the mango season approaches, a vendor arranges the season's first batch of mangoes on Jayamahal Main Road in Bengaluru on Sunday. ALLEN EGENUSE J.

Visually challenged woman to become a judge in Kerala after topping merit list

K.S. Sudhi

KOCHI

Lawyer Thanya Nathan C. will most likely enter the annals of Kerala's judicial history as the first visually challenged woman judge.

Ms. Nathan, who is totally blind, has been ranked first on the merit list of persons with benchmark disabilities in the recent judicial service examination for the selection of Civil Judges (Junior Division) in the Kerala Judicial Service.

In a separate resolution, the conference reaffirmed that the true tradition of Ahlussunn wal Jama'a and Samastha's 'manhaj' (methodology or path) rests on following one of the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

It was a landmark judgment by a Supreme Court Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwal and R. Mahadevan in 2025 which noted that "visually impaired candidates

cannot be said to be 'not suitable' for judicial service and they are eligible to participate in selection for posts in judicial service". That paved the way for Ms. Nathan to become a judge. "This should probably

be for the first time that a candidate with visual disability is clearing the judicial service examination in Kerala. It's not known whether such candidates had earlier applied for the post. Currently, there are

Reconsider demand on paddy bonus: Kerala CM

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Sunday asked the Union government to reconsider its demand that the additional bonus given by the State for paddy be discontinued.

Mr. Vijayan criticised the Centre's argument that excess paddy production would entail additional expenditure on storage on the public exchequer.

He also asked the Centre to explain whether its demand was an immediate outcome of opening up the Indian market to American farm produce under the recent India-U.S. trade agreement.

"no visually challenged judges in Kerala," judicial sources said.

Overcoming her limitation, 24-year-old Ms. Nathan secured the first rank in the LL.B. examination from Kannur University. She began her practice as a junior to a lawyer at Taliparamba in Kannur.

"My senior and a few others encouraged me to take the recruitment exam. I studied law using the Braille system. Now, technology has come to the aid of people like me, where screen-reading software helps us read texts," Ms. Nathan, who does not need a white cane to move around, told *The Hindu*. "I am confident of overcoming the challenges."

M CH-CHE



Question and answer

Parliament must function as the forum to debate contentious issues

In an unusual departure from established parliamentary convention, the Lok Sabha adopted the motion of thanks to the President's address to Parliament without the Prime Minister's reply to the debate on February 5. The explanation by the Lok Sabha Speaker, Om Birla, for the PM not replying to the discussion on the motion raised more questions than it answered. Mr. Birla said that he had concrete information about Opposition Members of Parliament (MP) planning something "unexpected", obliquely suggesting that they may have caused harm to the PM inside the House. It is bizarre to assume that the Leader of the House – the Prime Minister – avoids speaking in the House fearing harm from fellow MPs. Developments in the House, earlier and outside, provide a more plausible reason for the PM not showing up in the Lok Sabha. The Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, during his speech on the discussion on the motion of thanks, sought to cite excerpts from a book by former Chief of the Army Staff, General M.M. Naravane, which was disallowed by the Chair. On the one hand, the LoP was not allowed to speak and, on the other, the PM chose not to speak. Both are against parliamentary norms and, more than that, a disturbing erosion of democratic accountability.

The debate and reply function as a mechanism through which the executive is held accountable to Parliament. Mr. Birla stated that he had requested the PM not to come to the House because there were credible inputs about a possible disruption or an "unforeseen" situation near the PM's seat. As Congress MP K.C. Venugopal has pointed out in a letter to the PM, parliamentary rules require that a debate on the motion of thanks must conclude with the PM's reply, and if the House wishes to close the discussion without the PM's reply, a specific resolution must be moved and adopted. Whether or not the book in question was published, as long as Mr. Gandhi was willing to authenticate its contents and place it before the Chair, he should have been allowed to speak. The book in question raises serious issues related to national security, and to deny elected members the opportunity to discuss these is indefensible. The portions that Mr. Gandhi cited outside the House, if accurate, point to the tendency of the political executive to evade critical decision-making by passing the buck and then avoiding accountability. A thorough parliamentary discussion concluding with the PM's reply would have been the opportunity to prove that charge wrong. By skipping the reply, PM Narendra Modi proved his critics right.

Messaging power

The data sharing policies of WhatsApp must be scrutinised thoroughly

The Supreme Court of India, last week, sharply questioned Meta Platforms LLC and its messaging platform WhatsApp, in an appeal rooted in updates it made in 2021 around user data sharing with other Meta services such as Instagram and Facebook. The Court underscored the power that WhatsApp holds in India's messaging ecosystem: it is practically impossible to reach everyone with a smartphone, coordinate groups, and undertake business communications without being on WhatsApp. The app's "network effect" has captured nearly every smartphone in the country. The precise background of the litigation that reached the Court is an appeal against a ₹213.14 crore penalty issued by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) for abruptly amending its privacy policy, allowing the firm to share user data across its sister concerns, Facebook and Instagram. Users were prompted at that time to accept the terms or cease using the service. This ultimatum was problematic, and understandably drew pushback from civil society, the government, and the CCI.

Nobody argues that WhatsApp must not earn money for a service that has been transformative for communications in India. Owing to its parent's massive scale of operations, WhatsApp has been able to offer messaging, multimedia sharing, telephony – services that were until 2016 prohibitively priced by telecom operators – for free, with only an Internet connection and a phone number as a pre-requisite. WhatsApp's enthusiastic adoption of end-to-end encryption also furthered a societal expectation for secure communications as a norm, in a country where telecommunications has always been subjected to excessive executive-led surveillance. What is equally true is that WhatsApp is so deeply embedded in Indian society that its transition to an advertising model, where it would start making money here, deserves the highest scrutiny. Competition regulators, including in India, have frowned upon ubiquitous platforms that present users with ultimatums that they can scarcely refuse. There are free alternatives to WhatsApp that work just as well – Signal, Telegram and even Arattai from Zoho are serviceable – but they lack what makes the Meta product so valuable: the guarantee that virtually everyone knows is on it. Allowing users to "opt out" of data sharing is an inappropriate remedy for services at WhatsApp's scale, because the power of the default option at that scale leaves far too many with no real, informed choice in the matter. The Court's thoughts on this matter are correct, but they need to be supported by a digital competition law, a draft of which was released in 2024, but has seen little progress since. As India approaches a billion Internet users, that law is needed to protect and foster a healthy digital marketplace.

What makes the Meta product so valuable: the guarantee that virtually everyone knows is on it. Allowing users to "opt out" of data sharing is an inappropriate remedy for services at WhatsApp's scale, because the power of the default option at that scale leaves far too many with no real, informed choice in the matter. The Court's thoughts on this matter are correct, but they need to be supported by a digital competition law, a draft of which was released in 2024, but has seen little progress since. As India approaches a billion Internet users, that law is needed to protect and foster a healthy digital marketplace.

A social media ban will not save our children

On February 4, 2026, three sisters, aged 12, 14 and 16, ended their lives in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, leaving behind their family and a country struggling to comprehend the horror. Preliminary police reports suggest it to be a case of screen addiction and parental conflict. Politicians, parents and pundits have united in demanding swift action. The sentiment is understandable. When a child dies, we want someone to blame and, sometimes, something to ban. But beneath the fury lies a dangerous impulse: to solve a complex problem with a blunt instrument that absolves platforms of accountability while stripping young people of their digital rights.

The evidence linking heavy social media use to harm to adolescent mental health is beyond speculation. While a few outliers exist in scholarly literature, many meta-analyses and systematic reviews identify small but consistent associations between heavy social media use and increased anxiety, depressive symptoms, self-harm and body image dissatisfaction among teenagers, particularly girls. While most of these studies have not been conducted in India, they still serve as a note of caution on the effects of social media use.

An approach that will not work in India
The tragedy in Ghaziabad has coincided with a crescendo of government anxiety and regulatory intervention across the globe. Australia has a targeted ban, who many in India now point to as a template. In 2024, Australia passed a law prohibiting anyone under the age of 16 from holding accounts on 10 major platforms, including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat and X, which is enforced through mandatory age verification and backed by fines of up to \$50 million (Australian). The law came into force on December 10, 2025, making Australia the first country to truly pull the plug on under-16 social media accounts.

On February 3, 2026, the Prime Minister of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, announced plans to ban social media for those under 16, vowing to "protect them from the digital Wild West" and to hold executives criminally liable for algorithmic amplification of hate. These are emotionally satisfying responses. They also bear the familiar fingerprints of a moral panic. As Stanley Cohen showed more than 50 years ago, when society fails to solve complex social problems, they are labelled as vilified "folk devils" and met with disproportionate, symbolic crackdowns. For



Apar Gupta
is an advocate and the Founder Director of the Internet Freedom Foundation, India

India to copy paste this approach would be disastrous for four distinct reasons.

First, bans are technically porous and difficult to implement even if outsourced to social media companies themselves. Adolescents are often more digitally literate than the legislators regulating them. As seen in jurisdictions with strict age-gating, bans invariably trigger a mass migration to Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) or, worse, push young users from regulated platforms such as Instagram to encrypted, unmoderated corners of the dark web where grooming and extremism thrive unchecked. Some forms of enforcement, if linked to identity verification, may also pose the risk of connecting every social media account with a government ID, creating a mass surveillance framework.

Second, a blanket ban ignores the complexity of adolescent development. As noted by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and some child rights bodies, social media is also a lifeline. For rural adolescents, urban slum dwellers, queer and differently-abled teens seeking peer support, these platforms are often their only window to a community where they feel seen.

Third, this approach suffers from a severe democratic deficit. In India, there is a chronic habit of making policy for young people without ever speaking to them. Have we asked what they would like?

Fourth, and most importantly, a social media ban will certainly calcify the gendered social inequalities that will prevent girls from lower income households, particularly young girls, from using the Internet for their social mobility and charting their future. Data from the National Sample Survey show that only 33.3% of women in India reported having ever used the Internet, compared to 57.1% of men. In patriarchal settings, where female Internet access is already viewed with suspicion, a government mandate to "police" age is likely to result in families just confiscating the device entirely from young girls.

A social media ban ignores complex realities when what is needed instead is a healthy media ecology

What can be done
What, then, is the alternative? First, the government must abandon its addiction to censorship. It must stop relying on the blunt instrument of bans or centralising every government response within the "notice and takedown" regime of the IT Act, 2000. Instead, it must directly confront the economic power and technical architecture of Big Tech. We urgently need a sophisticated menu of legislative tools that

include a robust digital competition law and legally enforceable "duty of care" obligations towards minors, with provisions for monetary penalties. Crucially, these must be enforced by an independent, expert regulator, not by the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology that lacks expertise and is susceptible to political influence.

Second, India needs serious public funding for surveys and longitudinal research on how social media actually shapes children's well-being locally, across class, gender, caste and region. Young people must be at the centre of this policy process – from the design of the surveys to being active participants who shape its findings. We have already seen the folly of ignoring them. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, with its poorly designed "consent gating", will result either in false declarations or exclusion.

The issue of regulation

Finally, we should ask why our moral outrage is uniquely limited to social media? Do not any of these issues exist with Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots and its integration with social media platforms? Early research already links higher AI use in creating a "cognitive debt" that leads to weaker critical thinking. Relatedly, young people are already using generative AI tools for emotional and mental health advice. Recent reporting and litigation have highlighted serious child-safety failures in conversational AI systems, including sexualised interactions with minors and alleged links to self-harm and suicide. If the concern is about harm to children, regulation has to be consistent and our failure to consider AI regulation must be considered.

In the end, a ban might offer the comforting illusion of control – a way for our politicians to show they "did something" after the latest tragedy. But the price would be paid by the very young people whose rights and futures are ostensibly being defended. As media scholar Neil Postman, who began his career as a public schoolteacher noted, "I am not pro, or anti, technology. That would be stupid. For that would be like being pro, or anti, food."

The lesson for us as adults is to provide a healthy media ecology to our children rather than taking social media completely off the table. This is tougher work than a ban. But it requires us to confront our dissonance on the doctrine of tech-driven innovation that is exempt from regulation, where on one day we demonise social media and on another, worship AI.

Myanmar's military-scripted polls, India's strategic bind

Five years after the February 1, 2021 coup, Myanmar's military sought to manufacture political normalcy through elections held in three phases between late December 2025 and January 2026. Predictably, the military-aligned Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won. The outcome was barely a surprise since voting was permitted in only 265 of the country's 330 townships, with a controlled political participation.

Polling was largely confined to urban wards, as most rural areas remain under resistance influence. The junta claimed an overall voter turnout of around 55% – roughly 13.14 million of 24 million eligible voters. This sharp decline, from the roughly 70% turnout recorded in 2015 and 2020, reflects not voter apathy, but widespread rejection of a military-scripted political exercise.

The credibility deficit was compounded by the junta-appointed Union Election Commission dissolving several opposition parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD), the Arakan National Party, and the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy, with senior leaders jailed. Senior General Min Aung Hlaing fielded dozens of serving and retired military figures under the USDP banner, which has now claimed sweeping victories. The new Parliament is slated to be formed within two months.

Elections amidst war; India's response
Since the coup, at least 7,738 people, including activists, journalists, and civilians, have been killed, while over 30,000 have been arrested. Of these, 22,767 remain in detention, including NLD leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and former president U Win Myint, and 11,497 have been sentenced, often on politically motivated charges. More than 1,300 houses and structures have been destroyed, particularly in Sagaing and Magway.

The regime's brutality has fuelled the growth of resistance groups, notably the People's Defence Forces, which now operate alongside long-established ethnic armed organisations and control large swathes of territory, including 91 towns.

Despite the elections, these groups exert significant influence, constraining the USDP and



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is Associate Fellow, Neighbourhood Studies, Observer Research Foundation

suggesting that the conflict is likely to intensify. For India, Myanmar is both a strategic neighbour and a gateway to Southeast Asia, crucial for its Act East Policy. The elections, therefore, continue to pose a long-standing dilemma for New Delhi's security and connectivity interests, without legitimising a deeply contested political mechanism.

In repeated statements in December 2025 and January 2026, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal has reiterated that India supports Myanmar's democratic transition and that any electoral process must be free, fair and inclusive, with the participation of all political stakeholders. This carefully calibrated language reflects India's attempt to uphold democratic principles while avoiding a complete diplomatic rupture with Naypyitaw. During the same period, New Delhi also clarified that any Indians who had visited Myanmar during the election process had done so in their personal capacity, signalling a distance and absence from the political exercise.

High-level engagement has continued alongside this calibrated rhetoric. On the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting in August 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Senior General Min Aung Hlaing to review bilateral ties and explore avenues for cooperation. While reiterating India's readiness to support Myanmar's developmental needs, the Prime Minister also emphasised the importance of conducting free, fair, and inclusive elections involving all stakeholders. The message was clear: engagement would continue, but without explicit political endorsement.

Amidst this, India has continued to play its humanitarian role by sending relief teams, humanitarian and medical assistance, and the establishment of a temporary field hospital under Operation Brahma during the March 2025 earthquake, which allowed New Delhi to remain engaged while avoiding legitimisation of the regime.

Implications for India
Myanmar shares a 1,643-kilometre border with four of India's northeastern States, making instability across the frontier inseparable from

India will have to manage its ties with the regime, balancing principles with pragmatism

India's internal security. Violence and state collapse have already triggered refugee inflows into the nation. India currently hosts 90,100 displaced Myanmar nationals in Mizoram and Manipur. The absence of a coherent national refugee policy places disproportionate burdens on State governments, thus exposing faultlines in this respect. Continued post-election instability is likely to sustain such movements.

Indian-backed projects, including the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, have faced repeated delays due to insecurity in conflict-affected regions. The junta's claims of post-election normalisation will be difficult to translate into improved implementation conditions, forcing New Delhi to reassess timelines, risk exposure and engagement strategies.

Moreover, transnational security threats – for instance, the proliferation of narcotics and human trafficking networks – have accelerated amid weakened border controls and fragmented authority. Of particular concern is the rapid expansion of cyber scam centres and cyber slavery networks operating in border conflict zones in Myanmar, from where 2,165 Indians have been rescued since 2022, but more still remain within the shackles. These developments present emerging non-traditional security challenges, underscoring the need for coordinated and clearer domestic and regional policy responses.

The path for New Delhi
As western and regional blocs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) refuse to recognise the election outcomes for now, it becomes essential for India to maintain its balanced approach. New Delhi is likely to sustain limited engagement with the regime in power to protect core interests, while simultaneously maintaining contacts with local actors, which it has already been doing in recent times.

Myanmar's elections have, therefore, not marked a turning point. For India, they underline a hard truth: managing relations with a fractured neighbour will require balancing principles with pragmatism – at a time when neither offers an easy exit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Watch your ears

The article, "Loud music may damage your hearing before you realise it" ('Science' page, February 8), has the right note of caution for a society that has normalised noise as celebration. The harm caused is silent, gradual and often irreversible. Yet, in India, loudspeakers continue to blare at

weddings, festivals, political rallies and neighbourhood functions, turning residential areas into captive auditoriums. This is no longer music or pleasant sound, but public nuisance, where decibel levels become a crude display of power rather than joy or devotion. The right to peace, sleep and health is forgotten, with little regard

for children, the elderly or the sick. Culture cannot be an excuse for civic cruelty.

Noise is pollution.

M. Jameel Ahmed,

Mysuru

UPSC online application
I wish to highlight certain difficulties faced by candidates during the online application process for the UPSC Civil Services

(Preliminary) Examination 2026, the notification for which was released on February 4, 2026. There were problems related to the uploading of photographs and signatures. This year, the Commission introduced a new format and revised specifications for these uploads. As this was the first time the updated

format was implemented, many candidates faced confusion despite making sincere efforts to adhere to the instructions. There were glitches while uploading photographs and signatures, repeated upload failures, unclear or distorted previews, and discrepancies between the uploaded image and the final submission view. Given the

high stakes involved, it would be fair to provide a limited correction window for photographs and signatures, as is the practice in other national-level competitive examinations.

Gayathri B.,

Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address.

THE NUMBERS THAT COUNT

The Centre and the margins

The Hindi heartland weighs more than their share in the making of Lok Sabha majorities. In 11 of 15 instances, the region had proportionate or higher share in the majority; while the south went underrepresented in nine cases. Coalition majorities are more dispersed geographically, bringing in margins into power in Delhi. An exclusively population based delimitation of LS seats could further the prominence of the heartland. By Varghese K. George, Nitika Francis and Vignesh Radhakrishnan

A Lok Sabha (LS) majority is often mentioned as monolithic fact, a number that can be nothing but objective. The objectivity of the number in this case is rather superfluous. An absolute majority in the LS requires 272 members, i.e. more than half of its total strength of 543, wherever those come from; but where those members come from within the country has consequences for how representation is managed and governance priorities are set at the national level. Decisions impacting a particular State or a region can be taken by a majority in Parliament in which the affected State or region has little say. The neutering of Article 370 in 2019 was a remarkable case of this possibility, but examples abound – from setting conditions for central schemes to designing the education policy.

The regional distribution of the LS majority has a qualitative impact on federalism and democracy. This is an analysis of the regional distribution of national majorities in 15 Lok Sabhas, including the current one. We start this analysis with the fourth LS elected in 1967, when the status of the Congress as the single dominant party was broken evidently in the polls. By 1967, several strands of resistance to the national politics, represented then by the Congress, had gained electoral salience. These mobilisations were driven by religion, class, caste, and language. The regional variations in the political dynamics began to influence which party or coalition wins a majority.

The north and the west have weighed more in the ruling benches of the LS, relative to their share in the total strength, while the south, the east, and the northeast have weighed less in the majority than their proportion of the total strength. Of the 15 LS majorities, in 11, the north had proportional or higher share in the majority, while the south had this only in six. While the north has been underrepresented in the majority only four times out of 15, the south has been underrepresented nine times. In 1991, when the Congress was shrunk to the south but still managed a majority, the country also had the first Prime Minister from the south. Non-BJP coalitions tend to have majorities that have a wider spread generally speaking, but the 1999 NDA government led by A.B. Vajpayee is one of the most evenly spread in terms of its members in the LS. The 1977 and 1989 LS elections were exceptional for their complete divergence between the north and the south. In both years, caste and religious conflicts in the Hindi belt shaped the national majority in the LS. The southern States comprised as low as 2% of seats in the government

In the 15 LS majorities between 1967 and 2024, the northern States were overrepresented 11 times; the southern States were underrepresented 9 times

benches in these two years. The elections of 1977 and 1989 often get portrayed in grand frames – as restoration of democracy after the Emergency and a popular upsurge against corruption after the Bofors kickback allegations. Beyond those claims, and closer to the ground, lies the reality of caste and religious conflicts in the Hindi heartland which fuelled the Jayaprakash Narayan movement and the V. P. Singh movement, respectively. Peninsular India remained solemnly untouched by these battles of the heartland.

