FRIDAY
March 20, 2026
CHENNAI
CITY EDITION
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World Oral Health Day
20 March

SENSODYNE

ARE YOUR TEETH AGEING FASTER THAN YOU ARE?

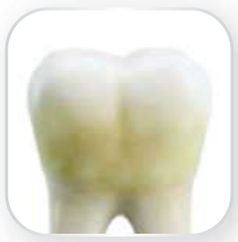
5 signs your teeth could be ageing faster

Cavity

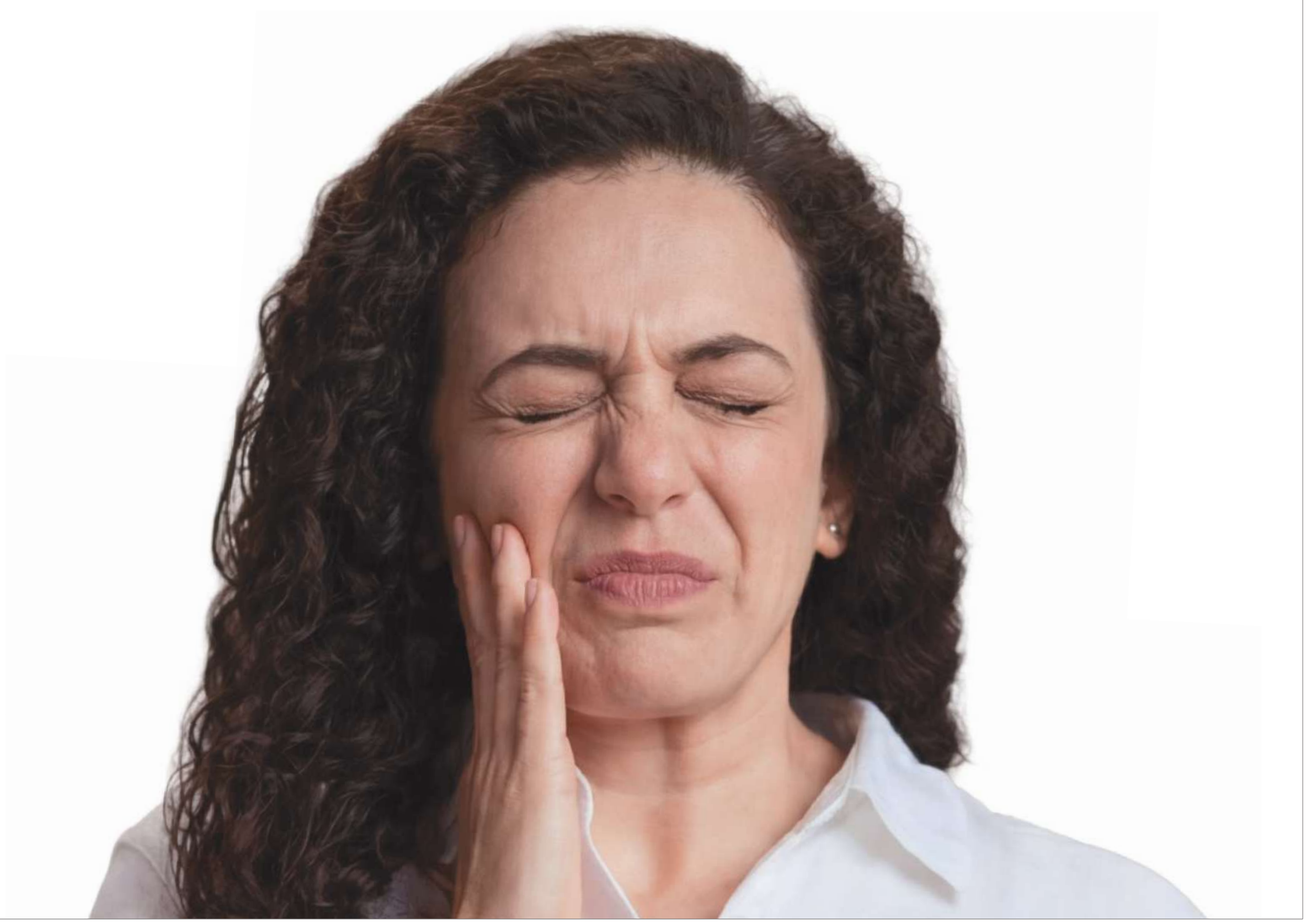
Sensitivity

Enamel Wear

Gum Issues


Yellowing

FLIP TO KNOW YOUR DENTAL AGE



World Oral Health Day
20 March

SENSODYNE

CHECK YOUR DENTAL AGE TODAY!

This World Oral Health Day,

SENSODYNE partners with ida Indian Dental Association

to help you discover your dental age

and start your journey to better oral health.

Scan below to get your
personalised dental age report

Take the first steps
for better oral health today

Visit your dentist every 6 months

Brush gently using a soft-bristled toothbrush

Use a specialised toothpaste for sensitivity

Protect enamel daily with an enamel-care toothpaste

In service of your oral health

SENSODYNE | SENSODYNE PRONAMEL | parodontax THE GUM EXPERTS

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DEFENCE CONCLAVE
Work to make India a drone hub: Rajnath
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TOUGH FIGHT LIKELY
Dravidian giants in T.N. face a new disruptor
ASSEMBLY POLLS » PAGE 11

CROSSOVER TO MYANMAR
Porous border in focus after foreigners' arrest
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PARLEY
How far should governments go in using AI?
Concerns of safe usage, accountability remain
OPINION » PAGE 9

EMPHATIC WIN
Barcelona storms into the last-eight stage
SPORT » PAGE 16

Israel won't hit key Iran gas facility again: Trump

President distances the U.S. from Israeli strike on gas field in Iran's South Pars, one of the largest in the world, after Iran launches missiles at energy facilities in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel

Stanly Johny

Distancing himself from an Israeli strike on Iran's South Pars gas field, U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday said Tel Aviv would not target the "extremely important and valuable" site again and warned Tehran against attacking Qatar's energy facilities.

His remarks came after Iran launched missile attacks at energy facilities in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Israel, following Israeli air strikes that caused a fire at South Pars in Iran's southern Bushehr province, one of the largest known gas fields in the world.

"Israel, out of anger for what has taken place in the Middle East, has violently lashed out at South Pars Gas Field in Iran. A relatively small section of the whole has been hit. The United States knew nothing about this particular attack, and the country of Qatar was in no way, shape, or form, involved with it, nor did it have any idea that it was going to happen," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Mourners at the funeral procession of Iran's national security chief Ali Larijani and Basij commander Gholamreza Soleimani. AFP

'Iran didn't know this'

"Unfortunately, Iran did not know this, or any of the pertinent facts pertaining to the South Pars attack, and unjustifiably and unfairly attacked a portion of Qatar's LNG Gas facility," he added. "No more attacks will be made by Israel pertaining to this extremely important and valuable South Pars Field unless Iran unwisely decides to attack a very innocent, in this case, Qatar - In which instance the United States will massively blow up the entirety of the South Pars Gas Field."

Israeli media reported that an oil refinery in the northern port city of Haifa was hit. Saudi Arabia's Defence Ministry said a drone crashed into the Samref refinery in the Red Sea port of Yanbu. In Kuwait, drone attacks sparked fires at the Mina Abdullah and Mina Al-Ahmadi refineries.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

'Iran may let more Indian vessels pass Hormuz Strait'

M. Kalyanaraman
Suhasini Haidar

Iran is putting together an approval process for allowing safe passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, according to Lloyd's List Intelligence (LLI), a maritime data and intelligence company.

India, which has been in direct talks with Tehran, has earmarked 22 India-bound vessels for evacuation, including 20 ships which are assessed as critical to the country's energy security.

On Iran's watch

Richard Meade, the editor-in-chief of Lloyd's List Intelligence, told *The Hindu* that an LPG carrier took "an unusual route" by travelling through Iran's territorial waters before exiting the strait.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

Stock markets crash over 3% as oil price spikes to $114 a barrel

Market meltdown

BSE Sensex registered a **massive 3.26% drop.** A look at commodity-wise performance

Sector	% change
Auto	-4.07%
Realty	-3.79%
Finance	-3.66%
Industrials	-3.49%
IT	-3.41%
Capital goods	-2.88%
Telecom	-2.70%
Fast Moving Consumer Goods	-2.40%
Healthcare	-2.34%
Oil and gas	-2.17%
Energy	-1.73%
Power	-1.67%

SOURCE: BSE INDIA

Ashokamithran T.
MUMBAI

Indian stock markets experienced a meltdown, crashing over 3%, as oil price spiked to $114 a barrel and the U.S. Federal Reserve signalled higher inflation on Thursday. This was the worst day since June 2024 when markets crashed over 5% in a session.

This is also the fifth instance since 2021, when benchmark indices dipped lower than 3%.

Nifty opened at 23,197.75 and Sensex at 74,750.92 points, down about 2.4% from the previous close. Both the indices maintained the level before crashing to the day's low of 22,930.35 and 73,950.95 points before closing at 23,002.15 and 74,207.24 points. These were levels that markets were trading at in mid-2024.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 10

NEARBY

EPS in Delhi for seat-sharing talks with Amit Shah

CHENNAI
AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami went to New Delhi on Thursday to discuss seat sharing for the State Assembly election with Union Home Minister and BJP leader Amit Shah. » PAGE 6

T.N. govt. amends rules governing maternity leave

CHENNAI
The Tamil Nadu government has amended service-related rules governing its women employees to allow relaxation of conditions for availing maternity leave. » PAGE 6

FRIDAY REVIEW » 4 PAGES

Festive fervour

Fresh start: A woman in traditional attire takes part in the *Gudi Padwa* procession to mark the Marathi New Year at Girgaon in Mumbai on Thursday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Police arrest 38-year-old man in connection with murder of Class XII girl in Thoothukudi

Shankari Nivethitha B.
THOOTHUKUDI

The police on Thursday arrested a suspect in connection with the murder of a Class XII student from a village in Thoothukudi district last week.

The arrested was identified as M. Dharma Muneeswaran alias Maveeran, 38, from Sayalkudi in Ramanathapuram district.

Addressing the media, Thoothukudi District Superintendent of Police C. Madhan said evidence that led to Muneeswaran's arrest was gathered purely through scientific investigation. He said 10 special teams, comprising four Deputy Superintendents of Police and six Inspectors, were formed, and the investigation was carried out on multiple angles.

He said 461 individuals from the district were interrogated both directly and through digital methods. As the case is still under investigation, further details cannot be disclosed at this time, he said.

Thoothukudi SP C. Madhan addressing mediapersons on Thursday. N. RAJESH

Responding to a question on whether this was a sexual assault-cum-murder, Mr. Madhan said it was and samples had been sent for testing. He said Muneeswaran had several cases against him but had no political background. He added that necessary action would be taken to ensure maximum punishment for the accused.

The 17-year-old girl reportedly went missing in a scrub forest area around 250 metres from her residence on the evening of March 10. On the same day, her parents visited the Kulathur police station around 9.30 p.m. to lodge a complaint. Since the girl was a minor, her parents were asked to lodge the complaint at the Vilathikulam All-Women Police Station. On March 11, they approached the Vilathikulam station. But the personnel allegedly refused to register the complaint.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 6

FTA talks with Israel, GCC countries may be delayed

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The ongoing conflict in West Asia is going to create delays in India's negotiations on free trade agreements (FTA) with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries as well as Israel, a senior official in the Commerce Ministry said.

The FTA with the U.K., however, could be implemented by May 1, and the trade agreement with the European Union could be ratified by the European Parliament by the end of November, they added.

"There are several impacts of the war in West Asia, but one of them is that our talks with the GCCs and Israel will be delayed, since most of the parties involved are at war currently," the official explained, declining to be named as the matter is still under discussion.

FTA negotiations with the GCC countries – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – were launched on February 24.

The same month, between February 23-26, India and Israel also held the first round of negotiations for a bilateral FTA.

"The implementation of the U.K. FTA should happen by end-April, and we might decide to announce it on May 1," the official said, adding that India was looking for a "significant date" to announce it, and that International Labour Day was a good and early candidate.

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was signed on July 24, 2025.

INBRIEF

S.A. Engineering College conducts 24th graduation day

A total of 759 students graduated on the 24th graduation day of S.A. Engineering College on Wednesday. Thirty rank holders were awarded cash prizes worth ₹2.52 lakh along with shields and citations. Chief guest K. Raghul, Regional Director, Staff Selection Commission-Southern Region, urged students to keep learning continuously to overcome challenges, according to a press release. D. Duraiswamy, Chairman, S.A. Engineering College; D. Paranthaman, vice-chairman; D. Dasarathan, secretary; and S. Amarnath, correspondent, were among those present at the event.

Regional Meteorological Centre gets new head

Sivananda Damodara Pai, Scientist 'G', assumed charge as the Head of the Regional Meteorological Centre, Chennai, on Thursday. He previously served as Programme Director, Ministry of Earth Sciences, and headed the Agromet Advisory Division of IMD, New Delhi.

Text & Context and Health

Weekday features on *The Hindu* epaper (epaper.thehindu.com) carries explainers, special articles and quizzes. In the latest issue (March 20, Friday), the following explainers are available:

- Oil, power, and politics of disruption **newsth.live/oilwars**
- Women and TB in India: a story of deprivation, discrimination and debt **newsth.live/womentb**

You can use your smartphone's inbuilt features to access this article. If it's an Android phone, use Google Lens to read and tap the url to access the article. If it's an iPhone, use Live Text on camera to do the same.

This densely-populated urban area faces civic gaps despite infrastructure push

Home to a diverse electorate, comprising working-class sections, government employees, and small business owners, Villivakkam reflects the city's evolving socio-economic landscape. A 24-hour govt. hospital and the replacement of the ageing sewer network are some of the demands of voters

CONSTITUENCY WATCH

K. Lakshmi
CHENNAI

Villivakkam, a prominent urban constituency in the city, presents a mix of long-established, densely-populated low-income residential areas, an industrial cluster, and rapidly expanding middle-class areas, some of which have given way to apartment complexes in recent years.

Home to a diverse electorate, comprising working-class sections, government employees, and small business owners, the constituency reflects Chennai's evolving socio-economic landscape. It has retained its distinct character, with a significant working-class population shaping its identity. Once the largest constituency in the city, Villivakkam has shrunk in size as many constituencies, including Ambattur, Kolathur, Madhavaram, Maduravoyal, and Virugambakkam, were carved out of it following the delimitation process.

Villivakkam has traditionally witnessed a strong presence of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), and the parties have won the Assembly election seven times since 1977.

Villivakkam

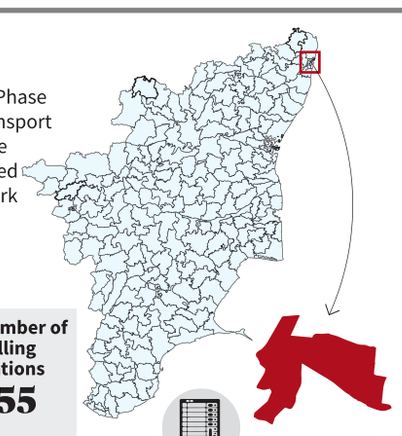
While voters welcome Metro Rail Phase II, they seek restoration of the transport connectivity that was lost after the bus terminus in the area was closed to facilitate the ongoing Metro work

WARDS 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 104

CIVIC ISSUES

- Vanishing footpaths in Villivakkam and Ayanavaram
- Lack of green spaces
- Ageing sewerage network

Number of polling stations 255



Electors before SIR:
Total: 2,54,992
Men : 1,25,030
Women : 1,29,899
Others : 63

Electors after SIR:
Total: 1,59,764
Men : 76,947
Women : 82,785
Others : 32

2021 Assembly election result:
Vetriazhagan of the DMK defeated J.C.D. Prabhakar, who was then with the AIADMK, by a margin of **37,237 votes**

Wait continues: The long-neglected Villivakkam lake has been restored and improved with recreational facilities. But it is yet to be opened to the public. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Rapid development

In the past five years, the constituency has undergone various improvements in terms of addressing key civic challenges of flooding, better healthcare facilities, and creation of new infrastructure facilities such as community halls and storm-water drains. However, residents flag some basic issues remain unresolved. Besides Villivakkam and Ayanavaram, parts of Anna Nagar Western Extension fall within this constituency. The long-neglected Villivakkam lake has undergone restoration but is yet to be opened to the public.

Eugin J.B. of Villivakkam said many evicted residents of areas, including those from Bharathi Nagar, Sathya Nagar, and Malligai Cheri near MTH Road, were yet to be provided with house-site *patta* documents. While pointing out that the constituency has many community halls and a renovated playground in Agathiyar Nagar, he said there was scope for improvement and a 24-hour government hospital would be a welcome facility.

Traffic congestion, lack of green spaces, gyms, and playgrounds, the need for improved transport connectivity, and the replacement of ageing sewer network continue to dominate public discourse, along with the rising cost of essential goods. While residents have welcomed the ongoing work to expand Metro Rail connectivity through the Phase II Project, they pointed out that the construction had disrupted existing public transport systems and caused significant inconvenience.

S. Prabhakaran of Villivakkam Exnora said: "We need more small buses to connect North Red Hills Road, Rajaji Nagar, and ICF and buses to areas such as Kilambakkam. Many commuters have been put to hardship after the closure of the Villivakkam Bus Terminus for Metro Rail work. More bus shelters are needed on North Red Hills Road."

Voters also raised concern over the stray cattle menace in places including South Mada Street and sewage overflow on Perumal Koil North Mada Street, a bustling vending zone.

Space for street vendors

Lalitha R., a vegetable vendor, said, "I often face issues because of roadside vending. Sewage overflow is common during the monsoon. The government must provide a designated market space."

In Ayanavaram, the growing commercialisation of residential areas has emerged as a key concern. C.V. Amarendran of V.P. Colony pointed to the increase in illegally parked vehicles on roads, disappearing footpaths, and eateries encroaching on roads.

While major political parties are yet to announce candidates, this time too, the constituency is gearing up for a four-cornered battle. The Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) is expected to replace the Makkal Needhi Maiam (MNM) in the fray, with initial media reports suggesting that TVK's general secretary Aadhav Arjuna is likely to contest here. Functionaries of various parties noted that the constituency had a notable fanbase for actor-turned-politician Vijay, which could translate into support for the TVK , particularly among the lower middle-class voters.

C. Martin, Villivakkam secretary, CPI(M), said the DMK-led alliance and the CPI (M) retained a strong hold in the constituency and various development works and welfare schemes undertaken by the ruling party would work in their favour. He cited flood mitigation in Sidco Nagar, construction of primary health centres, and renovation of parks as some of the works that have been implemented so far.

Man sentenced to 20 years RI in 2018 POCSO case

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A Special Court for cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in Chengalpattu has convicted and sentenced a 56-year-old man to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment for committing aggravated penetrative sexual assault on a six-year-old girl in 2018.

The police said that on July 2, 2018, the six-year-old child was forcibly taken by R. Narayanan of Tirusulam, when she went to play near his house in Pallavaram. Based on a complaint given by the child's parents, the All-Women Police arrested Narayanan and booked a case against him under Section 366 (Abduction) of the Indian Penal Code and Section 6 (Punishment of aggravated penetrative sexual assault) of the POCSO Act. After completing the investigation, the police filed a charge sheet against the accused in the special court in Chengalpattu in August 2019.

Thirteen witnesses were examined and 16 documents were marked by the prosecution. At the conclusion of trial, the court sentenced him to undergo 10 years' rigorous imprisonment for abduction and another 10 years under the provision of the POCSO Act.

THE HINDU
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Book offering behind-the-scenes glimpse of political strategy launched

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Minister for Information Technology and Digital Services Palanivel Thiaga Rajan on Thursday said politics had revolved around the same issues for centuries, but the media, methodology, and scale and scope have evolved over the years.

Speaking at the launch of the book titled *Inside the War Room: How Power is Built, Fought and Won*, written by entrepreneur Aspire K. Swaminathan and published by Thamarai Brothers Media, the Minister said the book distilled the author's experiences, covering a wide range of scenarios with clarity and would serve as a learning curve for anyone entering politics or campaign-related fields. Congress leader and Sivaganga Lok Sabha member Karti P. Chidambaram, who received the first copy of the book, said in this era of information overload, people struggled to remember recent events, making it difficult for political parties to stand out without sharp strategies.

From left, author Aspire K. Swaminathan, MP Karti P. Chidambaram, Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan, and R. Krishnamurthy of Thamarai Brothers Media at the book launch in Chennai on Thursday. R. RAGU

He said the book was an essential read not only for those aspiring to be involved in politics but also for anyone venturing into management. He also stressed that empathetic listening is the need of the hour and pointed out that politics cannot function without a human touch.

Mr. Swaminathan said decision-making plays a crucial role in any profession, and when it comes to politics, it becomes even more important.

He said the book offers a rare, behind-the-scenes look at political strategy through 51 real-world scenarios.

Webinar on tech-enabled TB care to be held today

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Ahead of World TB Day, *The Hindu* will conduct a free public webinar on Friday, March 20, 2026, on the topic "World TB Day: Towards Patient-Centric and Tech-Enabled TB Care."

The webinar will be held from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. The session will focus on the evolving landscape of tuberculosis care, highlighting the importance of patient-centred approaches, community engagement and the growing role of technology in TB diagnosis, treatment adherence and monitoring.

India's response

The discussion will look into how India's tuberculosis response is adapting through digital tools, improved diagnostics and data-driven programmes. The webinar will also address the lived experiences of people affected by tuberculosis, the need to reduce stigma, and the importance of ensuring that policies and programmes respond to the needs of patients and vulnerable communities.

Expert panellists include Ramya Ananthakrishnan, director of REACH (Resource Group for Education and Advocacy for Community Health); Rhea Lobo, tuberculosis survivor and former board member of the Community Delegation to the Stop TB Partnership; and Animesh Sinha, advisor with Médecins Sans Frontières. The session will be moderated by Serena Josephine M., Special Correspondent, *The Hindu*.

To register, click here or scan the QR code given below.

India's push for large-scale renewable energy projects is creating land conflicts, environmental concerns: experts

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

India's push for large-scale renewable energy projects is creating new land conflicts and environmental concerns, speakers said at a webinar hosted by the Climate Change Media Hub of the Asian College of Journalism on Thursday.

The webinar 'Covering Heat: What Gets Missed', featured Aparna Ganesan, documentary film-maker and independent journalist, and Mrinali K., advisor and climate research lead at Land Conflict Watch and NatGraf.

Drawing from her documentary on the Kamuthi solar park in Tamil Nadu, Ms. Ganesan said post-project impacts on communities remain under-reported. She described how farmers who lost access to land also lost groundwater sources and livelihood autonomy, leading to migration and dependence on low-paying work. Women, she added, now spend heavily on purchasing water, while pastoral communities face shrinking grazing lands and rising conflicts.

She also pointed to environmental changes, including increased local temperatures and high water usage for cleaning solar panels, even as nearby communities struggle with water scarcity.

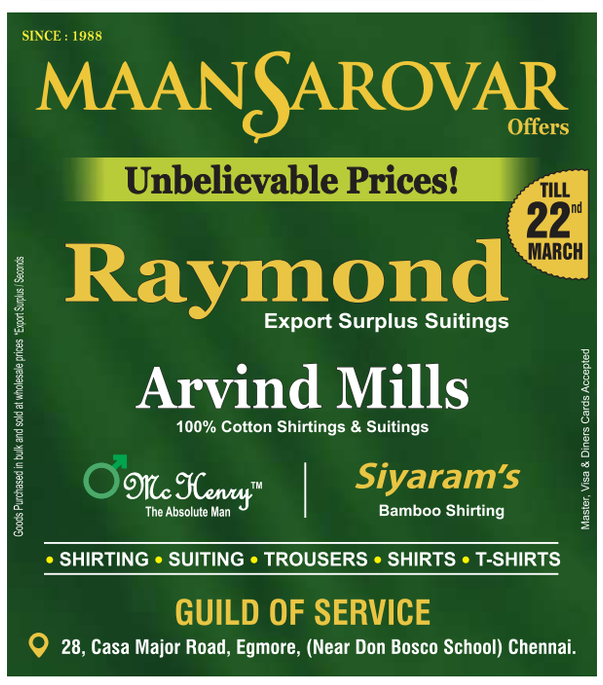
> In the conflicts we have documented, in many cases, communities have come back and said that even after projects are up and running, there is a lot of environmental degradation happening
>
> **MRINALI K.**
> Advisor and climate research lead at Land Conflict Watch and NatGraf

Ms. Mrinali outlined regulatory gaps, noting that solar and wind projects are classified as "white category" industries and exempt from environmental clearance processes, including Environment Impact Assessments (EIA).

"But the whole process [of EIA] at least gives some space for people to put down their problems and what they are afraid of. By doing away with this, we don't have any documentation of what could potentially happen. And in the conflicts we have documented, in many cases, communities have come back and said that even after projects are up and running, there is a lot of environmental degradation happening," she said.

She highlighted that nearly 80% of land conflicts linked to such projects involve common lands – areas used by communities for grazing, water access, and livelihoods – were often categorised as "wasteland" in official records.

The session was moderated by journalist Shreya Raman. The Climate Change Media Hub is supported by Interlink Academy.



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Chengalpattu man falls off cliff in the Nilgiris

UDHAGAMANDALAM: A tourist from Chengalpattu, who was taking a selfie at the Needle Rock View Point near Gudalur, sustained injuries after he slipped and fell a 100 feet from a cliff on Thursday.

The injured, identified as Sivagurunathan, was incapacitated.

Sivagurunathan was administered first aid and nutrition, but the rescue team members have so far been unable to bring him out from the spot where he fell.

Officials requested help from the military cantonment in Wellington to help rescue Sivagurunathan.

MTC's small electric buses to fill gaps in connectivity

300 e-buses will be deployed under the connectivity project that has identified 162 routes in city

STORIES FROM THE ROAD

R. Srikanth
CHENNAI

Commuters facing hardships to access various modes of public transport would soon be relieved as the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) would be deploying small electric buses on a mass scale as part of the first and last mile connectivity (FLMC) project.

MTC has floated tenders for purchasing 300 small electric buses, with the first phase to be launched after the Assembly election. As per the tender, the buses would be operated on the gross-cost-contract (GCC) basis. Already, MTC has implemented the GCC model for operating big electric buses in the city.

EV push: The MTC has floated tenders for purchasing the buses that will hit the roads after the Assembly election. FILE PHOTO

The small bus would help in phasing out the 162 small buses that are under operation.

A senior MTC official said the project was initiated based on the study by CUMTA and Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP), and also the feedback received from the private routes allotted for private buses. The current fleet of 12 to 13 years old small buses are being operated on routes that were not scientifically studied. Under the FLMC project, commuters would not have to walk for more than five minutes to reach a bus stop and the maximum waiting time would be between 10 and 20 minutes.

The FLMC project has identified 162 routes, and in the first phase, 300 e-buses would be deployed in 85 routes. The official said the small buses were initiated with an aim to provide last mile connectivity for residents residing in interior areas and those not able to access proper public transport facilities.

The small bus follows the concept that they should not be operated on trunk routes, should be operated within a 10-kilometer radius, and should have services at least within 20 minutes. However, the small buses became a financial drain. Under the FLMC project, the small e-buses would have ticketing similar to the newly launched premium bus services and would not have conductors.

M. Purushothaman, a resident of Ullagaram, said that with the MRTS services having been extended to St. Thomas Mount railway station, the small buses would pave the way for increased patronage in the Ullagaram and Adambakkam stations.

Collective demands withdrawal of Jnanpith Award to Vairamuthu

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A Collective of Tamil Creators, Readers, and Social Activists have urged that the Jnanpith Award to Vairamuthu be withdrawn immediately.

The letter with 230 signatories, including writer Ambai, poet Sukumaran and actor Rohini among others, pointed out that awarding an undeserving individual would irrevocably erode the credibility and dignity of the award.

"Vairamuthu's writings are nowhere close to reflecting Tamil society's core values or its long-cherished cultural pride. Instead, his literary identity is defined by lowbrow writing, adorned with superficial and ornate rhetoric. Bestowing such a high honour upon a commercial writer basking in mere wordplay, whose works fail to reflect the genuine emotions of the people, is an insult to true literary stalwarts," the letter stated.

Noting that, through the #MeToo movement, nearly 18 women had publicly accused Vairamuthu of sexual harassment, they said that awarding an individual burdened with such long-standing moral stains is at odds with the ethos of a modern society that champions women's rights. The letter pointed out the ONV Literary Award had been announced for Vairamuthu and the Kerala Cultural Academy (KCA), which was set to confer the award, withdrew its decision after protests.

The letter stated that it is essential for the Jnanpith committee to consider this moral precedent set by KCA. "The Jnanpith committee may take its cue from this precedence and withdraw its decision."

Timings
CHENNAI

FRIDAY, MAR. 20		
RISE	06:13	SET 18:20
RISE	06:54	SET 19:36
SATURDAY, MAR. 21		
RISE	06:13	SET 18:20
RISE	07:38	SET 20:34
SUNDAY, MAR. 22		
RISE	06:12	SET 18:20
RISE	08:25	SET 21:36

Chennai Weather	max	min
Tiruvallur	34	21
Chennai Airport	34	24
Chennai City	32	24

Chennai Airport Today
34°C Morning will be pleasant. Day will be warm. Night also will be pleasant. Spell of light rain and thundershower may occur.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
34°C The weather will be warm. Night will be pleasant. Spell of light rain and thundershower with gusty winds to occur.

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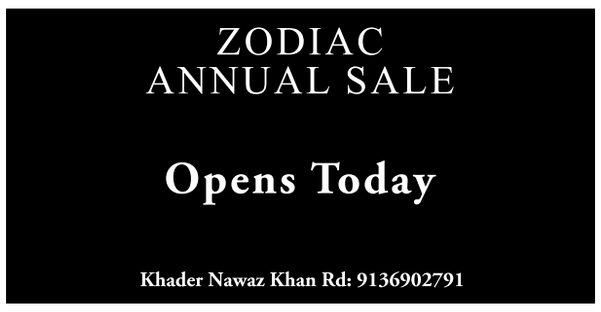

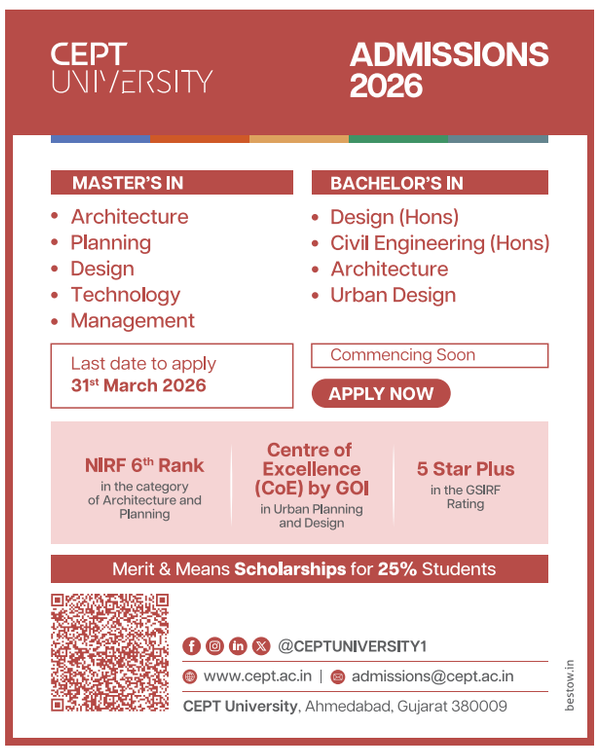

CINEMA ❖ ARTS ❖ EVENTS

MUSIC DANCE DRAMA

The Music Academy, Madras
Today 6.00p.m. to 7.30p.m. At the Kasturi Srinivasan Hall – Concert by Young Veena artist Saranya B. Mangal (Veena), Aswini Srinivasan (Mridangam), R.A. Rohith (Ghatam). Programme under the endowment instituted by Smt. Rajamma & Sri. N. Gopalaswami, former CEC, in memory of their grandmother Smt. Kanakam Raghavachari.

Madurai Mani Iyer Rasikas Association, Chennai-4, Phone: 9841313527
Sri Ramanavami Special listening session on Sunday 22nd March, from 4.15 pm Venue: Gokhale Sastri Hall, Karpagambal Nagar, Mylapore. All Rasikas are welcome!

Sringeri Bharathi Vidyashram, T.Nagar. Ph: 24348964
Vardhanti / Sri Ramanavami Music, Today 6.30pm, Kum Amritha Murali - Vocal, Shri L. Ramakrishnan, Shri N. Manoj Siva. All are welcome.

Sri Ramanjaneya Trust, Tambaram Sanatorium, Ch-47, Ct: 9445105533
Sri Ramanavami Festival 2026 Today at 7pm Smt. B. Suchithra -Vocal, Shri Karaikkal S. Venkatasubramanian - Violin, Shri A.V. Manikandan – Mridangam.

Sri Thyaga Brahma Gana Sabha (Regd.) Vanimahal, Ph: 28152166
In association with Sri Kanchi Mahaswami Vidya Mandir Rajakilpakkam, Chennai, Integrated Enterprises (India) Ltd and City Union Bank celebrates 18th NAMASANKEERTHANA VAIBHAVAM 2026 at Vani Mahal. Today 4.30pm Dhyana keerthans by Sri Karthik Gnaneshwar Bhagavathar and Party. 6.30pm Dhyana Keerthans Contd., & Pooja by Srivanjiyam Sri Muralidharan Bhagavathar and Party. All are welcome.

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Tamil Nadu InFocus

THE HINDU

NUGGETS OF HISTORY

A distinguished writer who specialised in *Kamba Ramayanam*

T. Gnanasundaram, who passed away recently, was a distinguished writer who had served as a professor at Pachaiyappa's College and Tamil University, Thanjavur. A scholar of both Tamil and Sanskrit, he specialised in *Kamba Ramayanam* studies. He authored *Vainava Uraivalam*, an authority on the Vaishnavite tradition.

A temple that has an outstanding structure of eight-sided vimana

The Rajagopala Swamy Temple at Mannarkoil near Ambasamudram has an outstanding structure of eight-sided vimana (*ashtanga vimana*). The 1,000-year-old temple in Tirunelveli district is said to be the place where Kulasekara Alwar, one of the 12 Vaishnavite saints, spent more than 30 years of his life.

A Tamil weekly journal founded by Pandit C. Iyothee Thass

Oru Paisa Tamizhan was a Tamil weekly journal founded by Pandit C. Iyothee Thass. It began publication in June 1907, from Royapettah in Madras, and was priced at one paisa. Issued every Wednesday as a four-page journal, it was renamed *Tamizhan* in 1908. Through it, Iyothee Thass voiced ideas of social reforms.

Paintings in natural caves were adapted into a Jain shrine

Armamalai Cave Paintings in Tirupattur are found in natural caves and were adapted into a Jain shrine in the Eighth Century. The site contains unbaked mud structures, believed to have served as resting spaces for Jain monks. The vivid wall and ceiling paintings depict themes from Jainism, including the *Astadikpalakas*.

Victoria Technical Institute was opened in Madras in 1887

The Victoria Technical Institute was established in 1887 in Madras to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee and promote indigenous arts and crafts. As a charitable trust, it supported artisans through exhibitions, sales, and training. Currently, it is functioning on Anna Salai. (*Compiled by N. Sai Charan*)

An auspicious day for the Irular community to reconnect with their roots on the seashores

For the Irulars, the Masi Magam festival is deeply tied to their culture and collective identity. They gather in their thousands on the shores of Mamallapuram to perform marriages, naming ceremonies for children, ear piercing, and tonsuring. In fact, they come in search of their patron deity Kanniammal, who they believe had left them

Bhagavathi Sampath K. J.

Masi Magam, an auspicious day in the Tamil calendar, is celebrated across the State with religious vigour. The festival also holds significance for the Irular community, for whom the occasion is deeply tied to their culture and collective identity. Members of the community often live on the margins and in some places as bonded labourers. In the days leading up to Masi Magam, members of the community from across Tamil Nadu gather in their thousands on the seashores of Mamallapuram, a historic coastal town known for its ancient rock-cut temples, stone sculptures, and monuments built during the Pallava dynasty.

The occasion offers them an opportunity to perform rites of passage, including marriages, naming ceremonies for children, ear piercing, tonsuring, and rituals in fulfilment of prayers offered to their patron deity Kanniammal. In fact, they come to the seashore in search of Kanniammal, who they believe had left them, to persuade the deity to return home with them. "There is a strong belief in the community that prayers offered to the deity will be answered and all rituals performed on Masi Magam are spiritually potent and effective," said E. Tamil Selvan, guest lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Madras, who has been studying the community.

Known for ecological knowledge

The community, designated as a Scheduled Tribe and spread across Tamil Nadu, is known for its rich traditional ecological knowledge, including expertise in handling snakes, preparing herbal remedies for snakebites, and collecting honey. Romulus Whitaker, a well-known herpetologist, worked closely with the community while studying snakes and venoms. Members of the community also engage in agricultural labour and work as wage labourers in brick kilns.

The Irulars, who participate in Masi Magam, are predominantly from the northern districts of Kancheepuram, Chennai, Chengalpattu, Tiruvannamalai, and Villupuram. For nearly a week, Irular families camp along the beach in tents, combining rituals with traditional songs, dances, and communal celebrations.

Full of fervour: Days before Masi Magam, Irulars camp along the beach, combining rituals with songs and dances. On the full moon day, the presence of tribal deity Kanniammal is believed to be witnessed along the shore. NAVEENRAJ GOWTHAMAN

K.V. Kanniappan, 43, a member of the community from Villupuram, has worked with the International Justice Mission (IJM) as the district coordinator for the rehabilitation of the rescued bonded Irula labourers. "Attending the Masi Magam festival brings a deep sense of happiness and fulfilment. Being surrounded by so many people feels like being with family, and the occasion is truly one of joy and celebration," he said.

S. Kushpu, 35, from Villupuram, said, "For the celebration of Masi Magam, we start saving on expenses days in advance and go to Mamallapuram along with our families and friends. Though we worship our deities every day, nothing can match the sense of fulfilment when we stand at the seashore and allow the waves to engulf our feet. It feels like the deity has accepted us."

According to Edgar Thurston, who extensively studied the Irulars in his book *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, "The Irulas periodically worship Kanniammal, their tribal deity, and Mari, the general goddess associated with epidemic diseases. On the full moon day [Pournami], the presence of the deity Kanniammal is believed to be witnessed along the seashore."

Referring to folklore, S. Rani, 54, a leader of the community from Siruseri, explained that the community gathers at the seashore to bring back the deity Kanniammal, who they believe left the community in anger during the Tamil month of Margazhi. "We create seven steps representing the seven Kannis (virgins), and at dawn, in a unique ritual, almost every family arranges flowers, betel leaves, lemons, puffed rice, neem leaves, broken coconuts, and bananas to be kept at seven Kannis made of sand. We erect a pandal, and the naming of children, tonsuring of children, and marriages take place," she said.

During the ritual, women and men believed to be possessed by the deity run towards the sea, only to be stopped by their family members. They then turn into oracles and make predictions for the community. Families also collect seawater and take it home, believing it will bring luck and peace. "Participating in the event makes our minds light and fills us with happiness. We believe that not only our relatives, but also our ancestors, are present on the seashore," she said.

Stories about ancestors

The celebrations are also marked by vibrant songs and dances performed collectively by community members. These art forms play a vital role in preserving and sustaining their culture and traditions. Through their songs and dances, they narrate stories about their ancestors, traditional occupations and practices, and their devotion to their deity, Kanniammal.

Rani and Kanniappan are also the founding members of Dolkkattai Irular Kalaikuzhu and Mullai Kalaikuzhu (artiste groups) respectively. The groups have systematically written, compiled, and recorded the community's songs. "The idea is to record our songs, and once it became more prevalent in the community, everyone began to feel proud of it," Rani said.

In addition to celebrating their heritage, their songs and dances serve as a medium for spreading awareness of important social issues such as the need for education, community empowerment, and social justice, as the community still struggles with poverty and lack of social empowerment. "In the songs and dramas, we tell the younger generation about the community's origins, tracing them as one of the ancient Tamil communities, their traditional knowledge, their suffering as bonded labourers, the social ostracisation they face, and the difficulties in obtaining community certificates and other issues," Kanniappan said.

Collection of the names of animals as portrayed in Tamil classics

The ancient Tamils employed a remarkable richness of vocabulary to refer to animals. H. Chithiraputhiran, a former professor at Tamil University, Thanjavur, has compiled a specialised dictionary of animals in classical literature to recover these words

B. Kolappan

A scene of a male and female deer drinking from a pool, depicted in *Ainthinai Aimpathu*, is often cited to illustrate the ideal bond between lovers. Set in the arid *Palai* landscape, the poem describes how the *Pinaimaan* (female deer) and the *Kalaimaan* (male deer), exhausted after wandering in search of water, arrive at a small pool. However, there is only enough water to quench the thirst of one. In an act of love and self-denial, the male pretends to drink so that the female may quench her thirst, while the female feigns drinking for the sake of the male. Thus, neither truly drinks.

References to plants and flowers

This episode is among many in Tamil classical poetry that captures the intimate bond the ancient Tamils shared with nature. The literary landscape is not inhabited by animals alone; it is richly adorned with references to plants and flowers. *Kurinjipattu*, for instance, speaks of 99 flowers, and Tamils wore different flowers for different occasions. Many of these animal names have gone out of usage. To recover this vocabulary, H. Chithiraputhiran, a former professor at Tamil University, Thanjavur, has compiled a dictionary of animals in classical literature. Titled *Tamil Sevvilakkiyangalil Vilangina Sorkal: Special Dictionary-Index, Concordance, Dictionary* (Classical Tamil Literature-Special Dictionary of Animals), the work has been published by the Central Institute of Classical Tamil. As R. Chandrasekaran, Director of the Central Institute of Classical Tamil, notes in his introduction that the elephant, tiger, bear, and lion belong to the *Kurinji* region; the deer and rabbit to *Mullai*; the buffalo and otter to *Marudham*; the shark to *Neithal*; and the red dog or dhole to *Palai*. These associations reveal the ecological awareness embedded in classical literature. In *Nattrinai*, the hero, returning from war, sees a jungle fowl scratching the wet ground and offering an earthworm to its mate. Moved, he urges his charioteer to use the long-unused goad and drive the horses faster so that he may reach his beloved without delay. Here, the word *Kaanvaranam* is used to refer to the jungle fowl.

The Tamils employed a remarkable richness of vocabulary to refer to animals, using not only multiple synonyms for a single species but also distinct terms to denote the male, female, young, and even groups of animals. Deer alone are identified by 38 names; buffaloes by 20; lions by 15; goats by 28; bulls by 31; horses by 23; monkeys by 17; mongooses by 13; tigers by 20; cats by nine; elephants by 45; porcupines by five; rabbits by three; dogs by 11; pigs by 13; donkeys by four; and cows by 27.

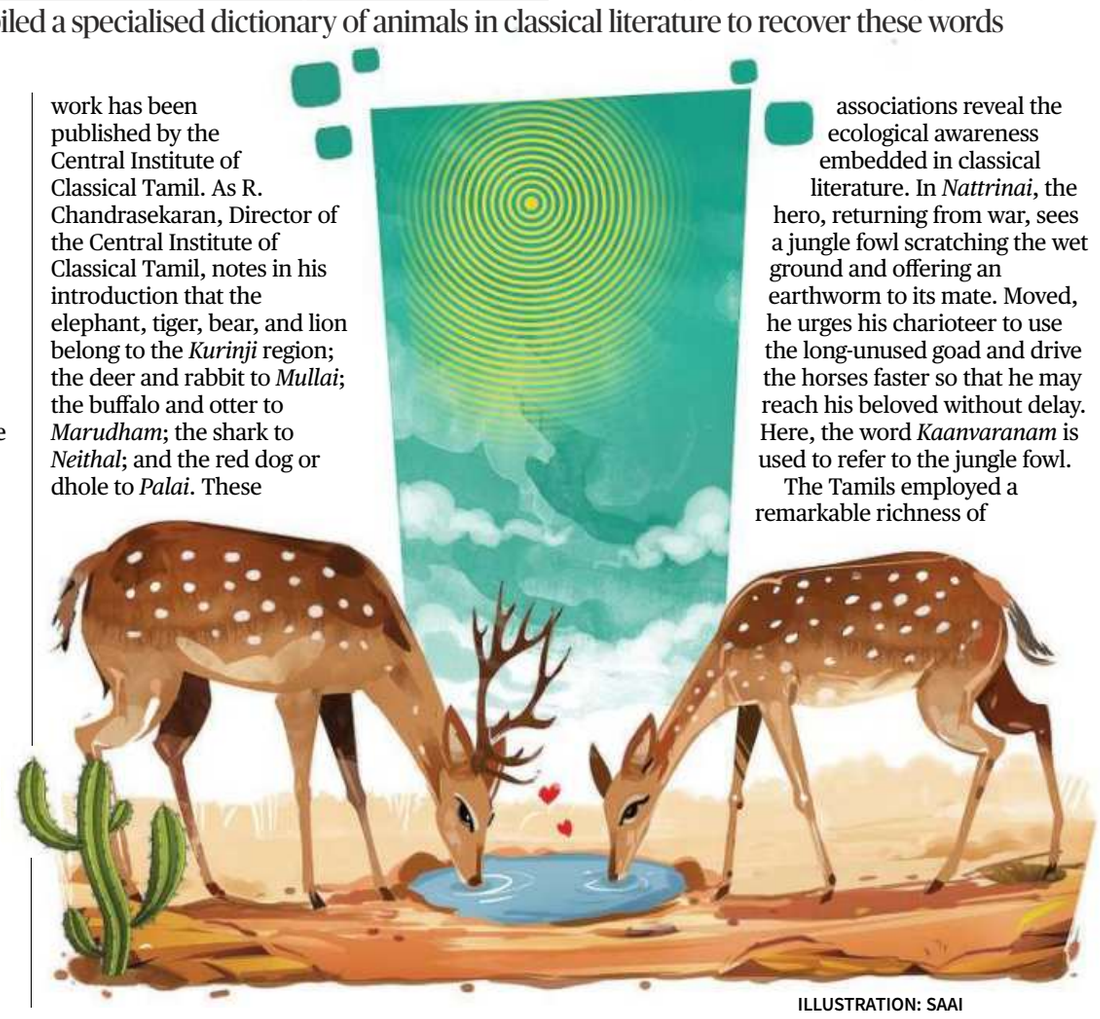

ILLUSTRATION: SAAI

Mr. Chithiraputhiran has listed these names in alphabetical order, along with references to the 41 literary works in which they appear and the lines that mention them. He has enriched the work by providing a comprehensive table that includes the English and scientific names of the animals. He also explains the challenges in identifying animal names, as words such as *Maa* and *Maan* are often used as prefixes and suffixes. For instance, *Maa* combined with *Ari* becomes *Arima*, meaning lion. *Maan* combined with *Ulai* becomes *Ulaimaan*, which also denotes a lion. *Karima* refers to an elephant; *Kalima* to a horse; *Kaimma* to an elephant; *Paima* to a horse; and *Mathama* to an elephant. While *Maan* denotes a deer, *Kalaimaan*, *Nalmaan*, *Paimaan*, and *Mulavuman* are also used for horses.

Distinguishing sex

Certain terms distinguish the sex of animals, while others are applied across species. *Oruthal* refers to the male of several animals, including elephant, bull, buffalo, pig, tiger, and deer. *Eru* denotes a bull, male deer, and male buffalo, including the *Kalaimaan*. *Kaduvan* is used for the male of the monkey and the cat. *Pinavu* denotes the female of several animals, including the tigress, dhole, pig, bear, monkey, and elephant. In many cases, the specific animal referred to in a poem must be inferred from its context.

Pothu is one of the Tamil words that has disappeared from everyday use. In Kerala, however, the term *Pothu* denotes buffalo and meat. According to the *Tolkappiyam*, *Pothu* was used to refer to the male of several species, including bull, buffalo, deer, crocodile, and peacock.

The unique flavour of the Dindigul cigar, a balm to Winston Churchill in times of war

During the Second World War, the British Prime Minister decided to have a regular supply of these cigars made by Spencer and Co. A permanent order was placed with the Government of Madras. Spencer and Co. shut the business in the 1950s. What is left of the Spencer Compound is a portion of the ground that has become an unkempt garden

Beulah Rose

At the height of the Second World War, Winston Churchill, sunk in his armchair and enclosed in his bunker at Whitehall, London, with a frown, would have nursed his Johnnie Walker Red, while reaching out for his Romeo y Julieta, a Cuban cigar that would give him a balanced aromatic experience. But, on that day, due to the war, the consignment from Cuba may have been delayed, and his hand would have reached out to Flor de Dindigul, from India. In a distracted manner, he would have cut the crap and toasted the edges with his trade-mark scowl slowly disappearing. As he drew the smoke in and swirled it, he could taste in the top notes the heat and roaring life of an Indian summer. Strong and bold, it would have led his thoughts to stray to his time spent in India between 1896 and 1899. And, in those few moments of quietness, Churchill would have sunk deeper in his chair, forgotten war strategies, and for a few blissful moments he would have relaxed as the heady robust note was replaced by a subtle sweet tinge bringing in the unique flavour of the Dindigul cigar.

A shadow of its former self: In the early 1890s, Eugene Oakshott of Spencer & Co. decided to expand its cigar manufacturing operation to Dindigul. About 60 acres of land was bought a little away from the town. After the business was closed, the Spencer Compound was broken into bits and parcels, sold and resold. G. KARTHIKEYAN

'Churchill Cigar Assistant'

Maybe, it was then that he decided to have a regular supply of Dindigul cigars. A permanent order was placed with the Government of Madras to ensure a regular supply of the robust Dindigul cigars even during and after the war. It was said a 'Churchill Cigar Assistant' post was created to keep track of the order and the PWD Division in Tiruchi was responsible for procuring and sending these cigars to London. A quarterly report was also to be sent to the government on the quantity dispatched for settlement of bills by the Governor of Madras on behalf of Winston Churchill. This quarterly report was called 'Churchill Cigar Report'. If there was no dispatch of cigars during a quarter, a report stating nothing was dispatched also had to be sent.

Tobacco was introduced in India by the Portuguese during the reign of Akbar. Cultivation spread and before long it reached south India. Regions in and around Dindigul, especially Vedasandur rich in red loamy soil, were seen as ideal for tobacco cultivation. Till the early 1980s, acres and acres of farmland in this belt was under the dark-green egg-shaped leaves of the tobacco plant. The leaves grew up to 51 inches in length and had a width of about 27 inches. These leaves captured the dark mysterious savour of a ground that would bake and crack in the intense summer heat.

As the leaves turned yellowish green, they were ready for harvest. The leaves were plucked and strung on twine and left to dry. The zephyr that would float in at dusk would carry the whiff of tobacco. For a long time, the locals would chew cured tobacco that was fermented with jaggery and honey. This often gave out an earthy and sweet aroma, and many saw this as a viable marketing business. Sensing an opportunity, in the early 1890s, Eugene Oakshott of Spencer & Co. (based in Madras) decided to expand its cigar manufacturing operation to Dindigul to meet the rising demand. About 60 acres of land was bought a little away from the bustling town, which was then restricted to the Old Palani Road.

Soon, bundles of dried tobacco leaves were being brought in bullock carts to the factory in Spencer Compound, and the air wafted with the fragrance of curing tobacco that was being pounded and rolled into cigars. From the rustic and crude moist snuff chewed by the locals, the Dindigul tobacco found a refinement and finesse in the Spencer Compound. Spencer & Co. churned out brands of cigars, such as Salisburys, Gold Mohurs, Siestas, Little Randolphs, and Torpedos.

Each puff of these cigars would have brought to the palette of a cigar aficionado the full-bodied earthy smell of a dry earth. It was the scent of well-furrowed tobacco farms at Vedasandur. Once the smoke dissipated, in its place was a seductive perfume that hinted of the first rain falling on a burning earth.

Trichinopoly suruttu abandoned

As historian S. Muthiah once wrote in his column 'From Madras Miscellany' for *The Hindu*, "It was Spencer's cigars for which Sir Winston Churchill, after forsaking the Trichinopoly suruttu, had once placed a permanent order with the Government of Madras to ensure a regular supply – even during World War II. The order remained on the books till Spencer's stopped making cigars." By the 1950s, Spencer & Co. had wound up the business in Dindigul. Today, what remains of the Spencer Compound is a miniscule portion of the ground that has become an unkempt garden. No longer on the outskirts, this 60-acre is now the heart of Dindigul and has disappeared into an ever-growing and expanding city. Broken into bits and parcels, sold and resold, bearing numerous encroachments, the Spencer Compound lives on the name boards of shops and hotels that have been built just opposite the bus stand. The cigar business then came into the hands of business houses like Angu Vilas. But with the Tamil Nadu government's ban on tobacco products that began in 2013, the farmland under tobacco has been sold to cotton mills.

Bundles of dried tobacco leaves were brought in bullock carts to the factory in Spencer Compound. Spencer & Co. churned out brands of cigars, such as Salisburys, Gold Mohurs, Siestas, Little Randolphs, and Torpedos

The 'status quo' mindset

Going back to the 'Churchill Cigar Assistant' anecdote, in February 2021, while defending the farm reform laws in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi used it to criticise the 'status quo' mindset of the Indian bureaucracy. In bureaucratic circles, it was whispered that even after India became independent in 1947, the 'Churchill Cigar Assistant' post continued for decades until the State government constituted a commission for raising the salaries of government employees. At that time, the 'Churchill Cigar Assistant' had written to the commission seeking a raise and, well, no one in the top echelon of power was even aware that such a post had existed. The rich, complex bouquet of a well-cured Dindigul cigar has long disappeared in the urban odour of pollution. What remains are elusive notes in the annals of history and anecdotes that subtly bring the remembrance of a long-forgotten addictive-luxury to the fore.

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Installation of Grid connected Rooftop Solar Power Plants at Roofs of control rooms of various 400/220/132kV substations of PSTCL and SLDC building under CAPEX model (capacity of 2702 kWp) **1. Last date & time for submission of tender- 28.04.2026 upto 11:00 AM** **2. Date & time for opening of tender- 30.04.2026 at 11:00 AM**	

Detailed NIT/specification may be downloaded from Punjab Govt. e-tendering website **https://eproc.punjab.gov.in.nicgep/app**. Corrigendum, if any, will not be published in newspapers. As such the website may be visited regularly for updates.
1078/12/2025-26/9689 Dy. CE/TS (D), PSTCL, Patiala.

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MECHANICAL BRANCH - TIRUCHCHIRAPPALLI DIVISION
E-Tender Notice No.: GEM/2026/B/7367987 Dated: 18.03.2026
E-Tenders are invited by the Divisional Railway Manager (Mechanical), Southem Railway, Tiruchchirappalli-620001 for the following work:

1	Name of work with its location and completion period:	
	Outsourcing of OEA (Other End Attention) / PFTR (Platform Turn Round) attention to trains at KIK, MV & MQ stations for a period of 1 year	
2	Approximate cost of the work	₹ 3,14,47,020.00 (Rupees Three Crores Fourteen Lakhs Forty Seven Thousand and twenty only)
3	Earnest Money to be deposited	₹ 3,07,240.00 (Rupees Three Lakhs Seven Thousand Two Hundred and Forty only)
4	Date & Time for closing of tender	**At 12.00 hours on 10.04.2026**
5	Total Days for Validity of Offer	**60 days**
6	Stipulated date of Commencement of work	Within 15 days from the date of issue of "Letter of Acceptance" or as per the instructions of Competent Authority.
7	Time Period	01 year from the date of commencement of work.
8	Particulars, where complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office inviting tender.	**https://www.gem.gov.in** Office of the Senior Divisional Mechanical Engineer, Divisional Office, Mechanical Branch, Southern Railway, Tiruchchirappalli-620001.

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I, RAMYA (Surname) Kumar W/o Kumar Sivasailam Alagu Nellai, born on 19.07.1989 residing at No.125/1A, Sri Varaguna Valli Flats, Thiruvalluvar Salai, Kaikankuppam, Alwarthirunagar, Chennai–600087, shall henceforth be known as RAMYA (Surname) PECHINATHAN THANAMMAL
I, P.J. Vimal Chand, S/o. PJayaraman, residing at No.1.C. Pattunool Chatiram, Sriperumbudur, Kanchipuram District, Tamilnadu. Pincode - 602 105. Shall henceforth be known as P.J. Vimal. for all purpose.
I,MITHRAANUSHYA D/O.KUMANAN, residing at No.19,Moovendar 2nd Street, Pallikaranai,Chennai–100, My name in Aadhar & Pan Card and Gas Bill as Mithraanushya Kumanan and my name in my school T.C. Mithra Anushiya K.P. Both names are same and my correct name is Mithraanushya Kumanan for all purposes. This is application of Passport to the concern authority. It is true and best to my knowledge & belief.
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From Page One

Police arrest 38-year-old man in connection with murder of Class XII girl

The personnel of the Vilathikulam station also allegedly used derogatory remarks against the victim. Finally, a case was registered at the Kulathur police station. However, the victim was found murdered on March 11. The Kulathur police rushed to the spot and sent the body for a post-mortem.

The victim's parents and villagers staged protests demanding the arrest of the suspect and action against the Kulathur and Vilathikulam police for failing to act in a timely manner. Although the post-mortem was completed on March 12, her family said they would only accept the body after the suspect's arrest. Sources said that during the investigation it was found an unidentified bike was parked few metres away from where the body was found. Further analysis of CCTV footage from the surrounding areas helped trace the suspect. Based on these leads, one of the special teams arrested Muneeswaran. The police said he had stolen the bike from Parthibanur in Ramanathapuram district a few days ago. A kin of the victim told *The Hindu* that talks were on, and the body would mostly be received by Friday.

The police said Muneeswaran was previously arrested for a similar crime. Two years ago, the Fast Track Mahila Court in Thoothukudi had awarded him a life sentence, holding him guilty of rape and murder in a case reported in 2022. The court had found him guilty and convicted him on four counts – life imprisonment for murder, 20-year rigorous imprisonment for rape, 10-year jail term for robbery, and two weeks' jail term for criminal restraint. He had come out on bail granted by the Madras High Court only in December 2025, the police said. Meanwhile, Inspector-General of Police Vijayendra Bidari appreciated the meticulous investigation by the special teams in cracking a "blind" case.

Palaniswami meets Shah in Delhi for talks on sharing of seats

Dhinakaran will leave for Delhi on Friday, possibly to take part in the deliberations. Anbumani is also expected to go to the national capital

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Thursday night met the Union Home Minister and BJP strategist, Amit Shah, for finalising the seat-sharing arrangements for the April 23 Assembly election in Tamil Nadu.

It is likely that Mr. Palaniswami would brief the media on his discussions on Friday.

Meanwhile, AMMK founder T.T.V. Dhinakaran would leave for New Delhi on Friday morning, possibly to take part in the deliberations. PMK leader R. Anbumani is also expected to go to New Delhi.

Crucial phase: There have been reports that the AIADMK will contest 165 seats, and the BJP 27 in the Assembly election. FILE PHOTO

Sharing of seats

There have been reports that the AIADMK would contest 165 seats; the BJP 27; the PMK 17; the AMMK 9; and the Tamil Maanila Congress 3.

In 13 constituencies, smaller allies would field their nominees on the symbol of the AIADMK. Though leaders of the AIADMK and the BJP, speaking privately, deny any such understanding, there has not been any formal denial from any of the parties.

In 2021, the BJP and the PMK contested 20 and 23 seats, respectively, of which they won four and five seats, respectively.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election when the BJP and the AIADMK contested separately, the former had finished second in many Assembly segments, ahead of the latter.

Stalemate over seats continues between DMK and CPI(M)

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

The CPI(M) has refused to relent on its demand for six Assembly seats, though the ruling DMK is prepared to offer only five.

Even after three rounds of talks, the two parties have been unable to reach an agreement, as the CPI (M) State committee has taken a firm stand against settling for five seats. "We have conveyed the decision of the State committee to the DMK leadership," CPI(M) State secretary P. Shanmugam said on Thursday.

He said that even during the previous election, the DMK had indicated that it would offer more seats in the next election. "But that has not happened. We are answerable to the State committee, and not to any individuals in the party. The DMK plans to contest around 170 seats; it could reconsider its allocation," he added.

When asked whether the party would leave the alliance, Mr. Shanmugam said, "So far, there is no change in the party's political stand on supporting the DMK alliance to defeat the BJP and its allies."

DMK's contention

The DMK's argument is that it cannot part with more seats as it has accommodated additional parties in the alliance, and has already given three more seats to the Congress. It has allotted only five seats to the CPI, which had contested six seats in the 2021 Assembly election.

The DMK is keen on finalising its pact with the CPI(M) before proceeding with talks with the VCK and the DMDK. The VCK, which was allotted six seats in 2021, is likely to be given a couple more, while the DMDK has already been allotted a Rajya Sabha seat. The party is now demanding double-digit Assembly seats, but the DMK has asked its leader Premallatha Vijayakant to scale down the demand.

The DMK leadership does not want to create a situation in which it would be reduced to a minority in the Assembly, as had happened in the 2006 election. At that time, it depended on the Congress and the PMK for support.

250 more companies of CAPF to be sent to T.N. for Assembly poll

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

In addition to the 50 companies of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) that were inducted earlier this month, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has allotted 250 companies of the paramilitary force to Tamil Nadu for the conduct of a safe, free, and fair Assembly election.

These companies would be inducted on April 6 and 13. Other preparatory operations, including the training of poll personnel and randomisation of EVMs and VVPAT units, are also under way.

Randomisation exercise

The Election Commission of India has scheduled the first randomisation of EVMs and VVPAT units for next week.

The process would take place in all 38 districts on one of the days between March 23 and 25.

On Thursday, a virtual training session on the Presiding Officer mobile App (PRO App) was held for all DEOs/ROs.

DMK's Mannachanallur MLA 'distributes' SUVs to party members; ECI issues notice

C. Jaisankar
TIRUCHI

The Election Commission of India (ECI) on Thursday issued a notice to S. Kathiravan, the DMK MLA representing the Mannachanallur Assembly constituency, after the AIADMK filed a complaint accusing him of distributing SUVs to DMK functionaries in his constituency.

In his complaint to V. Saravanan, Collector and District Election Officer, P. Nagarajan, Tiruchi North district secretary of the IT wing of the AIADMK, alleged that Mr. Kathiravan and his father V. Srinivasan had distributed SUVs to five panchayat union secretaries and two town panchayat secretaries of the DMK in the Mannachanallur constituency on March 16 and 17, when the Model Code of Conduct was in force.

The AIADMK alleged that the SUVs were distributed to five panchayat union secretaries and two town panchayat secretaries

According to the complainant, Kattukulam Ganesan, Ramachandran, and Senthil Karthikeyan were among those who had received the vehicles.

'Clear violation'

He alleged that it was a clear violation, and that the MLA had misused his power for political gain. He had also posted on Facebook on Sunday and Monday, sharing photographs of the vehicles being given away.

"It is a blatant violation of election rules by Mr. Kathiravan, who is likely to be renominated by the DMK from Mannachanallur constituency. The total value of the vehicles is said to be over ₹1 crore. The Election Commission of India should take suitable action against Mr. Kathiravan," Mr. Nagarajan said.

When contacted, Mr. Saravanan told *The Hindu* that a notice had been issued to Mr. Kathiravan, seeking an explanation. The Returning Officer would take a call on it, he added.

N. Siva, the Returning Officer of the Mannachanallur constituency, said Mr. Kathiravan had been asked to file his reply within 24 hours. Appropriate action would be taken based on his reply, he added.

NTK pitches for decentralised governance, anti-drug measures, and Tamil-centric policies

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The NTK has released its poll manifesto, outlining an expansive governance framework centred on decentralisation, social welfare, and Tamil identity.

The manifesto proposes a major administrative overhaul, including the creation of multiple functional capitals across Tamil Nadu to ease pressure on Chennai and improve governance. It suggests distributing administrative, legislative, industrial, and cultural functions across cities such as Tiruchi, Chennai, Coimbatore, Madurai, and Kanniyakumari.

The party has placed a strong focus on agriculture, which it regards as the backbone of the economy. It calls for policies to strengthen farmers' livelihoods, protect natural resources, and ensure food security. It also emphasises water management, environmental conservation, and climate resilience.