The prominence of the heartland

There are two axes around which these parliamentary majorities are aggregated – namely, the dynamics within the heartland, and between the heartland and its peripheries. Within the heartland, religion and caste are the key drivers of mobilisation; between the heartland and the regions, language and cultural autonomy come into play. Regional autonomists prefer the weaker of the national hegemons at any given point in time – that is why all regional formations have allied with both the BJP and the Congress over these decades. The Akali Dal is the only exception, in that it has only allied with the BJP, and never with the Congress. The current LS majority is largely dependent on two parties – the JD(U), a heartland social periphery party, and the TDP, a peninsular, linguistic party. But they have less leverage than they had in 1999. Why? Because Bihar and Andhra Pradesh were both bifurcated in the interim; and the national hegemon, the BJP, commands enough numbers in the heartland to be able to hold its ground. This had happened in the past too – the Congress was dependent on subaltern caste parties in the heartland and the regionalists in 2004, but in 2009, the UPA was elected with winning one of four seats in Uttar Pradesh. That explains why UPA-2 could ignore parties of the social and regional peripheries, compared to UPA-1.

Quest for a truly national majority

How could national majorities be spread more geographically and socially? If the national parties are truly national in terms of their geographical and social spread, this is achieved to a large extent. The Congress had once enjoyed that advantage, but as of now, both the Congress and the BJP derive their strengths from specific regions. The regional spread of the majority is also better when coalition governments are in power at the Centre. In 1976, the Congress government decided to freeze delimitation of LS seats for 25 years, though the party could have advanced its strengths in the heartland by going ahead. At the expiry of 25 years, in 2001, all parties agreed to extend the freeze by another 25 years, until after the 2026 Census. In 2026, the BJP has to reconcile within itself two opposing factors while dealing with the delimitation question. It has an incentive to privilege the priorities and the world view of the heartland from where its parliamentary majority comes from. But it also wants to be truly national by expanding its base in States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Punjab.



With inputs from Suman Raj L, Shriram N and Nivedha M

REGION-WISE SHARE

Overrepresented Underrepresented

The table shows the share of the ruling coalition in the Lok Sabha

Year	North: 45.9% of LS seats in 1967, 1971; changed to 45.1% in 1976	West: 14.1% of LS seats in 1967, 1971; changed to 14.5% in 1976	South: 24.5% of LS seats in 1967 and 1971; changed to 23.9% in 1976	East: 11.8% of LS seats in 1967, 1971; stayed at 11.8% in 1976	North-East: 3.7% in 1967 and 1971; changed to 4.6% in 1976
1967	51%	17%	20%	7%	4%
1971	51%	16%	20%	8%	4%
1977	69%	13%	2%	14%	1%
1980	46%	18%	27%	7%	2%
1984	55%	17%	17%	9%	2%
1989	66%	13%	2%	18%	0%
1991	26%	20%	39%	8%	7%
1996	28%	9%	38%	18%	6%
1998	55%	11%	22%	9%	3%
1999	48%	17%	24%	10%	1%
2004	41%	11%	31%	13%	4%
2009	36%	14%	32%	12%	6%
2014	62%	21%	12%	1%	3%
2019	60%	20%	9%	7%	4%
2024	52%	15%	17%	11%	5%

In 15 national majorities: North overrepresented 11 times; South underrepresented 9 times

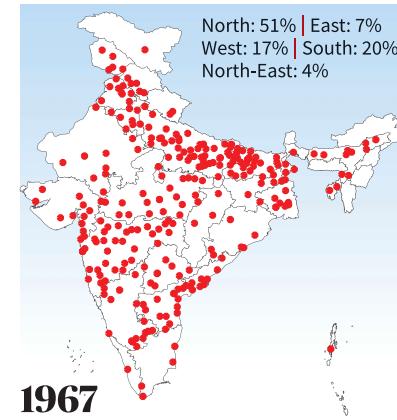
North: UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, MP, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, J&K, Uttarakhand, Haryana, HP, Punjab, Rajasthan, Chandigarh, Ladakh **N.East:** Arunachal, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura **South:** Andhra, Karnataka, Kerala, TN, Telangana, Puducherry. **West:** Maharashtra, Goa, Gujarat, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep **East:** Odisha, WB, Andaman & Nicobar islands

MAPPING THE RULING COALITION

The dots on the map represent the number of Lok Sabha seats of the ruling coalition or party, State-wise. Only the majority – i.e. the Lok Sabha MPs supporting the government – is mapped in each. For instance, the dots in the 2024 map indicate the MPs supporting the current government. During some Lok Sabha terms (1996, 1977, 1989) there were more than one government. In such cases, only the majority of the first government is plotted here. Percentages indicated in some cases may be approximations and may not add up exactly to 100.

The text on top of each map shows the region-wise share of the ruling coalition in the Lok Sabha

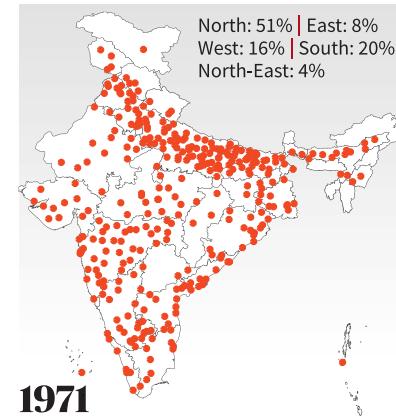
The text at the bottom shows the number of seats won by the top three parties in the ruling coalition (in case of no coalition, only the primary party is mentioned)



1967

Congress dominance is broken; anti-Hindi agitation routed the party in Tamil Nadu which came under the sway of Dravidian politics. It faces setbacks in the Hindi belt, Gujarat, and Odisha but retains majority, albeit reduced, in the Lok Sabha.

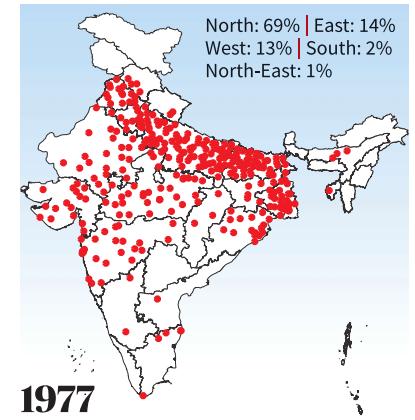
■ Congress: 283



1971

Indira Gandhi called early LS elections after splitting the Congress and emerged victorious, sweeping the polls across the country. The Congress made an alliance with DMK and other parties in Tamil Nadu

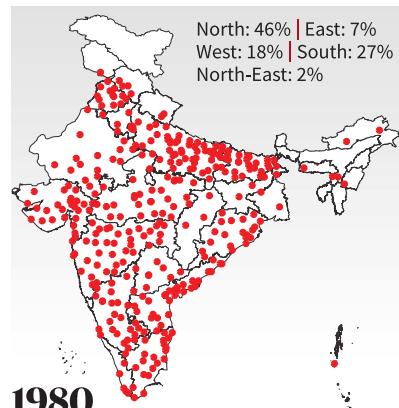
■ Indian National Congress (Requisitionists): 352



1977

Congress loses power in the Centre, 30 years after Independence. The Janata Party and its allies win their majority largely from upper India, with the south and northeast sparsely represented. The Congress did not win a single seat in UP

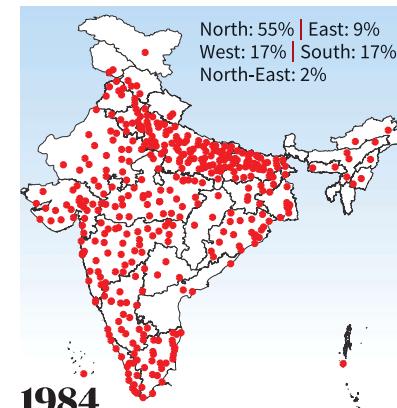
■ Janata Party: 295 ■ CPI(M): 22 ■ Shiromani Akali Dal: 9



1980

The Janata alliance collapses, and the Congress under Indira Gandhi returns. The majority numbers are broadly spread across the country, though the northeast remains in the margins

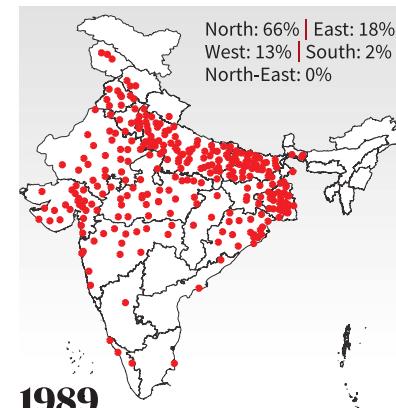
■ Indian National Congress (Indira): 353



1984

A nationwide surge of the Congress, following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The exception is Andhra Pradesh, where a new linguistic party, the Telugu Desam Party, wiped out the Congress

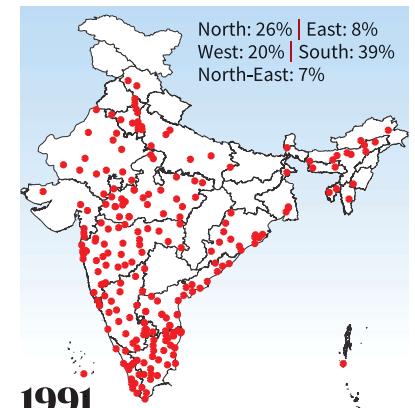
■ Indian National Congress (Indira): 404



1989

A new national axis of the Janata Dal, the BJP and the Left win Lok Sabha majority but had nearly zero representation from the peninsula and the northeast. UP and Bihar were the epicentre

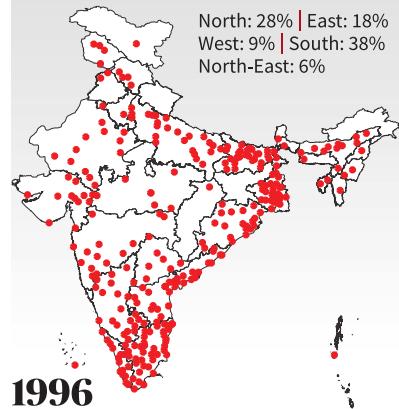
■ Janata Dal: 143 ■ Bharatiya Janata Party: 85 ■ Communist Party of India (Marxist): 33



1991

Rajiv Gandhi assassinated midway through the election, the Congress made a comeback by a narrow margin. With most of its numbers from the South, India also got its first PM from the region - P V Narasimha Rao

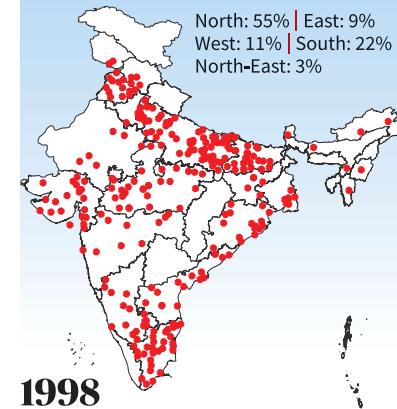
■ Indian National Congress (Indira): 232



1996

Marks the beginning of a coalition era that continues until 2014. East and the south gets more prominence. The second PM from the South - HD Devegowda

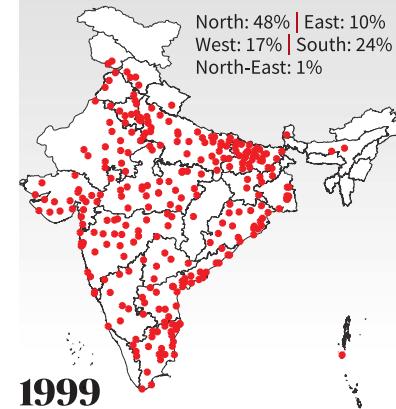
■ Congress: 140 ■ Janata Dal: 46 ■ Communist Party of India (Marxist): 32



1998

The BJP comes to power with the support of regional parties that mobilise caste and linguistic politics. The NDA is anchored in UP and Bihar, but its alliance with the AIADMK (TN) was critical. The govt fell when AIADMK withdrew its support

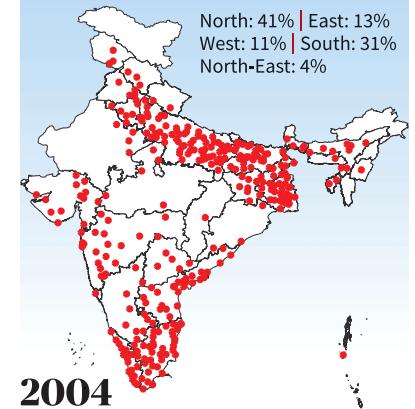
■ Bharatiya Janata Party: 182 ■ AIADMK: 18 ■ Telugu Desam Party: 12



1999

The NDA retains power, but the BJP shuffled its partners, roping in DMK (TN). The coalition numbers more dispersed than the previous one. A B Vajpayee as PM leads the consensus to freeze inter-State delimitation

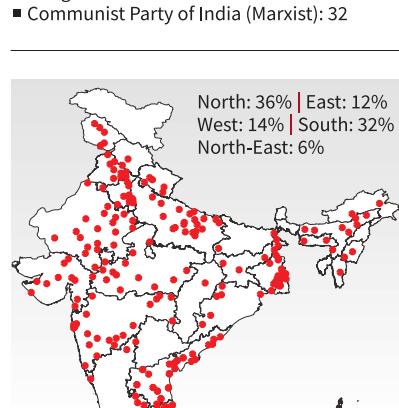
■ Bharatiya Janata Party: 182 ■ Telugu Desam Party: 29 ■ Janata Dal (United): 21



2004

The UPA government led by the Congress had a Lok Sabha majority from two clusters - the peninsula and the Gangetic belt, including West Bengal. Regional parties from UP, Bihar and TN and the Left were part of the ruling combination

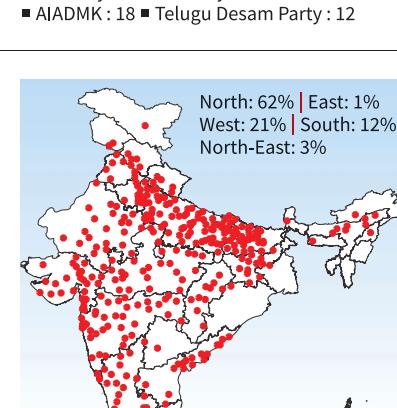
■ Indian National Congress: 145 ■ CPIM: 43 ■ Samajwadi Party: 36



2009

UP retains power; Congress makes major gains in UP riding the wave of OBC support following reservations for them in higher education. UPA-2, less dependent on the Left and regional parties, had its majority more dispersed than UPA-1

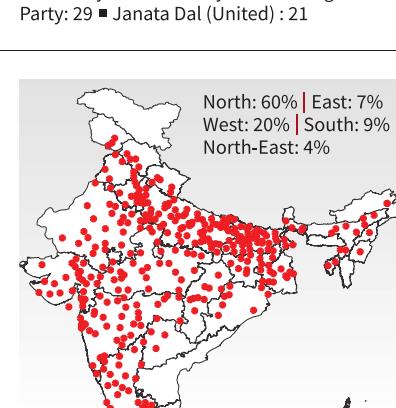
■ Congress: 206 ■ AIJC: 19 ■ Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam: 18



2014

The BJP wins a majority with major gains in UP and Bihar. The 2014 map is similar to 1967 - a national hegemon (BJP) on the ascent, and the other on the descent (Congress) - with the south featuring sparsely in the ruling side

■ Bharatiya Janata Party: 282 ■ Shiv Sena: 18 ■ Telugu Desam Party: 16



2019

The BJP wins again and bigger, with more concentration of its MPs in the heartland, leaving the eastern seaboard

From Page One**India, Malaysia ink pacts to expand strategic ties**

During the visit, Mr. Modi met Malaysia's Indian-origin Ministers, MPs, and Senators and interacted with four leading industry leaders.

"We are maritime neighbours. For centuries, our peoples have had deep and cordial ties," he said in his media statement. Mr. Modi also announced India's decision to establish an Indian Consulate General in Malaysia.

In his remarks, Mr. Ibrahim noted India's economic growth and said his country would benefit immensely if it could secure more ways and opportunities to collaborate with New Delhi.

"It (India's economic growth) is on spectacular rise in the international trade scene," he said, describing the decision to use local currencies for bilateral trade as "remarkable".

In the talks, Malaysia extended its support for India's permanent membership in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Elaborating on engagement in the security domain, Mr. Modi said cooperation in counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and maritime security will be strengthened, adding that both sides will further expand defence ties.

"Along with AI and digital technologies, we will advance partnerships in semiconductors, health, and food security," he said, noting that the discussions at the CEO Forum opened new opportunities for trade and investment.

The Prime Minister touched upon India's position on Indo-Pacific and its steadfast views on the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) centrality in the region. "The Indo-Pacific region is emerging as the world's growth engine. We, along with ASEAN, are committed to development, peace, and stability throughout the Indo-Pacific region," he said. "With the support of friendly countries like Malaysia, India will further expand its relations with ASEAN. We agree that the review of the ASEAN-India Trade Agreement, ITIGA, should be completed expeditiously," he added.

During his meeting with Malaysia's Indian-origin political leaders, he appreciated their active role in strengthening the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

The PIs included Tuan Gobind Singh Deo, Minister of Digital, Ramanan Ramakrishnan, Minister of Human Resources, M. Kulasegaran, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, and R. Yuneswaran, Deputy Minister of National Unity, among others.

BJP deletes Himanta video after backlash

K.C. Venugopal, Congress MP and party general secretary (organisation), said the video was "nothing but a call to genocide" and was not so innocuous as to be ignored as troll content.

"It is poison spread from the very top, and there must be consequences for this. There is no hope that [Prime Minister] Narendra Modi will condemn or act against this, but the judiciary must act, and there shouldn't be any leniency shown in this case," he posted on X.

Supriya Shrinath, Congress's chairperson for social media and digital platforms, said the video was proof of the BJP leaders' character as "mass murderers". She added that deleting the video was not enough, and asked if the courts and other institutions were asleep.

Lawyer-activist Prashant Bhushan said the Supreme Court should take *suo motu* notice of the video and hold the BJP functionaries responsible for uploading it. "This is a serious criminal offence. Any Opposition functionary putting up such a post would have landed in jail under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act," he said.

Tagging Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, the Kerala unit of the Congress sought to know why the BJP timed the "genocide" post with Mr. Modi's visit to Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country, where "he is enjoying the warm hospitality of their Muslim leadership". "The BJP has lost all pretensions that they have officially started giving open calls for minority genocide, that too by showing a Chief Minister shooting Muslims down," the party unit posted on X.

Trinamool Congress MP Sagarika Ghose said the Assam BJP was guilty of clear incitement to violence. "Can't get away with deleting the ad... Exemplary punishment must be given in this case," she said.

India-Greece defence ties in focus as Ministers meet in New Delhi today

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

With a focus on enhancing defence cooperation, Greek Defence Minister Nicos Dendias and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will hold a bilateral meeting on Monday at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.

The discussions are expected to focus on enhancing cooperation in the defence sector, a senior

official said.

Speaking at the India-EU Forum 2026 on Saturday, Mr. Dendias described India as an indispensable partner for Europe, highlighting New Delhi's growing strategic and economic importance for the European Union and Greece in particular.

Mr. Dendias noted that European perceptions of India have evolved significantly over time, adding that India is now viewed as

a "necessary-to-have" partner.

Defence ties between India and Greece have seen steady momentum in recent months. In January this year, the two countries held the inaugural India-Greece Joint Services Staff Talks in New Delhi, marking a step towards institutionalising defence cooperation.

Earlier, in September 2025, the Indian Navy and the Hellenic Navy conduct-

ed their maiden bilateral maritime exercise in the Mediterranean Sea. The exercise, which concluded on September 18, 2025, was carried out in two phases – a harbour phase at Salamis Naval Base from September 13 to 17, followed by a sea phase on September 17 and 18.

The upcoming talks are expected to further consolidate the growing defence partnership between the two countries.

Himanta targets Gaurav Gogoi, wife on 'Pak. links'

Assam CM questions State Congress chief's 2013 Pakistan visit, says a probe into the visit has been handed over to Centre; Gogoi dismisses claims, asks how CM's family acquired 'vast tracts of land'

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday questioned Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's "suspicious" 10-day visit to Pakistan in December 2013 and his British wife Elizabeth Colburn Gogoi's professional stint with a climate organisation in the neighbouring country.