Poll pitch: NTK chief coordinator Seeman releasing the party's manifesto for the Assembly election in Chennai on Thursday. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

On governance, the manifesto proposes dedicated representation for women in legislative bodies, arguing that existing mechanisms have not ensured adequate participation. It calls for reserved constituencies and institutional changes to improve women's presence in the Assembly and in Parliament.

The manifesto also stresses transparency, decentralised administration, and what it describes as a people-centric model of governance.

The NTK has highlighted prohibition and anti-drug measures as a major plank, linking substance abuse to rising crime and social decline. It has called for strict enforcement and systemic interventions to curb the spread of narcotics. In the social sector, the manifesto lays out a broad welfare framework spanning healthcare, education, and employment, alongside targeted schemes for specific occupational groups.

On education, the party promises equitable access, skill development, and reforms that align learning with employment opportunities and promote Tamil language and knowledge systems. It proposes improvements in public schooling and higher education, along with measures to enhance vocational training and employability.

Sector-specific steps

The manifesto also outlines sector-specific welfare measures. For farmers, it focuses on ensuring fair prices and improving irrigation and resource access. For fisherfolk, it proposes safety measures, livelihood support, and infrastructure development. Labourers and unorganised workers are promised social security and better working conditions, while small traders and entrepreneurs are offered support through policy measures aimed at easing business operations and improving access to markets and finance.

Assembly's average annual sitting days declined from 64 in 1st term to 32 in 16th

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The average annual sitting days of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly had reduced by half, from 64 during the first term (1952-57) to 32 during the 16th term (2021-26), according to an analysis by PRS Legislative Research, an independent research body.

According to the analysis, the 16th Assembly, whose tenure began on May 11, 2021, and is set to conclude on May 10, 2026, met for only 155 days – the lowest duration for a full-term Assembly since 1952. However, data shared by Speaker M. Appavu during his valedictory speech in the Assembly on February 20 stated that the House had met for 161 days.

The average annual sitting days saw a constant reduction from 2006. It was 46 in the 13th Assembly (2006-11), 40 in the 14th Assembly (2011-16), and 34 in the 15th Assembly (2016-21), the analysis said.

During the tenure of the 16th Assembly, 201 Bills were introduced, of which 194 were passed, excluding Finance and Appropriation Bills and seven other Bills that were not considered for the analysis. Of the Bills passed, 78% were cleared by the House on the day of introduction, while 10% were passed within two to five days. The remaining 12% were passed after more than five days of introduction, the analysis said.

During this tenure, 82% of the Bills received assent [from Governor/President] within three months of passage, while nine Bills received assent more than a year after being passed. These include six Bills that were deemed to have received assent following a judgment of the Supreme Court in 2025, the analysis said.

Urban governance, education, and public services emerged as key legislative themes during this tenure, with 13% of the Bills being related to education, 12% pertaining to urban and municipal governance, and 8% pertaining to law and order, according to the analysis.

Report card

The 16th Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly at a glance

The Assembly met for **155 days** - the lowest duration for a full-term Assembly since **1952**

Average annual sitting days dropped from **64** (1st term) to **32** (latest term)

Between 2021 and 2026, a total of **201** Bills were introduced and **194** were passed; none of these were referred to committees*

78% of the Bills were passed within a day of introduction

Most Bills focused on education and urban governance

No Private Members' Bills were introduced

Note: This excludes Finance and Appropriation Bills. Seven Bills with unconfirmed dates of passing have been excluded from the calculation

Source: PRS Legislative Research

State govt. amends rules governing maternity leave

Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu government recently amended the service-related rules governing its women employees to allow relaxation of conditions for availing maternity leave. Under the amendment, maternity leave of 365 days may be granted for one additional delivery, even if a married woman government servant already has two surviving children, born as twins, from her first delivery.

Earlier, in such cases, maternity leave of only two weeks could be granted, and no more than six weeks could precede the expected date of delivery. The Tamil Nadu government's decision, issued through a G.O. dated March 13, followed the Supreme Court's orders dated May 23, 2025, and the Madras High Court's orders dated January 21, 2026.

The government's decision follows Supreme Court and High Court orders. GETTY IMAGES

However, as per the amendment, in the case of a married woman government servant having two or more surviving children, maternity leave on full pay shall be limited to a period not exceeding 12 weeks, which may be availed of from pre-confinement rest to post-confinement recuperation, at the discretion of the government servant.

"Based on the observation made by the Supreme Court of India, it is clear that the restriction of grant of maternity leave to women employees is violative of Article 21 of the Constitution of India," the G.O. issued by Chief Secretary N. Muruganandam for the Human Resources Management Department said.

Referring to the Supreme Court order, the Tamil Nadu government said it had carefully considered the order and the provisions under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, and had further decided to grant maternity leave to women government servants having two or more surviving children, and make suitable amendments to this effect in the Fundamental Rules of the Government of Tamil Nadu, 1922.

Expelled CPI functionary Mathur Sathya arrested

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Mathur Sathya, who was expelled from the CPI following sexual harassment allegations, was arrested on Thursday.

Police sources said he was arrested in Bengaluru, and was being brought to Chennai for further inquiry.

The CPI removed him from its primary membership and all associated organisations after the allegations surfaced. Its south Chennai district secretary S.K. Siva said the decision was taken at a district committee meeting held on March 14.

The party also submitted a complaint to the Greater Chennai City Police Commissioner, seeking action in support of the complainants.

Ahead of polls, veterans switching sides shake up political scene in Kerala

As many as six former legislators shifted allegiance to rival camps and are now in the fray against former comrades; while four from CPI(M) ended ties with the party, two from CPI left for the BJP

K.S. Sudhi
KOCHI

Shifting loyalties is considered commonplace in electoral politics. Yet, long-serving legislators moving to rival political camps and contesting elections is uncommon in the State's political landscape.

But lately, Kerala has been witnessing precisely that trend: former legislators moving to other parties and ideologies they once fought tooth and nail, both inside and outside the Legislative Assembly, and seeking a mandate under the election symbols of their former opponents.

As many as six former legislators have thus shifted their allegiance to rival camps and are in the fray against their former comrades. While four former Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] legislators ended their ties with the party, two from the Communist Party of India (CPI) left for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) camp.

Aisha Potty, a three-time CPI(M) MLA from Kottarakara, ended her decades-long association with the party during the third week of January this year. Ms. Potty, who had headed the Kollam district panchayat as the party nominee from 2000 to 2005, had started gravitating away from the CPI(M) around five years ago when the party chose to replace her with K.N. Balagopal, who later went on to become the State Finance Minister, from the Kottarakara Assembly constituency. The Congress was quick to seize the opportunity and field her from the same constituency.

(Clockwise from top left) G. Sudhakaran, S. Rajendran, Aisha Potty, K. Ajith, P.K. Sasi and C.C. Mukundan. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

However, that decision left its aftershock in the Congress as R. Resmi, the general secretary of Mahila Congress, who unsuccessfully contested against Mr. Balagopal last time, joined the BJP after realising that the Congress would prefer Ms. Potty over her. This time, Ms. Resmi, as BJP candidate, will take on Mr. Balagopal and Ms. Potty.

S. Rajendran, the CPI(M)'s representative from Devikulam in the 2006, 2011, and 2016 elections, joined the BJP. Mr. Rajendran, who was at loggerheads with the party for quite some time, left behind the Marxist ideology and embraced the "nationalist" politics of the BJP. The BJP has dutifully fielded him from the constituency.

Another stalwart to leave the left camp was former Public Works Minister G. Sudhakaran, who was forced to retire from active politics after the party fixed the retirement age as 75 years for its leaders. Mr. Sudhakaran, a four-term legislator, had openly expressed his resentment when he was dropped from the State committee, at the State conference of the party held in Ernakulam in 2022.

Former CPI(M) legislator P.K. Sasi, against whom the Congress had raised serious allegations of sexual misbehaviour, may find a new ally in that party itself following his decision to sever ties with the CPI(M) and to contest as an Independent candidate from Ottappalam. The decision of the United Democratic Front (UDF), of which the Congress is a constituent, will be known shortly.

Two of the CPI's former legislators, K. Ajith, who represented Vaikom for a decade from 2006, and C.C. Mukundan, the first-time MLA from Nattika, decided to forgo their communist legacy and find comfort in the saffron camp. Both Mr. Ajith and Mr. Mukundan have been fielded as BJP candidates from the constituencies.

It's to be seen whether the former legislators would be able to convince the electorate about their newfound affability with their former foes and repeat their electoral performance.

Congress announces second list with 37 candidates in Kerala

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The AICC has stuck to its stand that no sitting MP will be allowed to contest in the Assembly polls

The Congress party on Thursday announced its second list of candidates for the upcoming Assembly elections in Kerala, hours after senior leader K. Sudhakaran made it clear that he will abide by the party's decision.

Among the list of 37 candidates put out by the All India Congress Committee (AICC) are T.O. Mohanan from the Kannur Assembly constituency, which was sought by Mr. Sudhakaran, and Satheesh Kochuparambil from the Konni constituency, which was sought by Adoor Prakash, MP. The AICC stuck to its stand that no sitting MP will be allowed to contest in the Assembly elections in the State.

Seats for Left dissidents

Significantly, the party has not announced any candidates for the Payyannur, Taliparamba and Ottappalam constituencies, where the United Democratic Front (UDF) is expected to lend support to Communist Party of India (Marxist) dissidents.

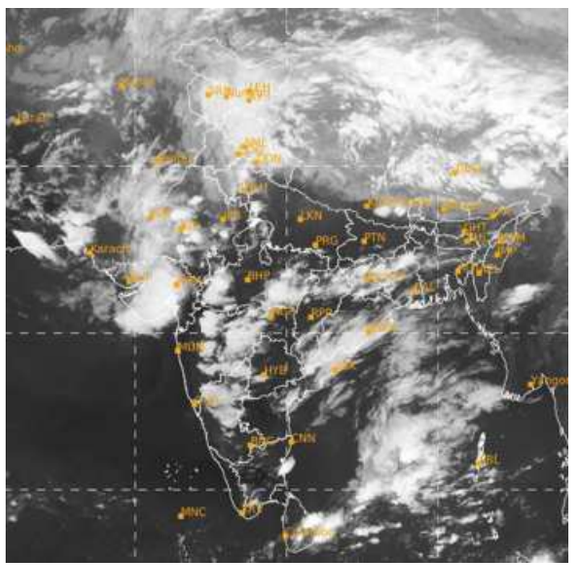
While in Payyannur, the front will support former Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] district committee member V. Kunhikrishnan, in Payyannur, it will support former CPI(M) district secretariat member T.K. Govindan and in Ottappalam, former CPI(M) MLA P.K. Sasi. The party has not announced any candidate for the Ambalappuzha segment as well where it is expected to support former CPI(M) leader G. Sudhakaran.

Sandeep Varier, who quit the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2024, has been fielded from the Thrikkarippur constituency. The Kasaragod District Congress Committee (DCC), which had opposed his candidature, had earlier on Thursday softened its stand following intervention from the party leadership. Abin Varkey has been fielded from the Aranmula constituency, despite local level protests against his candidature.

Soon after the list was announced, incumbent Perumbavoor MLA Eldhose Kunnappilly expressed dissatisfaction as Manoj Moothedan has been fielded from the seat. Ernakulam DCC president Mohammad Shiyas has been fielded from the Kochi constituency, although Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) general secretary Deepthi Mary Varghese had also raised a claim for the seat. Among the other major candidates are M. Liju (Kayamkulam), former Kochi Mayor Tony Chammani (Vypeen), former Speaker N. Sakthan (Neyyattinkara), former Health Minister V.S. Sivakumar (Aruvikkara). Sebastian M.J. will fight from Poonjar constituency.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday


TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.15 HRS)

Forecast for Friday: Heavy/very heavy rainfall likely at isolated places over Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal and Sikkim. Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Bihar, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	31.6	18.5
Ahmedabad	—	35.2	22.5
Aizawl	2.4	30.4	16.2
Allahabad	—	37.2	19.4
Bengaluru	7	31.4	17.4
Bhopal	—	34.2	17.2
Bhubaneswar	—	35.3	22.5
Chandigarh	1.4	20.8	14.7
Chennai	—	32.9	21.2
Coimbatore	—	35.0	21.4
Dehradun	0.6	26.9	16.8
Gangtok	67	20.6	8.7
Goa	—	33.8	24.5
Guwahati	11	28.7	17.4
Hubballi	—	32.0	19.0
Hyderabad	—	32.4	20.5
Imphal	—	27.9	15.9
Jaipur	—	30.1	21.4
Kochi	0.8	32.4	25.8
Kohima	—	18.2	13.0
Kolkata	—	33.8	24.0
Kozhikode	5	34.5	24.6
Kurnool	1	35.5	22.1
Lucknow	—	35.9	20.5
Madurai	—	38.0	23.6
Mangaluru	—	34.1	23.0
Mumbai	—	30.7	21.2
Mysuru	—	33.6	18.0
New Delhi	8	26.8	17.6
Patna	—	34.0	23.9
Port Blair	—	32.2	26.3
Puducherry	—	31.0	21.9
Pune	0.8	36.3	20.6
Raipur	—	33.9	21.3
Ranchi	—	34.3	20.0
Shillong	—	20.6	9.7
Shimla	3	17.0	8.8
Srinagar	12	9.5	5.8
Thiruvananthapuram	—	34.8	24.8
Tiruchi	—	36.5	23.4
Vijayawada	3	33.7	22.2
Visakhapatnam	—	32.5	25.9

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	56	86	31	140	135	
Bengaluru	4	13	38	86	106	
Chennai	19	10	26	18	48	
Delhi	24	58	80	231	—	
Hyderabad	13	17	33	51	78	
Kolkata	21	32	42	33	48	
Lucknow	13	40	33	122	147	
Mumbai	12	70	34	29	66	
Pune	—	91	80	88	116	
Visakhapatnam	12	49	23	42	83	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Angul, Odisha recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 303 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Pampore, Jammu & Kashmir recorded a healthy AQI score of 14

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

SO_2: 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.

NO_2: 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, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & 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

HC orders status quo on appointment of new SNDP directors

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Thursday refused to stay its March 12-order disqualifying Vellappally Natesan and others from holding posts in the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam, and passed an interim order directing status quo till further orders.

This comes after the State government informed the court that a new list of directors had not yet been finalised.

Thursday's order comes after Mr. Natesan, who was general secretary of the SNDP Yogam, and Tushar Vellappally, who was vice-president, approached the court challenging the order.

The court, in its March 12-order, disqualified them from the posts following a finding that they had violated the Companies Act, 2013, by failing to file audited accounts of the SNDP Yogam for three consecutive years.

The high court had also ordered the appointment of a new board of directors, acting on petitions from late literary critic M.K. Sanoo and others, who accused the officers of not submitting financial statements and questioned an IG (Registration) order allowing them to continue.

The case will be heard again on Monday.

Telangana SIT set to probe phone data in farmhouse drugs case

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Investigators in the Moinabad farmhouse drugs case in Telangana are set to analyse extracted mobile phone data and call detail records, with electronic intelligence collection to identify linked consumers, peddlers and suppliers.

Officials close to the probe said that the findings in the coming days are expected to help establish the origin and wider network behind the drugs.

Three accused, including former MLA Pilot Rohith Reddy, were produced before the court, where police sought custody for further investigation. The matter will be heard on Friday. The other accused include Rohith Reddy's brother Rakesh Reddy and Namith Sharma.

Police have sought their custody for 10 days, stating that further interrogation was required to gather evidence and examine possible links, while the defence opposed the request.

The case pertains to a raid conducted on March 14 at a farmhouse in Moinabad belonging to Pilot Rohith Reddy, where two grams of cocaine was reportedly seized. Ten persons present at the premises were detained, including Putta Mahesh Kumar, MP from Eluru, and Moraganeni Ramesh.

BJP declares candidates for Bagalkote and Davangere

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI/BENGALURU

The BJP on Thursday announced its candidates for the Assembly bypolls in Karnataka's Bagalkote and Davangere South constituencies, which have fallen vacant, necessitating fresh elections.

The party has fielded Veerabhadrayya Charantimath from Bagalkote and Srinivas T. Dasakariyappa from Davangere South.

The decision was taken at a meet of the BJP's Central Election Committee under the chairmanship of party leader Nitin Nabin, with Prime Minister and others in attendance.

Government of Maharashtra
Office of the Executive Engineer
Construction Division (Special Project) Nagpur
E-Mail:- constdivnagpur.ee@mahapwd.com **Telephone No 0712-2562976**

E-Tender Notice No. 67 Year 2025-26

Online E-Tenders in works "B-2 Forms" are invited by Executive Engineer Construction Division (Special Project) Nagpur for the following works from the Registered Contractor. The tender documents should be downloaded from the Government. Website **https://mahatenders.gov.in** The competent authority reserves the right to accept or reject any or all the tenders. Conditional Tenders will not be accepted.

Sr No.	Name of Work	Estimated Cost (In Rs / Lakhs)
01	Cement Concrete and construction of Four Lane of Kamthi-Kalmana (MDR-45) Tal.Kamptee Dist. Nagpur	Rs.2400.00 Lakhs
02	Cement concrete and construction of Four Lane of Bhilgaon to Ranala in Babulkheda-koradi-suradevi-khasala-bhilgaon-ranala-ghorpad (MDR-40) Tal. Kamptee Dist. Nagpur	Rs.2000.00 Lakhs
03	Tender Download: As per e-tender schedule uploaded on e-portalhttp://mahatenders.gov.in Tender pre-Bid Meeting:- As per e-tender schedule uploaded on e-portalhttp://mahatenders.gov.in E-Tender Opening;-Online Tinie Table will be applicable and it will be Final.	

All information of e-tendering is available on the following websites/Notice Board.
1) **https://https://mahatenders.gov.in** (If there is any changes in the notice, then the information will be communicated on the above websites) Online Time Table will be applicable and it will be Final.
2) Executive Engineer, Construction Division (Special Project) Nagpur Office Notice Board.
3) For any correspondance contact Above mention e-mail & Telephone No.
4) On Date of downloading of Tender, submit Copy of Tender and Annexre in Envelope No. 1 to this division.

Outward No/ 1528/Tender/Dt.16/3/2026

Sd/-
(Parag Thamke)
Executive Engineer,
Construction Division (S.P.)
Nagpur

DGIPR/2025/2026/6684

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संख्या : जीएसयू/सीपीएम/जेपी/निविदा/26–27 दिनांक : 18.03.2026
इस कार्यालय द्वारा ज्ञापित खुली निविदा सूचना संख्याः जीएसयू/ सीपीएम/जेपी/निविदा/25–26 दिनांक 06.03.2026 में निविदा सं० गति – शक्ति /इन्जी./जेपी/2025 – 26 / 22 जो दिनांक 31.03.2026 को खोली जानी थी । उक्त निविदा अब दिनांक 07.04.2026 को खोली जावेगी । इस निविदा में पुर्व में डाली गई तकनीकी बिड और वितीय बिड को हटाकर नई तकनीकी बिड, वितीय बिड और ठेके की सामान्य शर्तो की शुद्धि पत्र संख्या 11 को वेब साइट **www.ireps.gov.in** पर डाली गई है कृपया नई तकनीकी बिड, वितीय बिड और ठेके की सामान्य शर्तो की शुद्धि पत्र सख्या 11 को मध्य नजर रखते हुये निविदा प्रस्तुत करे। यह अन्य शर्ते यथावत रहेगी।
390-CR/26 **उप. मुख्य इंजी. (जी.एस.यु.) जयपुर**
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OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

SRI.RAGHAVAN.V, 74 years, from Poonammallee/ Wayanad. Passed away on 17th March 2026. Mob: 9446064023

WITH DEEP sorrow, we announce the passing of Mr. Ramana (R R) Prasad on 18th March 2026 in Bangalore. He will be deeply missed and fondly remembered by all who knew him. He is survived by his wife, Indra; son, Karthick & family; daughter Meenakshi & family.

With profound grief, we announce the passing away of
Smt. S. Visalam,
W/o Sri G. S. Subbaraman on 18.03.2026
Families of Ramkumar, Anuradha Narayanan and Balasubramanian

SAD DEMISE

Shri A N RADHAKRISHNAN (88)
Former Correspondent - PS Senior Secondary School & Former Director - Shriram Group of Companies expired on 19.03.2026 at his residence.
Malathi, Shyamala, Sunandini.

IN MEMORY OF YOUR LOVED ONES
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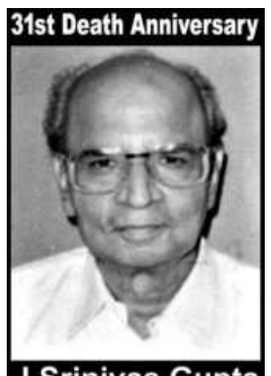
DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

9th ANNIVERSARY

N. RANJAN
10.05.1952 - 20.03.2017
Fondly remembered by
FAMILY MEMBERS & STAFF OF Pillai & Sons Motor Co.
CHENNAI, THANJAVUR, TRICHY & BRANCHES & HAWK TECHNOLOGIES (P) LTD

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

31st Death Anniversary


J.Srinivas Gupta
29 Oct 1929 - 20 March 1995
"Built on your principles, guided by your legacy"
Sar v Sri™
Morulaa Health Tech Pvt Ltd™
Morulaa Enterprises Pvt Ltd
Alxelar Innovations Pvt Ltd

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

26th ANNIVERSARY

27.07.1971 20.03.2000
Dr. V. VENKATESH
(Venky) M.B.B.S., F.R.C.S.
When someone you love becomes a memory, the Memory becomes a treasure-
You are always in our heart's
Dr. K. Vaidyanathan - Mrs. V. Vasantha
Dr. V. Anand Kumar MDS - Mrs. A. Anandhi BE
Mr. Suresh .S BE MS - Mrs. Anu Suresh MA
& Children

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

IN LOVING MEMORY
Professor K.R.Rajagopal
Distinguished Professor, Texas A & M University
Distinguished Professor, IIT Madras

1950 - 2025
Forever in our Hearts & Minds,
Chandrika Rajagopal
Keshava & Shilpa Rajagopal
Sudarshan & Kavita Rajagopal
Grandchildren and Family

Fire and fury

Donald Trump's miscalculation in Iran is hurting the whole world

Benjamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump have brought death and destruction to Asia and economic havoc on the whole world by launching an ill-conceived, illegal war on Iran on February 28. Twenty days on, Iran continues to fire missiles and drones at Israel and neighbouring Persian Gulf countries hosting U.S. bases. Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, along with retaliatory strikes on oil and gas facilities in the Gulf countries, have driven up energy prices, threatening the global economy. The irony is stark: Mr. Trump, who won the presidency twice, campaigning on opposing America's "forever wars", has now led the U.S., at Israel's behest, into another disastrous conflict. After the initial window for regime change closed, Mr. Trump sent mixed signals. He said he had authorised talks; when Iran refused, he ordered a strike on Kharg Island, the country's main energy export terminal. Israel then escalated the conflict further by assassinating Ali Larijani, Iran's Security Council Secretary and a key link between the Revolutionary Guards, who are leading the war effort, and the political establishment, as well as Iran's Intelligence Minister and the commander of the Basij paramilitary force. On Wednesday, Israel crossed another red line by attacking Iran's South Pars gas field, triggering Iranian strikes on energy sites in Qatar, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Many had warned even before the war began that an all-out attack on Iran could trigger a regional crisis. Mr. Trump, who until recently sought the Nobel Peace Prize, went ahead regardless. With over a dozen American soldiers killed, more than a hundred wounded, U.S. bases under attack, and rising oil, gas, and fertilizer prices, he now faces growing political backlash at home. On March 17, Joe Kent resigned as Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, claiming that the U.S. entered the war "due to pressure from Israel and its powerful American lobby". It is now clear that Mr. Trump did not anticipate such a prolonged conflict. Even if Mr. Trump wants to declare victory and end the bombing, he faces two hurdles: Iran can continue attacking targets in the Gulf and Israel; and the Strait of Hormuz remains shut. If Mr. Trump prefers further escalation, he could end up sending ground troops to Iran, an extremely risky gamble, or expanding the war to the region's energy infrastructure, a move that could cripple the global economy. The only viable option is diplomacy. Mr. Trump should engage Iran through a mediator with access to all sides and pursue a mutually workable deal. Tehran should stop holding the global economy hostage and reopen the Hormuz Strait as part of a ceasefire. A deal could still be possible if the U.S. offers credible guarantees against future American or Israeli aggression.

Losing the way

ISRO must fix issues before launch of next second-generation satellites

ISRO's NavIC constellation, for which it has launched 11 satellites since 2013, is in operational distress. Only three satellites remain capable of providing position, navigation, and timing (PNT) services, leaving the constellation unable to fulfil its purpose of replacing the U.S.'s GPS system over the Indian subcontinent. A PNT constellation requires at least four PNT-capable satellites, and India had only four until ISRO said an atomic clock onboard the IRNSS-1F satellite failed on March 13. The constellation's first-generation satellites use rubidium atomic clocks made by Swiss company SpectraTime, and which have been dogged by failure. ISRO's latest attempt to launch a second-generation satellite, NVS-02, was abortive after the machine was left in the wrong orbit. IRNSS-1F, launched in March 2016, completed its 10-year design life just three days before its clock failed. Eight other satellites have either been decommissioned, have failed to reach orbit or have bad clocks. In 2018, ISRO transitioned to using indigenous rubidium atomic clocks, developed by the ISRO-Space Applications Centre. NVS-01, launched in May 2023, was the first to carry the device; all second-generation NVS series satellites will too.

Part of NavIC's genesis was the U.S.'s refusal to share GPS data over Kargil during the 1999 war, and it continues to function largely as a defence programme managed by ISRO. However, while the space sector reforms in 2020 vouchsafed ISRO for R&D and NewSpace India for commercialisation, the absence of a national space law leaves ISRO acting as both designer and operator of NavIC, overextending the agency. Equally, India lacks a counterpart to the GPS Directorate or EUSPA, which respectively manage the GPS and Galileo constellations. The new generation of rubidium clocks also faces procurement challenges and ISRO has proposed equipping each satellite with five atomic clocks instead of the previous three. The constellation has been degrading faster than it can be replenished, due to ISRO's poor launch rate. This problem stems from several factors, including issues with the PSLV, an insufficient budget that must maintain a PNT constellation, an upcoming human spaceflight programme, several earth-observation satellites, and R&D for new rockets. ISRO is also hand-holding start-ups that have yet to get a grip on launching rockets to low-earth orbit. Meanwhile, the Union government has encouraged electronics manufacturers to support the L1 band of the NVS series for better interoperability with GPS while expecting its use by the armed forces. For all these reasons, ISRO's plan to launch three more second-generation satellites in 2026 does little to inspire confidence.

New GDP series, charting the path ahead

G.C. Manna

is a professor at the Institute for Human Development, Senior Adviser at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), and a Member of the Advisory Committee on National Accounts Statistics

A much-awaited new GDP series with the base year as 2022-23 is now available in the public domain. On February 27, 2026, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation came out with a press note on a new series of GDP estimates and related aggregates for the financial years 2022-23, 2023-24 and 2024-25. This addresses the long-standing demand for a more accurate and realistic picture of the size of the Indian economy by updating the base year. It overcomes the limitations of earlier estimates, which relied on the outdated 2011-12 base year.

The overall size of the Indian economy in terms of GDP as per the new series at current prices (in rupees lakh crore) is estimated to be 261.18 (financial year 2022-23), 289.84 (FY 2023-24) and 318.07 (2024-25), respectively (first revised estimate). These aggregates are marginally (between 3% and 4%) lower than what were released earlier based on the previous series. The relative shares of primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in total Gross Value Added (GVA) at current prices during 2024-25 remained at 21.4%, 25.8% and 52.9%, respectively. The manufacturing sector depicts a high growth rate (more than 9%) in real GVA for both the years: 12.7% in 2023-24 and 9.3% in 2024-25. As regards the expenditure side estimates, the share of private financial consumption expenditure in GDP is around 56%, both at current and constant prices during the years 2023-24 and 2024-25.

Major refinements in the new series

Some of the most significant refinements in the methodology adopted in the new series include: first, segregation of activities of multi-activity enterprises belonging to non-financial private corporate sector by apportioning the total GVA of the enterprise across its business activities using the corresponding revenue share information of the company available in the form of MGT 7/7A data (as against entire GVA being allocated to the major activity of the enterprise in 2011-12 series); second, use of a separate blown up factor at the industry x size class level, based on paid-up capital, for scaling up the GVA of the reported active companies to account for the contribution of the active companies which did not file returns; third, a comprehensive coverage of Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs) using Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) data; and fourth, the use of high-frequency (annual) data on GVA per worker (GVAPW) as per the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) in conjunction with the estimates of the number of workers utilising the information available through Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) to estimate the GVA contribution of the Household Sector. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that in the 2011-12 series, base year (2011-12) GVA estimates at the activity level for the Household Sector were extrapolated using suitable indicators to derive GVA for subsequent years.

> Updating the ASI sampling frame and refining the ASUSE survey methodology can further enhance the accuracy and reliability of GDP and GSDP estimates

The new series also introduces significant improvements in the estimation of real GVA through the expanded application of 'double deflation' and 'volume extrapolation' methods, bringing the estimates more in line with international guidelines. In addition, the benchmark estimates for 2022-23 private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) are now derived more directly by utilising data from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES 2022-23), especially for items that are widely consumed across household groups and tend to exhibit low income elasticity.

The challenges ahead

Among the four institutional sectors, namely, general government, public corporations, private corporations and households for which GVA estimates are separately computed and then aggregated, the database of the first two sectors is quite robust. Coming to the private corporate sector, particularly the private non-financial corporate segment, for which GVA is compiled using the MCA database – a critical issue lies in allocating the national-level total GVA of companies across States to derive the corresponding Gross State Value Added (GSVA), given that the primary data are available only at the enterprise level.

In the 2011-12 series, total manufacturing GVA at the national level was allocated proportionately over States by using their shares in GVA as per the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI). In the new series, apart from ASI data (confining to manufacturing sector), the GST data is also available for this purpose. A major limitation with the ASI data is the inadequacy of the ASI frame. To illustrate, the number of companies in 2011-12, as on December 15, 2014, as per the MCA database classified under 'Manufacturing' was 135,802 (source: Changes in Methodology and Data Sources in the New Series of National Accounts, Base Year 2011-12, Central Statistics Office, 2015) as against only 67,649 factories covered under the corporate sector in ASI, 2011-12 (Table 7, Principal Characteristics by Type of Organisation in ASI 2011-2012 (Revised)). Accordingly, the proportionate shares of different States in the total GVA derived from the ASI based on a truncated frame may not reflect the reality and hence affect the State GDP figure. Remedial measures to improve the sampling frame of ASI by utilising the MCA and GST databases can be a step in the right direction. In parallel, a properly designed sample survey of active companies could be worth exploring to derive the percentage shares of different States in total GVA by the companies.

Resolving fluctuations

As regards the Household Sector, its GVA at the activity, i.e., 'compilation category' level in the new series is derived as the product of GVAPW as per the ASUSE and number of workers based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). This necessitates that the corresponding estimates from the surveys are fairly reliable. However, available results from the ASUSE indicate a certain volatility in the estimates across the years for some industries and States.

For example, the all-India annual estimates of GVAPW (rural and urban combined) as per the ASUSE (covering both household sector and 'quasi-corporate' units) for the years 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 were found to be ₹163,078; ₹255,447; and ₹201,930, respectively, for the 'manufacture of rubber and plastic products' which is a distinct compilation category in GDP calculations.

Similarly, the annual estimates of GVAPW pertaining to the manufacturing industry in respect of Bihar were found to be ₹89,638; ₹117,021; and ₹100,101, respectively, for the three years. To address this problem, the methodology in the new series recommends the use of three years' moving average, wherever necessary, except for the base year. However, in resolving the issue of such fluctuations in the annual estimates of GVAPW, it may be worth exploring whether a rotating panel design in the ASUSE with a substantial overlap in the samples between any two consecutive years – similar to the procedure adopted in the PLFS – can yield better estimates.

Finally, to conclude, updating the ASI frame and refinements in the survey methodology of ASUSE can be effective in further improvement of the GDP and GSDP estimates.