Addressing presspersons, Mr. Sarma asked Mr. Gogoi, the State Congress president and son of former Chief Minister late Tarun Gogoi, to disclose details of his visit to Pakistan months before he was elected to the Lok Sabha, during which he "uncharacteristically" maintained "digital silence". He asked the Congress leader to make public a letter allegedly issued by Pakistan's Interior Ministry, leading to the modification of the itinerary in his visa.

Mr. Gogoi entered Pakistan through the Attari-Wagah border for his visit from December 14 to 24, 2013. "Pakistan is not a tourist destination. Asked by the media about the purpose of his visit, he claimed that he had gone to meet his



I want him to make public its content. We want to know who he met in Lahore and why Pakistan rolled out the red carpet for him

HIMANTA BISWA SARMA
Assam Chief Minister

wife, who had shifted to India 21 months earlier," Mr. Sarma said, adding that the Special Branch of the Assam Police was not informed about the visit, although Mr. Gogoi's father was the Chief Minister then.

Serious allegations

Assam's Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the MP's alleged Pakistan links, learnt about the modification in his itinerary by confiscating his passport, Mr. Sarma said.

"I want him to make public the letter. We want to know its content. We want to know who he met in Lahore and why Pakistan rolled out the red carpet for him," he said.

"We suspect he may have undergone some form of training during those 10 days," the Chief Minister said.

Citing the seriousness of the allegations, Mr. Sarma said the Assam Cabinet decided on Saturday to hand the case over to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and seek a national-level investigation. He added that while the SIT had not interrogated Mr. Gogoi out of respect for his position, it would do so if directed by the Centre.

Mr. Sarma said some kind of "indoctrination" was evident from the questions related to national security raised by Mr. Gogoi in Parliament in 2014. These questions were related to uranium reserves, border security, Chinese infrastructure, defence procurements, climate change, and national water mission strategies.

Mr. Sarma described Mr. Gogoi as a "national threat" and alleged he could be vulnerable to

blackmail. "Who facilitated his visits to Islamabad and Karachi? If he does not answer, every question he raised in Parliament will be viewed with suspicion" the Chief Minister said.

Mr. Sarma alleged that Ms. Gogoi, who had joined U.K.-based climate organisation LEAD Pakistan as a consultant on March 18, 2011, was effectively "managed" by Pakistan".

However, Mr. Gogoi said the Chief Minister embarrassed himself before the media and claimed that the journalists remained unconvinced after the lengthy press conference. He dismissed the allegations and instead asked how Mr. Sarma's family acquired vast tracts of land across Assam, promising redistribution if Congress came to power.

"I pity the journalists from Delhi and Assam who had to suffer the most flop press conference of the century. This was worse than a C-grade cinema. Most mindless and bogus points," he said in a post on X. "This #SuperFlop is in contrast to our #XomoyParivartanYatra which has been a hit in uncovering the 12,000 bighas of land occupied by the Chief Minister and his family."

Meghalaya Police told to act against illegal mine owners

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Since Feb. 6, officials have seized 6,904 metric tonnes of coal from various places near the fatal mine

The police in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district, the hub of rat-hole coal mining, have been told to go beyond the labourers to hunt down financiers and owners of the illegal coal trade.

The crackdown followed widespread criticisms of the Conrad K. Sangma-led State government for "enabling" the illegal operations and a directive from the High Court of Meghalaya seeking "immediate, effective, and stringent action" against those involved in a series of mining accidents, including the February 5 dynamite blast, in an illegally operated mine that has so far claimed 27 lives.

East Jaintia Hills District Magistrate Manish Kumar, invoking Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, imposed a total ban on the assembly of five or more people around illegal mining sites in the Thangsko area. His order, seen as an admission of a lapse in ground-level intelligence, said there was evidence of continued illegal extraction. It tasked the magistrates with "identifying" the mine owners and financiers, believed to wield major political clout.

The district administra-

tion, noting the possibility of local groups or individuals trying to obstruct law enforcement, dismantle machinery, or destroy makeshift camps of miners to hide evidence, authorised the magistrates to seize all vehicles and equipment used in the mining operations and initiate proceedings under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act.

Since February 6, five teams comprising executive magistrates, police personnel, and officials from the Directorate of Mineral Resources have seized 6,904 tonnes of coal from various locations around the fatal mine, along with equipment used by miners.

Vikash Kumar, the district's Superintendent of Police, said the seizure of 63 detonators from individuals from Assam and Tripura underlined a "well-established supply chain" feeding the illegal mining industry. "We are dismantling all labour camps in the area... There will be no scope for illegal mining anymore," he said.

Country will soon be free from Naxalism, says Shah ahead of March 31 deadline

Shubhamoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday chaired a high-level security review meeting in Chhattisgarh capital Raipur on Left-Wing Extremism (LWE).

The meeting was held with the Centre's March 31 deadline for eliminating the Maoist insurgency from the country on the horizon.

"Today, in Raipur, I held a review meeting with the Chhattisgarh government and officials on anti-Naxal operations. Security-centric strategy, infrastructure, attacks on Naxal financial networks, and surrender policy have yielded positive results, and Naxalism is being completely eradicated before March 31," Mr. Shah wrote on X.

The Home Minister said the country would soon be free from Naxalism, which had plunged generations into the darkness of poverty and illiteracy. Mr. Shah said the ongoing fight against Maoists must not be scattered. Emphasising



Home Minister Amit Shah, being felicitated by Chhattisgarh CM Vishnu Deo Sai, during a review meeting in Raipur on Sunday. PTI

the need for smooth coordination between various State and Central agencies, he said remaining Maoists must not be allowed to escape to other States.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma, the Union Home Secretary, the Director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Special Secretary (Internal Security) in the Ministry of Home Affairs attended the meeting.

Directors General of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Border Security Force (BSF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and National Investigation Agency (NIA) as well as

Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Telangana, along with several senior officers, were also present, the official added.

Future strategy

Mr. Vijay Sharma said it could be the last major meeting before March 31.

"I believe this will be the last major meeting before March 31, 2026..."

This meeting will largely determine the strategy for how to proceed in the future," he said before the meeting.

Mr. Sai said the meeting chaired by Mr. Shah was a strong indication of decisive progress against Naxalism.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Modi pointed out that his

India and Malaysia are connected by the 'shared affection' for Tamil: Modi

Press Trust of India
KUALA LUMPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that India and Malaysia are connected by a shared affection for Tamil, underlining the strong presence of the language in education, media, and cultural life in the country.

Malaysia is home to nearly three million people of Indian descent, the second largest in the world, with an overwhelming majority of Tamil origin.

"India and Malaysia are also connected by a shared affection for the Tamil language. In Malaysia, the strong and vibrant presence of Tamil is visible in education, media, and cultural life," Mr. Modi said while speaking to presspersons on the concluding day of his two-day visit to Malaysia.

"I am confident that today's audio-visual agreement will bring our hearts even closer through films and music, especially Tamil cinema," Mr. Modi said.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Modi pointed out that his

Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim is a "big fan" of MGR, just like "several of us in India", as a song from the Tamil actor's movie *Naalai Namathe* was presented during a lunch hosted for the Indian leader.

Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran, popularly known as MGR, was a popular Indian actor, director and producer who founded Tamil Nadu's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party and went on to become the State's Chief Minister. *Naalai Namadhe* is one of his several blockbusters, released in 1975.

"At the lunch hosted by my friend, PM Anwar Ibrahim, one of the songs sung was *Naalai Namathe*, from a movie starring the great MGR!" Mr. Modi posted on X. He added that "PM Anwar Ibrahim, like several of us in India, is a big fan of MGR!"

Addressing a community programme on Saturday, Mr. Modi also said that the Indian diaspora continues to serve as a strong bridge between India and Malaysia.

He said that inspired by this history, India had established the Thiruvalluvar Chair at the University of Malaya and would now set up a Thiruvalluvar centre to further strengthen shared heritage.

Community). "We are all one society," he said. Mr. Bhagwat stressed the need for trust, friendship, and dialogue with Muslim and Christian communities.

"Islam is called the religion of peace, but peace is not seen... What is seen in Islam and Christianity today is not as per the teachings of Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad. We need the practice of true Islam and Christianity," he said.

He said there is no majority or minority (com-

India-Greece defence ties in focus as Ministers meet in New Delhi today

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

With a focus on enhancing defence cooperation, Greek Defence Minister Nicos Dendias and Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will hold a bilateral meeting on Monday at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi.

The discussions are expected to focus on enhancing cooperation in the defence sector, a senior

official said.

Speaking at the India-EU Forum 2026 on Saturday, Mr. Dendias described India as an indispensable partner for Europe, highlighting New Delhi's growing strategic and economic importance for the European Union and Greece in particular.

Mr. Dendias noted that European perceptions of India have evolved significantly over time, adding that India is now viewed as

a "necessary-to-have" partner.

Defence ties between India and Greece have seen steady momentum in recent months. In January this year, the two countries held the inaugural India-Greece Joint Services Staff Talks in New Delhi, marking a step towards institutionalising defence cooperation.

Earlier, in September 2025, the Indian Navy and the Hellenic Navy conduct-

UCC should be framed after taking everyone into confidence: RSS chief

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat on Sunday said the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) should be framed by taking everyone into confidence, and must not lead to divisions.

Asked whether "achche din" (good days) for the RSS had arrived after the BJP came to power, Mr. Bhagwat said the award's prestige would rise if it were conferred on

"other way round", noting the Sangh had remained committed to the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, and those who supported it had benefited. *Achche din* for the RSS came "because of the hard work of the volunteers...",

'Trade deal with U.S. enhances our relationship'

Commerce Minister says all of India's sensitivities have been protected by carefully seeing 'what are the products where India is self-sufficient, farmers have good production, we don't import at present or will not be required to import, and we have excluded these from the scope of this agreement'; he says the Opposition parties have a weak mindset and they are trying to misguide innocent farmers

INTERVIEW

Piyush Goyal

Varghese K. George
Nistula Hebbar
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Negotiations of the formal Interim Agreement on trade between India and the U.S. are "nearly complete", Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said. He added that India's import of critical commodities is likely to grow to \$2 trillion in five years, a part of which the U.S. will supply. Edited excerpts:

What has been the departure in this deal from India's previous relationship with the U.S.?

I think it's a continuation of our very strong and important strategic relationship. They are one of our most important partners in the world. We are both large democracies. We have shared interests in several sectors. We have a strong defence partnership. We have a strong technology partnership. We have a

strong critical minerals partnership. We are also members of two Quads together, so it's a very, very powerful relationship. The trade agreement further enhances our relationship and elevates it to a much deeper friendship.

Our red line was related to agriculture...

Largely. All of India's sensitivities, every single one of them, have been safeguarded. The sensitivities have been protected by carefully seeing what are the products where India is self-sufficient, farmers have good production, we don't import at present, or will not be required to import, and we have excluded these from the scope of this agreement.

But some farmer groups, such as those growing cotton, are unhappy...

This will help cotton farmers because exports can grow by leaps and bounds. We have a competitive edge in textiles compared to our competitors. Now, markets in the U.K., Europe, EFTA countries, Australia, New Zealand, so many new markets, all in the

developed world, at 0% duty, are going to support our textiles. In America, our reciprocal tariff of 18% is amongst the lowest among our peer group of competing economies, so effectively the demand for cotton is going to go up.

We do need to import the extra long staple cotton, which we don't have in India in sufficient quantity. So, if we give them a quota in cotton, it's actually good for the Indian ecosystem. Exports will grow, and as exports grow, the demand for domestic cotton also grows.

There are so many items where they are opening up the U.S. market for our farm produce and processed foods to be exported. We already are a large exporter. We export \$54 billion-\$55 billion every year of these products. In that situation, we are now looking at how we can double that.

Sadly, the Opposition parties have such a small and weak mindset that they're trying to distort the story and misguide our innocent farmers.

I want them to understand that we are opening up new opportunities in Europe, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and several



SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

other countries.

With the U.S., we have also got 0% reciprocal tariff on a large variety of agriculture products, such as spices, masalas, tea, coffee and their extract, copra and coconut oil, many nuts like areca nut, Brazil nut, cashew nut, chestnut, which you make in India, fruits and vegetables like avocado, bananas, guavas, mangos, kiwis, papayas, pineapples, shiitake mushrooms.

What are the areas where American demands could be accommodated?

There are many areas, like tree nuts, for example. We

One general concern has been the commitment to buy \$500 billion of U.S. goods.

Well, it's an intention. And it comes out of the fact that we have a big demand for particular goods that you don't have in India, which we have to import. Today, we are importing \$300 billion of these goods from different parts of the world. A large part of it comes from geographies that are not our preferred sources.

Is this deal concentrating our supply chain towards the U.S.?

This \$300 billion that we are importing right now is growing every year. We estimate that in the next five years, we will need \$2 trillion of all of these products, which can also come from the U.S. I have full intention to buy that and to diversify from our existing sources.

Our trade deals with some other countries involved liberalising the Indian labour movement, but this one does not...

Every trade deal stands on its own legs, but bear in mind, immigration is never discussed in a trade deal. So even with the European Union, the mobility partnership is outside the trade deal. It's a separate partnership.

Trade deals have an element of people for implementing the objectives of the trade deal. So, for example, if somebody gets a contract to do the plumbing in a hotel in Switzerland, I will need to send people to do the plumbing. So trade deals only address mobility from that perspective.

deal, obviously I will reply. People have mixed up two different issues.

If you ask the Agriculture Minister about the trade deal, he won't answer. If you ask me about what's happening with, let's say, the oil mission, I wouldn't be able to respond. I would have a general idea, but I would not like to make a statement on record without full knowledge of facts. Each person handles his own responsibility.

Do you still feel that we will see the formal agreement by mid-March?

Oh yes. Unlike with other countries, where we did the framework agreement and then got down to the nitty-gritties, in the U.S. case, we've done a full negotiation of all the issues literally line by line. So, the negotiation part is nearly complete. We'll be able to close it quickly.

The joint statement came before because the reciprocal tariff has to come down to 18%. The executive order of reducing it to 18%, we hope to see next week.

(Full interview on: newsth.live/PiyushGoyal)

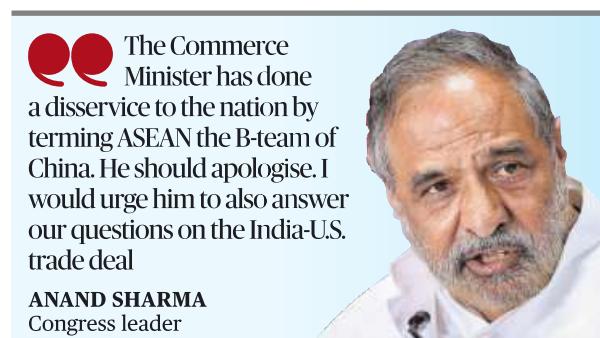
Cancel ASEAN trade pacts if against national interest, Cong. dares Goyal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Anand Sharma on Sunday dared Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal to cancel trade pacts with ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore if they were against the national interest.

Mr. Sharma, Commerce Minister in the erstwhile UPA government, was reacting to Mr. Goyal's press conference on Saturday in which he had questioned UPA-era deals and policy decisions such as the import of palm oil.

"It's ironic that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Malaysia for an ASEAN outreach tour and the Commerce Minister made these statements," Mr. Sharma told *The Hindu*. "What's stopping their government from cancelling these deals if they are against the nation?"



Mr. Sharma justified the decision to import edible oils such as palm oil, citing data to argue that imports were required to meet domestic demand. "India remains an importer of edible oils. Annual indigenous production is 10.5-10.6 million tonnes, while imports are 16 million tonnes per year. Nearly \$18.3 billion was spent in 2024-25," he said.

He said that palm oil was imported even during the NDA government led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and

had continued during the 12 years of Narendra Modi's government.

Answer our questions'
"The Commerce Minister has done a disservice to the nation by terming ASEAN the B-team of China. He should apologise for his statements. I would urge him to also answer our questions on the India-U.S. trade deal, which remains shrouded in mystery," Mr. Sharma said.

Mr. Sharma said U.S. President Donald Trump's

"tall claims" about the agreement raised "fundamental questions beyond trade, which concern national sovereignty, India's global commitments, the multilateral rule-based trade regime and the WTO."

Pointing out that the average U.S. MFN (most-favoured nation) tariff on India was around 3% before the 25% reciprocal tariffs of April 2025, he asked, "What is there to celebrate?"

He sought answers on whether India had agreed to open up its agriculture and dairy sectors, offer "zero-duty access" to U.S. products, commit to buying \$500 billion worth of American goods, and restrict purchases of Russian oil. "The government must answer all these questions by our people. They can't be silent on the details and seek to blame previous governments," he said.

CPI(M) slams India-U.S. trade deal, flags risks to farmers, sovereignty

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) on Sunday sharply criticised the Union government over the India-U.S. trade agreement, calling it a "shameful surrender" that threatens India's economic security and sovereignty.

In a statement, the CPI(M) Polit Bureau alleged that the BJP-led government had granted "sweeping concessions" to the United States in the so-called interim trade deal, including zero-tariff access for several U.S. agricultural exports such as fruits, cotton, tree nuts, soybean oil, and other food products.

These decisions, the party warned, would inflict severe losses on lakhs of Indian farmers.

The party said apple growers in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and parts of the Northeast

were already hit by earlier trade pacts with countries such as New Zealand, and would face further distress. Cotton and soybean farmers, struggling with rising input costs and rural indebtedness, would be similarly affected, the statement noted.

The CPI(M) expressed concern over reports that India had agreed to dismantle non-tariff barriers on food and agricultural goods. Such a move, it said, would amount to rolling back farm support and subsidies, leaving domestic producers defenceless against heavily subsidised U.S. imports and making Indian agriculture "increasingly unviable".



Seeks full disclosure
Reiterating its opposition to the agreement, the CPI(M) demanded that the government immediately place the full details of the trade deal before Parliament and make them public. It urged the Centre to refrain from signing any pact that it said would harm the interests of Indian workers, farmers, and the wider population.

Bengal tells EC it will deploy 8,505 officers for SIR

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Ahead of a crucial hearing before the Supreme Court on the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, the West Bengal government has informed the Election Commission (EC) that it is ready to make 8,505 Group B officers of the State available for the process.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N.V. Anjaria is scheduled to hear on Monday a bunch of petitions, including the one filed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, relating to the ongoing SIR process.

Ms. Banerjee had objected to the appointment of micro-observers in the State when she appeared before the top court in person during the previous hearing on the issue on February 4. The Trinamool



Long wait: People wait for document verification for hearings under the special intensive revision at Balurghat in West Bengal on Saturday. PTI

Congress leader had claimed that micro-observers were appointed only for West Bengal.

Counsel for the EC, Rakesh Dwivedi, said that micro-observers were appointed in West Bengal because the State government did not make Group B officers available to the EC for SIR. The senior advocate had stated before the Supreme Court that on-

ly 80 Group B officers, such as Sub-Divisional Magistrates, were made available for overseeing the SIR process in the State.

Names of nearly 58 lakh voters were deleted from the draft electoral rolls for the State published in December 2025.

The top court had asked the poll body to be more sensitive while issuing notices on grounds of minor discrepancies, such as mismatched spelling of

names. The Supreme Court, on January 19, issued a set of directions to the EC to ensure that the verification of the persons put in the "logical discrepancies" category is conducted in a transparent manner, without causing stress and inconvenience to the person.

The process of SIR in the poll-bound State, which began in November 2025, is on its last legs. The CEO of West Bengal, Manoj Kumar Agarwal, on February 7 sought a one-week deadline extension from the EC for the SIR, the groundwork for which is proposed to be completed by February 14.

The final voter rolls were earlier scheduled to be published on February 14.

If the recommendation for extension is accepted, then the final rolls are likely to be published by February 21.

Four years on, Kanhaiya Lal's family still waiting for justice, says Ashok Gehlot

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI/JAIPUR

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Sunday alleged that the accused in the 2022 Kanhaiya Lal murder case in Udaipur were "BJP workers" and that his family was still awaiting justice despite it being an "open-and-shut" case.

The BJP had in the past denied the Congress's allegation that one of the main accused in the case was its member.

Responding to a statement by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Mr. Gehlot said through his X handle, "The country's Finance Minister stated in Parliament while referring to the murder of Shri Kan-

haiya Lal in Udaipur that no action was taken. This is factually completely wrong and misleading. The Rajasthan Police arrested the murderers within just a few hours."

He said, "Then, the Union government handed the investigation over to the NIA. Since then, from 2022 until today in 2026, Shri Kanhaiya Lalji's family has been waiting for justice.

"...the truth is that family was given 50 lakh rupees in compensation, and both of their sons were given government jobs. After the elections, whenever Home Minister comes to Rajasthan, he remains silent on this issue. The people of the country are watching all of this and, when the time comes, will hold you accountable," he said.

Alleging that those accused of having murdered Kanhaiya Lal were BJP workers, he said, "Due to them not having received punishment even now, the apprehension in the public's mind is only growing stronger that, because they are BJP workers, these two are not being given punishment despite it being such an open-and-shut case."

He alleged that during the elections, the BJP "lied" about the compensation given to the victim's family.

"...the truth is that family was given 50 lakh rupees in compensation, and both of their sons were given government jobs. After the elections, whenever Home Minister comes to Rajasthan, he remains silent on this issue. The people of the country are watching all of this and, when the time comes, will hold you accountable," he said.

IN BRIEF



CPI(M) MP meets two persons who faced harassment

CPI(M) MP John Brittas on Sunday met and extended solidarity with Vakil Ahmed, a shopkeeper who was allegedly harassed by a right-wing crowd, and Deepak Kumar who stepped to protect Mr. Ahmad, in Kotdwara of Uttarakhand. "In the divisive times we live in, it is crucial that we protect and nurture such individuals," said the Rajya Sabha member, who also brought an annual membership at Mr. Kumar's gym and clothes from Mr. Ahmed's shop saying that they have been facing an informal economic boycott.

Court declares two persons fugitive economic offenders

The then chairman and managing director (CMD) and a whole-time director of Amira Pure Foods Private Limited have been declared "fugitive economic offenders" by a special Delhi court. They face charges of bank loan fraud and money laundering. The court has also ordered the confiscation of movable and immovable assets worth ₹123.85 crore, belonging to the accused persons/companies, under the Fugitive Economic Offenders Act. The two accused have been identified as CMD Karan A. Chana, and whole-time director Anita Daing. As alleged, the company defaulted in repayment of interest and failed to submit the financial statement. Its loan accounts involving ₹201.85 crore were designated as fraud by all the member banks.

Ailing Kuki-Zo BJP MLA airlifted from Imphal to Delhi

Manipur's Kuki-Zo MLA Vungzgin Valte, who was grievously injured during the May 2023 ethnic conflict, was airlifted from State capital Imphal to New Delhi for advanced treatment on Saturday. The Bharatiya Janata Party member from Thanhon constituency had been staying in Churachandpur following prolonged treatment in New Delhi. He was brought to Imphal from Churachandpur early morning on Sunday. Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh met Mr. Valte in Imphal later in the day before he was airlifted for treatment at a private hospital in Gurugram, a government spokesperson said.

4 Indians injured in Russian university attack recovering

Four Indian medical students who were injured in a stabbing spree by a juvenile in a Russian university are "stable and recovering well," the Indian mission said on Sunday. These four Indians were among at least six people injured in the stabbing attack on Saturday at the State Medical University in Ufa, about 1,200 km east of the Russian capital, in the Bashkortostan Republic. Indian consular officials from Kazan on Sunday visited the four students at the hospital. "They are stable and recovering well. Our consul officer met them today in the hospital and also met other students in the hostel," the Indian mission here said. PTI

'Linguistic, cultural markers can solve caste enumeration riddle'

Professor G.N. Devy says this approach may begin with collecting information on mother tongues; the scholar and linguist notes that not taking this opportunity to separately enumerate Denotified Tribes could alienate more than 10 crore people

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

Linguistic and cultural markers could hold the key to solving the caste enumeration riddle, says scholar, linguist, author, and cultural activist G.N. Devy.

In an exclusive conversation with *The Hindu*, he explained that even if residents entered what they thought was their caste name, post-Census studies and a carefully layered scrutiny could analyse markers of language, ancestry, lifestyle, and kinships to arrive at a comprehensive list of castes that accounts for all groups, while being able to explain duplication, variations in names, and spellings.

"This model has been tried and tested for languages," said Professor Devy, whose work leading the "Peoples' Linguistic Survey of India" project resulted in the documentation of more than 780 languages in the country.

The Union government has planned to hold the

QQ The methodologies of surveying and enumerating languages could be used to condense not just the 2011 SECC data but also the data from the upcoming Census. But this would require the government to keep the data open to scrutiny for scholars.

G.N. DEVY
Cultural activist

next Census in 2026 and 2027. The first phase – houselisting – is set to be completed this year; the second phase – population enumeration (with caste) – is due in 2027. However, the methodology for caste enumeration has not yet been announced by the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India.

There are discussions among activists, scholars, and community leaders about two possible methods: the first is to leave an open field in the Census form – what the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC) did; and the second is to compile a list of

castes for people to select from – what Bihar's Caste-based Survey did. The argument for the latter often draws its strength from the fact that the 2011 SECC ended up returning more than 46 lakh caste names.

Post-Census study
Speaking to *The Hindu*, Professor Devy argued in favour of the first method, saying that the methodologies of surveying and enumerating languages could be used to condense not just the 2011 SECC data but also the data from the upcoming Census. However, he noted that this would require the government to keep the data open to scrutiny for scholars and involve institutions such as the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI).

Explaining the approach, Professor Devy said the process may begin with collecting information on mother tongues. "The 2011 Census returned 19,000 mother tongues. But this was put through multiple layers of scrutiny that accounted for duplication, variation in spellings, errors, and yet another layer to filter for those with verified grammar. This narrowed the list down to 1,369 mother tongue languages," he said.

Using the example of community classification, he continued, "Similarly, there is a community called Sansi in Punjab. The same community is called Kanjar in Rajasthan, Chhara in Gujarat, and Kanjar Bhat in Maharashtra. But it is one community because they have a shared language called Bhaktu. So, while the census will return four names, it can point to common language, ancestry, lifestyle,

relatives, marriages, and kinship bonds. And the Anthropological Survey of India can certify this."

Professor Devy added that works such as AnSI's 'People of India' project could be a reference point.

DNT count needed

Professor Devy, a scholar who co-founded the Denotified, Nomadic, and Semi-nomadic Tribes - Rights Action Group (DNT-RAG), along with author Mahasweta Devi and has chaired the government's 2006 Technical Advisory Group for DNTs, said that the Census office must declare its intention to explicitly count the DNT communities (formerly classified as "criminal" under the colonial-era Criminal Tribes Act, 1871). He noted that if this opportunity is not taken, India risks alienating more than 10 crore people,

presenting a "problem that can become much bigger than the problem of calculating, tabulating, and making a proper list". Full interview on newsth.live/Devy

Prohibitory orders issued in Manipur's Ukhrul district

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Administration of Manipur's Ukhrul district on Sunday imposed prohibitory orders in Litan area of the district "until further notice", following tension between Naga and Kuki-Zo villagers over an assault case.

District Magistrate Asish Das said the restrictions, under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, were imposed on apprehension of breach of peace and public tranquillity in the area. The restrictions came into force from 7 p.m. on Sunday.

The district administration also requisitioned the services of the Army and paramilitary forces, including the Assam Rifles, as a preventive measure. According to reports, a Kuki-Zo group allegedly assaulted a Tangkhul Naga man at Litan on Saturday night.

It also said that the matter was being addressed peacefully and customarily through the established authority of the Litan Sa-reikhong village "in consultation with the family of the injured person".

Doval meets his Canadian counterpart, discusses safety, security of citizens

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval met his Canadian counterpart, Nathalie Drouin, in Ottawa on Saturday.

The two sides acknowledged the progress on initiatives aimed at supporting the safety and security of their countries and citizens, the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement on Sunday.

They agreed to a shared work plan to guide bilateral cooperation on national security and law enforcement issues and to enable practical collaboration on respective priorities.

The move is seen as part of efforts to normalise relations that came under strain following the killing of a Khalistani separatist in 2023. Mr. Doval's visit to Ottawa comes ahead of Canadian Prime Minister



National Security Adviser Ajit Doval with his Canadian counterpart Nathalie Drouin. FILE PHOTO

Mark Carney's visit to India in March.

During the meeting, Mr. Doval and Ms. Drouin, Deputy Clerk and National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Canadian Prime Minister, agreed that each country would establish security and law-enforcement liaison officers and that their respective agencies would build on working relationships. This important step will help streamline bilateral communications and enable timely information sharing

on issues of mutual concern to Canada and India, such as the illegal flow of drugs, particularly fentanyl precursors, and transnational organized criminal networks, the Ministry said.

India and Canada also committed to formalising cooperation on cybersecurity policy and information sharing on cybersecurity issues, as well as continuing discussions on cooperation related to fraud and immigration enforcement.

Biotechnology is steering accelerated green growth of the future, say experts

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

In a webinar on "Biotechnology Education: Skills and Opportunities for a Sustainable Future" on Sunday, panellists explained how the discipline can drive a sustainable and technology-integrated future that aligns with societal demands, addresses current issues of healthy and safe day-to-day living.

The webinar was presented by the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT), Chennai, and *The Hindu*.

Pooja Shivanand Breah, assistant professor, Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences Programme, University of Brunei, Darussalam, pointed out that India was the fastest growing bio-economy in the world.

From \$10 billion in 2014 to \$165 billion in 2024, it has grown 16 times, and the bio-revolution now has a

ble development should meet the needs, and not the greed, of the present," he stressed.

G. Jayaraman, Professor and dean, School of Bio Sciences and Technology, VIT Chennai, focused on sustainability as a prospective career that biotechnology offers. "Those with skillsets in microbial culture techniques, gene manipulation, and data analysis will have no dearth of opportunities in green growth and bio-enabled economy in the future," he said.

Jayanthi Velayudhan, post-doctoral fellow, spoke of her journey as a biotech researcher at the VIT.

It was the second edition of the webinar series "Biotechnology: Role in Industry 5.0 - Sustainable Future Pathways". The session can be viewed at <https://newsth.live/THVITBTSY>

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

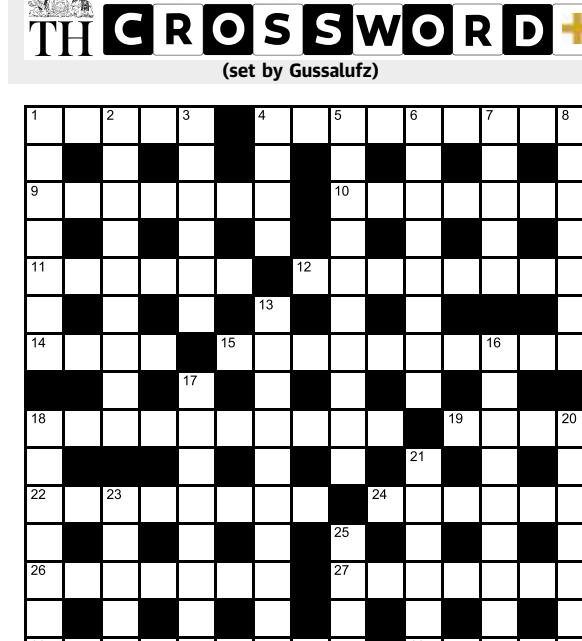
FAITH

Only will of God prevails

Sri Kesava Vajapeya Swamy said in a discourse that when the people of Ayodhya were immersed in joyous celebrations over the forthcoming coronation of Sri Rama, an unexpected and tragic turn of events awaited them. King Dasaratha, filled with happiness, went to Queen Kaikeyi's palace to share the auspicious news. However, Kaikeyi's mind had already been poisoned by her malicious maid Manthara. Instigated by her, Kaikeyi reminded the king of the two boons he had once granted her. To the utter shock and sorrow of Dasaratha, she demanded that her son Bharata be crowned king and that Rama be sent into exile in the forest for 14 years. Kalidasa reminds us that Manthara's wicked counsel cost Kaikeyi her husband and earned her the painful reproach of her own son Bharata.

King Bhojaraja observes that Kaikeyi's heart was originally pure and pristine like the sacred river Ganga, but it was violently disturbed and sullied by Manthara. Valmiki declares that King Dasaratha worshipped Lord Ranganatha for thousands of years and ruled Ayodhya with unwavering righteousness. Yet even such a noble *punyaatma* – one who had wrapped himself completely in dharma – was compelled to undergo this heart-rending ordeal. If this be the fate of such a virtuous king, what then can be said of us, ordinary mortals?

The contrast between Dasaratha's life of joy and fulfillment before meeting Kaikeyi and the dramatic events that unfolded overnight in her palace, completely overturning the course of events, clearly reveals a profound truth: nothing truly lies in our hands; it is the will of God alone that governs and decides everything.



Across

- 1 Momentum in favour of church (5)
- 4 Gen X reach out for someone with currency in many countries? (9)
- 9 Reportedly, they use their tongues in drinks (7)
- 10 Revolving double entendre ("IT's over with all unfulfilled!") about marriage (7)
- 11 Voices in the heart of woods, near tall evergreens (6)

Down

- 1 Mornment in favour of church (5)
- 2 Carefree zebra shows how to chill again (8)
- 3 Nearly bald hero (4)
- 4 Temperature in ice age pot readjusted for meat pastry (7,3)
- 5 Ms. X, not an evangelist? (10)
- 6 Conflicts happened to be connected with rupees (4)
- 7 Be as composed, everyone, as a sandy shore (3,5)
- 8 European prime minister is back with anger and great power (6)
- 9 Increase in egg prices ends, union's leader arrested (7)
- 10 Evacuate if given time after rail malfunctions (7)
- 11 Woman records family material (9)
- 12 Perhaps some mother's role in film? (5)
- 13 Men and strong women engaged in greetings (no husband) (7)
- 14 Resign, joining authentic startup, initially for payments (9)
- 15 Brought out Tesla, perhaps in order to cover sexual inadequacy (6)
- 16 More followers of KKK, we're told? (4)
- 17 Perform tricks, including juggling etc.? Fancy! (10)
- 18 Current measurement in the morning, according to agency: 50% (8)
- 19 "He shows us the way regularly," Gauri added (5)
- 20 Excuse wrongdoing involving England? I'm not sure, upon reflection (7)
- 21 Used conch irritatingly

MONEYWISE

Gold and silver prices turn volatile

B.Krishnakumar

Precious metals started the new year 2026 with a bang with both gold and silver reaching fresh all-time highs in January. The price action, however, turned hugely volatile in the past few trading sessions with precious metals price cooling off almost 10% off the recent highs.

Comex Gold zoomed past the psychological \$5,000-mark and reached a fresh high of \$5,626.8 on January 29.

Gold price, however, sold off sharply thereafter to end the month at \$4,907.5, representing a 13.3% gain.

The price action in Comex Silver was no different with the white metal reaching a record high of \$121.8 before settling at \$85.25 at the end of the month. This represents a gain of 20% last month.

Turns volatile

Mirroring the trend in the global markets, the MCX Gold price, too, turned volatile towards the end of the



Speed breakers: Prices turned hugely volatile in the past few trading sessions. AFP

month after having hit record highs a few days ago. MCX gold closed at ₹50,849 per 10-grams at the end of January, after having recorded a high of ₹1,93,096 on January 29. MCX Gold gained 8.3% last month while MCX Silver gained 23.7% last month to settle at ₹2,91,922 per kilogram.

Stay range bound

The anticipated cool off in precious metals price materialised towards the end of January. The price of Comex Gold is likely to remain range bound in the \$4,400-\$5,650 in the near term. A clear trending move is likely to materialise only if the price clears the boundaries of this anticipated zone of \$4,400-\$5,650.

The long-term trend remains positive and the gold price could resume uptrend once the anticipated consolidation or pull back phase is over. Comex Silver price too cooled off from the highs, but the price moved up way beyond earlier expectations. The recent price action suggests that the price could remain stuck in a broad range of \$75-\$110.

Local gold prices

In the domestic market, gold price turned volatile in the past few trading sessions, mimicking the trend in the international market. The recent price action indicates that the domestic gold price could oscillate in the ₹45,000-₹90,000 range. Expect back and forth movement within this zone for the next few weeks.

MCX Silver, too, sold off rapidly after having reached a high of ₹4,20,048 per kilogram. Similar to gold, MCX Silver, too, is likely to remain in a range. The price is likely to move back and forth in the ₹2,40,000-₹3,85,000 zone. Only a breakout from the extremes of this zone would set the tone for the next big directional move. Until then expect volatile price action within this broad zone. To summarise, gold and silver have cooled off from overbought zone. The price action is likely to be confined to a broad trading range for next several weeks.

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

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



Client friendly: The IRDAI's portability framework for hospitalisation cover is designed to protect policyholders GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

The hidden risk in hospitalisation renewals

Start renewal/porting process in advance; follow up persistently with intermediary/insurer; do not allow existing policy to lapse until the new cover is formally issued

COVER NOTE

K. Nitya Kalyani

Recently I came across multiple cases of insureds being left exposed at precisely the moment they believed they were protected. The insurer already received the proposal and the premium only to later reject the proposal or offer a cover so materially altered it bore little resemblance to what was originally proposed and accepted. These are not isolated service failures but a trending operating procedure undermining the trust in insurance.

Insurance is a contract. There is a proposal, an acceptance, a defined set of conditions under which compensation will be due and a computed consideration to be paid. The conditions are the risks you are insured for and the consideration is the premium. A proposal form is filled with personal data and coverage needs, the risk is underwritten (evaluated) and premium decided. When premium is paid, the insurer assumes the risk.

The small but critical twist in the cases is this: a quote is offered by an intermediary (agent, bank, or broker), the proposal form, supporting documents and the premium are all collected though formal underwriting and acceptance are still pending. In principle, premium collection should follow acceptance, not precede it.

The intermediary was



There is no deterrent against collecting premiums before underwriting is done nor clear accountability when this jeopardises continuity of cover

When that sequence is reversed, the risk silently remains with the customer. What does this look like in real life?

A colleague of mine had a family hospitalisation policy coming up for renewal. She was approached by a different insurer offering a higher sum insured at a very attractive premium. Reassured, she paid the premium and assumed her family cover was secure.

Days later, she was informed one family member could not be covered due to a medical reason, one which alarmed her and which their treating family doctor simply could not accept as a valid medical concern.

Continuity at risk

On another dimension, the timing of the rejection placed the family's cover continuity at risk. In proceeding with the new insurer, she had missed the renewal date of existing policy which was in the final days of the grace period. With Pongal holidays intervening, the only practical advice I could give her was to immediately renew the old policy within the grace period.

The intermediary was

however, the framework is silent on the consequences of post-premium rejection. There is no explicit deterrent against collecting premiums before underwriting is completed nor clear accountability when such practices jeopardise continuity of cover.

This is a regulatory gap deserving urgent attention. At least, insurers should not be allowed to collect premiums before underwriting decisions are final. Where premiums are collected and proposals rejected, timelines for refunds, compensation for delay and responsibility for loss of continuity must be defined. Intermediaries must be held accountable when their actions/advice expose clients to avoidable risk. Until such safeguards are firmly embedded, consumer awareness remains the first – and often only – line of defence.

Here are tips to avoid such heartburn: Start renewal/porting process in advance. Follow up persistently with the intermediary and the insurer, preferably in writing. Above all, do not allow existing policy to lapse until the new cover is formally issued. In case of doubts, renewing the current policy preserves certainty – and buys you a full year to thoughtfully reassess coverage, insurer and the fine print that too often shows its sting only when it is already too late.