The views expressed are personal

AI-powered tax governance in India and its challenges

Sthanu R. Nair

teaches economics and public policy at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Kozhikode, Kerala

Ranjith Gundaboina

works on Artificial Intelligence applications in financial services and was an Assistant Manager at the State Bank of India, managing credit portfolios and risk assessment

A key tax policy challenge facing India has been the low tax-Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio and high levels of tax evasion. On average, during 2001-22, India's tax-GDP ratio (16.36%) was the lowest among emerging and developing economies. India loses around 4.3% of tax revenues due to tax evasion annually. At the India AI Impact Summit (February 2026), global leaders and tech titans hailed India's progress in utilising the power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to solve real-world problems.

One problem area where the application of AI is worth examining is tax revenue mobilisation and tax governance. In this context, India's Income Tax Department (ITD)'s Project Insight (PI) initiative – aimed at leveraging AI and data analytics to strengthen tax administration and revenue mobilisation – warrants critical examination.

The benefits

Launched in 2017 and fully operational in 2019, the PI aims to encourage voluntary tax compliance, reduce high-risk cases of potential tax evasion, make tax enforcement fairer and equitable, and reduce prejudice in tax enforcement.

The PI has three components. The Income Tax Transaction Analysis Centre (INTRAC) is the analytical engine that utilises AI and advanced data analytics to process financial data from multiple sources, including banking and financial institutions, property and securities transactions, credit card and GST payments, and high-value purchases, to generate a 360-degree taxpayer financial profile.

Such information helps the ITD detect inconsistencies between taxpayers' declared income and their actual financial activities. The Compliance Management Centralized Processing Centre ensures behavioural compliance using information from the INTRAC. It nudges taxpayers who have filed incorrect tax returns to file correct returns using the Non-intrusive Usage of Data to Guide and Enable (NUDGE) strategy, which involves sending SMS or email reminders to the person pay taxes that match their actual economic activities. Taxpayers can either submit a revised tax return or stand by the initial returns they filed. Deploying AI in tax administration has several benefits. First, it can assist tax agencies in accurately assessing taxpayers' risk profiles and identifying tax evasion. Second, it enables tax administrators to prioritise tax evasion cases based on the size and sophistication of evasion. Third, AI can automate routine tax administration tasks, freeing tax administrators to focus on those that require greater human judgment. Fourth, AI can enhance taxpayer services by assisting taxpayers with filing correct tax returns, answering queries through smart chatbots, and preventing tax scams.

> Artificial Intelligence in India's tax administration is improving outcomes, but safeguards are needed

Outcome of PI initiative, concerns and risks

The PI is beginning to show the results. After receiving nudges, many taxpayers utilised the ITD's updated-return feature to make voluntary changes to their original tax returns. Since 2020-21, over one crore revised returns have been filed, resulting in an additional ₹11,000 crore in taxes. Out of the 19,501 taxpayers contacted by the ITD as part of a targeted Foreign Income and Assets NUDGE campaign, 62% of them corrected the information originally reported in their tax returns. Also, 30,161 tax filers declared overseas assets totalling ₹29,208 crore and foreign income of ₹1,089 crore from cryptocurrencies or virtual digital assets.

The NUDGE campaign covering 6.25 lakh taxpayers resulted in corrections of false claims for income-tax deductions amounting to ₹963 crore for political donations, and the payment of additional taxes to the tune of ₹410 crore. The average time taken to process a tax refund has decreased from 93 to 17 days. Recently, using big data analysis and AI tools, the ITD discovered that restaurants across India had suppressed sales turnover of ₹70,000 crore since 2019-20 using sophisticated methods such as selective deletion of cash invoices, post-billing modifications, wiping of sales data, and manipulation of bill value.

Many advanced countries, such as Australia, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States have successfully implemented AI-enabled platforms modelled on the PI and have generated additional revenue.

As India transitions to algorithmic tax governance, several operational, ethical, and legal issues require serious attention.

The first is about data provenance and quality. AI systems such as the PI are only as good as the data they are trained on. They could identify outliers, but cannot always distinguish evasion from legitimate complexity. Data on variable-income professionals using prior savings, clerical errors, or joint family financial structures can trigger false positives. Without accessible human review, taxpayers must prove the legitimacy of flagged patterns.

The second is on the algorithmic bias. AI models trained on historical enforcement data can unintentionally duplicate existing socio-economic or geographic biases, identifying tax fraud more often in some taxpayer or geographic areas than others, as demonstrated by the Dutch childcare benefits scandal.

The third is on the issue of explainability and due process. For an AI-based tax compliance system to be legitimate, taxpayers need to know why they were identified, how their information is used, how the system arrives at its decisions, and have a clear, easy way to challenge decisions. There must be a human-in-the-loop evaluation for any decision with serious consequences for taxpayers.

The fourth is about the concerns over data privacy and security. Accessing sensitive financial and personal information about taxpayers creates a big attack surface for potential exploitation.

There is no ombudsman

Finally, India lacks an AI ombudsperson to review contested decisions, a requirement for algorithmic impact assessments and public reporting of false-positive and appeal-success rates, and external audits of risk-scoring models.

Without such strong AI governance guardrails outlined above, the PI might turn into a hidden surveillance system that compromises accountability and tax system fairness, making taxpayers less trusting and more resistant. India must make a clear choice: to pursue a modern tax intelligence system that is both ethical and effective.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'Industry' definition

It is quite surprising that a nine-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India has been constituted to reconsider the definition of industry under the repealed Industrial Disputes Act. The definition came to be settled in the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board case (1978 2 SCC 213) and has stood the test of time for almost 50 years, providing a democratic forum to the working class. It is perplexing that the Court is going into the correctness of the earlier definition when the new definition itself is under scrutiny. Though the earlier interpretation was wide, workers were hard-pressed to get any relief. If, at this distance of time, the interpretation is now narrowed, many workers who had at least had a forum will be left without one. While it is true that Parliament can amend the law, any interpretation that leads to under-inclusion would be in gross violation of Articles 14 and 21.

N.G.R. Prasad,
Chennai

Children in the crossfire

The loss of children in any war is a grave humanitarian crisis. In the context of the Iran-Israel-U.S. conflict, actions such as airstrikes, attacks and regional instability have led to casualties of children on both sides. Children are often displaced, facing risks of diseases and lacking access to basic necessities. Also, conflicts disrupt education, depriving children of learning opportunities. While war causes massive casualties across all demographics, the long-term, structural and physical devastation disproportionately impacts children, often leading to life-long trauma or premature death (Opinion page – Data Point, "Children have borne the brunt of Israel-U.S. aggression", March 19). Global leaders, therefore, must prioritise diplomacy over escalation, uphold international law, and ensure that all states renew their commitment to global stability and the mechanisms designed to protect children in armed conflicts.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

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

How far should governments go in using AI?

Isha Suri

Research Lead at the Centre for Internet and Society

Raman Jit Singh Chima

Asia Pacific Policy Director and Senior International Counsel at Access Now, a nonprofit committed to defending digital rights

PARLEY

As governments begin deploying Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in public administration, national security and policymaking, questions about its safe usage and accountability have taken centre-stage. The issue came into focus in the U.S. after reports revealed a dispute between the Pentagon and AI company Anthropic, which refused to remove safeguards that were in place to prevent mass surveillance and the usage of autonomous weapons. The incident underscored a deeper tension between governments seeking to deploy AI systems and the companies that control them. As states collaborate more closely with AI companies, who ultimately governs the systems that govern us? Isha Suri and Raman Jit Singh Chima discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Areena Arora**. Edited excerpts:

What kinds of state capacity could AI actually strengthen? And where should governments be cautious about relying on it?

Raman Jit Singh Chima: It depends on the problem a government is trying to solve and who it is dealing with. AI can sometimes have transformative effects, such as improving access to data or enabling better analysis, but it is often deployed without clarity on the problem, the data available, or the costs involved. There are also high-risk areas such as facial recognition, surveillance, and certain health applications, where misuse can lead to significant harm. In such cases, a 'do no harm' principle should apply, and in some contexts, outright prohibition may be justified.

Isha Suri: AI systems tend to work best in well-scoped use cases. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, image-processing tools could distinguish between different types of lung infections because the problem was clearly defined and the parameters were known.

Governments should begin by defining the objective of deploying AI. That clarity is often missing. Before adopting any system, they should ask whether AI is necessary, whether less intrusive alternatives exist, and what the risks are. A necessity and proportionality test is critical. AI should not be adopted simply because it exists.

If sharing more data with AI systems make government services faster and more efficient, why should people worry about privacy? What harms are on the table?

IS: We need to question what 'efficiency' means and for whom. Evidence on productivity gains is still weak. In many cases, efficiency claims translate into labour substitution. There is also a lack of transparency. Data collected for one purpose can be used elsewhere. Welfare data can be used for policing or denying benefits.

The idea that citizens are okay with sharing data assumes informed consent, which is often not the case. Many people do not fully understand how their data is used. In countries like India, what is often framed as cultural comfort with lower privacy is actually a function of low digital literacy.

So, individuals may make decisions without full information, while the long-term consequences unfold. That is why the state must anticipate harms and build safeguards at the design stage, not after deployment.

Dangerous mix: Logos of the U.S. Department of War and Anthropic. REUTERS

RC: The idea that better AI requires more personal data is flawed. It benefits certain commercial actors but it's not technically necessary. More data is not always better. It can be inefficient, risky, and beneficial mainly to companies that rely on large-scale data extraction and compute-heavy infrastructure. There are alternatives. Smaller models, for instance, use limited data and can produce clearer outputs. There are also on-device AI systems that do not require constant data transfer to large data centres. We should challenge the assumption that handing over data is the price of better services.

AI companies say they need access to large public datasets to build better systems. Should governments treat these datasets as strategic national assets, or can they be shared with private companies to accelerate development?

RC: We should be very wary of the idea that data is something that can be monetised. Opening data up to private actors creates risks for privacy, security and sovereignty. It also repeats past mistakes where public systems were handed over without adequate safeguards.

> If domestic systems are built on infrastructure or partnerships controlled by large global companies, then we are not truly building indigenous capability. We are simply layering on top of existing dependencies
>
> ISHA SURI

IS: Framing data as a national or economic asset is problematic because it shifts attention away from its nature as a fundamental right tied to privacy. There are also issues of consent. Citizens may provide data for one purpose, but not for its use in commercial partnerships. We also need to question who is driving the demand for access to large datasets. Often, it is private companies with clear economic incentives.

Ultimately, what we risk is a situation where public data and public money enable private extraction of value, with limited accountability. That makes it critical for governments to step back and evaluate who benefits from such arrangements and whether they align with public interest.

Governments have always worked with the private sector. Should we treat or fear AI differently in that partnership?

RC: We should learn from past digital infrastructure projects. Systems should not be deployed first and regulated later. There is also a risk that technology becomes an end in itself. Governments may expand systems not because they improve outcomes, but to justify prior investments. Large partnerships can also lock governments into costly and inflexible arrangements.

IS: Projects like Aadhaar and DigiYatra should be seen as cautionary examples. Trade-offs in welfare delivery cannot be treated lightly. Even small exclusion rates can have severe consequences. There are also accountability gaps when public infrastructure is run through hybrid or private entities.

If other governments begin adopting AI and it becomes inevitable globally, should India adopt it as well?

RC: Governments should not follow global trends blindly. AI should be used only where it advances public interest and democratic values. Policymakers should focus on practical concerns like data protection, procurement and market concentration.

IS: The idea of inevitability is overstated and often driven by industry narratives. Governments should define their own objectives instead of reacting to the fear of missing out.

If other governments adopt AI more fluently, does India risk falling behind?

RC: If we are concerned about artificial general intelligence, the focus should be on building foundational scientific capacity.

The current industry narrative suggests that supporting large AI companies and their infrastructure is the way to get there. That may actually be a distraction from building real capabilities. If you look at India's past, investments in core science enabled major programmes in space and nuclear development. A similar approach is needed here if we want sovereign technological capability.

IS: We also need to question what it means to "fall behind." AI is not just an application, it is a full stack, including compute, data and models. If domestic systems are built on infrastructure or partnerships controlled by large global companies, then we are not truly building indigenous capability. We are simply layering on top of existing dependencies. This creates risks of lock-in and long-term dependence on foreign technology monopolies. It also raises concerns about sovereignty and control. At the same time, a lot of the hype around artificial general intelligence and superintelligence may be diverting attention from present-day harms, including labour impacts, environmental costs and concentration of power.

So where does that leave us?

RC: Be cautious about how and where AI is deployed in government. Focus on clear use cases, avoid unnecessary dependence on large private players, and prioritise public interest, security and long-term sustainability.

IS: Governments need to clearly define their objectives before adopting any technology. Ask whether AI is necessary, and whether the risks are proportional to the benefits.

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

NOTEBOOK

Interviews do not have to be confrontational to be news-worthy

Why timely interviews are necessary and how it can help readers stay ahead of political developments

Vijaita Singh

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk was released from detention on March 14 after being imprisoned in Jodhpur, Rajasthan for 170 days. The news, which was announced through a press release by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), surprised many. However, readers of *The Hindu* may have seen it coming.

A week before the release, Mr. Wangchuk's wife and co-founder of the Himalayan Institute of Alternative Learning, Gitanjali J. Angmo, was approached by this newspaper for an interview.

As someone who has been covering the Ladakh issue since 2020, when civil society groups in the newly created Union Territory (UT) started campaigning for constitutional safeguards, there has always been a deep curiosity and shock about the events that unfolded in Leh city on September 24, 2025. The protest to demand Statehood and inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution – which would give the region tribal status, and provide more autonomy to the locals in deciding who they can sell their land to – turned violent, leaving four people dead.

Such violence from a place known for its peaceful agitation and silent marches was disturbing. It was therefore important to keep the readers informed by regularly following-up on such events. Two days after the incident, on September 26, a police team blocked the roads leading to Mr. Wangchuk's home at his village in Uleytokpo, 70 km from Leh, and later, in his own words, "bundled" and took him to Jodhpur prison, around 1,400 km away.

Ms. Angmo, who was at work was informed by a police official that he was being taken to Rajasthan. For one-week there was no further information from the police, following which, Ms. Angmo filed a *habeas corpus* petition in the Supreme Court. In the meantime, the Ladakh administration stated that Mr. Wangchuk had been booked under the National Security Act (NSA), a provision where an individual can be put behind bars for a year without trial based on executive orders.

For the past five months, Ms. Angmo has been living out of a suitcase, dividing time between Delhi and Jodhpur, attending court hearings and apprising Mr. Wangchuk of the judicial progress. When she agreed for the interview, the idea was to bring forth her struggle and inform readers about her journey navigating the legal labyrinth in Delhi and the emotional toll it takes to face the system.

On being asked a specific question of whether Mr. Wangchuk will continue to protest if the top court ordered his release, Ms. Angmo said he would rather seek a resolution to their demands through dialogue than pursue the path of agitation. After the story was published, there was consternation among his followers on social media that he was abandoning the movement. On March 12, a post on his X account said that he has not stepped away from activism but it will require "clarity, unity, and sincere dialogue." On March 17, in his first remarks after the release, he reiterated that he does not see protests as the way forward and would instead prioritise dialogue. "Talks are a give and take process, both sides have to be flexible and considerate," he said, adding that unnecessary prolonging of dialogue would hamper meaningful conversation.

The Supreme Court had finalised the hearing and was expected to deliver the verdict soon. Though he was released ahead of the hearing on the petition challenging the NSA order, and two days before the protest called by civil society groups in Leh and Kargil, he insisted that there were no conditions imposed by the Centre upon his release. The Ladakhis on the other hand went ahead with the protest on March 16 to press for their demands.

The readers and his followers may derive their own conclusions about Mr. Wangchuk's politics and his plans ahead, but the episode showed the importance of timely interviews. Interviews do not have to be confrontational to be news-worthy.

vijaita.singh@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Long way down

Steady jaunt: An adult male Nilgiri Tahr descends a steep rocky terrain in the Anamalai Tiger Reserve along the Ghat section of the Pollachi-Valparai Road in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu on March 14. With grasses and shrubs withering with the onset of summer, Nilgiri Tahrs navigate these vast stretches in search of green fodder. PERIASAMY M.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1976

MPs question need to impound additional DA

New Delhi, March 19: The proposed reduction in income tax rates was widely welcomed but the need for continuing the impounding of additional incomes to workers was questioned by members in the Lok Sabha as the House continued general debate on the budget to-day.

The record rise in Plan outlay was described as a significant feature of the budget with the right emphasis on agriculture.

Mr. C. M. Stephen, Deputy Leader of the Congress Parliamentary Party, welcomed the reduction in income tax rates, the concession in respect of house construction and the proposal to give investment allowance for stepping up industrial production.

But he did not see any justification for continuing the impounding of additional income of workers.

Mrs. Mukul Banerjee (Cong.) also suggested that the compulsory deposit scheme should be abolished as promised by the Government last year.

Dr. N. N. Kailas (Cong.) suggested that the income tax exemption level be raised to Rs. 12,000 in view of the substantial decline in the value of the rupee.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 20, 1926

Northern India chamber of commerce

Lahore, March 19: On the occasion of the third annual general meeting of the Northern India Chamber of Commerce which was held to-day, the members of the Chamber gave a luncheon party to a number of prominent citizens of Lahore, mostly businessmen, at the Masonic Hall, at which the Governor of the Punjam who was the principal guest, was present. After Mr. Horn, Vice-Chairman, read the report of the Committee on the position of the Northern India Chamber and its activities up-to-date, His Excellency, Sir Malcolm Hailey, delivered a short address to the Chambers.

From Page One

Israel won't hit Iran gas facility again: Trump

The UAE suspended operations at Abu Dhabi's Habshan gas facility after authorities said debris of intercepted missiles fell on the site. The Bab oil field in the Emirate was also targeted by Iranian projectiles.

Qatar's state-run energy firm Qatar Energy said on Wednesday that its Ras Laffan Industrial City, one of the most critical energy hubs in the world which handles roughly 20% of the global LNG exports, came under attack. On Thursday, it said several of the company's LNG facilities were hit by Iranian missiles, causing "extensive damage".

Meanwhile, American media quoted Israeli officials as saying that the U.S. was informed in advance about the South Pars strike. South Pars is part of an offshore gas reservoir in the Persian Gulf shared by Qatar and Iran. Iran on Wednesday evening said it targeted energy facilities in Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Israel after several phases at South Pars came under attack.

The Iranian attacks "constitute a dangerous escalation and a violation of international law", the UAE's Foreign Ministry said in a statement. "The UAE reserves its full right to take all necessary measures to protect its sovereignty and national security, and to safeguard its national interests." The Foreign Ministry of Qatar declared "the military attaché and the security attaché at the [Iranian] embassy [in Doha], in addition to the staff of the two attaché offices 'persona non grata'," and asked them to leave the country within 24 hours.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said the kingdom reserves the right to take military actions "if deemed necessary" in response to the Iranian attacks. "What little trust there was before has completely been shattered... We're going to use every lever we have... to get these attacks to stop," he said.

Later in the day, Iran's Foreign Minster Abbas Araghchi signalled that Iran was ready for restraint but threatened to escalate if its energy facilities were attacked again.

Stock markets crash as oil hits $114 a barrel

The sudden slump towards the final trading hours was due to soaring Brent crude futures price hitting a new high of $114 a barrel and the rupee depreciating to a new low of ₹92.89 a dollar.

All the 21 sectoral indices were down with Nifty Auto down more than 4%.

Increasing risk of inflation due to the war in West Asia led gold tumbling 3% to $4,650 an ounce. "The decline was largely driven by the Federal Reserve's hawkish stance, with any potential easing now contingent on clear signs of moderating inflation," said Kaynat Chainwala, AVP Commodity Research, Kotak Securities.

Markets witnessed the perfect storm when Israel attacked the world's largest gas field in Iran and the latter retaliated by attacking major energy sites in the Gulf region. This sent crude prices soaring to $114 a barrel.

On the global macro front, the U.S. central bank - the Federal Reserve - held interest rates steady ranging between 3.5% and 3.75%, signalling higher inflation could stymie further rate cuts in 2026. But a rate hike by the U.S. Fed would make American markets more attractive for foreign funds, intensifying their current exit from the Indian market.

"Going ahead, markets appear to be in a phase of heightened fragility, where sentiment is being driven by rapidly evolving geopolitical developments and a sharp rise in crude prices. Given the intensifying tensions around energy infrastructure in West Asia, we remain cautious on the market in the near term and expect volatility to persist," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

"Nifty breached its key prior swing low of 22,955, confirming bears' return with a vengeance...," said Vinay Rajani, Senior Technical Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

'Iran may allow more Indian ships via Strait'

"Automatic Identification System data, while sparse, suggests India's LPG carrier *Shivalik* took an unusual route around Iran's Larak Island and through Iranian territorial waters so IRGC Navy and port authority could assess visual confirmation of the identity of the vessel," Mr. Meade said.

LLI has reported that nine ships have exited through Iran's supposedly safe corridor and at least one tanker was allowed to pass through for payment of $2 million to Iran.

Reliable sources in India, meanwhile, said that with the situation in West Asia continuing to escalate, Indian ships stuck in the Strait of Hormuz for more than two weeks have been asked to "stay put" for now. The process for Indian ships and others has been paused after the Israeli strikes on Iran's largest gas fields at South Pars, they said.

Last week on March 12, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian, officials said they began talks on 24 ships, then stranded west of Hormuz. Iran said they would allow two Indian ships along with those of a few other countries to pass the strait.

The vessels that were allowed to pass were asked to traverse "through a specific route close to the Iranian coast", a source confirmed.

Modi, Jaishankar call for dialogue as strikes escalate

French President says India and France are working closely together to reduce tensions in West Asia; recent attacks against energy installations are 'deeply disturbing', says MEA spokesperson

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India and France are "working closely together" to de-escalate tensions in West Asia, French President Emmanuel Macron said, after a conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, one of many calls that Mr. Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar made to leaders worldwide.

Since February 28, Prime Minister Modi has spoken to counterparts across the Gulf states, Iran and Israel and other countries. PTI

As Israel and Iran both stepped up attacks on energy installations and gas fields across the Gulf region, the government said this targeting of civilian infrastructure was "deeply disturbing" and "unacceptable", calling for them to stop.

In the past, New Delhi had condemned Iran's attacks on Gulf states, but not the strikes by the United States and Israel. Just last week, India had co-sponsored a UN Security Council resolution that only condemned strikes by Iran on its neighbours. In a marked shift, however, the government is now emphasising the need to avoid attacking civilian infrastructure "across the region".

"Recent attacks against energy installations in different locations across this region are deeply disturbing and only serve to further destabilise an already uncertain energy scenario for the whole world," the Ministry of External Affairs' official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday.

Speaking to Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of Qatar, Mr. Modi said India stands in solidarity with Qatar, that suffered major losses from the Iranian strikes on the Ras Laffan gas facility, and "strongly condemns the attacks on the region's energy infrastructure".

In a flurry of telephone calls, the Prime Minister also spoke to the leaders of Jordan, Malaysia and Oman. Since February 28, Mr. Modi has spoken to his counterparts across the Gulf states, Iran, and Israel, and a number of other leaders, and also with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Mr. Jaishankar met with UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al Hashimy, and spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar over the telephone. India has also been engaging all leaders of the BRICS grouping that it is chairing this year, although it has not been able to craft a consensus statement due to differences between Iran and the UAE, which are both members.

The lack of a statement from BRICS is in contrast to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) grouping, which includes Iran but not the UAE. The SCO issued a statement on March 2 condemning the strikes on Iran as well as the ensuing conflict.

"BRICS membership and SCO membership are two different categories. If you look at the members, you will get an answer as to why we are having issues in forming a consensus," Mr. Jaiswal said, in response to a question from *The Hindu*.

In his phone calls on Thursday, Mr. Modi said he had called for a return to "dialogue and diplomacy". Referring to the call with Mr. Macron, he said: "We look forward to continuing our close coordination to advance peace and stability in the region and beyond."

New education Bill is 'constitutional overreach': Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Jairam Ramesh

The proposed legislation to restructure the regulatory framework of higher education represents constitutional overreach by the Union government, the Congress said on Thursday. The Viksit Bharat Shiksha Adhishthan (VBSA) Bill, 2025, was introduced without consulting States, bureaucratises higher education, and hands over grant-giving powers to the Education Ministry that is controlled by politicians, Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh said, in a statement explaining the party's opposition to the Bill.

Mr. Ramesh added that a Parliamentary panel has flagged a high number of vacancies at existing regulatory bodies, including the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). The Bill proposes to subsume these bodies, and the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) into a single 12-member Commission, under which three separate Regulatory, Accreditation, and Standards Councils will operate.

"This concerning news comes at a time when there is already a move to restructure the architecture of higher education regulation through the VBSA Bill, 2025," Mr. Ramesh said.

Though the Centre has cited Entry 66 of the Union List in the Constitution to defend its right to introduce the Bill, the legislation gives the proposed new umbrella Commission "powers beyond this scope and specifically encroaches on State government powers", he added.

The Bill seeks to divide UGC's grant-giving powers from the regulatory structure to minimise conflicts of interest, with the government saying future funding mechanisms will be designed by the Education Ministry.

MEA receives plea for consular access for 6 Ukrainian nationals

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

Three days after six Ukrainian nationals and a U.S. citizen were produced in court by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for working with ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar by entering via Mizoram, officials here confirmed that they have received request for "consular access" for the Ukrainian nationals from the Embassy of Ukraine. Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on Thursday that the six Ukrainians and an American were found to be "wanting" of the required permits for visiting Mizoram.

"Relevant agencies of the Government of India are investigating the case... Yes. We have received consular access request and this will be addressed keeping in mind the legal requirements that are involved in this particular case," said Mr. Jaiswal. The official remarks from India came soon after the Embassy of Ukraine expressed "serious concern" over the arrest, raising questions over the reports that the arrests were "prompted by information provided by the Russian side".

"Ukraine firmly rejects any insinuations regarding the possible involvement of the Ukrainian state in supporting terrorist activities," said the Embassy of Ukraine in a statement underscoring the need for "verified facts and transparent procedures".

Unfenced border with Myanmar in focus after arrest of seven foreigners

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Amid the recent arrest of seven foreign nationals, including six Ukrainians and a U.S. citizen, who allegedly crossed illegally into Myanmar via Mizoram to train armed ethnic groups in weapons handling and drone operations, data show that 43 km of the total 1,643 km border with Myanmar has been fenced so far.

The fencing project will include gates that record biometrics and photographs of people who cross the border. FILE PHOTO

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has accused the foreigners of importing drones from Europe to Myanmar via India for the use of ethnically armed groups (EAGs) in the country. The government recently informed a parliamentary panel that to check illegal migration, trafficking and insurgent activities along the Myanmar border, "coordination with local communities, Myanmar Army and associated security agencies is maintained" and a "joint counter-drone mechanism with monthly reporting has also been instituted".

The fencing project, which includes installation of gates that record biometrics and photographs of people who cross the border, has faced resistance as people on either side share deep ethnic, social and cultural ties.

As many as 43 designated exit and entry gates were proposed to regulate the movement of people and biometrics and gate passes were introduced.

However, over the past two years, the number of gates has declined to 38 and only 20 are now functional, a government source said.

According to latest data provided by the Ministry to a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, of the total 1,643 km of fencing approved by the government, 390.39 km has been sanctioned and only 43.75 km of fencing has been completed so far; 346.64 km is currently under construction.

India and Myanmar share an unfenced border and have a unique arrangement called the Free Movement Regime (FMR). While Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced in February 2024 that the FMR was being scrapped, it was only regulated and free movement of people – without visas and passports on either side of the unfenced border – was restricted to 10 km from the earlier 16 km.

Vikram Doraiswami

Doraiswami named India's Ambassador to China

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India has appointed Vikram K. Doraiswami as the next Ambassador to China, the Ministry of External Affairs announced on Thursday. Mr. Doraiswami is currently the High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom.

"He is expected to take up the assignment shortly," the Ministry's statement said. Currently, Pradeep Kumar Rawat is serving as India's Ambassador to China.

Rajnath stresses need for self-reliant drone industry

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Calling for self-reliance in drone technology, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday urged industry stakeholders to work in mission mode to establish India as a global hub for indigenous drone manufacturing by 2030.

Addressing micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), start-ups, innovators and policymakers at the National Defence Industries Conclave held at the Manekshaw Centre, Mr. Singh noted that true self-reliance goes beyond assembling drones and must extend to manufacturing critical components domestically.

"From moulds to software, engines and batteries, everything must be produced in India," he said, highlighting that many countries still rely heavily on imports, particularly from China, for key drone components.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visits a stall during the National Defence Industries Conclave in New Delhi. @DEFPRODNINDIA/X/PTI

Citing ongoing global conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and tensions between Iran and Israel, the Defence Minister said these developments have established drones and counter-drone systems as decisive tools in modern warfare.

He stressed that building a robust domestic drone ecosystem was critical to ensuring strategic autonomy.

Mr. Singh also highlighted the importance of collaboration across large industries, MSMEs, start-ups and innovators. He assured full support from the government to accelerate this transformation.

During the event, Mr. Singh launched the 14th edition of the Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC-14) and the fourth edition of ADITI challenges under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) framework.

SC reserves verdict on ambit of 'industry'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court reserved judgment on Thursday on whether educational institutions, hospitals, and sovereign functions of the government and its instrumentalities would fall within the definition of 'industrial activity' under the Industrial Disputes Act.

The Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, reserved its verdict on the third and final day of oral arguments.

The question of law before the proposed Bench concerns a 1978 judgment in *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board vs. A. Rajappa*.

The 1978 judgment had expanded the ambit of 'industry' to hold that any systematic activity (whether or not for profit), including charitable and government-run services, were an industry if they met the parameters of a triple test.

APPEAL

Master Toni, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital No.APD1.0011844940, 4 years is Diagnosed to be Suffering from Thalassemia Major. He is currently on supportive care for the same. The only Curative Treatment for Thalassemia major is Bone Marrow Transplant. The Estimated cost of the transplant is approximate Rs.29,00,000/-.

Please send donation however small by Cheque/D.D/M.O Fav. **Save Poor Lives** A/c Toni, **Our A/c Details:** S/B A/c No. 20000913487. S.B.I. R.A.Puram, IFSC CODE:SBIN0001855. Please Donate by G-pay No.9884607377, UPI Id: savepoorlives@oksbi. Donations are exempted under 80G of I.T. ACT.

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ASSEMBLY POLLS

'Transfers are interference of highest order'

Expressing alarm over the "arbitrary removal of more than 50 senior officials", West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said the transfers were "political interference of the highest order".

Since the announcement of election dates, the Election Commission has transferred several key officials, including the Chief Secretary, Home Secretary, and the Director-General of Police.

Ms. Banerjee described the move as a "systematic politicisation of institutions meant to remain impartial, and a direct assault on the Constitution". She said officers removed from their posts were being deputed as election observers. "This is not governance. It reflects sheer incompetence being passed off as authority," she said on social media.

Mamata Banerjee has criticised the EC over the transfer of over 50 senior officials.

Pradyut's son withdraws as Cong. candidate

Prateek Bordoloi has withdrawn his candidature from the Margherita Assembly constituency in Assam, a day after his father and Nagaon MP, Pradyut Bordoloi, joined the Bharatiya Janata Party.

In a letter addressed to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday, the son said the "present circumstances following my father's decision to join another political party" were inappropriate for him to continue as a candidate.

The senior Bordoloi quit Congress on Tuesday and joined the BJP the next day. The BJP nominated him as its candidate from the Dispur Assembly seat on Thursday.

Mr. Prateek insisted that his decision was guided by his respect for the organisation and his desire to uphold the values and discipline of the Congress party.

BJP has turned the EC into its weapon to win elections through deceit. What is happening in Bengal is exactly what happened in the Delhi election

ARVIND KEJRIWAL
AAP convener

Left Front releases second list for Bengal

The Left Front released a list of 32 candidates on Thursday for the West Bengal Assembly election. This is the Front's second list, after 192 names were released on Monday.

The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) has fielded nominees in key constituencies across south Bengal.

UDF is bowling googlies particularly to the Left Democratic Front because they are on a sticky wicket and we can catch them on that

SHASHI THAROOR
Congress leader

Kerala BJP president Rajeev Chandrashekhar with M.J. Job, who will contest from Alappuzha. ANI

BJP reshapes its Kerala playbook, bets big on Christian votes

Nistula Hebbar
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fielding seven Christian candidates for the Kerala election reflects the party's gambit to reach out to the Christian community, traditionally supporters of the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF), in the State.

According to 2011 Census, Christians make up around 18.4% of Kerala's population.