(The writer is a business journalist specialising in insurance & corporate history)

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%)			
	Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Small Finance Banks				
AU Small Finance Bank	7.10	6.35	7.10	6.75
Equitas Small Finance Bank	7.20	6.90	7.00	7.00
ESAF Small Finance Bank	7.60	4.75	6.00	5.75
Jana Small Finance Bank	7.77	7.00	7.50	7.77
Shivalik Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.00	6.75	6.25
Silice Small Finance Bank	7.75	6.25	7.50	7.00
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	7.90	7.25	7.25	7.90
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.45	7.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.00	7.50	7.00
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	6.45	6.25	6.45	6.45
Bandhan Bank	7.20	7.00	7.00	5.85
City Union Bank	7.00	6.80	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.00	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	6.60	6.30	6.40	6.25
DCB Bank	7.15	6.90	7.00	7.15
Federal Bank	6.75	6.25	6.75	6.40
HDFC Bank	6.45	6.25	6.45	6.40
ICICI Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.50
IDFC FIRST Bank	7.00	6.30	7.00	7.00
IndusInd Bank	7.00	6.75	6.90	6.65

Rates as on February 5

Home Loan Interest Rates

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.)		
	Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
(In %)			
Public Sector Banks			
State Bank of India	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70
Bank of Baroda	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.25
Union Bank of India*	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50
Punjab National Bank	7.25-9.10	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00
Bank of India	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.25
Bank of Maharashtra	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90
Punjab and Sind Bank	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70
Indian Overseas Bank	7.10 #	7.10 #	7.10 #
Indian Bank	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55
Central Bank of India	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
LIC Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Bajaj Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Tata Capital	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
PNB Housing Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
GIC Housing Finance	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
SMFG India Home Finance	10.00 #	10.00 #	10.00 #
Samaan Capital	8.75 #	8.75 #	8.75 #
Aditya Birla Capital	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
ICICI Home Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
Private Sector Banks			
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.70 #	7.70 #	7.70 #
ICICI Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
Axis Bank	8.00-11.90	8.00-11.90	8.00-9.10
HSBC Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
South Indian Bank	7.80 #	7.80 #	7.80 #
Karur Vysya Bank	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65
Karnataka Bank	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68

*Extra interest rate concession of 0.05% to borrowers opting for insurance policy

#Onwards Rates as on February 4 Source:Paisabazaar.com

Are you tax aware? THINKINVESTOR

Most mass-affluent investors may not have the choices available to HNWIs. The decision to invest tax-efficiently is nevertheless crucial. So, they should first decide on asset allocation.

Venkatesh Bangarawuswamy

You are a tax-aware investor if you actively integrate the impact of taxes into all investment decisions. Should you? In this article, we discuss what it takes to be a tax-aware investor.

HNWIs vs. mass affluent

The rich are typically tax-aware investors. The asset management industry refers to them as High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs), which include Very HNWI and Ultra HNWI. The middle-class span a wide range of wealth, where the top-end of the spectrum could be tax-aware investors. So, a large part may not be tax-aware investors. The middle-class is typically referred to as mass-affluent investors.

The investment process starts with the asset allocation decision. This involves deciding how much of your expected annual savings should be allocated to each asset class you intend to invest to achieve life goals. The next step is the asset location decision. This refers to deciding how to invest in a tax-efficient way to achieve the asset allocation decision. This is based on three locations: taxable, tax-deferred and tax-exempt. The tax-exempt location includes provident fund, public provident fund and national pension scheme. All capital appreciation products fall into the tax-deferred location, where tax liability arises only when you sell the investment. The rest falls into the taxable location.

Most mass-affluent investors must choose from the three locations. Some mass-affluent investors and typically all HNWIs create tax shelters, in addition to using investments that directly fall into these three locations. Setting up tax shelters may be optimal only beyond a wealth level. So, for most mass-affluent investors, the goal must be to align asset allocation to achieve their goals even if some investments are taxable. If you want capital appreciation along with stable income, invest in equity funds and bank deposits. The former will fit into tax-deferred location and latter, the taxable location. While tax on accrued interest will hit the bond exposure in portfolio, there is the benefit of diversifying source of returns.

Conclusion

Most mass-affluent investors may not have the choices available to HNWIs. The decision to invest tax-efficiently is nevertheless crucial. So, they should first decide on asset allocation. Then, check if bond asset-class exposure can be in a tax-exempt location, given the objective to earn income returns with minimal reinvestment risk. If not, they may have to choose the taxable location. The trade-off is the tax incurred for lowering the reinvestment risk.

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

TEHRAN

Nobel laureate Mohammadi faces seven more years in Iranian prison



An Iranian court sentenced Nobel Peace Prize winner Narges Mohammadi to over seven more years in prison, her lawyer said. Over the past quarter-century, Ms. Mohammadi, 53, has been repeatedly tried and jailed for her campaigning against Iran's use of capital punishment and the mandatory dress code for women. AFP

MOSCOW

Suspect involved in shooting of top Russian General detained, says FSB



Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) said on Sunday that the man suspected of shooting top Russian military intelligence officer Vladimir Alexeyev has been detained in Dubai and handed over to Russia. The senior officer was shot several times in an apartment block in Moscow on Friday, investigators said. REUTERS

BANGKOK

Conservative Thai Prime Minister claims victory in national election



Thailand's conservative Prime Minister claimed victory in the general election on Sunday, after television channels projected his party would be by far the largest in Parliament after riding a wave of nationalism. "We are likely to take first place in the election," Anutin Charnvirakul told reporters at his party headquarters. AFP

ADDIS ABABA

Ethiopia accuses Eritrea of military hostility, seeks removal of troops



Ethiopia on Sunday ordered neighbouring Eritrea to "immediately withdraw its troops" from Ethiopian territory, with the pair inching towards a new conflict. Ethiopia's Foreign Minister has accused neighbouring Eritrea of military aggression and of supporting armed groups inside Ethiopian territory. AFP

Japan's first woman leader on course for landslide win in general election

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party-led coalition on track to secure over 350 of the 465 seats, exit polls show; the snap election was called to capitalise on her strong approval ratings; her rule has strained Tokyo's ties with Beijing

Reuters
TOKYO

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's ruling coalition is set for a landslide victory in Sunday's election for Japan's Lower House, exit polls showed, a move that may rattle financial markets and accelerate a defence build-up aimed at countering China.

Ms. Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and coalition partner, the Japan Innovation Party, known as Ishin, could secure as many as 366 of the 465 seats in the chamber, a supermajority that would ease her legislative agenda, according to public broadcaster NHK.

The LDP alone is projected to win as many as



LDP chief Sanae Takaichi places a red paper rose on the name of an elected candidate at the party headquarters in Tokyo. REUTERS

LDP late last year.

Rare snap polls

Voters have been drawn to her straight-talking, hard-working image, but her nationalistic leanings and emphasis on security have strained ties with powerful neighbour China, while her promises of tax cuts

have rattled financial markets.

Residents trudged through snow to cast their ballots with record snowfall in parts of the country snarling traffic and requiring some polling stations to close early.

It is only the third post-war election held in February, with elections typically called during milder months.

Ms. Takaichi's election promise to suspend the 8% sales tax on food to help households cope with rising prices has spooked investors concerned about the heaviest debt burden among advanced economies will fund the plan.

"Her plans for the cut in the consumption tax leave open big question marks

about funding and how she's going to go about making the arithmetic add up," said Chris Scilicula, head of research at Daiwa Capital Markets Europe in London.

Younger voters are among the most supportive of Ms. Takaichi, with one recent poll finding more than 90% of those under 30 favoured her.

On Thursday, Ms. Takaichi received the "total endorsement" of U.S. President Donald Trump.

China will also be keeping a close eye on the results.

Weeks after taking office, Ms. Takaichi touched off the biggest dispute with China in over a decade by publicly outlining how Tokyo might respond to a Chinese attack on Taiwan.

Iran defies U.S. threats, says it has right to enrich uranium

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Sunday ruled out Tehran ever giving up uranium enrichment in its negotiations with Washington, insisting it will not be intimidated by the threat of war with the United States.

Mr. Araghchi told a forum in the Iranian capital that Tehran had little trust in Washington and even doubted that the U.S. side was taking renewed negotiations seriously.

"Why do we insist so much on enrichment and refuse to give it up, even if a war is imposed on us? Because no one has the right to dictate our behaviour,"

Mr. Araghchi said. "Their military deployment in the region does not scare us," he said, referring to the arrival of an aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, in the Arabian Sea.



Abbas Araghchi
The United States and Iran reopened negotiations on Friday in Oman for the first time since Israel's 12-day war with the Islamic republic in June of last year.

Iran is seeking to have U.S. economic sanctions on the country lifted, in exchange for what Mr. Araghchi said at the forum could be a series of confidence-building measures concerning the nuclear programme.

Western countries and Israel, thought to be West

Asia's only country with nuclear weapons, say Iran is seeking to acquire a nuclear bomb, which the Islamic republic denies.

Questions commitment
"They fear our atomic bomb, while we are not looking for one. Our atomic bomb is the power to say 'no' to the great powers," Mr. Araghchi said.

Mr. Araghchi's comments came after U.S. negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner visited the aircraft carrier on Saturday, signalling the persistent threat of U.S. military action against Iran.

Mr. Araghchi called into question the United States's commitment to negotiations.

"The continuation of certain sanctions and military actions raise doubts about the seriousness and readiness of the other side to conduct genuine negotiations," he said.

Parties vie for votes from supporters of Awami League in Bangladesh polls

Rabiul Alam
DHAKA

Seventy-year-old Abu Bakr has never cast his vote for any symbol other than the Awami League's "Boat". A life-long supporter of the party, he never imagined a national election without it. Yet on February 12, Bangladesh will go to the polls with the Awami League barred from contesting, following a crackdown after the mass uprising that ousted party chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and ended the party's 15-year rule.

"I have never cast my ballot for any symbol other than the Boat in my lifetime," he said. "The party is barred from this election, but I still intend to vote. I don't know if I will be able to vote in the next election, as I am already old," he said.

Following the dramatic fall of the Awami League, most of its senior leaders have either fled the country or remain in jail. With the party barred from contesting the election, its traditional vote bank has been left politically adrift.

In 2001, the League won its lowest-ever number of seats, securing just 62 out



Fill the void: Campaign banners seen during an election rally of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Dhaka on Sunday. AFP

of 300, despite receiving more than two crore votes when the electorate stood at just over seven crore. In the 2008 election, widely regarded as free and fair, the League won nearly 3.5 crore votes on its own as part of the Grand Alliance, when the number of registered voters had crossed the eight crore mark. With Bangladesh's current voter base exceeding 12.7 crore, a large segment of its former voters remain undecided, a factor that could prove decisive as former allies Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami now contest against each other.

Sources within the League said the party remains uncertain about its election strategy. Although

A recent nationwide survey found that more than 90% of voters said they intend to vote in the upcoming election, while around 8% remain undecided. Among those who previously voted for the Awami League, 48.2% said they would vote for the BNP and 29.9% for the Jamaat.

Influence voters

Political analysts say that Awami League currently lacks the organisational strength to prevent the election. Analysts also note that the party has lost moral authority following the killing of protesters during the July 2024 uprising. However, they note that the party retains significant grassroots support, which could still influence the election outcome.

AFM Bahauddin Nasim, joint general secretary of the Awami League, told *The Hindu* on Sunday that the party has boycotted the election and instructed its supporters not to vote.

He alleged that BNP and Jamaat activists were pressuring Awami League supporters to attend polling centres. "These elections will not be accepted by the people or the international community," he said.

Hamas rejects disarmament and 'foreign rule' in Gaza

Agence France-Presse
DOHA

A senior Hamas leader said on Sunday that the Palestinian Islamist movement would not surrender its weapons nor accept foreign intervention in Gaza.

"As long as there is occupation, there is resistance," said Khaled Moshal, who previously led the group.

"Gaza belongs to the people of Gaza and to Palestine. We will not accept foreign rule," he added.

A tranche of Epstein-related documents released

Keir Starmer's chief of staff quits over Mandelson's links to Epstein

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Chief of Staff, Morgan McSweeney resigned on Sunday, taking "full responsibility" for advising Mr. Starmer to appoint Peter Mandelson as Britain's envoy to Washington.

Mr. Mandelson was sacked in September last year after the extent of his links to sex-offender Jeffrey Epstein became publicly known.

The Mandelson scandal had led to calls from Mr. Starmer's opponents for

the Prime Minister to resign. This comes when Mr. Starmer is faring poorly in opinion polls with pressure from MPs in his own party to step down.

Mr. McSweeney was a key associate of Mr. Starmer, and it is as yet unclear how his resignation will impact Mr. Starmer's ability to continue in office.

Mr. Starmer had apologised last week to Epstein's victims for believing Mr. Mandelson's "lies", saying "the depths and darkness" of Mr. Mandelson's relationship with Epstein were not known to him.

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Chief Manager
Banking Operations Department

Date of opening: 09.02.2026

Last date of submission: 23.02.2026

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU
TAMIL NADU FOREST DEPARTMENT
Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission,
Metros - CMRL Building, Anna Salai, Nandanam, Chennai - 600 035.
Request for Proposal (RFP) No. IN-INSHORE-532766-CS-QCBS
Title: Consultancy Services for Supervision of Constructions of
Sea Turtle Conservation Centre, International Dugong Conservation Centre,
Mangrove Conservation Centre & International Bird Centre
The Chief Mission Director, Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission, Chennai requests for proposal from eligible consultants for the aforesaid assignment. The Proposals are invited under National Open Competitive Procurement (NCP). The detailed Request for Proposal (RFP) for the above assignment will be available on the website www.tntenders.gov.in from 09.02.2026 at 15.00 hours. All relevant information and instructions to consultants are provided in the RFP document.
1. The Pre-proposal conference will be held at 11.30 hours on 13.02.2026 at the O/o, Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission, Chennai.
2. Any addendum, corrigendum & clarification to the consultant's queries etc. will be published on the www.tntenders.gov.in website only.

Chief Mission Director,
Tamil Nadu Coastal Restoration Mission, Chennai.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BERHAMPUR
(Attno : Ambupuri, Near Income Tax Office,
Berhampur-760101, Ganjam, Odisha)
(E-mail: servbp2004@yahoo.com; Tel No.: +91-680-2404287)

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH e-Procurement
Bid Identification No. Online Tender/59-2025-26/BPR
Identification No. Name of work No. of Works Approx. Estimated Cost (in lakhs) Class of Contractor Period of Completion
Online Tender / 59-2025-26/BPR Road Works under PERIODICAL MAINTENANCE 01 No. Rs.231.45 Lakhs "B" Class or "A" Class as applicable 04 (Four) Calendar Month as provided
Procurement Officer Bid Identification No. Availability of tender online for bidding From To
Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Berhampur, Online Tender / 59-2025-26/BPR 12.02.2026 at 10.00 A.M. 26.02.2026 upto 5.30 P.M.
(i) EMD / Bid Security, Cost of Bid document is to be transferred through Online as per the procedure mentioned in the DTCN.
(ii) Non-submission of the information/documents through online by the bidder as per the items mentioned in the eligible criteria of the DTCN will also liable for rejection of his tender.
Further details & Corrigendum if any can be seen from the website: <https://tendersodisha.gov.in>
Chief Engineer, R.W. Circle, Berhampur
DIPR-25001/25071/25-26/0015

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA-DEPARTMENT OF SPACE CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC -SHAR SRIHARIKOTA-524124
Brief E-TENDER NOTICE
e-Tender Notice No.CMG/C/CON/258727
On behalf of President of India, Item Rate tenders are invited through e-tendering for the following works:

Brief Name of work	Est. Value (Rs)
Proposed BT for approach road and providing MS grill fencing at Visitors complex, SDSC SHAR	131 Lakhs

Last date for sale (Tender documents can be downloaded) up to 17/02/2026, 14:30 hrs. For eligibility criteria and other details, interested tenderers may please refer to the detailed bilingual (Hindi-English) Notice Inviting Tenders (NIT) on the website <https://www.isro.gov.in/Tenders.html> and tender free view at <https://www.tenderwizard.com/isro>.

GOVERNMENT OF TAMIL NADU INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT TAMIL NADU E-GOVERNANCE AGENCY (TNEGA)
E-TENDER NOTICE
Online tenders are invited by the Joint Chief Executive Officer (JCEO), Tamil Nadu e-Governance Agency (TNEGA), towards Selection of Technical Service Provider (TSP) for Implementation, Operation and Maintenance of AUA/KUA Services with Aadhaar Data Vault for Tamil Nadu e-Governance Agency, Government of Tamil Nadu
The tender document (RFP) can be downloaded at free of cost from <https://tntenders.gov.in/> from 09.02.2026, 16:00 hrs.
Bid for an amount of Rs.2,00,00/- has to be paid through online mode. Last date and time for online submission of bids through <https://tntenders.gov.in/> (e-Tender) is 24.02.2026 at 16:30 hrs. Bidders are advised to participate in the pre-bid meeting scheduled by TNEGA.
Joint Chief Executive Officer, TNEGA.
DIPR/827/Tender/2026

NO EASY MATCHES

You don't want to jinx anything: Markram ahead of Canada game



VIJAY SONEJI

South Africa captain Aiden Markram is in no mood to take Canada lightly in their T20 World Cup game. "You don't want to jinx anything. We've already seen some close games, and it doesn't look like there will be any easy matches. The gap between associate nations and the other countries has become much smaller."

ITALY'S DEBUT

How we react to the big stage is going to be our biggest challenge'



RITU RAJ KONWAR

Italy captain Wayne Madsen on Sunday said his side has done its homework ahead of the T20 World Cup. "Our biggest challenge now is to take the form that we've shown in the practice matches into the pressure cooker of the World Cup. So how we react to the big stage is going to be our biggest challenge."

WORLD-CLASS PLAYER

These grounds are too small for Phillips, says NZ's Ferguson



R. RAGU

I don't know how many times we need to keep saying this, but Glenn Phillips is a world-class player. He has all the shots, and these grounds are too small for him. He's unbelievably strong, and he's a big-game player. I've got high hopes on him for the rest of the tournament — New Zealand pacer Lockie Ferguson.

NO REGRETS

The team selection was correct: Trott on benching spinner Noor



R. RAGU

The team selection was correct... the seamers just didn't bowl well enough. Hindsight is nice, but dangerous as well. I didn't think it was going to spin a lot. You always think you could've done something differently whenever you lose, don't you — Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott on CSK spinner Noor Ahmad's non-selection.



Heartbreak: Lokesh's gutsy knock would have instilled belief among the Nepal fans, but it wasn't to be. AFP

England scrapes past Nepal in a final-over humdinger

Lokesh's unbeaten 39 keeps the 185-run chase alive till the end but Curran holds his nerve in the final over; Jacks earns the Player-of-the-Match award for his all-round performance

T20 WORLD CUP

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

More than 17,000 spectators — a vast majority draped in Nepal's red and blue — packed the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday.

When Lokesh Bam failed to find the boundary off the final two deliveries, a palpable sense of 'so near, yet so far' swept through the stands and across television screens worldwide as the Englishmen held their nerve to scrape home in their Men's

T20 World Cup opener.

With Nepal needing 10 off the last over, England medium pacer Sam Curran kept his composure to concede just five, restricting Nepal to 180 for six — four runs short of England's 184 for seven.

Had Lokesh (39 n.o., 20b, 4x4, 2x6) managed to connect cleanly even once against Curran's clever variations, Nepal would have pulled off the first upset of the tournament.

Nepal's late surge had ignited hope earlier. Lokesh's two fortunate boundaries — thick edges flying either side of the wicket-keeper — off Curran in the

17th over injected belief into the chase.

Still, with 46 needed off 18 balls, England remained the firm favourite. That equation shifted dramatically when Lokesh followed up with consecutive sixes — a lofted off-drive and a pull — as Jofra Archer's 18th over yielded 22 runs.

Lokesh struck two boundaries off Luke Wood in the penultimate over to bring Nepal within touching distance.

But Curran nailed his lengths in the final over, varying his bounce smartly and allowing England to pull off an escape.

Earlier, England was

steadied by a 71-run stand off 45 balls between Jacob Bethell (55, 35b, 4x4, 4x6) and captain Harry Brook (53, 32b, 4x4, 3x6) after three early wickets. A late cameo from Will Jacks (39 n.o., 18b, 1x4, 4x6), which helped England score 33 in the final two overs, ultimately proved decisive in a contest England survived rather than dominated.

The scores: England 184/7 in 20 overs (Jacob Bethell 55, Harry Brook 53, Will Jacks 39 n.o., Dipendra Airee 2/23, Nandan Yadav 2/25) bt Nepal 180/6 in 20 overs (Rohit Paudel 39, Dipendra Airee 44, Lokesh Bam 39 n.o., Liam Dawson 2/21). **Toss:** England. **PoM:** Jacks.

Seifert and Phillips counterattack in style to take New Zealand home

S. Dipak Ragav

CHENNAI

When Mujeeb Ur Rahman castled Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra off successive deliveries in the second over of New Zealand's chase, Afghanistan would have believed it had a chance to recreate the magic it produced against the same opponent two years ago.

However, Tim Seifert (65) and Glenn Phillips' counterattacking knocks ensured the Black Caps would not trip up again as they kick-started their Group D T20 World Cup campaign with a five-wicket win at the MAC Stadium here on Sunday. Chasing 183, the duo's 74-run partnership laid the platform for Mitchell Santner's men to overhaul the target with 13 balls to spare.