In its two candidate lists so far, the BJP has named Union Minister George Kurian from Kanjirappally, P. C. George from Poonjar, Anoop Antony Joseph from Thiruvalla, Shone George from Pala, Lijoy Paul from Mankada, Bijoy Thomas from Ollur, and M. J. Job from Alappuzha.

'Support evident'

The BJP has been raising issues concerning the Christian community as part of its strategy, including extending support to the community in the Munambam land case involving a dispute between the Waqf Board and locals. The State BJP intervened constructively when two nuns were arrested in Chhattisgarh on charges of trafficking without evidence. Interestingly, the party has steered clear of its marquee issues in northern India, the sale and consumption of beef and other dietary injunctions.

But will the candidatures and outreach programmes enable the party to overcome its Hindutva image in a State of diversity?

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Joseph, the BJP's State general secretary and Thiruvalla candidate, considered it "ironic" that the BJP was being characterised as communal.

"It is an irony that the BJP is considered to be a party of a particular section of Kerala, when BJP is the real secular party of Kerala, holding the principle of '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*' of Prime Minister Modi. Here in Kerala, a party like the Indian Union Muslim League which has the name of a particular religion is called secular, whereas BJP which has *janata* (people) in its name is called communal. This narrative has been set by Congress and CPI(M) to polarise minority votes," he said.

Mr. Joseph said the BJP's efforts to gain the support of the Christian community were evident in Union Minister Suresh Gopi's victory in the Thrissur Lok Sabha seat. "The community's votes will be the reason for the BJP's victory in these polls," he said.

The BJP leader said the Congress was "rudderless" in the State and it would pay the price for neglecting the issues of the Christian community.

Mr. Joseph is considered one of the Christian faces projected by the BJP who is not a newcomer, but has been through the party organisation. He was national secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha team and is also responsible for the Modi archive project, which is digitally collecting oral and written records related to Prime Minister Modi's life.

New playbook

The BJP has had to be counterintuitive with regard to its strategy in Kerala, after its success in Hindi-speaking States in northern India.

A new playbook in the State has long been in the making, with execution to be tested in these Assembly polls.

Dravidian titans face a new disruptor as T.N. girds for a high-stakes contest

The principal players have made compromises to strengthen alliances; while DMK has framed it as a Tamil Nadu versus New Delhi battle, AIADMK, which is in alliance with BJP, is confronting it directly; actor Vijay has cast it as a TVK-DMK contest, even as NTK seeks to consolidate its position

IN FOCUS

D. Suresh Kumar
CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu is gearing up for an intense election battle anchored by alliances led by the old Dravidian warhorses – the DMK and the AIADMK – with a new disruptor, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), founded by film star C. Joseph Vijay, shaking up the political landscape. The spirited presence of Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK), a Tamil nationalist outfit that has organically grown into an Election Commission-recognised State party in just over a decade, completes the quadrangular contest for the 234 Assembly seats.

Cognisant of the potential disruption on the cards, the principal players have left nothing to chance and responded by making the required compromises to forge stronger alliances.

Rainbow coalition

The DMK, led by Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, has gone beyond retaining its nine-year-old rainbow alliance comprising the Congress, CPI, CPI(M), MDMK, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), IUML, and others – largely bound by their ideological opposition to the BJP. Its Secular Progressive Alliance now comprises over 20 parties, with the inclusion of the late Vijayakant's DMDK, Kamal Haasan's Makkal Needhi Maiam, and several sub-regional outfits. Not just that, the DMK has also opened its doors to former AIADMK leaders, including three-time Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam and his supporters.

Mr. Stalin, in his quest to prevent vote spillover in the event of shrinking victory margins whenever a strong disruptor enters the arena, has not hesitated to make costly trade-offs. For instance, he conceded a Rajya Sabha berth to the ideologically agnostic DMDK to prevent it from moving into the AIADMK-BJP fold. Despite irritation within the DMK over some Congress functionaries publicly taunting the ruling party, the Congress has been allotted 28 seats, three more than in the previous election, along with a Rajya Sabha berth. These decisions have triggered fresh challenges for the DMK, with the CPI(M) and the VCK now seeking increased seat allocations.

Banking on the strength of this expanded alliance and its record on welfare schemes, such as those involving direct cash transfers and women empowerment, Mr. Stalin is pushing for what he calls a "Dravidian Model 2.0" government. He is also attempting to overturn the record of the DMK not having retained power in consecutive elections since the formation of the first AIADMK government in 1977.

EPS in charge

Seeking to dislodge the DMK, BJP strategist and Union Home Minister Amit Shah stepped in 11 months ago to bring a somewhat reluctant AIADMK back into the NDA fold, assuring the election would be fought under the leadership of Leader of the Opposition Edappadi K. Palaniswami.

Mindful of the need for a stronger alliance to take on the DMK, Mr. Shah persuaded the AIADMK leader to accommodate former party rebel T.T.V. Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam in the alliance. However, Mr. Palaniswami showed no such concessions to Mr. Panneerselvam or V.K. Sasikala, the former aide of the late Chief Minister Jayalalithaa. He also expelled senior leader K.A. Sengottaiyan, who eventually joined the TVK. Mr. Palaniswami also succeeded in roping in the PMK led by Anbumani following the latter's estrangement from his father and party founder S. Ramadoss. Several smaller parties with pockets of influence and caste groups have also joined the alliance.

While the NDA has expanded, its principal constituents remain divided on one key question – the nature of the government to be formed if they win. Mr. Palaniswami has been emphatic that it would be an AIADMK government, whereas BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have pitched for a coalition "double-engine" NDA government. Nevertheless, it has gone full throttle against the DMK, attacking it over issues of law and order, corruption, maladministration, and dynastic politics.

The third dimension

Challenging this dominantly bipolar landscape is Mr. Vijay, who has been drawing frenzied crowds, particularly among the youth and women, since launching the TVK two years ago.

Positioning the DMK as his political adversary and the BJP as his ideological opponent, Mr. Vijay has revived an anti-corruption plank while aligning his policies with the welfare-driven framework associated with Dravidian politics. His party reflects the culture of hero worship, poster politics, and aggressive attacks on rivals that have long characterised Tamil Nadu's political theatre.

Mr. Vijay had dangled the prospect of power-sharing with parties willing to align with him. Yet, no party chose to gravitate towards his formation. Still, analysts widely project he could secure a double-digit vote share. Whether that expectation translates into electoral success remains uncertain, given that the TVK lacks the deep organisational machinery that the Dravidian majors possess.

Also In the fray is the NTK, which has fielded candidates in all 234 constituencies, half of them women. Unlike Mr. Vijay, Mr. Seeman harbours no immediate ambitions of becoming Chief Minister. For him, improving on the party's 8% vote share would itself be a measure of success. On the sidelines are V.K. Sasikala and S. Ramadoss, who may at best chip away small pockets of community-based votes that might otherwise accrue to the AIADMK alliance.

Overall, the election is being framed in sharply different ways by the principal players. Mr. Stalin has pitched it as a contest between Tamil Nadu and New Delhi, effectively casting it as DMK versus the BJP-led NDA. Mr. Palaniswami is confronting him directly in that battle. Mr. Vijay, meanwhile, has framed it as a TVK versus DMK contest, while Mr. Seeman is projecting himself as an alternative.

The T.N. battle

A look at the Assembly results in 2021 where the contest was largely triangular. The upcoming polls in the State are expected to be a quadrangular contest among the DMK- and AIADMK-led alliances, the NTK and the TVK

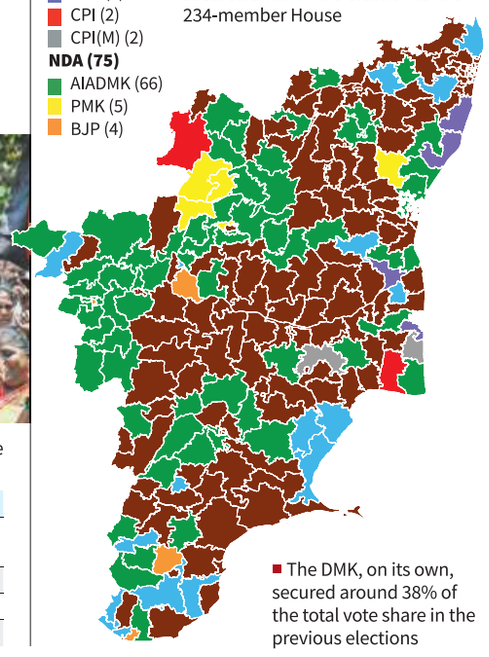
The table below shows the alliance-wise vote shares secured in 2021 Assembly election

Alliance	Vote share
Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA)	45.4%
National Democratic Alliance	39.7%
Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK)	6.6%
Others	8.3%

SPA (159)
- DMK (133)
- INC (18)
- VCK (4)
- CPI (2)
- CPI(M) (2)

NDA (75)
- AIADMK (66)
- PMK (5)
- BJP (4)

The map shows party-wise results of Tamil Nadu's 2021 Assembly election. No independent candidate secured a win in the election to the 234-member House



The DMK, on its own, secured around 38% of the total vote share in the previous elections

Congress defectors on BJP's list of 88 names for Assam

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Four of five recent defectors from the Congress, including one MP and three MLAs, have found their way into the Bharatiya Janata Party's list of 88 candidates for the April 9 Assembly election in Assam.

Missing from the first list, released by the BJP's central office in New Delhi on Thursday, are 19 MLAs, including Deputy Assembly Speaker Numal Momin (Bokajan constituency), Minister Nandita Garlosa (Haflong), and Phanidhar Talukdar, who defected after winning the 2021 polls from Bhabanipur on All India United Democratic Front ticket.

The BJP rewarded Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi, who quit the Congress two days ago, with a nomination from the Dispur seat, currently held by its five-time MLA Atul Bora. The party also named former State Congress president Bhupen Kumar Borah from the Bihpura constituency.

Himanta Biswa Sarma will contest from Jalukbari.

Kamalakhya Dey Purkayastha, who won the 2021 polls from Barak Valley's Karimganj North, is the BJP's candidate from Katigorah, while his counterpart Sashi Kanta Das has been fielded from Raha seat. The latter won this seat for the Congress in 2021.

Two more MLAs, who won the 2021 election on Congress ticket, are on the list of candidates. They are Sushanta Borgohain and Rupjyoti Kurmi.

Eyeing sixth term

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is the BJP's candidate from Jalukbari, one of four constituencies in Kamrup Metropolitan district, much of which is covered by Guwahati. A notable omission in one of the other three seats – New Guwahati – is former State BJP president Siddhartha Bhattacharya, who played a key role in bringing Mr. Sarma to the BJP from the Congress in 2015.

Many in the BJP said this was expected as the current party leadership has been phasing out the "old brigade".

Mr. Bora, among the older set of leaders, said the list was shocking when "everyone knew I will get a ticket".

Hours after the BJP declared its list of candidates, Dholai MLA Nihar Kanti Das resigned from the primary membership of the party, claiming lack of recognition of his work.

Chief Minister Sarma said it was natural for those left out to be angry.

Of the 88 candidates, six are women. Barring Minister Ajanta Neog (Golaghat seat), the women candidates are new faces.

Rupa Ganguly, 2 former MPs on BJP's second list in Bengal

Shiv Sahay Singh
Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Thursday announced candidates for 112 seats, which included three former MPs. The party, however, maintained silence on the candidature of Abhaya's mother.

On Thursday, the mother of the doctor who was raped and murdered at the R.G. Kar Hospital in Kolkata in August 2024 told presspersons that she had informed the BJP leadership about her decision to contest the Assembly polls from Panihati seat in North 24 Parganas district. The BJP has not yet announced a candidate for the seat.

The party had earlier announced candidates for 144 seats. It has made one change to that list, replacing the candidate for the Bishnupur seat.

The party has named three former MPs – former Rajya Sabha member Rupa Ganguly from Sonarpur South in South 24 Parganas, Arjun Singh from Noapara in North 24 Parganas, and Nisith Pramanik from Mathabhanga in Cooch Behar district.

Rupa Ganguly will contest from Sonarpur South.

It has fielded advocate Koustav Bagchi from Barrackpore seat and another lawyer, Tarunjyoti Tiwari, is the candidate in Rajarhat Gopalpur.

The party seems to have placed its faith in the old guard by fielding Ritesh Tewari from Belgachia Kashipur in Kolkata. In central Kolkata, the BJP has fielded heavyweight candidates like the party's West Bengal vice-president Tapas Roy, from the Maniktala seat, and party councillor Vijay Ojha, from Jorasanko.

Rekha Patra, a woman leader who emerged from the Sandeshkhali movement, has been fielded in Hingalganj in North 24 Parganas. The BJP candidate for Behala Paschim is Indranil Khan, who is the State president of the BJP Yuva Morcha. BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari's brother Dibyendu Adhikari has been fielded from Egra in Purba Medinipur district.

The BJP has also given ticket to actor-turned-politician Hiran Chatterjee from Shyampur in Howrah. Mr. Chatterjee, a sitting MLA, had to vacate the Kharagpur Sadar seat for BJP heavyweight Dilip Ghosh.

The BJP has also given ticket to three MLAs from the Matua-dominated region. Ashok Kirtania will contest from Bongaon Uttar, Swapan Majumdar from Bangaon South, and Subrata Thakur from Gaighata. Former Bongaon district BJP president and Bongaon municipality councillor Devdas Mandal will contest from Habra.

INBRIEF

CBI questions Anil Ambani in ₹2,929-crore cheating case

The Central Bureau of Investigation on Thursday questioned industrialist Anil Ambani for nearly eight hours in connection with a ₹2,929-crore cheating case, registered against Reliance Communications Ltd. and him on a complaint by the State Bank of India, officials said. He was questioned on alleged fund diversion, misappropriation and other irregularities in the loan funds issued to the company by the bank, they said. Mr. Ambani has been called again on Friday for questioning.

SC quashes criminal case against YouTuber Elvish Yadav

The Supreme Court on Thursday quashed criminal proceedings launched by Uttar Pradesh against YouTuber Elvish Yadav in a narcotics and wildlife protection law case involving snake venom as unsustainable in law. A Bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and N. Kotiswar Singh found that the alleged "psychotropic substance" recovered from a co-accused in the case was not listed in the Schedule of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

24 States, U.T.s set aside funds for new rural jobs scheme

They use past expenditure under the MGNREGA as the baseline as the Centre is yet to notify the formula for determining the State-wise normative allocations under the VB-GRAM (G) Act

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

With the Centre yet to notify the formula for determining State-wise normative allocations under the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Act, 2025, at least 24 States and Union Territories have nevertheless earmarked funds for the new rural employment programme.

Under the Act, States must bear 40% of the scheme's expenditure, except in the northeastern and hilly States and UTs such as Jammu & Kashmir, which receive a relaxation.

Union Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan informed the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday that 27 States and UTs are making provisions for the new scheme, though he read out allocations for only 24 of them, amounting to a little over ₹31,000 crore. The Union Budget for 2026-27 has set aside ₹95,652 crore as the Centre's share.

Under the Act, States must bear 40% of the scheme's expenditure, except in the northeastern and hilly States. AFP

The Union Budget for 2026-27 has set aside ₹95,652 crore as the Centre's share

Responding to criticism that States may struggle to shoulder their share of the financial burden, Mr. Chouhan highlighted that even Congress ruled Himachal Pradesh, despite its opposition to the Act, had allocated ₹143 crore. Karnataka, he noted, was the only major outlier. "Many members asked where States will find the money. I am only addressing their anxiety," he said.

A key pending element is the Centre's formula for normative allocation. Section 4(5) of the Act mandates that the Union government determine State-wise allocations annually based on "objective parameters".

The clause aims to ensure equitable distribution, following complaints from economically weaker States that they receive disproportionately lower funding.

In the absence of clarity, most States have used their past expenditure under the MGNREGA as the baseline while also accounting for the additional 25 workdays promised under new Act, which extends guaranteed employment from 100 to 125 days. For instance, Rajasthan has spent over ₹7,597 crore under the MGNREGA so far, this financial year. Its 40% share comes to roughly ₹3,038 crore. The State, keeping a margin for the expanded work guarantee and anticipating uncertainty in Central allocations, has set aside ₹4,000 crore.

Chhattisgarh Bill against conversions passed amid boycott

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly on Thursday passed a new legislation to regulate religious conversions. The Opposition boycotted the House proceedings, calling for a review.

The Chhattisgarh Dharm Swatantra Vidheyak (Freedom of Religion Bill), 2026 seeks to replace a 1968 law from undivided Madhya Pradesh. It holds any conversion violating its provisions as "illegal", and introduces stricter penalties, including life imprisonment and fines up to ₹25 lakh in specific cases.

It would "stop conversions carried out by taking advantage of people's poverty, and lack of education and knowledge", Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai told journalists.

"No person shall convert, directly or otherwise, or by use or practice of glorification, misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement, by physical or digital means, or by any other means, to convert or abet the conversion of any person or persons from one faith or religion to another," according to the Bill.

The Bill broadens the definition of allurements to include monetary benefits, gifts, employment, free education or medical facilities, promises of better lifestyle, or marriage. "Coercion", according to the Bill, includes psychological pressure, physical force, or threats, including social boycott. It also proposes publishing "details of the proposed religious conversion on its official website maintained by the competent authority under this Act", and the setting up of special courts to hear all such cases registered under the proposed law.

Mass conversions, which the law defines as the conversion of two or more persons, may attract imprisonment of not less than 10 years, extendable to life imprisonment, and fines of ₹25 lakh or more, while repeat offenders may face life imprisonment.

Assam polls: Pradyut factor dominates in Congress's list

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The Pradyut Bordoloi factor dominated the third list of 22 Congress candidates released for the April 9 Assembly polls on Thursday.

The Congress retained MLA Asif Mohammad Nazar from the Laharighat constituency and dropped Sibamoni Bora, who defeated BJP heavyweight Angoorlata Deka to win the Batadrava seat in 2021.

The two are linked to the resignation of Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi from the Congress. Ms. Bora was travelling with Mr. Bordoloi when their vehicle was attacked in April 2025.

Mr. Bordoloi quit the Congress over the party's alleged indifference to his plea not to re-nominate Mr. Nazar, as one of his attackers was reportedly the MLA's close associate.

The Congress list names Durlav Chamua as the candidate for the Nagaon-Batadraba constituency, indicating that Ms. Bora is no longer in the party's plans.

X accounts posting content critical of govt. 'withheld'

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

A number of people who post content critical of the government on their X accounts were greeted late on Wednesday evening with an email from the social media platform, telling them that their accounts were now withheld in India. The reason: a takedown order issued by the Union government under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The accounts, many of which are run under pseudonyms, posted memes and other content criticising the government in the weeks and months leading up to their handles being censored.

The accounts and posts remain visible to X users outside India.

The Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF), a Delhi-based digital rights advocacy, called the censorship "alarming," and said that "independent reporting documented takedowns affecting speech that appears political, satirical, or critical, rather than clearly unlawful".

The accounts and posts remain visible to X users outside India.

Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinate said at a press briefing in Delhi that this censorship was an "extremely dangerous trend". Ms. Shrinate accused the government of deciding "what is acceptable, what is not acceptable on social media", adding that "anything critical of the Prime Minister will have to go".

The accounts targeted include handles that collectively have lakhs of followers, but are mostly run anonymously. *The Caravan* magazine said that one of its posts, excerpting a story it published, was also taken down under Section 69A, which allows the government to take down online content by sending a notice to the platforms that host it.

The Electronics and Information Technology Ministry did not respond to questions on the takedowns.

Over the past few weeks, several individual posts mocking, criticising and satirising the Union government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have also been "withheld" by X and Meta's Instagram in India, though the government has not directly contacted those who posted this content. None of the deleted posts from this period appear to have been reinstated, even as the IFF said it was helping some users challenge the censorship with the IT Ministry.

The IFF, in a statement, called on the "Union government to halt any move to decentralise Section 69A blocking powers further, publish blocking orders only as per the letter and spirit of the *Shreya Singhal* judgement, and ensure timely notice to affected users with clear grounds and avenues for remedy".

Lack of 'sustainable water sources' will thwart Jal Jeevan Mission: panel

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary committee has said that the objectives of the Jal Shakti Ministry's flagship ₹8.69-lakh-crore Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) – that aims to provide consistent and potable water supply to all rural households – will remain "unfulfilled" if sustainable sources of water supply are not found.

This comes after an official in the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation – an arm of the Ministry – told the committee that despite taps under the scheme having been installed at many places, there was an "...issue of water availability due to shortage of sources" and that in some places "...water sources were being exhausted within a year or two".

This prompted the committee to observe that "...the objective of providing water for the next 25-30 years under JJM will remain unfulfilled due to lack of source sustainability". Sources include rivers, lakes, ponds or any natural pool.

The programme, originally envisioned to achieve 100% coverage by 2024, has been stuck at around 81% since 2025. K. MURALI KUMAR

The committee recommended that the Ministry implement "source to tap" schemes, under which the entire chain of water supply such as the source of water, tank, supply, were accounted for. There are 6.83 lakh sanctioned schemes under the JJM.

The committee "note(d) with concern" that there was no information from the States on how many of these schemes were "source to tap". The panel said it was "...of the view that to maintain a long-term steady supply of safe drinking water, source sustainability is of paramount importance otherwise assets created under JJM will come to naught after extinguishment of available sources".

Govt. nod for extension

The Union Cabinet last week approved extending the JJM programme to 2028 and allocated additional funds to meet its target. A press note from the Ministry had noted that the programme's focus will change "...from infrastructure creation to service delivery, supported by drinking water governance and institutional ecosystem for sustainable rural piped potable water supply".

"To this end, a uniform national digital framework, namely 'Sujalam Bharat', shall be instituted, under which every village shall be assigned a unique Sujal Gaon/Service Area ID digitally mapping the complete drinking water supply system from source to tap," a Ministry statement said.

The programme, originally envisioned to achieve 100% coverage by 2024, has been stuck at around 81% since 2025. As *The Hindu* has previously reported, covering the remaining 20% requires more money than has already been spent so far.

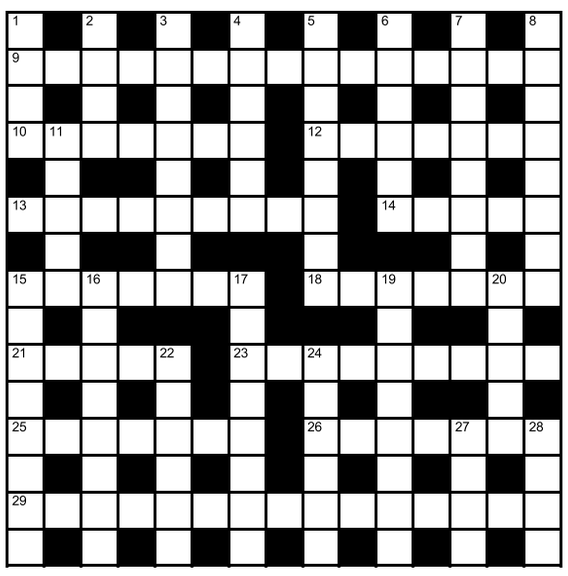
From the baseline of 3.23 crore (17%) rural households with existing tap water connections in 2019, more than 12.56 crore additional rural households have been provided with tap water connections so far under the JJM.

TH CROSSWORD + 14746

(set by Vidwan)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at *https://thehindu.com/crosswords*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

9 A militarist NATO resulting in dictatorship (15)
10 House girl used to be hot? Nonsense! (7)
12 Not under current coverage of France, Greece island gets evacuated (3-4)
13 Assortment of best retreats with religious instruction after rain (9)
14 Mother! Clear the decks! (5)
15 Bit unusual! Guys coming before time! (7)
18 Cosy retreats in heavily armed chopper (7)
21 Sharp strong beer? Right!(5)
23 Father! Clean Spooner's line carrying vital liquid! (5,4)
25 Get discouraged as pride crumbles (7)
26 Test pile, lacks one for instance (7)
29 Entertaining team and broken records for those following basics too literally! (15)

Down

1 Impress and get without force (4)
2 Bachelor's field is endless (4)
3 Bare cola cocktail for a tuna (8)
4 Some sweet cherries for one making good impressions! (6)
5 Moody sibling, ignoring cold, writing software (8)
6 Draw feminine force in real shapes (6)
7 Shifted her chair for high priest (8)
8 Like having thick raised joint at centre of a vessel (8)
11 Form of ordinary emptiness (5)
15 Fitfully switch positions (2,3,3)
16 Dead urgent! Prince going out for a dip! (8)
17 Stopped advancement of abnormal growth in the delta (8)
19 Up early in the day all year, as usual (8)
20 First politician to regularly deal and push (5)
22 The AA regularly talk about something that creates immersive drinking experience (3,3)
24 Compact essay about Hoover (6)
27 Present state (4)
28 Some cite as example of simplicity (4)

SUDOKU

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

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Observe silence: Murugan

Verse 12 of Arunagirinatha's Kandar Anubhuti is an upadesa verse, said So.So. Meenakshisundaram in a discourse. Here Muruga's advice to Arunagirinatha is "*chumma iru sol ara*." Murugan tells Arunagirinatha to control his thoughts and to be silent. When you are God-realised, you no longer let your thoughts wander. Your mind is no longer agitated over anything. When you have experienced God, your thoughts are refined. But how does one know one has reached this state? A disciple asked Ramakrishna Paramahamsa this question. Ramakrishna took the disciple to a place where a woman was making vadas. Ramakrishna asked her how she knew when the vadas were done. She said as long as they were not done, there would be a bubbling sound in the oil. When there was no sound, it meant they were perfectly fried.

Ramakrishna told his disciple, "When the mind is under control, there will be no turmoil in the mind. A person who has controlled his senses and mind, will be silent, like the vadas that are done." When we are waiting for food to be served, we talk with each other. But when food is served, we fall silent, because we are busy eating. Likewise, we talk about mundane things, when we are not focused on God. The moment we turn our thoughts towards Him, we do not feel the need to talk a lot. Siddhars have a lot of power because of their silence and tapas. Kattikulam Suttukkol Mayandi Swami was a siddhar. Mariappa Swamigal, a composer of songs, asked Mayandi Swami to guess what song he (Mariappa Swami) was thinking of singing. Mayandi Swami guessed rightly that Mariappa Swami was thinking of singing the upadesa verse of Kandar Anubhuti.

INBRIEF

India in talks with Russia, 2 others on fertiliser imports

India, a leading importer of fertilisers, is in talks to increase purchases from Russia, Belarus and Morocco as Middle East tensions and China's export curbs risk tightening supplies ahead of the summer planting season, government and industry sources said. India, where farming is a mainstay, imports fertilisers such as urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and muriate of potash, as well as liquefied natural gas, a key feed stock for urea production. The Middle East accounts for roughly half of India's DAP and urea imports. REUTERS

RBI working on avenues for Russian counterparts' INR use

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is working on providing more avenues for the usage of Indian rupee (INR) accumulated by the Russian trade counterparts, a senior official said on Thursday. "We are working on providing various avenues for using the INR, which is accumulated here by the Russian counterparts, to use it either for settling their imports or making capital investments in India, so on and so forth," N Senthil Kumar, chief general manager in RBI's Foreign Exchange Department, said at the Russia-India forum in Mumbai. PTI

NTPC arm commissions 165 MW capacity at Khavda-II

NTPC on Thursday said its step-down arm NTPC Renewable Energy has begun commercial supply of 165 MW electricity from 1200 MW Khavda-II solar project in Gujarat. With this, the total installed capacity of NTPC group stands at 88,709 MW and commercial capacity at 87,629 MW, a regulatory filing said. In a separate filing, NTPC Green Energy (NGEL) stated that the current commercial capacity of NTPC Green Energy Ltd Group stands at 9562.68 MW. REUTERS

'Attacks on Qatar's LNG facilities could impact India, but sources diversified'

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

Any attack on Qatar's energy facilities or anything that affects energy supplies from West Asia would impact India, but the country has diversified its sources to deal with the situation, Sujata Sharma, Joint-Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) told reporters on Thursday.

Ms. Sharma sought to address concerns about the impact on India's natural gas supplies going forward as Iran launched attacks on Qatar's Ras Laffan Industrial City.

"Forty-seven per cent of our import of LNG is from Qatar, [therefore], any impact there or anything which affects supplies in the Middle East would impact us," she stated, adding, "We are dealing with it in the sense we are trying to pick up cargoes from other sources."

Elaborating on the diversification of sources for LNG, she said, "Qatar is definitely a big supplier, however, there are other suppliers, such as Australia and the United States."

Ras Laffan Industrial City was subject to missile attacks from Tehran on Wednesday, causing "extensive damage" at Qatar's largest LNG facility.

India's natural gas consumption is 195 million metric standard cubic meters per day (MMSCMD), of which half is domestically produced. The remaining 60 mmscmd is routed via the Strait of Hormuz.

Chairman's resignation sparks turmoil at HDFC Bank

Stock plummets to 52-week low as Atanu Chakraborty makes 'sudden exit'; RBI assures investors of sound financial health, corporate governance; Keki Mistry made interim, part-time chairman

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

The sudden resignation of Atanu Chakraborty as part-time Chairman and Independent Director of HDFC Bank, India's largest private sector lender, caused massive value erosion of the bank's stock, which on Thursday fell to a 52-week low before declining 5.13% to ₹799.70 on the BSE.

The bank's investors lost an estimated ₹1.03 lakh crore in market capitalisation in a day despite the bank's board and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reassuring investors and markets about the sound financial health and high corporate governance at the bank.

In his resignation letter dated March 17, which was made public late on March 18 night, Mr. Chakraborty, a 1985 batch Gujarat cadre IAS officer, who was previously Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, stated, "Certain happenings and practices within the bank, that I have observed over last two years are not in congruence with my personal values and ethics. This is the basis of my aforementioned [resignation] decision."

"I confirm that there are no other material reasons for my resignation other than those stated above," Mr. Chakraborty said in his letter. On Wednesday evening, the RBI had appointed Keki Mistry, a HDFC veteran, as interim part-time chairman of the bank for a period of three months.

Calling it quits: Mr. Chakraborty took over the position in 2021 prior to the merger of HFDC Ltd. with HDFC Bank. FILE PHOTO

Addressing a virtual press meet on Thursday, Mr. Mistry said, "We really do not understand what led to this kind of reaction [resignation]. I assure all shareholders that there is no material matter at this point of time [that led to the resignation]. Members of the Board asked Mr. Chakraborty about the reason behind his resignation, but he said he had no particular concern."

"No specific issue was brought to our attention and no specific operational and other issues had been highlighted," Mr. Mistry said adding 'the board remains committed to safeguard the institutional values and investors' confidence.' He said the bank's board operated under strong governance standards, robust internal checks and is led by an "experienced management team".

At the age of 71, he said he would not have taken up the responsibility had the bank's governance standards not been in line with his values.

To a query on the reputational loss the bank might have suffered after the 'abrupt' resignation, Mr. Mistry said, "We will be able to arrest it. The management team and the board are united. Whatever fears are there in the minds of investors will be addressed. Also the RBI has expressed satisfaction with the bank." To another question on any friction with the management, Mr. Mistry said, "It's more of a personal relationship issue. Let's not get into that."

The Hindu attempted to reach Mr. Chakraborty, who took over the position in 2021 prior to the merger of HFDC Ltd. with HDFC Bank, for his comment and to verify the board's version, but his response remained awaited till the time of going to press.

Mr. Chakraborty had reportedly told a TV channel that he stepped down due to ideological differences and not for any organisational malpractices. High drama followed Mr. Chakraborty's resignation as the whole board tried to find an answer to the resignation to which he remained mum. This 'baffled' some of the board members.

It is learnt that he was persuaded to withdraw his resignation, elaborate his concerns, and amend the language in the resignation letter, to which he had refused. In the meantime, as the board meeting was on, four of the bank's directors had rushed to the RBI to brief the Central Bank about the development and take the regulator into confidence. This is said to have led to the swift approval for the interim chairman.

On Thursday, when the banks stocks were hammered at the stock exchanges and concerns raised over the bank's functioning, the RBI issued a statement reposing faith in HDFC Bank.

"HDFC Bank is a Domestic Systemically Important Bank (D-SIB) with sound financials, professionally run board and competent management team. Basis our periodical assessment, there are no material concerns on record as regards its conduct or governance.

The bank remains well-capitalised and the financial position of the bank remains satisfactory with sufficient liquidity," the RBI said. The regulator said it would continue to engage with the board and management.

"The intensity at which the bank is being supervised, the board and the management believes that there should not be any surprises. We are reasonably confident about the rigour, the ethos and confident that the controls are working," said Sashidhar Jagdishan, CEO & MD, HDFC Bank.

MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	74,207	-3.26
Gold	1,53,300	-4.36
Brent oil	110.70	-

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	1936.80	-70.40
Adani Ports	1356.00	-45.90
Apollo Hosp	7252.00	-219.00
Asian Paints	2186.00	-76.10
Axis Bank	1207.00	-46.20
Bajaj Auto	8868.50	-402.50
Bajaj Finserv	1714.90	-76.90
Bajaj Finance	832.20	-47.90
Bharat Elec	430.80	-11.80
Bharti Airtel	1827.00	-28.40
Cipla	1239.20	-29.30
Coal India	454.20	-1.00
Dr Reddys Lab	1274.50	-20.30
Eicher Motors	6793.00	-234.50
Eternal Ltd.	228.74	-13.80
Grasim Ind	2607.90	-115.20
HCL Tech	1311.80	-45.40
HDFC Bank	798.20	-44.85
HDFC Life	633.50	-9.85
Hindalco	897.05	-36.00
Hind Unilever	2077.30	-58.00
ICICI Bank	1250.10	-39.20
IntGlobeAvi	4154.30	-206.30
Infosys	1220.80	-46.30
ITC	298.00	-6.05
Jio Financial Services Ltd.	239.45	-8.75
JSW Steel	1130.90	-49.40
Kotak Bank	368.15	-7.25
L&T	3434.50	-173.40
M&M	3045.40	-169.20
Maruti Suzuki	12599.00	-449.00
Max Healthcare	953.10	-26.70
NestleIndia	1186.30	-18.50
NTPC	374.05	-4.45
ONGC	269.10	4.10
PowerGrid Corp	296.70	-2.70
Reliance Ind	1384.80	-23.30
SBI Life	1903.10	-59.40
State Bank	1048.90	-20.90
Shriram Finance Ltd.	949.80	-71.80
Sun Pharma	1744.40	-33.90
TataConsumerProduct	1044.60	-30.50
Tata Steel	190.51	-4.90
TCS	2356.00	-84.80
Tech Mahindra	1340.60	-44.60
Titan	4037.90	-107.60
Tata Motors PV	309.30	-15.45
Trent Ltd.	3481.90	-159.00
UltraTech Cement	10814.00	-433.00
Wipro	188.41	-5.89

CIL arm achieves single-day coal booking of 2.37 LT

Coal India arm BCCL on Thursday said it has achieved a record single-day coal booking of about 2.37 lakh tonnes under its special discount scheme aimed at liquidating stockpiles. Under the scheme, discounts ranging from ₹100-600 per tonne were offered across various slabs, which received an encouraging response. PTI

Centre announces ₹497 cr. RELIEF for exporters impacted by W. Asia crisis

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The government on Thursday launched the ₹497 crore Resilience & Logistics Intervention for Export Facilitation (RELIEF) scheme to provide credit insurance cover for exporters whose goods are stranded due to the West Asia crisis, or who are planning to export to the Gulf over the next few months.

The insurance premia under this scheme would be at pre-conflict rates and the focus would be MSME beneficiaries.

While announcing the scheme, the officials of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry acknowledged the hardship being faced by Indian exporters due to the constraints created by the war in West Asia, and said that the RELIEF scheme was aimed at alleviating this and providing them with surety about their exports.

"Our exporters who have been exporting to the Middle East are facing certain challenges," Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said at a press briefing.

In a separate inter-ministerial briefing, Special Secretary at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Rajesh Kumar Sinha said that there are two container ships currently in the Eastern part of the Strait of Hormuz, headed from India to Oman and the UAE. In order to help exporters affected by stuck

REPRESENTATIONAL PHOTO

shipments, the government announced the RELIEF scheme, which would be a part of the Export Promotion Mission that was announced in Budget 2025 and that was implemented over the course of 2025-26.

Contours of the scheme

The RELIEF scheme is to be in three parts, the Director General of Foreign Trade Lav Agarwal explained in a briefing.

The first component, comprising ₹56 crore, is aimed at exporters who already have credit insurance cover from ECGC Ltd., which is wholly owned by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry.

Under this scheme, such exporters would be able to avail of insurance premiums at pre-disruption rates, and the cover would extend to consignments where the Onboard Bill of Lading or airway bill is issued during February 14 to March 15, 2026. It would also only apply to consignments bound for UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Iraq, Iran, Israel and Yemen.

"ECGC covers loss due to war-related risks and associated political risks in the affected countries," Mr. Agarwal said. "It also provides enhanced cover up to 100% of loss, subject to some conditions and verification."

The second component of the scheme, comprising ₹159 crore, is aimed at those exporters who have not yet opted for ECGC cover and are looking to export to the affected countries over the next three months.

The cover would extend to those consignments for which the Onboard Bill of Lading or airway bill has been granted between March 16 and June 15, 2026. Energy shipments are, however, excluded from this.

Under this second component, ECGC would provide cover up to 95% of losses faced, subject to verification.

The third and largest component, accounting for ₹282 crore, is aimed at only MSME exporters that have been affected so far, and that have not availed of ECGC cover so far, and applies to consignments between February 14 and March 15, 2026.

In order to ensure that only MSMEs avail of this third component, the support is capped at Rs 50 lakh per exporter.

Apart from the ECGC insurance cover, the government is also in talks to create a protection and indemnity insurance (P&I) club to reduce dependence on foreign insurers.

Petroleum ministry puts PPAC in place to collect data on fuel stock

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Aiming to keep track of domestic fuel and energy stocks, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG) in a notification late on Thursday night designated the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) as the nodal agency to "collect, compile and analyse" the necessary information.

The gazette notification directs producers and refiners, among others, to furnish to the PPAC information relating to "production, imports, exports, stocks, storage, allocation, transportation, consumption, supply and utilisation of petroleum products or natural gas, aggregated or disaggregated by geography, time or consumers as they may be specified."

Addressing reporters during the inter-ministerial briefing on Thursday, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), said the move was to provide 'legal strength' to the already-existing mandate of the PPAC. "Now everybody has to give [the necessary] information, and with legal force, it would be better implementable," she said.

The official informed that more than 5,600 consumers had transitioned to piped natural gas (PNG) in the last three days.

Ms. Sharma also said about 1.25 lakh new connections had been provided in the last two weeks.

aries

Aryabhatta Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES), Manora Peak, Nainital Uttarakhand-263001

Admission to the ARIES PhD Program for the August 2026 academic session. PhD degree will be awarded by AcSIR.

Online application closes: 14 April 2026

For further details, visit:

https://aries.res.in/opportunities/phd-program

Registrar

कार्यालय अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता, सा.नि.वि., संभाग द्वितीय उदयपुर मु. बाँसवाड़ा
क्रमांक : डी– 783 दिनांक : 10/3/26
निविदा सूचना संख्या – 14/2025–26
NIB Code :- PWD 25-26A6073
सड़क निर्माण कार्य हेतु इच्छुक संवेदको से ऑनलाईन माध्यम से दिनांक 06.04.2026, सायं 06:00 बजे तक निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदा का अन्य विवरण वेबसाईट ("http://www.eproc.rajasthan.gov.in और http://www.sppp.rajasthan.gov.in) पर देखा जा सकता है। उपापन की कुल अनुमानित लागत राशि रू Rs. 633.76 लाख है।
UBN- PWD2526WLOB25307
(बी.एल.भेणिया)
अतिरिक्त मुख्य अभियन्ता
सा.नि.वि. संभाग द्वितीय उदयपुर
मुख्यालय बाँसवाड़ा
DIPR/C/5287/2026

राजस्थान सरकार
कार्यालय अधीक्षक मथुरादास माथुर चिकित्सालय जोधपुर
E-TENDER NOTICE NO. 19(2025-26) ITEM No. 1
Online Bids are invited from eligible bidders i.e. Manufacturer/Authorized Distributors/Dealers to provide various Items & Services at Mathura Das Mathur Hospital Jodhpur attached to Dr. S. N. Medical College Jodhpur as per tender terms and conditions. Tenders are to be submitted duly digitally signed in electronic format only on website http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in. The tender documents may be downloaded from above mentioned website. The tender document may also be seen on http://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in. The details of the bid are as follows: -
1. SUPPLY, INSTALLATION, OPERATION & MAINTENANCE OF 3.0 Tesla MRI Machine ALONG WITH PROVIDING INVESTIGATION RELATED SERVICES ON REVENUE SHARING BASIS ON PPP MODE
Estimated Cost - 12.00 CR
UBN - SMC2526SLRC00416
Superintendent
Mathura Das Mathur Hospital
Jodhpur
DIPR/C/5523/2026

Office of the Additional Chief Engineer (Project) PHED Ajmer
Qtr. No. II/2, PHED Colony, Vaishali Nagar, near RIICO Watch Factory,
Ph. No. 0145-2640265, email: acepajmer@gmail.com acepajm.phed@rajasthan.gov.in
S.No F()ACR/Proj/Aj/AR-JJM/2025-26/8014 Date: 16/03/2026
CORRIGENDUM NO. 1
In continuation to this office NIT No.03/2025-26 issued vide letter no. 2436-2491 dated 11.02.2026. The following amendment are hereby notified:-

S.N.	Description	As per original NIT	As per this corrigendum
1	Date & time for downloading of tender document	13.02.2026 at 10:00 AM to 16.03.2026 up to 06:00 PM	13.02.2026 at 10:00 AM to 25.03.2026 up to 6:00 PM
2	Date & time for online submission of tender	From 24.02.2026 at 10:00 AM to up to 16.03.2026 at 6:00 PM	Up to 25.03.2026 at 06:00 PM
3	Date & time of physical submission of tender fee, RISL charges and EMD	17.03.2026 at 01:00 PM	Up to 27.03.2026 at 01:00 PM
4	Date & time of opening of technical bid	17.03.2026 at 03:00 PM	Up to 27.03.2026 at 03:00 PM

All other terms and conditions shall remain same as mentioned in tender document.
(Gopesh Garg)
Additional Chief Engineer
(Project) PHED, Ajmer
DIPR/C/5670/2026

राजस्थान सरकार
कौशल, नियोजन एवं उद्यमिता विभाग,
प्राविधिक शिक्षा निदेशालय, राजस्थान, जोधपुर
W-6, सैक्टर–चार, जोधपुर Ph. 0291-2432290, FAX-0291-2632309, E-mail- scheme.dot@rajasthan.gov.in
No: DTE/T-4(SCHEME)/PMPES/4324(3)/2026/60715 दिनांक :14/03/2026
Corrigendum- II
ई–निविदा सूचना संख्या 01/2025–26 में निम्नानुसार संशोधन किये जो रहे है:–

S. No.	UBN No.	Corrigendum
01	UBN No. TET2526SLOB00140 TET2526SLOB00141 TET2526SLOB00142 TET2526SLOB00143 TET2526SLOB00144 TET2526SLOB00145 TET2526SLOB00146 TET2526SLOB00147	RFP में निम्नानुसार आवश्यक संशोधन किये जा रहे है– 1. Pre-Bid Conference- 16.04.2026 2. Authority response to queries latest by- 21.04.2026 3. Authority's additional response, if any- 28.04.2026 4. Bid Due Date- 19.05.2026 5. Opening of Technical Bids- 19.05.2026 6. Announcement of qualified Bidders- 03.06.2026 7. Opening of Financial Bid- 09.06.2026 8. Letter of Award (LOA)- Within 30 days of opening of Financial Bid 9. Validity of Bids- 120 days of Bid Due Date 10. Signing of License Agreement- withing 30 days of award of LOA

अन्य नियम एवं शर्तें पूर्ववत् रहेंगी।
संयुक्त निदेशक (प्रशिक्षण)
DIPR/C/5668/26

Indian Overseas Bank
Information Technology Department
Central Office: 763, ANNA SALAI, CHENNAI-600002
Indian Overseas bank (IOB) invites bids for the following:
GOVERNMENT E-MARKET PORTAL - Supply, Implementation, Maintenance of Cheque Truncation System (CTS) under Capex model.
BID NO: GEM/2026/B/7367951
DATED 17.03.2026
The Above GEM Tender document is also available and can be downloaded from the following websites www.iob.bank.in & www.gem.gov.in For Tender details and future amendments, if any, keep referring to the following website www.gem.gov.in

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA, "e"- PROCUREMENT NOTICE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER, KHORDHA (R&B) CIRCLE, KHORDHA
WORKS DEPARTMENT
Tender Call Notice
E-mail: rbcirclekhurda@gmail.com
Bid Identification No. CCE-Khordha (R&B) Circle - 15/2025-26 Memo No -611 Dt.12/03/2026
The Chief Construction Engineer, Khordha (R&B) Circle, Khordha on behalf of Governor of Odisha inviting percentage rate bid in double cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible contractors for Road works as detailed in the table below:
1. Nature of Work : Road Works
2. No of Work : 1 No
3. Tender Cost : Rs.10000.00 (On-Line)
4. Class of Contractor : A & Special Class
5. Available of Bid document in the Website : From 10.00 AM of Dt.23.03.2026 up to 05.00 PM of Dt.07.04.2026
6. Date of opening of Bid : Dt.08.04.2026 at 11.30 AM
7. The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the Website: https://tenderodisha.gov.in. Any Addendum / Corrigendum / Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.
Chief Construction Engineer, Khordha (R&B) Circle, Khordha
34001/204/2526
OIPR-34001/34127/1/25-26/0006

TEHRAN

Iran says it hit U.S. F-35; jet lands safely, pilot stable, says Centcom

AFP

Iran's state TV, quoting a Revolutionary Guard statement, said on Thursday that the country's air defence system hit an F-35 jet. U.S. Central Command said an F-35 fighter jet was forced to make an emergency landing after flying a combat mission over Iran, adding that the aircraft landed safely and pilot was in "stable" condition. AP

PARIS

Iran hangs three men in the first executions over January protests

REUTERS

Iran executed three men on Thursday who were accused of killing police officers during protests in January. They were the first hangings Iran has carried out related to the nationwide demonstration. Rights groups said the trio were executed without a fair trial and had given confessions under torture. AFP

LONDON

'Russian tanker shipping more than seven lakh barrels of oil to Cuba'

REUTERS

A sanctioned Russian tanker is shipping more than seven lakh barrels of oil to Cuba as the communist island suffers blackouts under a U.S. economic blockade, marine trackers indicated on Wednesday. The *Anatoly Kolodkin* loaded 7,30,000 barrels of crude from Russia and was bound for Cuba, Kpler said. AFP

WASHINGTON

U.S. approves over $16 bn in arms sales to Gulf states hit by Iran war

AP

The United States on Thursday announced the approval of $16.46 billion in military sales to the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, two Gulf states that have been hit hard by fallout from the Iran war. The UAE also received approval to buy systems designed to defeat small, unmanned aircraft for $2.1 billion. AFP

Hezbollah says it is battling Israel's advance in Lebanon

Hezbollah claims to have destroyed up to five Merkava tanks with guided missiles; Israeli troops are 'systematically destroying' villages with 'intense air strikes and overnight artillery shelling'

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

Hezbollah said on Thursday its fighters were battling Israeli forces in south Lebanon, as a military source on the ground said Israeli troops were slowly advancing while "systematically destroying" border towns.

Lebanon was drawn into the West Asia war on March 2 when Iran-backed Hezbollah attacked Israel to avenge the killing of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Israel responded with intense strikes on Lebanon that have killed at least 968 people and displaced over a million more, according to local authorities, and by launching ground operations in the south.

In a statement, Hezbollah said its fighters had ambushed Israeli troops entering the border town of Taybeh and destroyed a tank. "The enemy then attempted to continue its advance" from a nearby area, but fighters "again targeted them with guided missiles, scoring direct hits and destroying five Merkava tanks", Hezbollah added. "Enemy soldiers were seen fleeing the area of engagement."

Rising tension: Israeli tanks seen on the Israeli side of the border with Lebanon in the Upper Galilee in Israel on Thursday. AFP

The Israeli army announced on Monday that it had launched "limited" ground operations in Lebanon.

A military source in south Lebanon said that the Israeli army was advancing slowly and "systematically destroying" the border villages it enters.

Lebanon's state-run *National News Agency* reported a "violent night" in Khiam and Taybeh, saying the towns were "targeted by several air strikes and subjected to heavy artillery shelling that continued until dawn".

On Wednesday, Hezbollah said it had repelled an attempt by "Israeli enemy soldiers to advance" in Khiam.

In recent days, the group has reported targeting Israeli forces on the border with Lebanon and inside Lebanese towns such as Khiam. The town overlooks part of southern Lebanon and northern Israel and was the first point into which Israeli forces advanced after the start of the war. It was also the site of intense clashes between Israeli forces and Hezbollah during their last war in 2024.

Israel has issued warnings to all residents south of the Zahrani River, more than 40 km from the border, to evacuate, and has said it wants to create a buffer zone in Lebanon to protect residents of north Israel.

On Wednesday, the UN peacekeeping force said it was deeply concerned by a "violent escalation" in Lebanon.

'U.S. may 'unsanction' Iran oil already being shipped'

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Thursday that Washington might "unsanction" Iranian oil that is already being shipped, as energy prices soar due to the war in the West Asia.

Mr. Bessent's comments to *Fox Business* came as oil and gas prices made a renewed surge after Iran hit the world's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility in Qatar and threatened to destroy the region's energy infrastructure.

Mr. Bessent added in the interview that the U.S. government could also release more oil from its strategic reserves.

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has been scrambling to rein in rocketing energy costs after U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28. Tehran's retaliation brought commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz to a virtual halt, snarling energy supply chains.

Recently, the United States also temporarily allowed the sale of sanctioned Russian oil that is at sea. On Wednesday, Mr. Trump temporarily waived a century-old maritime shipping law in an attempt to help ease energy prices.

Scott Bessent

Soaring debt

The national debt surpassed a record $39 trillion on Wednesday, a milestone that comes just weeks into the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran.

The unprecedented figure highlights competing administration priorities, from passing a massive tax law and boosting defence spending and immigration enforcement to chipping away at the debt itself – the latter of which Mr. Trump promised to do as both a candidate and as President. The Government Accountability Office outlines some of the impact of rising government debt on Americans – including higher borrowing costs for things like mortgages and cars, lower wages from businesses having less money available to invest, and more expensive goods and services. Advocates for a balanced budget also warn that the long-term trend of borrowing more and paying more in interest will force Americans to face tougher fiscal tradeoffs ahead.

Michael Peterson, chair and CEO of the non-profit Peter G. Peterson Foundation, created to raise awareness of America's long-term fiscal challenges, said in a statement that "we must recognise this alarming rate of growth and the significant financial burden we are putting on the next generation."

White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett estimated that the war in Iran had cost the U.S. more than $12 billion so far.

(With AP inputs)

Iran missile fire kills three Palestinians in West Bank

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Iranian missile attacks have killed three Palestinian women in the occupied West Bank and a foreign worker in central Israel, medics said on Thursday.

Falling shrapnel struck a hair salon in the West Bank town of Beit Awa near Hebron late Wednesday, killing the three women, according to the Palestine Red Crescent Society, marking the first Palestinian deaths from Iranian attacks in the ongoing West Asia war.

The victims include 17-year-old Mays Ghazi Masalmeh, according to the official Palestinian news agency, *Wafa*. The Red Crescent said at least eight others were wounded, including one woman in critical condition.

A short while later, Israeli medics said Iranian missile fire had killed a man in central Israel, bringing the death toll in Israel from attacks during the ongoing war to 15.

Iraq's Kurdistan is becoming the new frontline in a widening Iran war

NEWS ANALYSIS

Anisha Dutta

On March 10 night, the skies above Erbil – the capital of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region – flashed with the streaks of air defence interceptors. According to Erbil's governor, at least 17 drones targeted the city in a single night, triggering sirens and sending residents scrambling indoors – a stark reminder that one of the West Asia's most stable corners is now being drawn into a widening regional confrontation.

Debris crashed into a civilian home near the U.S. consulate and landed close to a major public venue. Northern Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region, which hosts several Iranian Kurdish opposition groups, has seen a slew of such attacks since the war in what officials describe as a rapidly escalating campaign in the region.

The strikes hitting the region now come from multiple directions: Iranian missile attacks targeting Kurdish opposition groups based in northern Iraq, drone strikes by Iran-aligned militias targeting U.S. bases, and retaliatory operations linked to the widening confrontation between Tehran and Washington.

Muted response

Kurdish lawmakers in Baghdad warn that the federal government's muted response risks further destabilising the country. Civilian areas have also been affected: among those wounded in recent strikes were a delivery driver in Erbil, a nurse in a camp near Koya, and a child in the Qalawa neighbourhood of Sulaimaniyah.

Since February 28, when the U.S. and Israel intensified their attack on Iran, the Kurdistan Region has endured 307 strikes by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and affiliated groups, killing eight people and injuring 51, according to Community Peacemaker Team-Iraqi Kurdistan.

"In addition to the loss of life, the attacks carried out by the IRGC, and its affiliated groups have caused damage to civilian homes, oil fields, telecommunications infrastructure, hotels, public spaces, and government and civil institutions," said Kamaran Osman, a member of the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team.

Among the dead were a security employee at Erbil International Airport, four Kurdish fighters linked to Iranian opposition groups, and a French soldier killed in a drone strike on a joint military base southwest of Erbil. The confrontation between Iran, the U.S. and Israel are increasingly spilling across borders and threatening to pull Iraq back into a conflict it has struggled for years to escape. Northern Iraq has long served as a sanctuary for Iranian Kurdish dissidents. Several organisations, including the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK), Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Komala Party of the Toilers of Kurdistan, PAK and Khabat, maintain armed camps, political offices and refugee camps in the region.

The shadow of a Kurdish fighter falls on the shrapnel scarred wall of a damaged building, after an Iranian drone attack, in Erbil. AFP

On February 22, six of these groups announced the formation of the Alliance of Political Forces of Iranian Kurdistan, an umbrella coalition opposing the Iranian government.

Some of these groups maintain armed wings and have historically conducted operations against Iranian forces inside Iran's Kurdish regions. In recent weeks, speculation surfaced in Washington that such fighters could potentially play a role in a broader pressure campaign against Tehran.

U.S. President Donald Trump, at one point, suggested it would be "wonderful" if Iranian Kurdish forces based in Iraq crossed into Iran to attack Iranian forces, a remark that alarmed Kurdish leaders and risked provoking Tehran. Mr. Trump later appeared to walk back the suggestion, saying the U.S. did not want to complicate the war further. The Iranian Kurdish groups themselves have denied any coordinated role in the conflict so far.

The escalation is pulling U.S. forces in Iraq back into confrontation against their old adversary: Iran-backed Shia militias that battled U.S. forces during the years following the 2003 U.S. invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein. Militias allied with Tehran have launched dozens of drone and rocket attacks on American targets, including facilities near Erbil International Airport, a base used by U.S. forces at Harir, and even the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad.

For years, the U.S. sought to wind down its military involvement in the country, but the latest attack could change things on the ground. Iran holds deep influence in the country through Shia political parties and armed factions collectively known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), while the United States still holds significant leverage through security cooperation, economic ties and remaining troop presence.

For decades, Iraq has served as a geopolitical crossroads where regional and international actors compete for influence.

'Lawless groups'

Kurdish authorities have stepped-up criticism of Baghdad's response. Safeen Dizayee, head of the Kurdistan Regional Government's Department of Foreign Relations, condemned what he described as militia drone strikes targeting civilian and diplomatic sites in the region. "We strongly condemn the militia drone attacks on the Kurdistan Region's infrastructure and civilian sites, including the recent targeting of the UAE Consulate General in Erbil and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad," Mr. Dizayee said in a statement on Sunday, urging the federal government and security forces to disarm the "lawless groups".

Mr. Barzani also held a telephone conversation with Tom Barrack, the U.S. Ambassador to Turkiye and Special Envoy for Syria, during which both sides condemned the recent attacks on the Kurdistan Region and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

So far, the conflict has seen more than 7,000 strikes carried out on Iranian targets by the U.S. and Israel, according to US Central Command (CENTCOM), while Iran has responded by launching over 2,000 drones and 600 missiles. It has also begun to disrupt shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, a vital chokepoint for global oil trade.

Anisha Dutta is a journalist based in New York

Lawmakers in EU move to implement U.S. trade deal

Agence France-Presse
BRUSSELS

EU lawmakers took on Thursday a key first step towards implementing a trade deal with the United States, put on hold after the Supreme Court struck down many of President Donald Trump's tariffs.

The European Parliament's trade committee voted to cut EU tariffs on some U.S. imports as provided under an August deal that Brussels has vowed to stick by – but attached additional safeguards, lawmakers said.

"The tariff reductions will only take effect once the U.S. has resolved the chaos following the Supreme Court's ruling," Green lawmaker Anna Cavazzini said.

Pact was thrown into question after the court ruled Trump lacks authority to impose levies

The future of the EU-U.S. pact was thrown into question after the court ruled in February that Mr. Trump lacks the authority to impose levies under a 1977 law.

Mr. Trump responded with fresh duties but that raised complex questions about the implications for the EU deal, which had set tariffs at 15% for most EU goods. The European Parliament, which has a say on implementing the EU side of the accord, pressed pause on the process last month seeking clarifications. The European Commission said the EU would abide by the pact and had received reassurances the United States would do likewise.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA-DEPARTMENT OF SPACE
CONSTRUCTION & MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC –SHAR
SRIHARIKOTA-524124

Brief E-TENDER NOTICE

No:SHAR: CMG CIVIL:MAINT:E-PT-18/25-26 **Dt: 18.03.2026**

On behalf of President of India, Item Rate tenders are invited through e-tendering for following works;

Name of Work	Tender No	Estimate Cost
Readiness of 150 nos.of vacant/under repair Qtrs in PHC-I & II, SDSC	T/C-25-068	₹ 89.79 Lakhs
Replacement of Joinery in 105 nos occupied Qtrs in PHC-I & II, SDSC	T/C-25-069	₹ 40.56 Lakhs
Supplying & fixing shamiyana and its accessories on hire basis at SDSC for the year 2026-2027	T/C-25-070	₹ 13.71 Lakhs
Arresting roof leakage by PU treatment at Gate-1 Building, SDSC	T/C-25-071	₹ 5.82 Lakhs

Tender documents can be downloaded up to **30.03.2026**, **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**

Sd/- GROUP HEAD, CMG/ SDSC SHAR

ONE OF A KIND

Samson cannot be compared to anyone: Royals skipper Parag

FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Sanju Samson's game is unique; he cannot be compared to anyone. It is like asking, 'Who is Virat Kohli's replacement?' It simply isn't possible. However, every player plays to win, and everyone possesses different capabilities — RR skipper Riyan Parag on how the team plans to fill the void left by Samson's departure to CSK.

SHARED IDENTITY

DC unveils jersey in a campaign featuring Axar and Jemimah

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Delhi Capitals unveiled its official jersey for IPL 2026 on Thursday. The campaign brings together captains from both the men's and women's teams, Axar Patel and Jemimah Rodrigues. The design draws inspiration from the fierce tiger spirit that defines both the team and the city it represents, stated a press release from DC.

MOVING ON

Stirling steps down as Ireland T20I captain, will lead in ODIs

AFP

Ireland will begin its search for a new T20I captain after veteran batter Paul Stirling stepped down from the role as part of the team's long-term planning for the ICC T20 World Cup in 2028. Ireland failed to progress past the group stage in the recent showpiece. The 35-year-old opener will continue to lead the ODI side.

HOCKEY WORLD CUP

Indian men to meet Pakistan on Aug. 19; women take on China

FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

The Indian men's hockey coach Craig Fulton expressed confidence regarding the team's path after the World Cup draw, in which it was drawn in Pool D. **India's schedule: Men: Aug. 15:** vs. Wales; **Aug. 17:** vs. England; **Aug. 19:** vs. Pakistan. **Women: Aug. 16:** vs. China; **Aug. 18:** vs. South Africa; **Aug. 20:** vs. England.

Super Giants should strike a balance between aggression and recklessness

The Lucknow outfit has a fearsome batting unit that includes Pant; the addition of veteran pacer Shami lends assurance to the bowling attack

Tarun Shastry

Lucknow Super Giants enters the 19th edition of the Indian Premier League not as a team in transition but with a clear vision and belief. It is a side that has confronted the difficult situations and, crucially, resisted the temptation to overcorrect.

For a franchise that has lingered on the edge of playoff contention in recent years, this season feels less like a reset and more like a work in refinement.

At the centre of that identity is Rishabh Pant. His captaincy remains instinctive – bold, occasionally chaotic, but never tentative. Pant's influence extends beyond numbers; he dictates the tempo and shapes how his side tackles pressure. The challenge is to not curb that aggression but calibrate it.

The batting unit reflects a similar duality – depth tempered by vulnerability. Nicholas Pooran remains the most significant variable. Only a few players in the league possess the ability to alter a match as swiftly as he can, yet his inconsistency can leave the side exposed.

The balance Lucknow seeks lies in reducing the dependence on the West Indian – allowing Pooran to finish the innings rather than rebuild it.

IPL-19 COUNTDOWN

Lucknow Super Giants

OVERALL NUMBERS

Matches	58
Won	30
Lost	27
NR	1

PLAYOFFS 2022, 2023

BY OPPONENT

TEAM	M	W	L	NR
CSK	6	3	2	1
DC	7	3	4	0
GT	7	3	4	0
KKR	6	4	2	0
MI	8	6	2	0
PBKS	6	3	3	0
RCB	6	2	4	0
RR	6	2	4	0
SRH	6	4	2	0

LSG'S 2026 LEAGUE CAMPAIGN*

April 1	vs. DC	Lucknow	7.30 p.m.
April 5	vs. SRH	Hyderabad	3.30 p.m.
April 9	vs. KKR	Kolkata	7.30 p.m.
April 12	vs. GT	Lucknow	3.30 p.m.

*announced so far

THE SQUAD

Rishabh Pant (Capt.), Aiden Markram, Himmat Singh, Matthew Breetzke, Mukul Choudhary, Akshat Raghuwanshi, Josh Inglis, Nicholas Pooran, Mitchell Marsh, Abdul Samad, Shahbaz Ahmed, Arshin Kulkarni, Wanindu Hasaranga, Ayush Badoni, Mohammed Shami, Avesh Khan, M. Siddharth, Digvesh Rathi, Akash Singh, Prince Yadav, Arjun Tendulkar, Anrich Nortje, Naman Tiwari, Mayank Yadav, Mohsin Khan.

MIRACLE MAN

Aiden Markram

AIDEN MARKRAM is a crucial component of the Lucknow outfit. He is not the loudest presence, but the most stabilising. His value lies in adaptability — the ability to absorb pressure, rotate the strike, and accelerate when needed. In a line-up full of aggressive batters, his composure lends balance. If he provides consistent starts, he will allow Pant and Pooran to operate with freedom.

COMPILED BY **G. PRASAD & TARUN SHASTRY**

Aiden Markram and Mitchell Marsh lend contrast to the top-order. Markram offers composure and has the ability to anchor when momentum swings, while Marsh brings attacking intent in the PowerPlay. If their roles align, the batting pack begins to function as a cohesive unit rather than being a sequence of individual efforts.

The bowling attack, however, may ultimately define the side's ceiling. The acquisition of Mohammed Shami from Sunrisers Hyderabad adds a layer of assurance. He brings not only wickets but also control and experience. Alongside him, Mayank Yadav and Avesh Khan ensure that pace remains a defining feature.

Need of the hour: Pant will hope for a turnaround after a poor season with the bat last year. LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

The inclusion of Wanindu Hasaranga addresses a long-standing concern. A genuine wicket-taking option in the middle overs, Hasaranga provides balance in a phase that often dictates T20 contests. But there is uncertainty regarding his participation as a hamstring injury forced him out of the T20 World Cup.

Yet, for all the balance on paper, familiar issues persist. The batting unit can still unravel quickly, injuries to key all-rounders could disrupt continuity, and the depth in spin beyond Hasaranga and Digvesh Rathi may be tested on slower surfaces.

On the same page

Under Pant and head coach Justin Langer, the approach appears straightforward – aggressive without being reckless, structured without being rigid – with the expectation that its promise will be measured by how far it goes when the stakes are high.

The question is no longer what it can be, but how much Pant's men are willing to push themselves.