The two batters picked



Dynamic: Seifert waded into the Afghanistan attack. R. RAGU

their battles wisely; Seifert took on the pacers while Phillips (42) challenged the spinners. The former set the tone in the first over, smoking left-arm pacer Faizalhaq Farooqi for three boundaries. Phillips, meanwhile, swept Mujeeb to the fence a couple of times to guide New Zealand to 52 for two at the end of the PowerPlay.

Phillips next welcomed Rashid Khan by smashing him for a maximum and a four. Later, Seifert turned on the heat, slogging Mohammad Nabi for consecutive sixes and a four to bring the asking rate down before perishing. Daryl Mitchell and Santner, though, eventually got the job done.

Earlier, Afghanistan,

opting to bat first, made 182 for six riding on Gulbadin Naib's 63 (35b, 4x4, 4x6). Naib, who walked in at No. 3, took his time to settle in, managing just 18 off his first 16 deliveries.

After the halfway stage, Naib stepped up a gear against the part-timers when he swept Phillips over midwicket and then launched into James Neesham in an 18-run 13th over. From there, Naib muscled a couple of clean hits down the ground to bring up his half-century off just 29 balls.

However, Afghanistan's cautious approach in the first 10 overs meant it ended up a few runs short.

The scores: Afghanistan 182/6 in 20 overs (Gulbadin Naib 63, Lockie Ferguson 2/40) lost to New Zealand 183/5 in 17.5 overs (Tim Seifert 65, Glenn Phillips 42, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2/31).

Toss: Afghanistan; **PoM:** Seifert.

Kamindu, Kusal and spinners shine as Sri Lanka beats Ireland

Press Trust of India

COLOMBO



against Ireland on Sunday.

Kusal made 56 off 43 balls with five boundaries and added 67 for the fifth wicket with Kamindu, who smashed four fours and two sixes, to lift the host which was struggling at 86 for four in the 14th over.

Sri Lanka was also helped by a few dropped catches by the Irish fielders. In reply, the Lankan

spin duo proved too much for the Ireland batters. Only Harry Tector (40) and Ross Adair (34) made meaningful contributions.

The scores: Sri Lanka 163/6 in 20 overs (Kusal Mendis 56 n.o., Kamindu Mendis 44) bt Ireland 143/19.5 overs (Harry Tector 40, Ross Adair 34, Maheesh Theekshana 3/23, Wanindu Hasaranga 3/25).

Toss: Ireland; **PoM:** Kamindu.

India was tested, but the winning start should provide it momentum

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
MUMBAI

First steps in a global championship can be tricky, and India did reasonably well at the Wankhede Stadium here on Saturday. The defending champion opened its campaign in the ICC T20 World Cup on a winning note.

A 4-1 T20I series victory over New Zealand may have been the backdrop but a World Cup offers a different spectrum. It is a platform for the lesser-fancied units to test the bigger teams, and the odd coup is possible. Seen in that context, India managed to avoid a banana peel moment.

A 29-run triumph against the United States of America (USA) may seem easy but there were moments when India was tested. Stepping in without an indisposed Jasprit Bumrah, the Men in Blue found a warrior in Mohammed Siraj, a last-minute reinforcement to the squad after the injured Harshit Rana was ruled out.

Siraj's turn with the



white ball came in the game's second part after India was seemingly caught off-guard in the opening act. The surface was not the flat track it was supposed to be. There was swing on offer and a few deliveries stopped and skidded a bit while a kin-

awake and Suryakumar Yadav did precisely that.

His unbeaten 84 was a lesson in constructing an ideal T20 innings. He took his time, found his peace, and the 360-degree shots were employed gradually. It was the classic lull before the storm and eventually the scoops over fine-leg were finessed with precision.

Even as he tumbled often in the process, the USA attack struggled to adjust its radar, especially in the death. There were clean strikes down the ground too and India's 161 for nine proved to be a combative score. Arshdeep Singh and Siraj combined well to unsettle the rival batters. While Milind Kumar and Sanjay Krishnamurthy battled hard, the USA was always playing catch-up against a dominant host.

In the days ahead, with

One variation at a time, Mujeeb redefines the PowerPlay roles

Sankar Narayanan E.H.

CHENNAI

Today's matches

HEAD-TO-HEAD
Kolkata, 11 a.m.
Scotland 1 | Italy 1

HEAD-TO-HEAD
Colombo (SSC), 3 p.m.
Zimbabwe | Oman
First Meeting

HEAD-TO-HEAD
Ahmedabad, 7 p.m.
South Africa | Canada
First Meeting

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1, 2 & JIOHOTSTAR

lack of control took the sheen away from Mujeeb's double-wicket over.

"We've got to be able to build pressure. When Mujeeb got those two wickets in the second over, we then conceded 38 in the next four.

"Hence, they still finished the PowerPlay relatively strongly [52 for two]. If we had reduced that, there would have been a bit more pressure on them," Trott said at the MAC Stadium on Sunday, following Afghanistan's five-wicket loss in the T20 World Cup.

"I thought Mujeeb did really well."

"He's a very, very good bowler with lots of variations, and we saw how

dangerous he can be."

There was another bowler, though, whose PowerPlay wickets came in a winning cause: Lockie Ferguson.

By dismissing Ibrahim Zadran and Rahamanullah Gurbaz, the pacer helped NZ tighten the screws during the middle overs.

"I missed my mark a couple of times."

"I don't think they were all perfect deliveries, but I was pleased with the slower ball [which accounted for Gurbaz]," Ferguson noted.

"Mujeeb getting those back-to-back wickets was a huge roadblock for us, but the way (Tim) Seifert batted with Glenn (Phillips) was outstanding."



Mujeeb. R. RAGU

M CH-CHE

IN BRIEF



Victorious India u-19 team receives a grand welcome

The victorious u-19 World Cup-winning India team returned home to a grand welcome with family members of the players and a large number of fans turning up to receive the young heroes in Mumbai on Sunday. Skipper Ayush Mhatre and Vaibhav Suryavanshi stole the limelight while wicket-keeper Abhigyan Kundu, too, grabbed attention. Meanwhile, batting sensation Suryavanshi, Kanishk Chouhan and Henil Patel were named in the team of the tournament for the under-19 World Cup.

The u-19 World Cup team of the tournament: Vaibhav Suryavanshi (India), Viran Chamuditha (Sri Lanka), Faisal Shinozada (Afghanistan), Thomas Rew (Capt. & wk) (England), Oliver Peak (Australia), Ben Mayes (England), Kanishk Chouhan (India), Nooristani Omrzaai (Afghanistan), Vitel Lawes (West Indies), Ali Raza (Pakistan), Manny Lumsden (England) and Henil Patel (India).

RANJI QUARTERFINAL SCORES - DAY 3



At Mumbai: Mumbai 120 & 377 in 98.3 overs (Akash Anand 70, Musheer Khan 49, Tanush Kotian 48 n.o., Tushar Deshpande 47) vs. Karnataka 173 & 113/2 in 29 overs (K.L. Rahul 60 bat).

At Kalyan: Andhra 295 vs. Bengal 418/6 in 146 overs (Sudip Kumar Gharami 216 batting, in pic., Sumanta Gupta 81, Shakir Habib Gandhi 45 bat).

At Indore: J & K 194 & 248 in 70.3 overs (Abid Mushtaq 41, Vanshaj Sharma 54 n.o., Kuldeep Sen 4/65) vs. Madhya Pradesh 152 & 87/5 in 28 overs.

At Jamshedpur: Jharkhand 235 & 130 in 41.1 overs (Virat Singh 55, Abhay Negi 4/36, Mayank Mishra 5/22) lost to Uttarakhand 371 in 122.3 overs (Avneesh Sudha 64, Kunal Chandela 68, J. Suchith 70, Abhay Negi 46).

Record-breaker Nirupama lifts elite women's 63kg title

Nirupama Devi scripted clean and jerk and total records on her way to win the elite women's 63kg crown with an aggregate of 221kg at the National weightlifting championships in Modinagar on Sunday. Bidusmita Bhoi set three records (snatch 89kg, clean and jerk 117kg and total 206kg) while claiming the junior title. She also secured the bronze in the elite women's division.

The results (winners only): Women: 63kg: Elite: Nirupama Devi (RSB) snatch 94 kg, clean and jerk 127 kg, total 221 kg; **Junior:** Bidusmita Bhoi 89kg, 117kg, 206kg; **Youth:** Karangi Tharangini (AP) 81kg, 101 kg, 182kg.



Heptathlon gold for Tejaswin

Press Trust of India

TIANJIN (CHINA)

Tejaswin Shankar (5993 points) won the men's heptathlon event to clinch India's lone gold in the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships.

Pooja (silver in high jump), Tajinderpal Singh Toor (silver in shot put) and Ancy Sojan (bronze in long jump) were the other medal winners on Sunday.

Mounita Mondal finished sixth in women's long jump (6.01m).

LIVE TELECAST

Ranji Trophy: JioHotstar, 9.30 a.m.

Men's T20 World Cup: Star Sports 1, 2 & JioHotstar, 11 a.m. & 7 p.m.

Rahul's resolute innings gives Karnataka a fighting chance against Mumbai

The visitor, chasing 325, reaches 113 for two thanks to the batter's unbeaten 60; collective bowling effort ensures the host doesn't take the game away

RANJI TROPHY

Shayan Acharya
MUMBAI

On a warm Sunday afternoon at the MCA-BKC ground, K.L. Rahul came up with one of his grittiest innings to keep Karnataka in the hunt for a Ranji Trophy semifinal berth.

After Tanush Kotian and Tushar Deshpande added 89 runs in 82 balls to guide Mumbai to 377 and set a 325-run target for Karnataka, Rahul (60 batton, 94b, 7x4) showed his brilliance with the bat, despite the visitor losing Mayank Agarwal early.

Rahul's 84-run partnership with captain Devdutt Padikkal was at the forefront of Karnataka's fight-back. As the surface eased out after initially helping the bowlers, Rahul largely played in the V to bring up his 42nd First Class fifty and put Karnataka on firm



Main man: Rahul will have a big role to play on day four. FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

footing.

Padikkal, who guided Karnataka to a come-from-behind win against Punjab in the last group match, looked on course to score

another fifty, but Tanush Kotian struck as the south-paw offered a regulation catch to Yashasvi Jaiswal at first slip.

But with Rahul and Ka-

run Nair holding fort, Karnataka ended the day at 113 for two, 212 runs away from victory.

However, with the surface offering some turn at

the fag end, the Mumbai spinners Kotian and Shams Mulani will have a role to play. And as wicketkeeper-batter Akash Anand, who scored 70 in the second innings, indicated that even though the game is 'evenly poised', Mumbai remains on top, with its spinners hoping to make optimum use of the 'known conditions' on the fourth day.

Earlier, resuming the day at 189 for two, Musheer Khan couldn't extend his stay as he was caught behind by Kruthik Krishna in Vidyardhar Patil's opening over. After Akash, too, missed out on a deserving century, Mumbai lost wickets in clusters before Kotian and Deshpande stepped up. While Mumbai managed to secure a formidable lead, it was a memorable day for Karnataka stumper Kruthik, who made it to the record books with six catches and one stumping.

The scores: Mumbai — 1st

innings: 120.
Karnataka — 1st innings: 173.

Mumbai — 2nd innings: Yashasvi Jaiswal st. Kruthik b Shreyas 36, Akhil Herwadkar (run out) 33, Akash Anand c Kruthik b Kaverappa 70, Musheer Khan c Kruthik b Vidyardhar 49, Siddhesh Lad lbw b Shikhar 25, Suryansh Shedge c Kruthik b Vidhyadhar 25, Shams Mulani c Kruthik b Shikhar 9, Shardul Thakur c Rahil b Shikhar 1, Tanush Kotian (not out) 48, Tushar Deshpande c Kruthik b Kaverappa 47, Mohit Avasthi c Kruthik b Prasidh 0; Extras: (lb-14, b-9, nb-2, w-9) 34; Total (in 98.3 overs): 377.

Fall of wickets: 1-77, 2-77, 3-191, 4-227, 5-241, 6-256, 7-258, 8-287, 9-376.

Karnataka bowling: Vidhyadhar 22-5-78-2, Prasidh 19.3-2-71-1, Kaverappa 17-0-78-2, Shreyas 20-2-82-1, Shikhar 20-3-45-3.
Karnataka — 2nd innings: Mayank Agarwal c Avasthi b Shardul 3, K.L. Rahul (batting) 60, Devdutt Padikkal c Jaiswal b Kotian 39, Karun Nair (batting) 9; Extras: (lb-2) 2; Total (for two wkts. in 29 overs): 113.

Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-96.

Mumbai bowling: Shardul 5-1-24-1, Avasthi 5-0-18-0, Mulani 8-0-32-0, Deshpande 5-0-23-0, Kotian 5-1-13-1, Musheer 1-0-1-0.

Abhishek's late winner hands Services the crown



Joyful bunch: Services players rejoice after getting their hands on the trophy. AIFF

SANTOSH TROPHY

Sports Bureau

Abhishek Pawar fired Services to its eighth National title as he scored the decisive goal against Kerala in the 79th Santosh Trophy football championship final at the Dhakuakhana Football stadium, Assam, on Sunday.

Abhishek, who had also scored the winner in the league phase when the two sides met, rifled in the match-winner from the top of the box in extra time.

The goal came off a quick move by Services, which saw Shubham Rana bore his way into the Kerala box from the right.

Rana's precise cross was fisted away by goalkeeper S. Hajmal, but the ball

came to an unmarked Abhishek who unleashed a first-time right footer that thundered into the net at the near post.

Services then defended in numbers to shut Kerala out. In fact, throughout the match, Kerala struggled to break Services' cohesive defence.

The result (final): Services 1 (Abhishek Pawar 109) bt Kerala 0, after extra time.

SNAPSHOTS

Indian boxers clinch nine gold medals

Lovlina Borgohain and Arundhati Choudhary led from the front as India wrapped up a highly successful BOXAM Elite International 2026 tournament with nine gold medals.

India was represented in seven elite women's finals on Saturday, including an all-Indian title clash in the 54kg division and emerged with gold in each of them. India finished as the competition's most successful team with nine gold, three silver and seven bronze medals.

The results (finals): Women: 48kg: Manju Ranj b Marta Lopez (Esp) 5-0; 51kg: Nitu bt Noelia Gutierrez (Esp) 5-0; 54kg: Poonam bt Preeti 4-1; 60kg: Priya bt Tetiana Dovhal (Ukr) 5-0; 70kg: Arundhati Choudhary bt Anastasia Tarun (Ukr) 5-0; 75kg: Lovlina Borgohain b Kshirsagar secured gold in the junior mixed team event while Hrudya Shri Kondu and Anshul Batra prevailed in youth mixed team event.



Deepak 4-1; 75kg: Akash bt Aman Konsbekov (Kaz) 3-2; 80kg: Pavli illiusi (Ukr) bt Ankush 5-0.



In the 25m standard pistol event, Gurpreet Singh won gold to lead a clean sweep of the podium. Harsh Gupta clinched silver while Amanpreet Singh bagged bronze.

At the end of the fifth day of the competition, India extended its tally to 54 medals, including 34 gold, 12 silver and eight bronze. Elavenil continued her red-hot form, hitting a total of 253.4 in 24 shots while Arjun finished strongly with a total score of 251.6.

TNCA LEAGUE



Gopala Krishnan stars with a seven-wicket haul for Tiger CC

S. Gopala Krishnan scalped seven for 28 to set up a five-wicket win for Tiger CC against Sounder CC in the TNCA league IV-A match recently.

The scores: IV-A: Jubilee CC 264 in 45.5 overs (C.R. Sriram Prasad 31, G. Ajith Kumar 66, R. Vineeth 59, K. Keerthy Vashan 4/48) bt Twentieth Century Club 230 in 47.4 overs (Arya Ganesh 37, R. Rokith 50, P. Arun 54, B. Harish 5/59, R. Vineeth 3/36).

Kamty Club 227 in 50 overs (M. Vinith Kumar 63, Shiv Ganesh 45, N. Waseem Ahmed 57, S. Ravichandran 4/48, N. Aashish 3/62) lost to Galaxy SC 228/8 in 49.5 overs (J.S. Chandragandhan 82 no., P. Srinath 67, L. Nazerine Peter Franklin 3/46).

Reserve Bank RC 219/9 in 50 overs (M. Lakshminarayanan 57, A. Ponsubash 40, N. Lokesh 32, S. Abdul Khader 3/39, Prateek Bakaria 3/59) bt Venkateswara CC 212 in 48.1 overs (S. Kavin Kumar 81, S. Abdul Khader 31, K. Shivanand 30, M. Lakshminarayanan 3/35).

Vijay's RC 180 in 49.2 overs (P. Seeram 31, S. Sundara Raghuraman 36, Sabarinathan 43, G. Raj 3/10) lost to Sir Theagaraya RC 186/3 in 41.2 overs (V.S. Kousik 39 no.).

Milkway CC 234 in 46.3 overs (M. Selva Sudarsan 47, F. Joy Harran 58, A. Praveen Kumar 47, S.

TAMIL NADU ROUND-UP

Innings win for TN

Tamil Nadu defeated Tripura by an innings and 144 runs in the C.K. Nayudu Trophy (under-23) Elite C sixth round match at Dindigul on Sunday.

Resuming at 23 for one and with a deficit of 260, Tripura folded up for 116 in its second innings.

Tamil Nadu left-arm spinner P. Vignesh claimed his third fifer of the season (five for 35).

The scores: Tripura 168 & 116 in 42.2 overs (Manoj Das 39, P. Vignesh 5/35, Sachin Rath 3/28) lost to Tamil Nadu 428/9 dec.

Points: TN 16(69); Tripura 4(27).

Himachal beats TN

Himachal Pradesh posted an eight-wicket victory over Tamil Nadu in the BCCI senior women's One-Day Trophy's Elite D second round league match at Barsapara, Guwahati, on Sunday.

The scores: Tamil Nadu 125 in 39.5 overs (M.S. Aishwarya 51, Jyoti Thakur 3/24) lost to Himachal Pradesh 129/2 in 27.2 overs (Harleen Deol 52 n.o., Sushma Verma 37 n.o.).

Points: TN 16(69); Tripura 4(27).

Vedaanth spins PSBB (KK Nagar) to the semis

Left-arm spinner Vedaanth Bharath's five for 10 enabled PSBB (KK Nagar) script a huge 199-run victory over Santhome in the quarterfinals of the Vidya Mandir-Sportstar-Sanmar u-14 invitation cricket tournament here on Sunday.

The scores: Tamil Nadu 125 in 39.5 overs (M.S. Aishwarya 51, Jyoti Thakur 3/24) lost to Himachal Pradesh 129/2 in 27.2 overs (Harleen Deol 52 n.o., Sushma Verma 37 n.o.).

Points: TN 16(69); Tripura 4(27).

Jeeva scalps seven

Left-arm spinner Jeeva Nagendran's seven for 71 was instrumental in Tamil Nadu's 125/2 in 39.5 overs (M.S. Aishwarya 51, Jyoti Thakur 3/24) lost to Himachal Pradesh 129/2 in 27.2 overs (Harleen Deol 52 n.o., Sushma Verma 37 n.o.).

The scores: Quartefinals:

Heartfulness 179/7 in 30 overs (M.S. Aishwarya 51, Jyoti Thakur 3/24) lost to Himachal Pradesh 129/2 in 27.2 overs (Harleen Deol 52 n.o., Sushma Verma 37 n.o.).

Guru Nanak triumphs

Guru Nanak College defeated Jeppiaar University by seven wickets in the final of the



Joy brimmeth over: Dhakshineswar is the toast of the team after clinching the decisive win. K. MURALI KUMAR

Dhakshineswar powers India back into the elite

He joins hands with Yuki to put the host ahead before sealing the deal against the Dutch

DAVIS CUP

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

The last time India was among the global elite in the Davis Cup was in 2011 when it was one of 16 best nations in the World Group.

On Sunday at the S.M. Krishna Tennis Stadium here, the country returned to the high-table by beating Netherlands 3-2 in the Qualifiers first round.

It will be one of 14 representatives in the Qualifiers second round to be held in September and is likely to meet South Korea. Seven from the second round will progress to the Davis Cup Finals and join host Italy in the grand finale.

Five months ago, if anyone had predicted that

a yet-to-be-capped Dhakshineswar Suresh would lead India to the Promised Land, they would have been scoffed at. But the 25-year-old, of 6'5" frame and gangly build, played an outsized role, winning both the doubles and reverse singles to go with the singles win on the opening day.

It was reminiscent of the great Leander Paes, who would successfully play both singles and doubles, a feat the legend last achieved in 2004 away against New Zealand.

Thrust into the doubles battle in place of Sriram Balaji, Dhakshineswar partnered Yuki Bhambri to beat Sander Arends and David Pel 7-6(0), 3-6, 7-6(1).

Sumit Nagal's 7-5, 1-6, 4-6 loss to Jesper de Jong pushed the tie into a deciding contest but Dhakshi-

nswar came up with the goods to outwit Guy Den Ouden 6-4, 7-6(4).

Credit should also go to the Indian think-tank led by captain Rohit Rajpal which used Balaji as a decoy and played the bluff with Dhakshineswar.

Trust was placed in the latter's serving ability and his experience playing doubles on the U.S. collegiate circuit. And the 25-year-old did not disappoint. The tone-setting performance was the doubles where Dhakshineswar and Yuki combined to beat two players ranked in the ATP top-40.

In the first set, the Dutch pair had six break-points across two games on the Yuki serve, but did not capitalise. In the tie-breaker, they weren't aggressive enough and paid the price.

In the second stanza,

however, the visitors' touch play found wholesome expression. Arends, wearing fluorescent orange and sporting goggles, found the tennis to match his flashy looks, and executed a series of breathtaking shots to pull his team level.

The decider was up and down, but took a nasty turn at 5-6 on the Pel serve when a fierce forehand from Yuki hit Arends' left hand from close range. The 34-year-old took a medical time-out and came back with his little finger and ring finger tied together.

The serve toss was a problem, so was gripping the backhand. The match slipped into a decisive tie-breaker but there was only one winner.

Five hours later that joy doubled.

Sawangkaew overcomes Tagger's challenge to secure the title

MUMBAI OPEN

Tarun Shastry
MUMBAI

Same city, same tournament, different result. Thailand's Mananchaya Sawangkaew, runner-up in the 2025 edition, returned to Mumbai and flipped the script, brushing aside Austria's Lilli Tagger 6-4, 6-3 in the final to lift the L&T Mumbai Open 125K Series title at the Maharashtra State Lawn Tennis Association (MSLTA) courts on Sunday.

Second time was indeed the charm. After knocking on the door last year, she kicked it down this time.

The 23-year-old Thai delivered a composed performance, matching Tagger's power shot for shot before gradually wresting control and forcing the Austrian in-



Champion stuff: Sawangkaew was in her element in the title decider. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to long, draining rallies under hot and humid conditions.

Tagger came out guns blazing, firing two booming aces down the 'T' in the opening game.

Sawangkaew absorbed the early pressure, holding serve with clever placement and variation to level proceedings.

What followed was a

gripping see-saw battle, with Tagger unleashing her heavy serve and crisp backhand volleys, while Sawangkaew countered with deft slices, feathered drop shots and precise court positioning.

Locked at 4-4, Sawangkaew raised her level in the ninth game, engaging the 17-year-old Austrian in an intense baseline exchange

before breaking serve. She closed out the opening set in style with a clean cross-court winner.

Carrying the momentum into the second set, Sawangkaew mixed pace and touch to keep Tagger on the move.

Her variations earned a crucial break in the fifth game, and she held serve next to go 4-2 up.

Tagger refused to fade quietly, responding with two stunning aces, but Sawangkaew remained unfappable.

She held serve comfortably before delivering the decisive blow – breaking Tagger once more to seal the title in straight sets.

The results (finals): Singles:
Mananchaya Sawangkaew (Tha) bt Lilli Tagger (Aut) 6-4, 6-3.
Doubles: Polina Iatcenko & Elina Pridankina bt Nicole Fossa Huergo (Arg) & Sawangkaew 7-6(3), 1-6, [10-5].

Manchester City edges Liverpool in thriller

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse
LIVERPOOL



Drawing level: Silva toe-pokes City's equaliser against Liverpool. AFP

The visitors had another goal ruled out and Szoboszlai was sent off in the same incident after a VAR review.

LaLiga: Alaves 0 lost to Getafe 2 (Vazquez 53, Iglesias 71-pen).

Bundesliga: Cologne 1 (Thielmann 51) lost to RB Leipzig 2 (Baumgartner 29, 56).

Bayern Munich 5 (Kane 20-pen, 45-pen, Diaz 45+2, 62, 89) bt Hoffenheim 1 (Kramaric 35).

Serie A: Bologna 0 lost to Parma 1 (Ordonez 90+5).

On Saturday: LaLiga: Real Sociedad 3 (Sucic 24, Oyarzabal 37, Oskarsson 89) bt Elche 1 (Silva 42). **Serie A:** Genoa 2 (Malinovskyi 3-pen, Colombo 57) lost to Napoli 3 (Holjlund 20, 90+5-pen, McTominay 22).

Florentina 2 (Solomon 51, Keane 57) drew with Torino 2 (Casadei 26, Maripan 90+4). **Bundesliga:**

Borussia M'Gladbach 1 (Engelhardt 10) drew with Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Sander 44-og).

DAY 1 - 7TH MARCH

YĀTRĀ BY MAHESH KALE
NADA PRAVAHAM FT. PADMA VIBHUSHAN UMAYALPURAM K. SIVARAMAN
& ISHAAN GHOSH, SHRAVAN SAMSI

DAY 2 - 8TH MARCH

DRUMS OF THE EAST BY BICKRAM GHOSH
FT. ABHISEK MALICK, GOPAL BARMAN, RANJAN DE, GOKUL DHAAKI & TEAM

WOMEN WHO DRUM
FT. SWARUPA ANANTH, CHARU HARIHARAN, NUSH LEWIS, SHALINI MOHAN, HAMTA BAGHI

THE PARAI AWAKENS - UNRESERVED LIVE BY PRAVEEN SPARSH
FT. NANBARGAL GRAMIYA KALAI KUZHU, MYLAI M KARTHIKEYAN, DHOLAK KACCHA, LAXMAN ARVIND

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Siraj – swinging back into India's T20 blueprint

It took a little while for the Hyderabad pacer to reconcile to the fact that he was no longer in the scheme of things in the shortest format; the injury to Harshit earned him a late call-up to the World Cup squad and within minutes of taking the field against USA, he made an impression

R. Kaushik
MUMBAI

Mohammed Siraj is a massive fan of Cristiano Ronaldo. And therefore, by extension, of Portugal and Real Madrid, even though the Portuguese great has since taken his wares to Saudi Arabia. Such is the inspiration he draws from his 'hero' that the wallpaper on his cell phone is a photograph of Ronaldo, his back to the camera, right hand outstretched and the index finger shooting skywards, with the word 'BELIEVE.' inscribed overhead.

Because of his continued admiration for Real Madrid, the lion-hearted Hyderabadi had decided to give himself an early birthday present by making a trip to Spain later this week to soak in the Spanish giants locking horns with Real Sociedad at the Santiago Bernabeu next Sunday. Siraj turns 33 on March 13; he has had a long season entailing four Tests at home against West Indies and South Africa, six One-Day Internationals in Australia and at home against New Zealand, and a slew of matches for his home state in domestic cricket. Last month, he was named the captain of the Ranji Trophy team for the matches against Chhattisgarh and Mumbai, where he bowled a combined 61 overs. Siraj needed a break, to recharge and refresh before resuming training and preparation for the Indian Premier League, where he will turn up for Gujarat Titans, led by India's Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill.

Siraj has been pigeonholed as a longer format bowler, which is why while he has 45 Test appearances and 50 ODI caps, he had played only 16 Twenty20 Internationals between his debut in November 2017 and the tour of Sri Lanka in July 2024. It was after that Sri Lanka sojourn, which India swept 3-0, that preparations for the 2026 World Cup began in all seriousness. Gautam Gambhir, in his first days as the new head coach, worked out a blueprint for the future with skipper Suryakumar Yadav and chief selector Ajit Agarkar. That blueprint didn't involve Siraj, much to the disappointment of the Hyderabadi who had started the previous World Cup in 2024, playing all three matches in New York before making way for left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav when the tournament moved entirely to the Caribbean from the Super Eights onwards.

It took Siraj a little while to reconcile to the fact that he was no longer in the T20I scheme of things. The wait for a call-up to the 20-over side spilled over from one series to another, from one month to the next, before he came to grips with the realisation that his time in the format had passed him by when it came to the

country vs country battles. India started to place massive emphasis on multi-skilled players; there were a fair few specialist pacers in the mix, but Jasprit Bumrah and Arshdeep Singh were indispensable and Harshit Rana was the preferred choice because of his ability to wield the long handle. Siraj, therefore, could only watch on balefully, ruining his luck but wishing his mates well.

That's something which comes naturally to the affable, ever-smiling performer who has perennially had to perform under the massive shadow of Bumrah - backing his buddies. Even when he picked up 20 wickets in five Tests in Australia in 2024-25, he was deemed somewhat of a 'failure' because of Bumrah's towering presence. It needed England, and last summer when he picked up 23 wickets in the five matches, culminating in a dramatic series-levelling victory at the Oval in the final Test, for Siraj to be hailed as the champion he is. Within the dressing room, he has always been popular and immensely respected for his never-say-die spirit and the heart of a warrior, and while that is what most team-sports representatives aspire for, it must have hurt at some level that he wasn't the popular choice for celebration among the teeming masses that go by sheer numbers.

Unexpected call-up

Siraj had completed all the formalities required to travel to Madrid when, without warning, he got a call from Suryakumar, asking him to be ready to fly out to Mumbai to join the national team ahead of their World Cup opener against United States. In an unfortunate twist of fate, Harshit tweaked his right knee in the practice game against South Africa in Navi Mumbai on Wednesday night. The injury was serious enough to rule him out of the entire tournament. India didn't have much time to summon a replacement but once it was obvious that Harshit was *hors de combat*, Siraj became the obvious contender to step in because of his spunk and his experience, even though he had been disassociated from the format at the top level for a year and a half.

Understandably, Siraj's first reaction when his skipper called him was disbelief. "Surya bhai said, 'Get ready, pack your bag, and come'. I said, 'Surya bhai, don't joke, because this is not going to happen.' He said, 'I'm telling you the truth – get ready.' As soon as he hung up, I got a call from (selector Pragyan) Ojha," Siraj revealed guilelessly, still in disbelief. "So suddenly, I got shocking news. I came, played the match – everything was written. God is great."

Siraj flew into Mumbai from Hyderabad by 3.00 p.m. on Friday, and didn't allow the grass to grow under his feet. He had

The slaps, the pats, the high-fives and the hugs from Siraj's mates showed how much they had missed his feel-good presence in the India dug-out

played against the semi-professionals from America a year and a half back in New York, but there were a few new faces, and, in any case, it would have been impossible for him to dig that deep into his memory bank to pick up cues from an isolated encounter. He therefore spent time with the video analyst, quickly going through the process of understanding what he would be confronted against. He wasn't sure he'd play but he didn't want to go in cold, so to say. Then, another door opener through an illness to Bumrah that kept him out of Saturday's proceedings and just like that, Siraj lined up for the national anthem, singing with gusto as is his wont.

In his time away from the team, Siraj had seen his friends taking opposition bowling attacks apart with their fabulous aggression, so he must have been overcome with dismay when the US bowlers cut a swathe through the Indian top-order. If Siraj had expected a relatively 'light' welcome back, he was in for a rude shock. At 77 for six, he must have scrambled to get himself ready to go out and support his lone-ranger skipper, if the situation warranted. As it turned out, Siraj wasn't required to bat. Axar Patel, Arshdeep and Varun Chakaravarthy did enough to ensure that No. 11 Siraj didn't have to take guard. India had scrambled to 161 for nine, potentially enough but reliant heavily on early-over strikes.

Siraj came on to bowl the second over, and was immediately deposited over long-on, second ball, by Andries Gous for an 87-metre six. It was a stunning blow to a length delivery on the pads and Siraj had to immediately alter his length and his line. That paid off two balls later when Gous unerringly picked out Siraj's fellow Hyderabadi Tilak Varma at forward point. In his next over, Siraj forced Saiteja Mukkalla to find Varun at mid-wicket. A couple of minutes later, he went flying to his right, goalkeeper style, to try and pouch Sanjay Krishnamurthi at short third-man off Arshdeep, but the magnificent effort didn't yield the desired result as the ball popped out of his hands. Within minutes of taking the field, Siraj had left his impression. It was as if he had never been away from T20Is, such was the seamlessness with which he slotted back into the fray. Not done yet for the night, Siraj produced the perfect yorker off the last ball of the match to trap the adventurous Shubham Ranjane in front and formalise a 29-run victory earned

with far greater difficulty than India might have envisaged. Siraj finished with three for 29 from his four overs, his second-best T20I effort behind only four for 17 against New Zealand in Napier, three and a quarter years back. The slaps and the pats and the high-fives and the hugs from his mates showed how much they had missed his feel-good presence and how delighted they were that he would continue to light up the dugout for the next four weeks.

To say that Siraj bowled within himself on his reintegration will be no exaggeration. There would have been inevitable nerves, though the suddenness of the events of the hours leading into his return to play wouldn't have given him much time to feel terribly nervous or heavily weighed down. His immediate aim was to bowl the red-ball, first-class lines that come so naturally to him. There was also the small matter of ensuring that the two points didn't slip away, that India didn't make the worst possible start to their title defence.

Now that both those boxes have been ticked, and now that Siraj is certain to spend more time at the nets with the white ball and to re-establish his bond with Bumrah, he will be more versatile and experimental going forward. There is every possibility that despite three for 29, he will find himself on the bench at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in Delhi against Namibia on Thursday if Bumrah makes an expected full recovery because India must ease their No. 1 bowler back into action, ahead of the potentially stiffer challenges around. Should that be the case, Siraj will neither complain nor grumble because that is simply not the Siraj way. He will ferry drinks during the newly-introduced (at the international level) timeouts, with his million-dollar smile and pearls of wisdom in tow. He will rib his buddies, he will make them guffaw and chuckle, but he will also espouse his inputs because behind that simpleton exterior is an astute cricket brain that has netted him 232 international wickets.

It was written in the stars, perhaps, that Siraj must be a part of India's title defence, however unkind a cut that might be for Harshit. But will that title defence itself materialise? If you ask Siraj, he will look at you with those earnest eyes and insist, softly, "Whatever God has written will happen."

THE GIST

Because of his continued admiration for Real Madrid, the lion-hearted Hyderabadi had decided to give himself an early birthday present by making a trip to Spain later this week to soak in the Spanish giants locking horns with Real Sociedad next Sunday

Siraj has been pigeonholed as a longer format bowler, which is why while he has 45 Test appearances and 50 ODI caps, he had played only 16 T20Is between his debut in November 2017 and the tour of Sri Lanka in July 2024

There is every possibility that despite three for 29, he will find himself on the bench against Namibia if Bumrah makes an expected full recovery



EMMANUEL YOGINI

SCIENCE

Budget boosts domestic space research while spending lags behind

Only a few large astronomical observatories are capable of groundbreaking discoveries worldwide, which means researchers have to compete for observation time; when funding agencies favour their own national researchers, international scientists' access becomes increasingly restricted, and Indians are no exception

Prakash Chandra

The Budget has brought some cheer to India's research community, particularly for those involved in astronomy and space research, as it has earmarked ₹13,416.20 crore for the Department of Space for 2026-27.

A large chunk of the allocation has been set aside for deep-space exploration and astrophysics, including to build two advanced telescope facilities: the 30-m National Large Optical-Infrared Telescope and the National Large Solar Telescope near Pangong Lake in Ladakh.

Also in focus is the COSMOS-2 planetarium in Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh, to be completed soon, and improving the control systems of the Himalayan Chandra Telescope in Hanle, Ladakh. Currently, only the U.S., China, Japan and the European Union prioritise astronomy research to a high degree and constantly invest large sums to upgrade their terrestrial and space telescopes. So, astronomers have said, the telescope allocations will improve space research capability and science outreach in India.

Frontier research

However, experts also raised concerns about a significant drop in expenditure, with the actual expense falling short of budgetary estimates. This underutilisation has in the past led to bottlenecks in the planning and executing major projects.

"There were several proposed space missions which were finally not supported," Bhaswati Mookerjea, professor and chairperson of the Department of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Mumbai, said.

Dr. Mookerjea added that although this Budget "is an extremely positive step for astronomy in India," the importance of following it through couldn't be overstated: "The execution of big projects in India would still require some streamlining of resources with checks and balances."

Only a few large astronomical observatories are capable of frontier research and groundbreaking discoveries worldwide, which means researchers have to compete for observation time. And when funding agencies favour their own national researchers, international scientists' access becomes increasingly restricted, and Indians are no exception.

Relying on overseas facilities

To make matters worse, an astrophysicist (who didn't wish to be identified) told this reporter that India's problem is compounded by the attitude of bureaucrats and administrators.

"They are close-minded regarding concepts like buying fractional time on



India's highest telescopes are at Hanle village in Ladakh. R.V. MOORTHY/THE HINDU

large telescopes or missions – measures that are not only essential to foster stronger international collaborations and keep us at the forefront of astronomy research, but also serve as a stop-gap arrangement till we have our own large telescopes," the astrophysicist said.

For far too long has the country relied on overseas facilities for high-resolution data and specialised equipment to do space science, including collaborative projects such as radio, optical, and space-based observations. Acquiring strong domestic capabilities in space science and astrophysics is thus imperative if India is to reduce its dependence on foreign observatories.

Steadily strengthened

Building large-scale, next-generation observatories for cutting-edge space research, however, involves overcoming formidable financial and technological hurdles. These challenges often require collaborative partnerships with international teams and pooling resources and expertise with them is often the only way for Indian scientists to participate in ambitious projects. Adequate funding, effective governance and partnership with domestic industry offer a realistic solution to shrug off this dependence on foreign facilities and research data.

Fortunately, India's astronomy and space research ecosystem is being steadily strengthened with the addition of cutting-edge technology platforms. These include optical and radio telescopes, such as the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) near Pune, and data processing centres capable of AI-driven data analysis. These efforts, alongside the

A large chunk of the budgetary allocation for the Department of Space has been set aside for deep-space exploration and astrophysics, including to build two advanced telescope facilities

new budgetary push, could boost India's research capabilities, with the growing shift towards public-private partnerships in space research adding to the optimism. "Basic science and big budget experiments all over the world require funding from State agencies" Dr. Mookerjea said. "While there are many private enterprises in the space sector, proper channeling of their efforts and overall quality control and monitoring would require setting up of statutory bodies involving government agencies."

"In the past decade or so we have seen many startups in the space sector, often working in close collaboration with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) experts," Abhimanyu Susobhanan, assistant professor of physics at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Thiruvananthapuram, said. "The Department of Space established the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre in 2020 to promote such partnerships. This is a positive sign as such partnerships will promote innovation and attract private investment in the space sector."

Sub-millimetre sky

For that to happen, however, policymakers should acknowledge "the imperative for strategic resource

allocation and collaborative initiatives to maximise the scientific output from the country's astronomical assets." But, he cautioned, "we also have to keep in mind that private interests may not always align with the interests of the nation as a whole."

An important upside of developing homegrown cutting-edge resources in space science is that it will encourage students to engage in advanced research in the country, arresting the steady brain drain to institutions abroad. But that has been easier said, with a lot of homework still being required before it becomes a reality. For instance, the GMRT is the world's largest radio telescope array operating at low frequencies and attracts astronomers from across the world. But in the absence of a comparable optical telescope in the country, Indian scientists are forced to stand in line for telescope time at foreign facilities, as they do for doing research in high frequency radio astronomy.

Similarly, India doesn't have any telescope that operates in the critical sub-millimeter wavelengths.

"The sub-millimetre sky is a unique window for probing the architecture of the universe and structures within it, from the dusty sub-millimetre galaxies to the ringed nature of proto-stellar disks," Dr. Mookerjea said. "A proposal is in the pipeline and it is also a part of the Astronomy & Astrophysics Mega Science Vision 2035."

Only when such projects are realised can India's march towards becoming a leader in space exploration gather pace.