Stojanovic's strike salvages a draw for Jamshedpur against SC Delhi

ISL

Vivek Krishnan
NEW DELHI

Sporting Club Delhi's first home game of the 2025-26 Indian Super League (ISL) season against Jamshedpur FC produced a 1-1 draw at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Thursday. SC Delhi forward Joseph Sunny's 21st-minute opener was nullified by Nikola Stojanovic's strike in the 89th minute for the visitors.

The first goal of the game came about after midfielder Abdul Hudu found Lamgoulen Semkholun on the right wing. The full-back evaded his marker and sent in a teasing cross into the six-yard box that Jamshedpur goalkeeper Albino Gomes failed to deal with adequately. The ball rebounded to Matija Babovic, who turned provider with a clever pass to Sunny on his left. The 22-year-old forward from Kerala pounced on the opportunity with a smart finish past Gomes.

As the first half progressed, Jamshedpur had its share of chances. In the 34th minute, Stojanovic picked out Rei Tachikawa with a left-footed cross from the right. If Tachikawa had taken a shot with his first touch, he would have tested Delhi's defence. Instead, he appeared to initially control the ball with his right thigh and wasted precious seconds in the process.

Stojanovic. X@INDSUPERLEAGUE

Amid a spell of heavy rain, the resumption saw Jamshedpur press keenly for an equaliser. Though the Owen Coyle-coached side shaded the possession in the second half, clear-cut chances were few and far between.

It was with just a minute of regulation time remaining that Stojanovic's effort from outside the box, helped by a slight deflection off defender Rafael Alves, beat Nora Fernandes in the Delhi goal.

The result: Sporting Club Delhi 1 (Joseph Sunny 21) drew with Jamshedpur FC 1 (Nikola Stojanovic 89).

Friday's matches:

At Guwahati: NorthEast United FC vs Odisha FC, 5 p.m.

At Kolkata: Mohun Bagan Super Giant vs Mumbai City FC, 7.30 p.m.

Jolt for CSK as a hamstring injury lays Ellis low

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings suffered a big blow ahead of IPL 2026, with Nathan Ellis ruled out of the 19th edition of the tournament.

The 31-year-old Australian fast bowler, who was bought for ₹2 crore in the 2025 auction, has suffered a hamstring injury and won't recover in time.

"It is a big blow for us. Ellis is a crucial bowler, especially in the death overs. We are looking at replacements," said CSK CEO K.S. Viswanthan to *The Hindu* on Thursday during an event to announce Kauvery Hospitals as an official partner of the team.

The hospital's medical director Dr. Iyappan Ponnuswamy, Dr. Aravindan Selvaraj, co-founder and executive director, and Dr. S. Sivaram Kannan, clinical lead & chief consultant physician, were present on the occasion.

The loss of Ellis could force a major rethink of plans for the Ruturaj Gaikwad-led outfit.

Since 2022, the team had relied on Matheesha Pathirana as the death-overs specialist, but released the Sri Lankan pacer after a disappointing campaign last year.

Ready to roar: Samson with his CSK identity. INSTAGRAM @CHENNAIIPL

Meanwhile, Viswanathan also said that the foreign recruits will join the camp in the next few days.

He said that the recent West Asia crisis, which has affected major airline hubs in the UAE and Qatar, hasn't significantly affected the travel plans of their overseas recruits.

Noor Ahmad has already arrived, while Jamie Overton reached on Thursday. The likes of Dewald Brevis, Matt Henry, Zak Foulkes and Matthew Short will join by March 22, while Akeal Hosein will reach on March 25.

Meanwhile, Sanju Samson, the star of India's victorious T20 World Cup campaign, arrived in the city on Thursday to join the pre-season camp.

New partnership: Dr. Iyappan Ponnuswamy, Dr. Aravindan Selvaraj, Dr. S. Sivaram Kannan with Viswananthan at the function to announce the association with Super Kings. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The five-time champion made one of the biggest trade deals in the IPL last year when it traded in Samson from Rajasthan Royals for Ravindra Jadeja and Sam Curran.

The Super Kings, including their star player M.S. Dhoni, have been training in the city since March 1, initially at the High Performance Centre and currently at the MAC Stadium.

The players could be involved in an intra-squad game here on March 23.

Ellis. AP

Bhubaneswar to host World indoor athletics in 2028

Fantastic venue: The Kalinga Indoor Stadium is the first of its kind in India. FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

Sports Bureau

The Kalinga Indoor Stadium in Bhubaneswar will host the 2028 World Athletics Indoor Championships, the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) announced on Thursday.

The World Athletics Council allotted the event to India following its meeting in Torun, Poland, the venue of the 2026 edition starting on Friday. India last hosted a global athletics event, the World Half-Marathon, in Delhi in 2004.

"The global competition will be held at the Kalinga Indoor Stadium," confirmed Athletics Federation of India president Bahadur Singh Sagoo.

A two-member delegation from World Athletics had inspected the venue in January last. The stadium, which is the first of its kind in India, is set to host the inaugural National Indoors on March 24 and 25.

The venue is also the front-runner to host the Asian Indoor Championships in 2028. An Asian Athletics Association team had inspected the Kalinga Stadium last month.

Abhay and Anahat make smooth starts

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

A mix of dominant performances, stunning comebacks and five-game thrillers featured day two of the JSW Indian Open squash tournament on Thursday.

Egypt's Ibrahim Elkabbani and Mohamed Sharaf prevailed in gripping contests.

India's Abhay Singh produced a clinical show to get past Matthew Lai of Hong Kong 11-5, 11-6, 11-6.

In the women's draw, top seed Anahat Singh registered a 11-6, 11-9, 11-5 win over Egypt's Farida Walid.

Other results: Men: Ameeshenraj Chandaran (Mas) bt Velavan Senthilkumar 11-8, 11-9, 11-9; Duncan Lee (Mas) bt Ramit Tandon 11-9, 11-4, 11-9; Ibrahim Elkabbani (Egy) bt Yahya Elnawasany (Egy) 4-11, 11-8, 12-10, 6-11, 11-9; Mohamed Sharaf (Egy) bt Chi Him Wong (Hkg) 10-12, 11-3, 9-11, 11-7, 11-6; Veer Chotrani bt Yannik Omlor (Ger) 5-3, retd.

Women: Tanvi Khanna bt Nour Khafagy (Egy) 11-5, 11-9, 11-9; Joshna Chinappa bt Breanne Flynn (Irl) 12-10, 11-4, 8-11, 11-9.

INBRIEF

16-year-old Pavic is Bayern's youngest-ever in CL

Bayern Munich defender Filip Pavic, aged 16 years and 58 days, became the club's youngest-ever Champions League player and the third-youngest in the competition's history when he came off the bench against Atalanta on Wednesday. UEFA said Pavic was the first player born in 2010 to feature in a Champions League game and the third-youngest in history after Arsenal's Max Dowman (15) and Youssoufa Moukoko (16 years and 18 days).

Iran 'boycotting' USA but not WC: football federation chief

Iran will "boycott the United States" but "not the World Cup", Iranian football federation president Mehdi Taj said in a video released by the Iranian press agency Fars. Iran is currently scheduled to play its group matches in the U.S. in this year's tournament. "We will be preparing for the World Cup. We will boycott the United States, but not the World Cup," Taj said on Wednesday. Iran's football federation says it has opened talks with FIFA about potentially relocating its matches from the United States, though the global governing body has so far maintained that the tournament's schedule remains unchanged.

Messi scores milestone 900th career goal

Argentine superstar Lionel Messi bagged the 900th goal of his career on Wednesday but could not prevent Inter Miami from crashing out of the CONCACAF Champions Cup. The last-16 clash with Major League Soccer rival Nashville ended 1-1. However, Nashville advanced to the quarterfinals on away goals rule.

Gawli appointed as India u-20 men's team head coach

Former India international Mahesh Gawli has been named head coach of the Indian Under-20 men's team, the AIFF announced on Thursday. This is Gawli's second stint with the u-20 side, having previously served from 2022 to 2023. He has also worked as an assistant coach with the senior national team and the Indian Arrows.

Haaland to back new Total Chess World C'ship Tour

Norwegian footballer Erling Haaland is investing in Norway Chess and the new Total Chess World Championship Tour. Together with Norwegian businessman Morten Borge, Haaland has established Chess Mates, which will be a significant owner of Norway Chess. The Total Chess World Championship Tour, approved by FIDE, will consist of four tournaments each year and will crown a combined World champion across three disciplines – Fast Classic, Rapid, and Blitz chess. A pilot tournament is planned for autumn 2026, followed by a full season in 2027. Each season will have a minimum annual prize pool of $2.7 million.

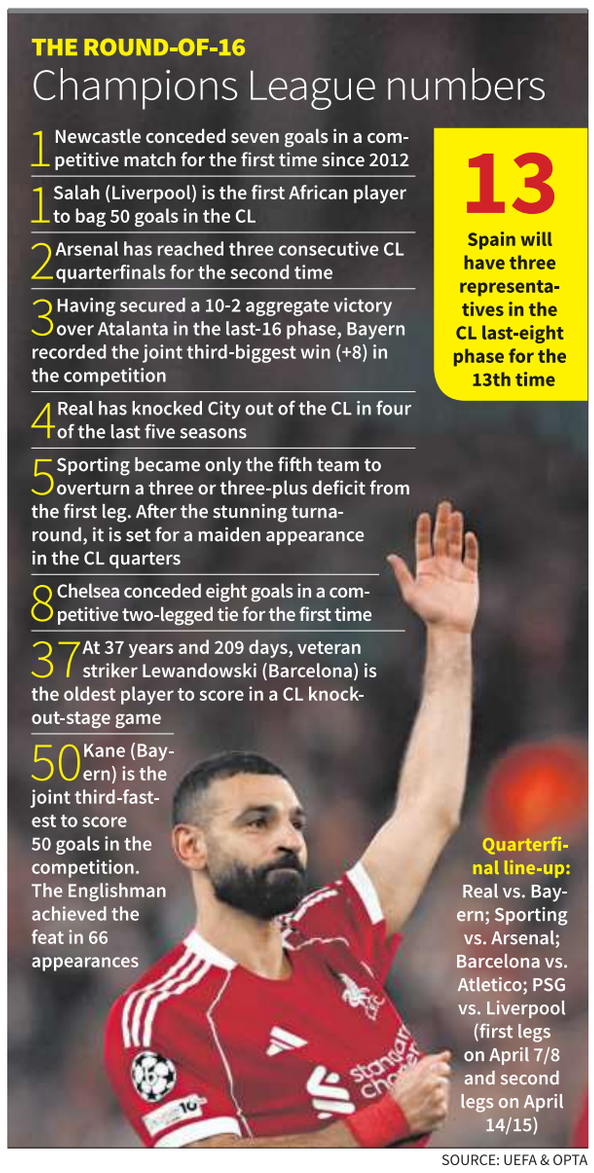
SUMMER CAMPS

Chennai St. Bede's Sports Foundation (CSSF) will conduct a summer cricket coaching camp for boys in the 6-19 years age group from April 1 to May 30 at the St. Bede's Grounds.
For details, contact 98400 70486 or 98412 27966.

BN CA will conduct a summer camp for boys and girls from April to June at Pattabi Nagar (opp. to Ramalaya Palace in Thiruverkadu).
For entry and further details, contact Radhakrishnan at 9941221367 or 75502 78313.

Barca pounds Newcastle into submission

The Catalan giant sets up a mouth-watering quarterfinal against Atletico, which progresses on aggregate despite losing at Tottenham; Liverpool proves too hot to handle for Galatasaray; dominant Bayern makes short work of Atalanta, winning the tie 10-2 on aggregate



SOURCE: UEFA & OPTA

FOOTBALL

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Barcelona hit Newcastle United for seven to reach the Champions League quarterfinals on Wednesday, while Liverpool overturned a first-leg deficit to beat Galatasaray in their last-16 tie and both Bayern Munich and Atletico Madrid advanced to the next round.

Raphinha and Robert Lewandowski both scored twice as LaLiga leader Barcelona tore apart Newcastle at the Camp Nou, winning 7-2 in the second leg of their last-16 encounter to progress 8-3 on aggregate.

All-Spanish quarterfinal

Hansi Flick's side can now look forward to an all-Spanish quarterfinal next month against Atletico.

Diego Simeone's men lost 3-2 on the night to Tottenham Hotspur in London, but progressed 7-5 on aggregate thanks to their 5-2 victory last week.

Liverpool was too good for Galatasaray, overturning a 1-0 first-leg deficit against the Turkish side with a comprehensive 4-0 win at Anfield.

The Reds are through to a quarterfinal against PSG.

Bayern's progress against Atalanta was never in doubt after its 6-1 win in the first leg in Italy, and followed that with a 4-1 success in Munich.

In elite club

Harry Kane's brace for Bayern took him to a half-century of Champions League goals, as he joined Salah and Thierry Henry on that overall mark – Kane has done it in 66 games compared to 97 for Salah.

Teenager Lennart Karl got Bayern's third and Luis Diaz the fourth, with Lazar Samardzic pulling one back as the Germans progress 10-2 on aggregate – they now face Real Madrid in a heavyweight showdown.

Deftly done: Raphinha scores Barcelona's first against Newcastle. AFP

The results (last 16, second leg):

Barcelona 7 (Raphinha 6, 72, Bernal 18, Yamal 45+7-pen, Lopez 51, Lewandowski 56, 61) bt Newcastle United 2 (Elanga 15, 28). *Barcelona wins 8-3 on aggregate.*

Liverpool 4 (Szoboszlai 25, Ekitike 51, Gravenberch 53, Salah 62) bt Galatasaray 0. *Liverpool wins 4-1 on aggregate.*

Bayern Munich 4 (Kane 25-pen, 54, Karl 56, Diaz 70) bt Atalanta 1 (Samardzic 85). *Bayern wins 10-2 on aggregate.*

Tottenham Hotspur 3 (Kolo Muani 30, Simons 52, 90-pen) bt Atletico Madrid 2 (Alvarez 47, Hancko 75). *Atletico wins 7-5 on aggregate.*

Balamurugan, Pande book a doubles medal for TN

TABLE TENNIS

Amol Karhadkar
INDORE

M.R. Balamurugan and Siddhesh Pande stunned West Bengal's top-seeded pair of Ankur Bhattacharjee and Shankhadip Das in the men's doubles quarterfinals to assure Tamil Nadu of its first medal at the 87th senior National table tennis championship here on Thursday.

Balamurugan and Pande prevailed 6-11, 11-4, 11-4, 13-11 in an intense 33-minute contest to set up a semifinal clash against Railways' Jeet Chandra and Anirban Ghosh.

While Balamurugan was solid with his forehand and backhand returns from deep, it was Pande's deft flicks that repeatedly caught the opposition off guard. His execution even led to Ankur losing his temper and receiving a yellow card for indiscipline.

In the fourth game, the Bengal pair surged to a 10-6 lead with aggressive play.

In focus: RSPB's Jeet and Anirban beat Haryana's Do Rosario & Nikunj in the quarterfinals. AMOL KARHADKAR

However, a couple of unforced errors, followed by another sharp flick from Pande, pushed the game into deuce.

As the Tamil Nadu pair converted its first match point, Ankur vented his frustration by throwing his racquet and tearing the rubber.

With several top singles players opting to skip the doubles events to conserve energy in the non-air-conditioned Abhay Prashal hall, the doubles competition has gained added significance among specialists. Jeet and Anirban, meanwhile, defeated Haryana's left- and right-handed combination of Wesley Do Rosario and Nikunj Attri in another engaging quarterfinal.

In a match marked by long rallies, the agile Anirban proved decisive, setting up a semifinal against the Tamil Nadu duo.

In the other semifinal, second seeds Ronit Bhanja and S. Preyesh Raj of Railways will face Petroleum Sports Promotion Board's combination of Divyansh Srivastava and veteran Sanil Shetty.

Sreeja survives a scare

Top seed Sreeja Akula survived a scare from her RBI teammate Ayhika Mukherjee, winning the battle of long-pimpled rubbers 1-11, 11-5, 12-10, 9-11, 11-8 in 45 minutes. After a slow start, Sreeja targeted Ayhika's backhand to precision. After enjoying six match points in the decider, Sreeja had a stutter as Ayhika saved four in a row. But a backhand error resulted in Sreeja along with her coach Somnath Ghosh heaving a sigh of relief.

The results: Men's doubles: Quarterfinals: M.R. Balamurugan & Siddhesh Pande (TN) bt Ankur Bhattacharjee & Shankhadip Das (WB) 6-11, 11-4, 11-4, 13-11; Jeet Chandra & Anirban Ghosh (RSPB) bt Wesley Do Rosario & Nikunj Attri (Har) 11-6, 4-11, 11-9, 12-10; Sanil Shetty & Divyansh Srivastaava (PSPB) bt Karthikeyhan Solaiyan & Tharun Shanmugam (TN) 11-8, 11-8, 10-12, 11-6; Ronit Bhanja & S. Preyesh Raj (RSPB) bt Sarthak Arya & Tushar Chauhan (Odi) 11-1, 13-11, 11-5.

Tickets on sale for CSK's fan event

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) is set to host ROAR'26, a mega fan event, on March 22 at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium.

The event will see "OG" Super Kings – featuring the likes of Suresh Raina, Matthew Hayden, Murali Vijay, and Subramaniam Badrinath – reunite to take on the current CSK squad in a series of exhibition matchups at Chepauk.

Adding to the spectacle, Oscar-winning composer A.R. Rahman will deliver a special live performance.

The event will begin at 4.30 p.m. Gates will open from 2.30 p.m. and entry will be permitted only through the gates mentioned on the tickets.

Kalaivanar Arangam, Madras University campus, Railway car parking, and Victoria Hostel have been assigned as parking locations. Plastic items, tobacco products, outside food or beverages, and pets are not allowed. Free drinking water will be available at all the stands. Limited wheelchair seating will be available in the I-Lower stand.

Tickets for the event may be purchased from the CSK and District apps, and the franchise's official website.

Sale details (read as stand, rate): C/D/E Lower, ₹2000; I/J/K Upper, ₹3000; I/J/K Lower, ₹3500; C/D/E Upper, ₹4000; KMK Terrace, ₹3500; KMK Lower, ₹15000.

Only four tickets will be issued per person.

LIVE TELECAST

New Zealand vs South Africa: 3rd T20I, Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 11.45 a.m.

Squash: Indian Open, FanCode, 3 p.m.

I-League: Sony Sports Ten 1, 5 & LIV, 4 & 6.30 p.m.

ISL: Sony Sports Ten 2 & FanCode, 5 & 7.30 p.m.

LaLiga: FanCode, 1.30 a.m. (Saturday)

Premier League: SS Select 1 & JioHotstar, 1.30 a.m. (Saturday)

ENGAGEMENTS

General: DRBCCC Hindu College, Annual Sports Day, chief guest, Olympian boxer and Arjuna awardee Venkatesan Devarajan (Sports Officer - S. Rly), college campus (Pattabiram), 10 a.m.

AROUND THE CITY

Champion: The victorious M.O.P. Vaishnav College handball team.

Ruling the roost: A.M. Jain College (Meenambakkam), winner of the CSK-DCAC inter-collegiate T20 tournament recently.

Tharun's five-for highlights Standard Ambattur's win

Left-arm spinner V. Tharun Kumar's five for 22 set up Standard Ambattur CC's five-wicket win over Ambattur CC in a Zone-A match of the Thiruvallur DCA first division league.

The scores: I-A: Ambattur 134 in 25.4 overs (L. Pradheep Vishal 47, V. Tharun Kumar 5/22) lost to Standard Ambattur 135/5 in 25.4 overs (V. Tharun Kumar 32, Javed Mohamed 31). *Match reduced to 30 overs per side due to overnight rain.*

II-B: WABCO India RC 234/9 in 30 overs (G. Rajesh Kanna 36, V.R. Abhishek 49, S. Ashwath Narayanan 32) bt Classic 114/9 in 30 overs (M. Dinesh Kumar 4/30).

Guru Nanak-A enters the final

Guru Nanak College-A prevailed over Ethiraj College by nine runs in the women's semifinal of the 12th Pavit Singh Nayar Memorial T20 All India inter-college cricket tournament on Thursday.

The scores (semifinals): Guru Nanak-A 120/3 in 20 overs bt Ethiraj 111/7 in 20 overs (A. Varshini 36).

Sri Ramakrishna CAS, Coimbatore 148/5 in 20 overs (S. Sweata 37, S. Vaishnaavi 47) bt Guru Nanak-B 83/9 in 20 overs.

Gowthaman's unbeaten ton sets up GE's victory

K.S. Gowthaman's unbeaten 151 helped GE T&D beat Mani Memorial by 50 runs in a Zone-B match of the DCA of Chengalpattu second division league.

The scores: I: Sheshadri MCC 177 in 36.4 overs (Mohisn M. Shaik 45, G. Umesh 47, K. Kevin Romario 3/21) bt Adambakkam 134 in 34.1 overs (K. Kevin Romario 53, Lakshmi Narayana 3/40).

Vijay 255 in 42.5 overs (S. Ganesh 31, Jagadeesh 58, Narendra Babu 35, Thamos Ryan 31, D. Saravanan 30, Bharath 3/54, Aravind Vedhagiri 4/44) bt Spring Field 99 in 24.5 overs (J. Sathish Shankar 3/16, Shiva Karthikeyan 3/34).

Gurunanak Combines 72 in 16.2 overs lost to Rider 76 for no loss in 7.4 overs (Joe Krish Tibertius 35 n.o., S. Shrihari 33 n.o.).

II-A: Prahlad 174/3 in 30 overs (M. Sudharsanamoorthi 73, NK. Pramoth 65) bt M.G. Bavanarayanan MCC 104 in 24 overs (Krishanth Kannan 4/5).

Friends XI 147/5 in 30 overs (B. Sai Shamrudh 39, S.P. Sundaram Raghu Raman 63 n.o.) lost to KRC 148/5 in 18.2 overs (K. Elangovan 62, B. Akshadh Rao 31 n.o., N. Harish Raghavendran 3/28).

II-B: GE T&D 267/3 in 27 overs (G.R. Jeyanth 57, K.S. Gowthaman 151 n.o.) bt Mani Memorial 217/9 in 27 overs (P. Pradeep Kumar 46, B. Sanjay Krishna 41, A. Shinoj 30).

Little Hearts 130/9 in 30 overs (S.A. Kavin Raj 36, Kukkala Shalom Snehal 36) bt Gopalakrishnan MCC 106 in 26.5 overs (G. Devesh 3/26).

K.S. Gowthaman (GE T&D, 151 n.o.), V. Tharun Kumar (Standard Ambattur CC, 5/22).

Nirmal-Sandip pair on top

Nirmal Kumar Jain and Sandip Dang secured 69.96% to win the MCC open bridge tournament. R. Sreekrishnan and G. Girish finished runner-up with 69.85%.

M.O.P. Vaishnav triumphs

M.O.P. Vaishnav College for Women beat A-Zone Combined 13-4 in the final to win the inter-zone women's handball tournament, organised by University of Madras, at Nazareth College recently.

A tale of two think-tanks

The English team management of Brook and McCullum has left Livingstone in limbo while India T20I skipper Suryakumar and coach Gambhir have facilitated the second coming of Kishan and Samson

R. Kaushik

Livingstone and Samson. GETTY IMAGES & EMMANUAL YOGINI

Liam Livingstone isn't just a journeyman cricketer. He has represented England in exactly 100 internationals across all three formats, is a World Cup winner (T20, Australia, 2022) and briefly captained the One-Day International side in a series against West Indies in November 2024.

The 32-year-old is more than a bits-and-pieces player, as a 20-over average of 28.00 at a strike-rate of 144.70 and 148 wickets at an economy of 8.48 across 340 matches will attest. He is a fantastic ball-striker, a finisher – a role much in demand – and he can bowl off-spin and leg-spin with equal felicity. He is a rare commodity in the modern game, especially in the T20 format where the decided onus is on all-round skills – oh, and did we say he is a gun fielder too?

Livingstone hasn't played for England for more than a year now, since the 50-over Champions Trophy loss to South Africa in Karachi. His last T20I appearance came a month before that, against India in Mumbai in early February 2025. When he was dropped, Livingstone didn't have too many complaints; he didn't have a great T20I tour of India, and his last six ODI innings produced a mere 88 runs. Three of those knocks came at the Champions Trophy, when he made 14, 10 and 9 while batting at No. 7. England lost all three games and were knocked out at the league stage; Livingstone believed at the time that that was the beginning of his problems. Little did he know then how they would spiral beyond control.

In a recent interview with *ESPNcricinfo* that is scathing of the English management, he has called the Champions Trophy 'the worst experience I've had playing cricket'. "I was asking for help and pretty much all I got was that I care too much and I need to chill out a little bit, and everything will take care of itself."

England's first assignment after the Champions Trophy was a home series against West Indies, and Livingstone was promptly dropped. Livingstone has revealed that he got a call from Brendon McCullum, the all-format coach, who told him that they wanted to 'try someone else'. There was a text message from Harry Brook, the white-ball skipper, and nothing at all from Luke Wright, the outgoing selector, Livingstone has maintained. And he has said that when he rang Rob Key, the managing director, the former international batter apparently told him that he was 'busy' at a Test camp in Loughborough.

Damning indictment

Under McCullum and Ben Stokes, the Test skipper, England pride themselves on a culture of inclusiveness, on looking after each other, on being empathetic and understanding. Maybe they are all this, but according to Livingstone, that only applies to those who are in the mix. "If you're in, you're in, and if you're not in, no-one cares about you." That's a damning indictment of team culture, if ever there was one.

For all the glitz and glamour associated with sport, cricketers are an extremely sensitive and insecure lot. Even the best are assailed by self-doubt on a regular basis; stalwarts have pointed out that cricket is a game of failure more than it is of success, and that the trick is in trying to prolong the gap between failures, if possible. International cricket's most prolific run-maker, Sachin Tendulkar, for instance, made 50 or more in Test cricket 119 times in 329 innings – that translates to him not scoring a half-century 63.8% of the times he took guard. That's how much the odds are stacked against even the best of the best.

In India, with its vast skill pool and a staggering depth that is a huge tribute to the terrific talent-spotting and nurturing process in play, the scramble for places in the national side is frenetic and often fruitless. For every Ishan Kishan or Varun Chakaravarthy that manages to break in through a combination of sustained brilliance and great fortune – and let's not underestimate the value of luck, ever, though it is never the decisive factor – there are thousands that fail to make the cut. Why, even at the State-level, supply far outstrips demand.

Kishan. VIJAY SONEJI

Vital role

When players rise to the top and get into the national side, it is not the end of the journey, even if it feels so, but merely the beginning of one. The goal is not to play alone for India, but to play well, play for the team, contribute to victories and have a long career. But because the process of gatecrashing into the elite mix is so draining and competitive, players need time to find their feet, they need not just opportunities but quality of opportunities. And that's where the role of the leadership group – the captain, the head coach, the selection panel – becomes vitally important.

It's impossible to perform with a clear mind when the sword of Damocles hangs tantalisingly, ominously, over one's head. Crack performances stem from a sense of security, from the knowledge that one will get a longish rope because their entry into the India ranks hasn't been by accident. They emanate from knowing that one has the faith and the confidence and the support and the backing of the team management, whose job it is to provide the perfect environment that will allow each individual to optimise their talent.

There can't be a one-size-fits-all approach, which is where man-management comes into the picture. Different players react differently to the same instruction delivered in the same manner. A respected former support staff member once told this writer that if he used the same language with Jasprit Bumrah as, say, with an Umesh Yadav or a Mohammed Shami, he would completely lose the genius from Ahmedabad. As coaches and/or captain, it is important to know what makes one tick, what to say when, when to crack the whip and when to hold back. Coaching, particularly, at the international level is less about high left elbows and impeccable wrist position as about managing people and helping them stay relaxed and in a good headspace. They said of Mike Brearley, the former England captain who didn't have the greatest batting record, that he had a degree in people. No wonder then that he extracted some of the most iconic all-round displays from Ian Botham, tempestuous and volatile but one of the greatest match-winners of all time.

Out-of-favour Livingstone has called the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy 'the worst experience I've had playing cricket'

This summary dumping of Livingstone might resonate loosely with Kishan, one suspects. The little fella from Jharkhand was in the process of establishing himself in the Indian side during the unfortunate availability of Rishabh Pant, slowly recovering from his terrible single-car accident of December 2022, when he was dropped from all three formats during the tour of South Africa in 2023-24. A year back, Kishan had smashed a double-century in an ODI in Chattogram; he followed it up with a half-century in his second and last Test appearance, in Port of Spain in July 2023 and opened alongside skipper Rohit Sharma in India's first two matches at the 2023 50-over World Cup, making 0 and 47 respectively while Shubman Gill was recovering from dengue.

By the South Africa tour, the wicketkeeper-batter had lost out to Jitesh Sharma in the T20I set-up, and to K.L. Rahul in the other two versions. Perhaps miffed, he quit the tour midway through in a huff, then foolishly ignored official decrees to represent his state in domestic cricket as he practised at a private academy in preparation for IPL 2024. Punishment was swift and hard-hitting; he lost his central contract and spent a further year and a half on the sidelines which he used judiciously.

Stellar show

Taking well-meaning advice from right quarters on board and readjusting his mindset, he assumed greater responsibility, tempered his happy-go-lucky approach, took his State to the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy T20 title – it helped that he made a century in the final – and led Jharkhand with imagination and nous. When India mulled a rejig to their batting order just ahead of the World Cup, he received a call from T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav, asking if he would win the team the title. *Bharosa karoge*? (Will you trust me?), Kishan counter-asked the captain. Suryakumar said yes, Kishan returned in a blaze of glory, finishing as his team's second highest run-getter and lighting up the tournament with his electricity and uninhibited stroke-making.

The man who finished ahead of Kishan in the run-making stakes himself is the beneficiary of tremendous support and backing from Suryakumar and head coach Gautam Gambhir. Sanju Samson played himself out of the XI with a string of low scores against New Zealand in January, but once India felt the need to split their left-handed opening pair of Kishan and Abhishek Sharma midway through the World Cup, the call went to the Kerala man to step in. For more than a decade, Samson had delivered on his promise only sporadically, but even when he lost confidence in himself, the think-tank didn't.

Dispelling self-doubt

They saw in him a gifted but anxious individual weighed down by underachievement, so they set about dispelling the gremlins of self-doubt. Gambhir went to the extent of telling Samson that he wouldn't drop him even after 21 ducks; at nets during the World Cup, whether he was likely to play or not, he received quality batting time. There was a conscious effort to make him feel comfortable and wanted, to give him the assurance that he belonged not just in the15 but also in the XI. When he got his chance, Samson responded in kind. In the three matches that mattered the most, he strung together a sequence of 97 not out, 89 and 89, finally displaying the consistency that his talent demanded but that perhaps his mental fragility repelled.

From fringe player at the start of the competition to Player-of-the-Tournament must be one of the great cricketing fairytale stories in recent times, and while there is no doubt that most of it was Samson, it wasn't just all Samson. And in that lies the victory of the leadership group, of its communication skills and messaging, of keeping the faith and eventually reaping the reward.

Brook and McCullum have their own way of functioning, perhaps vastly different from Suryakumar and Gambhir. The former has left Livingstone in limbo, the latter has facilitated the second coming of Samson. No prizes for guessing in which corner any player would like to be.