(Prakash Chandra is a science writer.
prakashat@gmail.com)

THE GIST

▼ The Union Budget 2026-27 has earmarked ₹13,416.20 crore for the Department of Space which has brought some cheer to India's research community

▼ A large chunk of the allocation has been reserved for building advanced telescopes and to upgrade two other facilities, which will improve space research capability and science outreach

▼ However, experts raised concerns about a significant drop in expenditure, with the actual expense falling short of budgetary estimates

▼ For far too long India has relied on overseas facilities for high-resolution data and specialised equipment to do space science, hence it is imperative to strengthen domestic facilities and reduce this dependence

BIG SHOT



A Maasai pastoralist leads emaciated cattle affected by a worsening drought due to the failed rainy season as they walk in a dried river bed towards a watering point from their settlement near Magadi township of Kajiado, Kenya on February 5. REUTERS

QUESTION CORNER

On thin ice



Q: Why does Thwaites glacier matter?

A: Thwaites glacier is a large glacier in West Antarctica, about the size of a large country.

Scientists have often called it the "Doomsday Glacier" in the media. It is one of the most important places on the earth for those trying to understand how sea levels will rise in future.

The glacier sits on land that slopes downward as you go further inland, dipping below sea level. This is important: warm ocean water is known to flow under the glacier's floating edge, i.e. its ice shelf, and melt it from below.

As a result, the ice shelf acts like a brace, like a doorstop, that slows the glacier's flow into the ocean. As the ice shelf becomes thinner or breaks in places, the glacier speeds up and loses more ice.

Scientists' studies have revealed that the glacier is already changing: it has been becoming thinner, retreating, and contributing to sea-level rise.

If Thwaites were to collapse completely over a long period, it could cause global sea levels to rise by around half a meter.

Thwaites is also holding back ice nearby in the West Antarctic Ice Sheet.



This undated photo shows Thwaites glacier in Western Antarctica. NASA

If it weakens beyond a point, other glaciers may lose ice faster as well, further increasing sea-level rise. Higher sea levels will cause coasts to flood more easily, worsen erosion, increase storm surges, and threaten cities, low-lying islands, and ports. While Thwaites is far from most lived areas, how it changes will affect people worldwide.

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

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of new EV buses launched by the Delhi government

500 The Delhi government on Sunday launched 500 electric buses, taking the total EV fleet of the Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) to 4,000, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said. The Chief Minister said that by 2028, the DTC plans to increase its total bus fleet to 14,000. PTI

Health centres attacked in Sudan's South Kordofan region

3 Sudan's South Kordofan region has seen attacks on three health facilities in the past week alone, leaving more than 30 dead, the World Health Organization said. The Sudanese army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces have been at war since 2023, with the conflict killing thousands of people. AFP

Amount for railway infra and safety projects in Bengal

₹14,205 In ₹ crore. Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said that West Bengal has been allocated ₹14,205 crore for railway infrastructure and safety projects in the 2026-27 Budget. He said work worth ₹92,974 crore is in progress in the State. PTI

Biometric updates for school children completed by UIDAI

1 In crore. Aadhaar custodian UIDAI has completed Mandatory Biometric Updates (MBU) for one crore school children covering 83,000 schools across the country. Lack of MBU in Aadhaar may lead to difficulties while carrying out authentication when registering for competitive exams like NEET, JEE etc. PTI

Revenue generated from liquor shop auctions in J&K

₹2,152 In ₹ crore. The Jammu and Kashmir government has generated about ₹2,152 crore from the auction of liquor shops over the past two years, and has no proposal to open new wine shops in 2026-27. PTI

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Why did Claude's plugins spook markets?

How did the market react to Anthropic's announcement on January 30? What is the definition of a SaaSpocalypse? Why has the Bank of America called the sell-off overblown? How did BloombergGPT set the standard? What employment opportunities are going to be threatened by this development?

EXPLAINER

Kalvan Mangalapalli

The story so far:

On January 30, Anthropic released 11 open-source plugins for Claude Cowork, its AI workplace suite. Unlike conventional chatbots, Cowork now functions as an autonomous digital colleague. It reads files, drafts documents, reviews contracts, and executes multi-step workflows across legal, finance, sales, and marketing sectors with minimal human instruction. Days later, Anthropic followed with Claude Opus 4.6, a model capable of coordinating teams of AI agents for financial research.

What was the response?

The market reaction was swift and brutal. A Goldman Sachs basket of U.S. software stocks fell 6% on February 3. Thomson Reuters plunged 15.8% (a record), LegalZoom sank 19.7%, and RELX dropped 14%. Nearly \$285 billion in market capitalisation was erased globally. In India, the Nifty IT index fell 5.87%, its steepest fall since March 2020, wiping out nearly ₹2 lakh crore. TCS and Infosys each fell over 7% on the day while Tech Mahindra lost over 5%. For the week, the index declined 6.4%, with Infosys down 8.2% and Tech Mahindra 7.1%.

The core fear – if one AI agent can do the work of an entire team, India's headcount-based outsourcing model faces existential repricing.

What is the SaaSpocalypse?

The term – coined by the Jefferies Group, a U.S. multinational investment bank – captures the fear that AI is replacing software, not just enhancing it. Traditional SaaS (Software as a Service) charges per user seat; when AI agents execute workflows autonomously, fewer humans need the software. A CNN report quotes Thomas Shipp of LPL Financial asking, "Why do I need to pay for software if internal development now takes developers less time with AI?"

Further, Salesforce is down 26% year-to-date, and the S&P 500 Software & Services Index has fallen by roughly 20%.

The Bank of America (BofA) called this an "indiscriminate sell-off" resembling the DeepSeek moment of January 2025, when China's DeepSeek shook the assumption that AI required massive capital, and Nvidia lost \$589 billion in a day. That panic proved overblown. BofA argued that this sell-off rested on contradictory premises – AI capex collapsing while AI adoption becomes so pervasive it makes software obsolete. Yet the structural shift is real. The question is whether markets are pricing a decade of disruption into a single week.

What are some real-world examples of AI disruption?

In March 2023, Bloomberg released BloombergGPT, a 50-billion parameter LLM trained on 363 billion tokens of proprietary financial data – the largest domain-specific financial dataset ever assembled. Bloomberg's CTO Shawn Edwards said it would "enable us to tackle many new types of applications" with "much higher performance out-of-the-box." BloombergGPT proved that domain-specific AI could outperform general models on financial tasks by a significant margin when it comes to sentiment analysis, entity recognition, news classification, and query automation. It was the proof of concept. Claude Cowork's finance and legal plugins



REUTERS

are the logical extension of this phenomenon – taking what BloombergGPT demonstrated within one platform and making it available as an autonomous agent across any enterprise. Claude's legal plugin – which can automate NDA triage (rapidly assessing and classifying Non-Disclosure Agreements), contract review, and compliance tracking – triggered the sharpest market reaction. Thomson Reuters recorded its largest single-day drop ever. LegalZoom fell nearly 20%. RELX (LexisNexis's parent) and Wolters Kluwer each lost over 13%.

Additionally, Goldman Sachs disclosed a six-month partnership with Anthropic to build autonomous agents for trade accounting, compliance, and client onboarding. CIO Marco Argenti said the bank was "surprised" at Claude's capability beyond coding, particularly in parsing regulatory documents and applying rule-based judgment. The shift from BloombergGPT (a domain model assisting analysts) to Goldman-Anthropic (autonomous agents replacing back-office processes) is the leap that spooked investors. FactSet fell 10%; S&P Global and Moody's also declined sharply.

Cognizant's partnership with Palantir embeds agentic AI within its TriZetto healthcare platform. The platform processes over half of U.S.' medical claims, and now AI will handle patient routing, claims adjudication, and supply chain tasks, with human oversight only for exceptions.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei has warned AI could displace half of entry-level white-collar jobs within 1-5 years. Salesforce's Marc Benioff has said the company will not hire additional engineers or lawyers because of AI.

Moreover, Andrej Karpathy, co-founder of OpenAI, described his own experience with Claude code as going from 80% manual+autocomplete coding and 20% agents in November 2025, to 80% agent coding and 20% edits+touchups. Semianalysis published this week in "Claude Code is the inflection point" that 4% of GitHub public commits are being authored by Claude code, and that they

will be 20% by the year-end.

How are Indian companies addressing this disruption?

Indian IT firms are investing, but incrementally. TCS and private equity firm TPG have committed \$2 billion to Hypervault AI data centres; Wipro earmarked \$1 billion for AI360; and Infosys has partnerships with both NVIDIA and Intel. Cognizant's Palantir-TriZetto integration is the most forward-looking partnership – combining domain expertise with a leading agentic platform.

However, the challenge is pace. As *Rest of World* noted, Cowork's plugins automate precisely the high-volume, repetitive work that is Indian IT's bread and butter. The "slower enterprise adoption" defence rings hollow when Goldman Sachs is embedding Anthropic engineers in its back office to co-design autonomous agents, and when the Pentagon has consolidated 75 software contracts under Palantir's \$10 billion enterprise service agreement construct.

The required pivot is from labour arbitrage to AI deployment partnerships. Indian firms possess unmatched domain expertise in banking, insurance, and healthcare. The Cognizant-Palantir model, where domain knowledge meets platform capability, should be taken as the template going forward.

Does this hurt employment?

The immediate signal concerning TCS has reduced headcount by approximately 11,000 recently, and multiple Chief Technology Officers have stopped hiring freshers entirely. Entry-level testing, maintenance, and compliance roles are the jobs most at risk. One fintech firm told *The Ken* that fresher hiring for certain teams has gone from 80% to zero.

Yet new demand is emerging. Every AI agent that performs autonomous work in a regulated environment such as healthcare claims, financial audits, and defence logistics requires what the industry calls HITL (Human-in-the-Loop) processes which include oversight, validation, exception handling, governance, and ethical review. These

roles demand domain knowledge and judgment, not just coding ability. Palantir itself, despite its autonomous capabilities, emphasises that its ontology-driven approach requires humans to define the business logic and maintain governance frameworks. Goldman's Argenti stressed agents will be "digital co-workers," not replacements, because compliance requires human judgment for edge cases. Three opportunities exist: deployment partnerships that embed and govern agentic platforms inside enterprises; HITL operation centres for regulated industries; and massive reskilling to train engineers to architect AI systems rather than write boilerplate code.

Can this be compared to when DeepSeek shook the industry?

In January 2025, DeepSeek shook the assumption that AI required massive capital which led to massive losses for Nvidia. However, the company's value rose 58% over the following year. BofA's Brad Sills has explicitly called this week's sell-off "overblown." Similarly, Gartner wrote that Cowork plugins are "potential disruptors for task-level knowledge work but not a replacement for SaaS applications managing critical business operations." Wedbush added that enterprises "won't completely overhaul tens of billions of dollars of prior software infrastructure."

The pattern will likely rhyme with DeepSeek: a sharp sell-off, partial recovery, then slow realisation that the underlying shift is real. DeepSeek challenged cost assumptions about building AI while Claude Cowork challenges revenue assumptions about the work AI can replace. One threatened input; the other threatens outputs. But both follow the same arc – panic, recovery, and then gradual structural repricing. The BloombergGPT-to-Cowork evolution shows this is not a bolt from the blue; it is a trajectory which has been visible. For Indian IT, the window to pivot from labour arbitrage to AI deployment is shorter than the market assumes.

The author is an energy and emerging technologies expert.

THE GIST

SaaSpocalypse, coined by the Jefferies Group, a U.S. multinational investment bank, captures the fear that AI is replacing software, not just enhancing it.

In January 2025, DeepSeek shook the assumption that AI required massive capital which led to massive losses for Nvidia. However, the company's value rose 58% over the following year. BofA's Brad Sills has explicitly called this week's sell-off "overblown."

If one AI agent can do the work of an entire team, India's headcount-based outsourcing model faces existential repricing. Entry-level testing, maintenance, and compliance roles are the jobs most at risk.

CACHE



AFP

How are dating apps relying on artificial intelligence for their users?

Dating apps are deploying AI features to learn more about their users, even as those looking for connections try to differentiate between human and chatbot matches. The Google Play Store even lists third-party apps designed to provide AI assistance to those wanting to secure dates

Sahana Venugopal

New York city mayor Zohran Mamdani recently gave a leg up to dating apps when he announced that he met his spouse Rama Duwaji on the dating platform Hinge. Soon enough, several users of the Match Group-owned dating app, even in India, said they were looking for their own Zohran Mamdani-style match 'made in heaven'. Hinge, unlike its sibling app Tinder, seeks to foster slower, thoughtful, and meaningful connections, based on its advertising. Whether one's dating app of choice is the fast-paced Tinder, the relatively more conscious Hinge, the women-centric Bumble, or even a traditional Indian matrimony platform, all these apps have made AI a core part of their product to help users find compatible partners.

An AI romance assistant

Over the past few years, to help users overcome "swiping fatigue" post the COVID-19 pandemic, dating apps have been deploying AI to improve the overall user experience, and help shy users kickstart conversations. These companies see Gen AI as a tool to make digital dating feel more comfortable, personalised, and interesting. For example, the Match Group in its report for the third quarter ended September 30, 2025, outlined an AI-powered feature called Chemistry that can look at users' device photos to understand them better.

"Powered by AI, this Interactive Matching feature, now known as Chemistry, is a major pillar of Tinder's upcoming 2026 product experience. It

gets to know users through interactive questions and, with permission, learns from their camera roll to better understand their interests and personality. Using deep learning, Chemistry combats "swipe fatigue" by surfacing a few highly relevant profiles each day, driving more compatible matches and engaging conversations," the company said, adding that "Chemistry" was live in New Zealand and Australia, and that there were plans to expand the feature to more countries in the coming months.

However, such features clearly show a lopsided approach where the user has to provide more personal information to the platform. "Users essentially give license to these companies to utilise these photos for whatever purposes they deem fit now and in the future. The benefits offered here don't outweigh the privacy risks from enabling this experimental AI feature," explained Satnam Narang, Senior Staff Research Engineer at Tenable.

Lisa Steinfeld, a data protection lawyer at noyb-European Center for Digital Rights, a Vienna-based non-profit, noted that AI systems appeared as "black boxes" for users who cannot easily understand how their data will be processed and whether this will be in compliance with existing laws.

"Another factor to consider is that Tinder will have to collect users' valid consent. This supposes that users are informed and [in agreement] to the processing. Specific and accessible information is therefore crucial, especially since people's camera rolls can include sensitive photos which could for

example reveal sex life, sexual orientation, political or philosophical beliefs," said Ms. Steinfeld. Risks include AI hallucinations, inaccuracy, lack of legal basis, unfairness, and the impossibility of exercising one's rights, she added.

Last year, noyb filed a complaint against Bumble, alleging that the app's "AI Icebreakers" feature, powered by ChatGPT to help initiate conversations between contacts on the 'Bumble for Friends' offering, were breaking EU laws.

"In order to do this, your personal profile information is fed into the AI system without Bumble ever obtaining your consent. Although the company repeatedly shows you a banner designed to nudge you into clicking "Okay", which suggests that it relies on user consent, it actually claims to have a so-called "legitimate interest" to use data," stated the organisation.

'Chatfishing' and chafed feelings
Dating platforms aren't the only ones experimenting with Gen AI. Users are themselves bringing their Gen AI prowess to the platforms with fake profiles built using image generators that fool both the site and other users.

If that wasn't complex enough to handle, more users on dating apps are stealthily using AI chatbots such as ChatGPT to flirt with potential matches, keep conversations running, to sound fluent in a non-native language, and get feedback on the best ways to respond to texts. This has led to a trend known as "Chatfishing," or a form of catfishing where daters use AI to create an enticing but false persona online. Meanwhile, those receiving visibly AI-generated

messages on dating apps feel disrespected, frustrated, or deceived.

The Google Play Store even lists third-party apps designed to provide AI assistance to those wanting to secure dates. One such app, called 'WingAI: Your AI Wingman,' declared itself a "secret weapon to get Same Day Dates." It invited users to upload other people's dating app bios and chats in order to generate AI responses to send back to them.

Tenable's Narang stressed the dangers of potential romance-baiting scams, known as pig butchering scams, where users looking for love end up getting defrauded. "We've seen fake profiles on dating apps using AI-generated images in the early part of 2024. Since the generative AI models have been improving exponentially, the fake profiles on these dating apps are only getting harder to spot," he said.

"For dating app users, the red flag warnings they should watch out for is a rush to move off platform (to SMS, WhatsApp and other messaging apps) to continue the conversation, and telling the user about their significant gains in financial or cryptocurrency complete with faked screenshots of dashboards," Mr. Narang explained.

While swiping through a dating app is often touted as a safe alternative that allows matches to privately vet each other before a first meeting, digital daters now need to be on the lookout for far more red flags than ever before. With AI tools in play – both behind the scenes and on stage – users looking for a Zohran Mamdani-style match must, perhaps, think of a new way to build trust through these connections.



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Her stellar review got her the promotion

I think he is capable of handling the two new projects as well as the fundraiser next month

S. Upendran

"There you are! Were you out of town last weekend? I didn't see you at all."

"No, I was very much here last weekend. Didn't step out of the house, though. I was watching the Australian Open! After Alcaraz's stellar performance in the semi-final, I just had to keep..."

"What performance?"

"Stellar. S...t...e...l...la...r. The first syllable rhymes with 'tell', 'spell' and 'shell'. The word is pronounced 'STELL-e' with the stress on the first syllable."

"I see! But what does the word mean?"
"The word literally means 'like a star'. Here, we're talking about the stars that we see in the night sky. When used with people, 'stellar' means 'excellent' or 'extremely high standard'. For example, the movie that I saw yesterday had a stellar star cast."

"The well-known sitar player gave a stellar performance at the festival."

"Our company is hoping to register stellar profits this year."

"Meaning, immense profits, I suppose. How about this example? For five years, our company struggled. After that, we've had stellar growth."

"That's an excellent example. Let's hope it continues to be stellar."

"Oh my god! Could you please stop using 'stellar'? I'm beginning to see stars! Did you watch the final between Djokovic and Alcaraz?"

"Of course, I did! It wasn't as good as the semi-final between Sinner and Djokovic, but some of the rallies were truly jaw-dropping."

"Jaw-dropping? Never heard that expression before. What does it mean?"

"How do you normally react when Alcaraz hits an amazing shot?"

"I scream or clap. Sometimes, I'm so amazed that I don't say anything. I just sit there with my mouth wide open."

"Exactly! You remain open-mouthed. You're so impressed that your jaw drops!"

"So, when you say that something was 'jaw-dropping', what you mean is that you sat there with your mouth wide open."

"Very good! Here's an example. The view from Raj's house was simply jaw-dropping."

"Of course! That perhaps explains why Raj was willing to pay a jaw-dropping amount for the old house."

"Here's another example. According to my friends, the special effects in the film and the dialogue were jaw-dropping."

"Is it okay to say, Alcaraz's performance in the Australian Open final was jaw-dropping?"

"It certainly is. Here's another, England's performance was anything but jaw-dropping."

"England is definitely capable of doing much better."

"Capable of."

"What are you talking about?"

"You said 'capable to do better'. It should be 'capable of doing better'."

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THE DAILY QUIZ

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

This quiz explores the consequences of the Second Red Scare in the wake of Senator Joseph McCarthy's allegations about communist infiltration within the U.S. government

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

Why is it called the 'Second Red Scare'?

QUESTION 2

Which U.S. presidential order in 1947 intensified suspicion of disloyalty among federal employees?

QUESTION 3

Approximately how many dismissals and resignations resulted from loyalty investigations (1947-56)?

QUESTION 4

Which congressional body investigated alleged communist influence in government and society?

QUESTION 5

How did McCarthy frame the ideological struggle in his February 9, 1950, speech?



Visual question:

This 2005 movie covers the struggle of journalist Edward Murrow against the witch hunt of communists undertaken by Joseph McCarthy. Name the movie. WARNER INDEPENDENT PICTURES

Questions and Answers to the

Text & Context, Edition 6

Elizabeth II ascended the throne in this year. **Ans: 1952**

2. This President of the United States began implementing a policy involving economic deregulation and cuts in both taxes and government spending. **Ans: Ronald Reagan**

3. This Jamaican singer is considered one of the pioneers of reggae. **Ans: Bob Marley**

4. Eva Braun was the wife of this infamous political figure. **Ans: Adolf Hitler**

5. This actor was born on February 6 in 1917. **Ans: Zsa Zsa Gabor**

Visual. Identify this French filmmaker who is widely regarded as one of the founders of this art movement in France. **Ans: François Truffaut**

French new wave

Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan| Sumana Dutta| Sudhir Thapar| Lachand Bhutani| Varghese Joseph

Word of the day

Ossify:

become bony; make rigid and set into a conventional pattern; cause to become hard and bony

Synonyms: petrify, rigidify

Usage: The new teacher did not subscribe to old ossified teaching methods.

Pronunciation: newsthw.live/ossifypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ɒs.i.fai/

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