THE GIST

- For all the glitz and glamour associated with sport, cricketers are an extremely sensitive and insecure lot
- There can't be a one-size-fits-all approach, which is where man-management comes into the picture
- Samson's stunning turnaround from fringe player at the start of the competition to Player-of-the-Tournament at the T20 WC must be one of the great cricketing fairytale stories in recent times

A doctor examining a patient during a consultation at a private hospital in New Delhi. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Women and tuberculosis: a story of deprivation, discrimination and debt

Women in India face problems from the very beginning of their TB journey: late diagnoses or misdiagnoses are compounded by stigma, limited mobility, lack of finances and multiple barriers to care; a comprehensive approach to prioritising and tackling their health right through their lifespans could go a long way towards combating TB burden

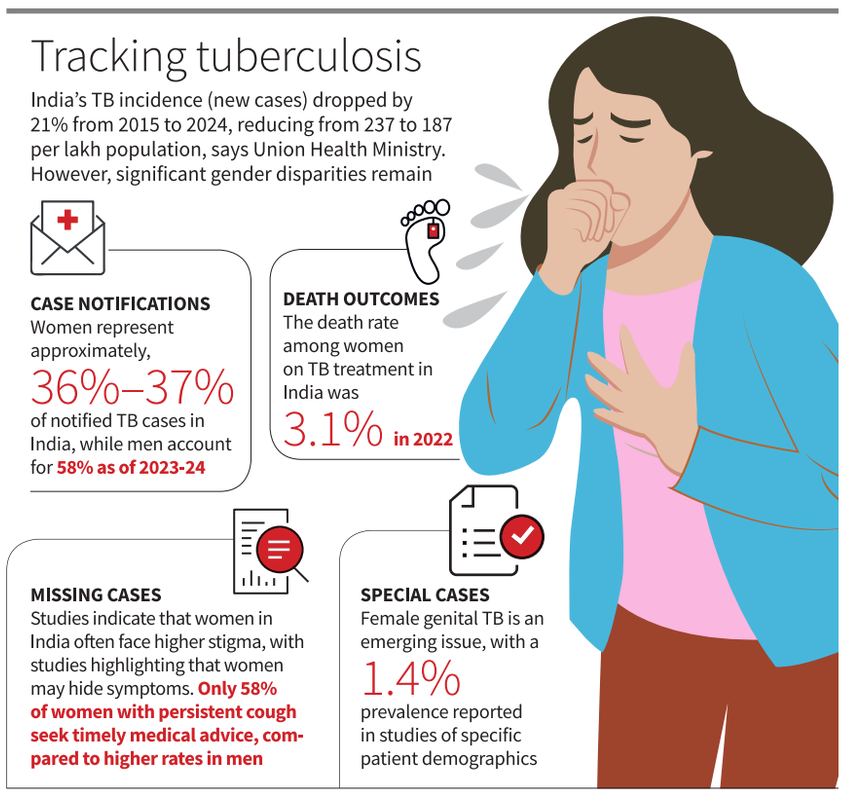
Bindu Shajan Perappadan

Rekha (named changed) does not like being photographed, has no close friends, and is not on social media. This wasn't the case a few years ago though.

In 2020, Rekha was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB), having contracted it from her father, who died two years later of the disease. Following the diagnosis, treatment, and cure, the now-28-year-old survivor says, "My diagnosis changed my life forever. The stigma attached to TB runs deep. I don't know if any person other than my own family will accept me." She adds that her close friends abandoned her, and her relatives, fearing shared financial responsibilities vanished. She has made the decision never to get married. Rekha adds that not being married at the time of her diagnosis and treatment was a real blessing. "It would have complicated and hampered my diagnosis, treatment, and recovery," she explains.

Rekha's TB story isn't unique in India. Here, women consistently face life-altering discrimination and stigma following a diagnosis.

Currently India bears the world's highest tuberculosis burden, accounting for over 25% of global cases, with an estimated 2.7 million new infections and over 3 lakh deaths in 2024, as per the World Health Organization's (WHO) Global TB Report 2025. The incidence dropped by 21% from 2015 to 2024, nearly double the global decline rate. The report states that 54% of people who developed TB in 2024 were men, 35% women, and 11% were children and young adolescents.



SOURCES: UNION HEALTH MINISTRY, WHO, INDIA TB REPORT 2024

Social, emotional impacts

Blessina Kumar is a health activist and public health professional with over three decades of experience working with diverse communities across India. "While men carry the larger burden of TB, data alone doesn't tell the entire TB story in India," she says.

Education and financial capacity do not always protect a person from stigma: a TB diagnosis can adversely hit even highly educated, financially independent Indian women, she says. "We worked with a young woman physician from Maharashtra who was married and had enrolled for her specialised medical degree, when she was diagnosed with TB. Overnight she was abandoned by her husband, while the disease took a toll on her physical and mental health. She couldn't continue her studies. It took her a few years to get her life back on track," shares Ms. Kumar. She says very few women, including this doctor who is now a practising paediatrician, are willing to talk about their diagnosis in public. For women, TB brings to the forefront questions about human rights and a woman's ability to make decisions about their own lives. Adequate nutrition, access to monetary resources, fear of social isolation, and hesitation to seek medical care are issues that most Indian women grapple with, Ms. Kumar explains. Alongside the actual disease, Indian women also fight delayed diagnosis, disrupted treatment and almost no mental health support. Ms. Kumar points out that despite the wins in TB elimination, the country has been able to achieve, women and their multi-fold problems persist.

Misdiagnosis, late diagnosis

Speaking about what doctors often encounter when dealing with female patients, Alpa Dalal, head of pulmonary medicine, Jupiter Hospital, Thane, explains that women often hide their TB symptoms, which leads to misdiagnosis and even death.

"The social stigma attached to TB reduces their marriage prospects. Married women face the danger of being abandoned by their husband and in-laws, and not getting any financial help for treatment and care. Women are also often expected to continue with their daily household work despite the disease, and if they get pregnant during treatment they often stop medicines fearing the side-effects on the foetus," says Dr. Dalal.

Doctors indicate that besides the socio-economic impact, women may experience TB differently from its typical manifestations and this has consequences for how TB is detected and treated. Evidence indicates that pulmonary TB can manifest differently in women, often leading to non-specific presentations such as fever and fatigue. As a result, women may not always exhibit the classic markers doctors associate with TB. Medical professionals who rely on verbal screenings are less likely to suspect women of suffering from TB when they initially reach out, contributing to further diagnostic delays.

Data from WHO's 2025 Global TB Report also shows that a higher proportion of men in India are diagnosed using bacteriological testing methods, whereas women are more likely to be diagnosed clinically, i.e., verbal symptom-based screening or using a chest X-ray without a confirmatory test. The male to female ratio of bacteriologically confirmed adult TB cases detected in India is 3:1.

Issues in diagnosis are further compounded by the reality that women are more likely than men to suffer from certain forms of extrapulmonary (non-lung) TB. While this form of TB is non-infectious and hence overlooked in global TB prevention programmes that primarily focus on transmission control, it can be debilitating.

One particularly concerning form, genital or reproductive tuberculosis, presents symptoms such as subfertility or menstrual irregularity, which are rarely associated with a typical TB diagnosis. Diagnosis and management of extra pulmonary TB (EPTB) can thus be a problem given the non-specific and atypical symptoms. In 2023, EPTB constituted 24% of the total notified cases and is generally more prevalent in immuno-compromised people.

Healthcare-seeking

Public health professionals say that in India, a woman's lack of autonomy restricts her decision-making power and access to resources, including healthcare. Nutritionally, too, women face a double burden: gender disparities in food security combined with higher nutritional needs during pregnancy, lactation, and menstruation make adolescent girls and women of reproductive age especially vulnerable to malnutrition.

Doctors explain that undernutrition significantly increases women's vulnerability to TB. Undernutrition is recognised as the leading comorbidity among all people with TB in India.

Women's health is often de-prioritised in the family unit making it difficult for them to leave their households and seek professional help. "In India the compounded effects of gender roles, restricted mobility, and an overall lack of awareness places women in a position of vulnerability that is nearly impossible to escape," says Dr. Dalal.

For Meera Yadav, the cost was one lung. The drug-resistant TB survivor recalls the severe coughing, high fever, and chest pain she had 13 years ago. She was finally diagnosed with MDR-TB, but delays in proper testing and limited awareness made her recovery journey difficult.

"I faced severe stigma and discrimination from my family, who isolated and abandoned me instead of offering support. The emotional trauma was as painful as the physical suffering. Due to extensive damage caused by the disease, I lost one lung," she says, adding that her treatment lasted until 2018. She is now a strong TB activist advocating for patient rights and better access to care.

"There is a need to meaningfully engage TB survivors in programme implementation. Survivors can play an important role in providing mental health and psychosocial support," she says. The government in 2019 formulated a gender-responsive framework of TB prevention and diagnosis. Its recommendations called for immediate attention and implementation by stakeholders, including the TB programme, frontline workers, and survivor networks.

"The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare launched the TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan on December 7, 2024 and among other innovative strategies, is heavily relying on AI-powered chest X-rays to screen asymptomatic TB, also called sub-clinical TB, among high-risk groups, such as the elderly, people living with HIV and diabetes, among others," says a senior Health Ministry official.

Gaps need addressing

Issues with diagnosis apart, gaps in treatment continue to plague the system. As per the 2025 India TB Report, management of EPTB is primarily available at tertiary centres and medical colleges.

Moreover, healthcare providers often do not have up-to-date information on the latest way EPTB is managed. In 2023, the programme developed a training module on extrapulmonary TB. Training healthcare providers to identify non-lung TB at earlier stages will be critical to improve management of this type of TB.

Post-TB complications can also worsen due to late diagnosis. Nearly 50% of survivors develop long-term lung complications, points out Vikas Mittal, director - pulmonologist, CK Birla Hospital, Delhi. Many continue to experience persistent breathlessness and chronic cough even after completing treatment, a condition known as post-tuberculosis lung disease (PTLD).

Survivors are also at increased risk of developing chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), even if they have never smoked. "Late detection can result in more severe lung damage and higher risk of post-TB complications," he says.

Doctors also explain that women in India have poorer immunity when compared to men, due to lower muscle mass, high incidence of anaemia, poor health-seeking behaviour, unhealthy nutrition and eating habits, and emotional suppression and neglect by family. A comprehensive approach to prioritising and tackling women's health right through their lifespans could go a long way towards combating the TB burden while also ensuring a healthier future for new generations.

(bindu.p@thehindu.co.in)

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

U.S. national debt in the wake of the Iran war

39 in $ trillion. The national debt surpassed a record $39 trillion, a milestone that comes just weeks into the U.S.-Israeli war in Iran. The unprecedented figure highlights administration priorities, from passing a tax law and boosting defence spending and immigration enforcement to chipping away at the debt itself. AP

Share of sitting RS MPs who declared criminal cases

32 in per cent. Around 32% of sitting Rajya Sabha MPs have declared criminal cases against themselves, while 14% are billionaires, according to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The report is based on an analysis of affidavits of 229 out of 233 Rajya Sabha MPs. PTI

Percentage dip in fire-related calls in Delhi this year

19 in per cent. According to Delhi Fire Services (DFS) data, 2,716 fire calls were received between January 1 and March 15, down from 3,352 in the corresponding period of 2025. Despite this, casualties remain a concern, with 13 deaths and 111 injuries reported, compared to 18 fatalities and 109 injuries during the same period last year. PTI

Number of African migrants who drowned off Comoros

17 At least 17 African migrants who were trying to reach the French Indian Ocean island of Mayotte have drowned off Comoros, the government said. Around 30 people had been found alive after the group arrived near the coastal town of Mitsamiouli, about 40 kilometres from the capital Moroni, a government Minister said. AFP

Rights activists killed in Colombia between 2016-25

1,000 "Between 2016 and 2025, the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights recorded 972 killings of human rights defenders," an average of nearly 100 deaths a year, the UNHCR said in a statement. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Oil, power, and politics of disruption

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz disrupts a vital artery of the global economy, triggering price increases and turmoil in energy markets; as supply shocks reshape the geopolitics of energy, countries like India, the U.S., and Russia recalibrate strategies amid shifting oil flows and rising dependence

ECONOMIC NOTES

Jayan Jose Thomas

The blue waters of the Strait of Hormuz, connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea, form a vital artery of the global economy. Through this narrow gateway – stretching just 33 km at some points – pass ships carrying nearly a fifth of the oil that is traded worldwide. After the U.S. and Israel launched a military campaign against Iran on February 28, Iran blocked ships passing through the Strait, leading to price increases and turmoil in energy markets.

Global energy flows

Oil and natural gas account for a little over half of the global energy supply (with coal, renewables, and other sources accounting for the rest, according to IEA data for 2024). They fuel vehicles from trucks to aeroplanes, produce electricity and cooking gas, and provide critical raw materials for industries.

West Asian countries around the Persian Gulf, notably Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, are among the largest producers of crude oil and natural gas. At the same time, some of the largest energy consumers are in East and South Asia, particularly China, India, and Japan. Still, these countries have limited domestic oil reserves to power their growing economies (though China is a major natural gas producer) **(Chart 1)**. They depend on crude and natural gas imports from West Asia, much of which passes through the Strait of Hormuz.

America and West Asia

The concentration of energy reserves, especially oil, in a few regions has been the primary trigger for some of the long-standing and intense contests between global powers. Aside from the Persian Gulf countries, only a few nations – the U.S., Russia, Venezuela, and Canada – have large oil and natural gas reserves.

The U.S. has been a principal player in the geopolitics of energy, both a major producer and consumer. Given the gas-guzzling sectors driving its economy, the U.S. has an average energy supply per person that is 10 times that of India and 2.4 times that of China. The hunt for more energy has been one of the primary motives of the U.S. international policies.

Control over oil in West Asia shifted from large American and European firms to state-owned national oil companies since the 1950s. Oil prices increased sharply in the 1970s, with Arab members exerting greater influence within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries. The U.S. response has been twofold: it increased domestic production by drilling more shale oil, especially since the mid-2000s, making it the world's largest oil producer, and it tried to mould the geopolitics of oil in its favour through strategic interventions, including the Gulf War (1990-91), the Iraq War (2003-11), recent action in Venezuela (2026), and the ongoing U.S.-Israel war with Iran.

Although current production levels are modest, Venezuela and Iran together account for 39% of the world's proven oil reserves. The promise of future oil is what makes these countries strategically important, especially in the profit projections of U.S. President Donald Trump. However, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has, at least in the short term, upset Mr. Trump's calculations and made Russia an unintended beneficiary of the energy turmoil. Following the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, Russia became a pariah in the West, especially Europe, and trade sanctions have long stymied its oil trade. But suddenly, as oil production capabilities in West Asia take a hit, Russian oil has become crucial for stabilising energy prices. Outside West Asia, Russia is the only country with a large tradable oil surplus **(Table 1)**.

Russian oil and India

The oil markets are deeply interlinked. Even a ripple in a corner of the market can gather itself into a tumultuous wave. India is the world's second-largest importer of crude oil and the third-largest consumer. Supply disruptions result in higher prices for essential goods and services in India. At the same time, India's actions in the oil market significantly impact global oil prices.

European countries, with limited domestic oil and natural gas reserves, have traditionally relied on energy imports, mainly from Russia, to withstand the frosty winters. But with sanctions on Russian products imposed since 2022, Europe has had to seek new energy sources, mainly in West Asia.

Today, with the Strait of Hormuz closed and oil prices crossing $110 a barrel, U.S. is desperate to see greater purchases of sanctioned Russian oil

In this context, India began purchasing Russian oil at discounted prices. The share of Russian imports in India's oil purchases increased dramatically – from 2.5% in 2021 to 39.0% in 2023. Notice that crude oil is processed in refineries to convert it into a range of products, including petrol, diesel, LPG, and petrochemicals. While dependent on imported crude, China and India have built large refining capacity and export a portion of their refined oil products. Some Indian refiners have made large profits by exporting products processed from discounted crude.

Despite their protestations, Western leaders quietly welcomed the stability in oil prices that resulted when demand from India was partly diverted to sanctioned Russian oil since 2022 **(Chart 2)**.

Under strain

Today, with the Strait of Hormuz closed and oil prices crossing $110 a barrel, the U.S. is desperate to see greater purchases of sanctioned Russian oil, which has long been marooned at sea, to calm the markets.

A week, indeed, can be a long time in international politics. As tensions prolong in West Asia, the global energy order could be reshaped.

(Jayan Jose Thomas is a Professor of Economics at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi)

When routes **run tight**

The closure of the Strait of Hormuz has disrupted a vital artery of the global economy, pushing up oil prices and unsettling energy markets

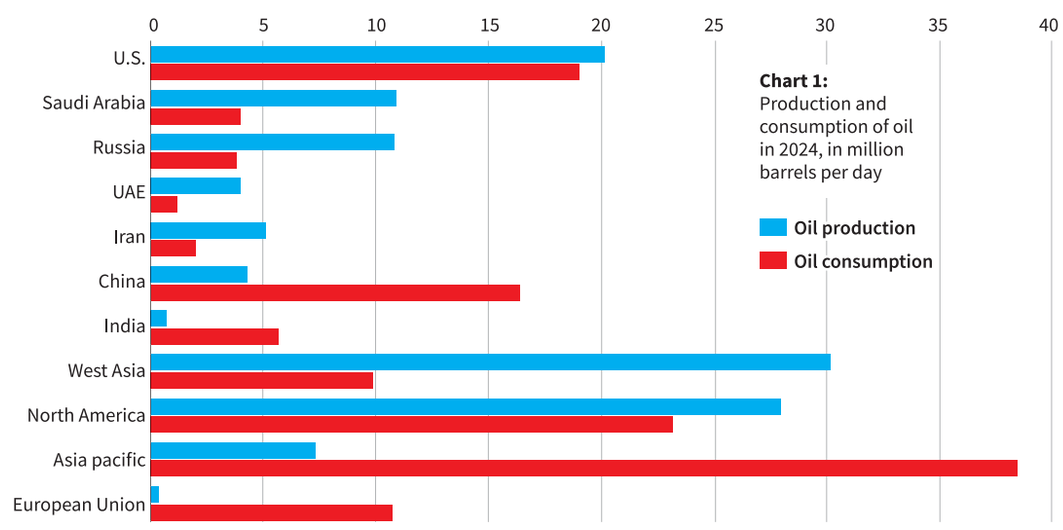

Chart 1: Production and consumption of oil in 2024, in million barrels per day

Source: Statistical Review of World Energy 2025, The Energy Institute

Table 1: Oil trade in 2024, in million barrels per day

	Crude & product imports	Crude exports	Product exports	Net Exports
Saudi Arabia	0.4	6.4	1.2	7.2
Russia	0.0	4.9	2.2	7.0
UAE	0.8	3.7	2.0	4.9
Canada	1.0	4.4	0.7	4.2
Iraq	0.1	3.6	0.5	4.0
U.S.	8.4	4.0	5.9	1.4
India	**6.0**	**0.0**	**1.9**	**-4.1**
China	13.4	0.0	1.2	-12.2
World	**69.4**	**43.2**	**26.2**	**0.0**

Source: Global Energy Review 2025, International Energy Agency (IEA)

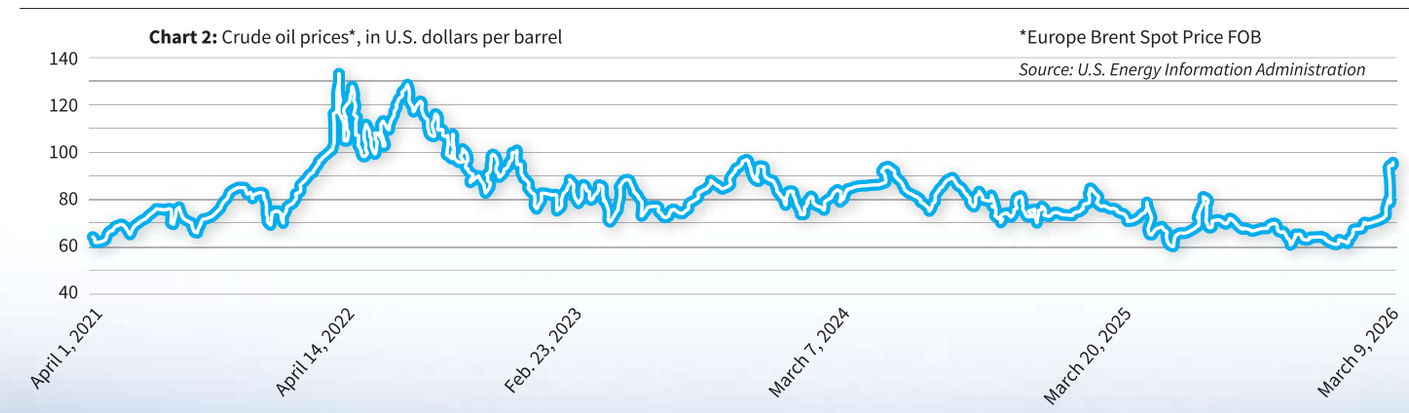

Chart 2: Crude oil prices*, in U.S. dollars per barrel

*Europe Brent Spot Price FOB

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration

THE GIST

- Oil and natural gas account for a little over half of the global energy supply, with West Asian producers and Asian consumers tightly linked through trade flows.
- The U.S. expands domestic production and pursues strategic interventions, while Russia emerges as a key supplier as disruptions hit West Asian output.
- India's purchases of discounted Russian oil boosted its refining and exports. But with global oil prices rising, uncertainty looms.

FULL CONTEXT

Before salt, there was water: why Mahad Satyagraha deserves its centenary

The republic must mark the centenary of the Mahad Satyagraha with the seriousness it deserves; it calls for a year of honest reckoning to ask whether the constitutional promise of dignity and freedom from untouchability has become a lived reality for all

Sanjay Hegde

Think of a child in school. He is thirsty. There is water in the classroom. But he cannot drink it. Not because the water is dirty. Not because there is a rule against drinking in class. He cannot drink because the peon who is supposed to pour the water into his cupped hands, from a height, so that the vessel is not polluted by his touch, happens to be absent that day.

No peon, no water

That was the rule that governed the childhood of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. He wrote about it with quiet, devastating precision in his autobiographical essay *Waiting for a Visa*, and in the fragment known as *No Peon, No Water*. He and his siblings, travelling to meet their father, arrived at a railway station parched with thirst. No one would give them water. They were Mahars. They were "untouchable." The public tap was not for them.

Let that image stay with you for a moment: small children, thirsty, surrounded by water, unable to drink. Not in a desert, but in a school. Not in a time of famine, but in a time of plenty.

That boy grew up. He went to Columbia. He went to the London School of Economics. He read law at Gray's Inn. And then he came home and walked to a water tank.

What happened at Mahad

On March 20, 1927, Ambedkar led a procession of thousands through the streets of Mahad, a small town in the Konkan, in the Bombay Presidency. Their destination was the Chavdar Tale, a public water tank. The Bombay Legislative Council passed the Bole Resolution in 1923, and the Mahad Municipality opened the tank to the depressed classes in 1924. But resolutions on paper and water in the throat are different things. The upper castes ensured that the resolution remained a dead letter.

Ambedkar walked to the tank. He bent down. He drank.

Thousands followed him – men, women, children. They drank. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they drank water from a public source as a matter of right, not as an act of stealth or charity.

And then the violence came. Rumours spread that the *satyagrahis* intended to enter the Veereshwar temple. Returning delegates were attacked in the streets, in their bullock carts, in their villages. The tank was "purified" with cow dung and urine, as though human dignity were a contaminant that could be washed away.

When Ambedkar returned to Mahad in December 1927 for a second conference, he brought with him not just the resolve to drink water again but a deeper symbolic intent. On December 25, 1927, the conference publicly burned a copy of the Manusmriti. That fire was not a mere gesture. It was a declaration that the future republic, if it was to mean anything at all, would rest on rights, not on graded inequality codified in ancient texts.

Ten years in court

What followed the satyagraha was as instructive as the satyagraha itself.

The upper castes of Mahad did not merely resort to violence. They also went to court.

On March 20, 1927, Ambedkar led a procession of thousands through the streets of Mahad. FILE PHOTO

On December 12, 1927, even before the second conference began, Hindu residents filed a civil suit in the Kolaba District Court seeking a temporary injunction to prevent the depressed classes from using the Chavdar tank. The injunction was granted on December 14, 1927.

Ambedkar, true to his belief in constitutional methods, chose to respect the court's order while continuing his conference. He addressed the gathering. He burned the Manusmriti. But he did not go to the tank.

The litigation dragged on for a decade. It passed through the trial court at Mahad and then the court of the Assistant Judge at Thana. At every stage, the courts held that the plaintiffs had failed to establish any immemorial custom entitling caste Hindus to exclude untouchables from the tank.

The case finally reached the Bombay High Court, where it was decided on March 17, 1937, by Justices Broomfield and N.J. Wadia in *Narhari Damodar Vaidya v. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar*. Justice Broomfield, in a passage that deserves to be remembered, held that the appellants had not established the immemorial custom they had alleged. The tank belonged to the municipality. It was public property. The untouchables had every right to use it.

A man led a procession to drink water from a public tank in 1927. It took until 1937 for the courts to confirm that he was entitled to do so.

The law vindicated Ambedkar. But the fact that vindication took a decade tells its own story about the depth of the resistance he faced.

Salt versus water

Three years after Mahad, on March 12, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi set out from Sabarmati *ashram* on his march to Dandi. The Salt Satyagraha was a masterstroke of political mobilisation. It challenged the economic apparatus of the colonial state and captured the imagination of the world press. Its place in the national narrative is secure, and rightly so. But consider what each satyagraha actually demanded, and of whom.

The Salt March demanded freedom from the British. The Mahad Satyagraha demanded freedom from fellow Indians. Dandi identified an external oppressor and asked him to leave. Mahad identified an internal sickness and asked a civilisation to heal itself. One required courage against a foreign ruler. The other required something harder: the willingness to look one's own neighbours, one's own co-religionists, one's own countrymen in the eye and say, "You have treated us as less than human, and we will not accept it any longer."

There is no dishonour to the Salt March in saying this. But there is a historical imbalance that needs correcting.

The salt tax was an imposition of an empire. Once the empire left, the tax could be abolished by a stroke of the legislative pen. Untouchability, by contrast, did not arrive with the British and did not leave with them. It was woven into the social fabric of Indian life for millennia. It required not a change of government, but a change of heart, of custom, of the very conception of who counts as human.

It is no accident that the man who drank water at Chavdar went on to draft the Constitution. The architecture of Part III bears the watermark of Mahad.

Article 15, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of caste and specifically addresses access to wells, tanks, bathing ghats, and places of public resort, reads as though Ambedkar had the Chavdar tank before his eyes.

Article 17, which abolishes untouchability and makes its practice a punishable offence, is the Mahad Satyagraha transmuted into constitutional text.

The Dandi March gave India the aspiration for Swaraj. Mahad gave India the grammar of equality. Swaraj could have been written by many hands. The grammar of equality could only have been written by one who had been denied water as a child.

The case for a centenary

The 100th anniversary of the Mahad Satyagraha falls on March 20, 2027. We are now in the 99th year. If this republic has any sense of its origins, any honest memory of the struggles that gave it a Constitution, it must mark this centenary with the seriousness and grandeur it deserves.

I would propose a year-long commemoration beginning on March 20, 2026, and culminating on March 20, 2027, with a great gathering at the Chavdar tank. Let citizens of every caste, creed, and class come to Mahad and drink together. Let it be a constitutional baptism: a re-immersion in the founding promise that no Indian shall be diminished by the accident of birth.

But let us not stop with only ceremonies.

Let the centenary year become a year of honest reckoning. Let us ask whether the child in a government school in rural India today, the Dalit boy, the Adivasi girl, the daughter of the sanitation worker, truly lives free of the "no peon, no water" principle, or whether that principle has merely found new vocabularies while retaining its venom.

Let us ask whether the manual scavenger who cleans our sewers with bare hands occupies a fundamentally different position from the Mahars barred from the Chavdar tank. Let us ask whether the constitutional text has become the reality of the republic.

The centenary must be a call for true equality for all, for the last, the least, and the lost. For every Indian whom the lottery of birth still consigns to a life of diminished citizenship, of invisible labour, of social suffering that is too familiar to even register as injustice any more. The waters of the Chavdar tank must flow again, not as historical memory but as living commitment.

Ambedkar did not merely draft a Constitution. He first had to prove, by walking to a tank in a small town and drinking water from it, that those for whom he would one day write that Constitution were human enough to drink. That act, radical and simple and shattering, remains the foundational moment of Indian constitutionalism. It came before Dandi. In what it demanded, and of whom it demanded it, it went deeper than Dandi.

And in the unfinished business of Indian equality, it still awaits its full redemption. The centenary approaches. Let the republic remember, lest it forget.

(Sanjay Hegde is a Senior Advocate practising in the Supreme Court)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

Why is December 26 called "Boxing Day"? (J. Shankar, Trivandrum)

In the 15th and 16th centuries in England, special boxes were kept in churches, which remained locked throughout the year. People, usually the wealthy, used to put money in them all through the year. On the 26th of December these boxes were opened and the money contained in them was distributed among the poor. Since the boxes were opened on 26 December, that particular day began to be called Boxing Day. Australians usually have a test match starting on this day.

On this day, it was also the practice of apprentices to visit their master's customers with a box in hand. The customers used to show them with gifts and some used to put money in the box. These boxes that the boys carried were often shaped like a pig. These were the first "piggy banks".

What is the meaning of the word "cacophony"? How is the word pronounced? (Y. K. Kumar Choudary, New Delhi)

Have you ever had a neighbour whose children had just started taking music lessons? Children who were just beginning to learn how to sing or play an instrument, especially the violin. If you had such a neighbour, then you know what cacophony is all about.

"Cacophony" is a formal word meaning loud, unpleasant noise. In a cacophony, you usually have a mixture of unpleasant sounds.

The "a" in the first syllable and the "o" in "pho" are pronounced like the "a" in "china", "about", and "amount". The "o" in the second syllable "co" is like the "o" in words like "pot", "hot", and "got". Some people pronounce it like the "ar" in "harm", "arm", and "farm". No matter how the "o" is pronounced, the stress is on the second syllable.

I have a friend who feels compelled to surf the Internet every day. Is there a word to describe such a person? (P. Mala, Mysore)

I am sure there are several words to refer to an Internet addict. A term, which I have come across quite often, is "Internet-dependent". Just as some people are dependent on drugs, a person who is Internet-dependent depends on the Internet to get his/her "kicks". Without a regular dose of the Internet, he/she becomes anxious, paranoid, etc.

A person who sits in front of a computer and works for long hours is called a "mouse potato". He/she may or may not be "Internet-dependent".

Is it ok to end a letter by saying "with regards" when you are writing to someone younger than you are? (R. Rama Subramanian, Coimbatore)

In India, some people prefer not to use "regards" when they write letters to someone who is younger than they are. Instead they prefer to use "best wishes". When they write to someone who is older than them, they conclude the letter with either "with regards" or "with respects".

A native speaker of English uses "regards" with people who are younger and older than him. It is common to see "with kind regards", "with warm regards", and "with best regards", in their letters. Some dictionaries state that this is a friendly but formal way of ending a letter.

Published in The Hindu on December 28, 1999

Word of the day

Haywire: erratic; out of control

Synonyms: chaotic, faulty, confused

Usage: *Everything went haywire after the storm.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/haywire

International Phonetic Alphabet: /heɪwaɪə/

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

The U.S. launched the Iraq war on this day in 2003. It lasted until 2011 and killed an estimated 1.5 lakh to 10 lakh people

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

The President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was captured by the U.S. military in December 2003. The operation was named after an American film set during a fictional World War 3. What was the name of the film?

QUESTION 2

In 2007, members of a private military firm, which was contracted by the U.S. government, killed 17 Iraqi civilians in Nisour Square in Baghdad. Four employees of the firm were later tried and convicted in a U.S. Federal Court. What was the firm called then (it has changed its name since)? And which U.S. President pardoned the four employees?

QUESTION 3

The U.S. President, George W. Bush, had insisted that Iraq was a "gathering threat" that had to be confronted. What did he say Iraq possessed?

QUESTION 4

This European country opposed President Bush's policy on Iraq. Frustrated with its response, the U.S. ordered that the names of food items that featured the country's name be changed in restaurants at the U.S. Capitol. Which country was this?

QUESTION 5

Mr. Bush referred to an axis of evil — governments that he alleged had sponsored terrorism. Name the three countries he was referring to.

Visual Question:

A tapestry copy of this painting can be found at the United Nations headquarters. It was covered at the UN in 2003 because it is an anti-war painting and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell was presenting America's case to go to war with Iraq at the UN. What is the painting by Picasso called?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Darwin's observations of finches on which Pacific archipelago became central to discussions of adaptive radiation? **Ans: Galápagos Islands**

2. The famous 1925 American trial over the teaching of evolution in schools is known by what name? **Ans: Scopes Trial**

3. Which fossil bird discovered in 1861 provided early evidence linking dinosaurs and birds? **Ans: Archaeopteryx**

4. Which term describes the integrated 20th-century framework that combined Darwinian evolution with Mendelian genetics? **Ans: The Modern Synthesis**

5. What biological unit carries hereditary information from one generation to the next? **Ans: The gene**

Visual: Identify this image. **Ans: Charles Darwin's first evolutionary tree diagram**

Early Birds: Suchit Narottam | Akshansh Thakur | Prem Nath Tiwari | K.N. Viswanathan