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UTTAR PRADESH POLITICS
Former JD(U) leader K.C. Tyagi joins RLD
NEWS » PAGE 8

NATION-WIDE BLACKOUT
Cuba reels under power grid collapse
WORLD » PAGE 12

KEY RESOURCE
Govt. to auction 19 critical mineral blocks
NEWS » PAGE 8

UNION-STATE RELATIONS
'Double engine' — a serious federal question
Fairness must guide India's federal balance
EDITORIAL » PAGE 6

INDIAN OPEN SQUASH
Anahat and Abhay emerge champions
SPORT » PAGE 13

Will completely close Hormuz Strait: Iran after Trump's threat

U.S. President had threatened to 'obliterate' Iran's power plants if Tehran did not fully reopen the Strait within 48 hours; hitting back, Iran's Parliament Speaker says critical infrastructure in West Asia could be 'irreversibly destroyed' if attacked

Reuters
Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON/TEHRAN

The Iranian military on Sunday threatened to completely shut down the strategic Strait of Hormuz and attack U.S. infrastructure, including energy facilities in the Gulf, if U.S. President Donald Trump acts on threats to target the country's power plants.

Mr. Trump on Saturday threatened to "obliterate" Iran's power plants if Tehran did not fully reopen the Strait of Hormuz within 48 hours, suggesting a significant escalation barely a day after he talked about "winding down" the war, now in its fourth week.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said that the U.S. may need to "escalate" its attacks against Iran to be able to wind down the war. Asked if Mr. Trump was winding down or escalating the war, he said: "They're not mutually exclusive. Sometimes you have to escalate to de-escalate."

The strait has been effectively closed since the start of the war, sparked by U.S.-Israeli bombardment of Iran. The conflict has since spread across West Asia, with Iran responding with attacks on Israel and U.S. interests in the region.

"If the U.S.'s threats regarding Iran's power plants are carried out... the Strait of Hormuz will be completely closed, and it will not be reopened until our destroyed power plants are rebuilt," military's operational command Khatam Al-Anbiya said.

Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf wrote on X that critical infrastructure in West Asia could be "irreversibly destroyed" should Iranian power plants be attacked.

Assessing damage: People inspecting the site of an Iranian missile strike in Dimona, Israel on Sunday. AFP

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8
RELATED REPORT ON » PAGE 12

PM chairs meet to review impact of conflict on India

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

As tensions continue to mount in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) to review the situation and suggest mitigating measures.

A government statement said that the conflict's impact over the short, long and medium term were assessed.

FULL REPORT ON » PAGE 8

BJP will fail to make any electoral gains in Kerala: Pinarayi

S. Anandan
KANNUR

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan says recent defections by several Left Democratic Front leaders to the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to contest the State Assembly election demonstrate betrayal and an erosion of values on their part. They will be powerless to ruffle the Left's electoral fortunes, he adds.

In an interview on Saturday with *The Hindu*, the Chief Minister spoke about why he considered the Congress a B-team of the BJP and why the BJP would fail to make any electoral gains in the State this time as well.

Mr. Vijayan said setbacks to the Left Front in some places in the local body elections could not be construed as a prevalent anti-incumbency sentiment against the State government.

The Left, he said, has maintained a good relationship with all communities, ruling out consolidation of community votes against the ruling front.

He said the government had strived to bring Kerala in step with modern times, and the people would recognise the effort.

The Kerala Chief Minister called the BJP's "develop Kerala" slogan duplicitous, citing the Centre's "callous" attitude towards the State in the face of adversities.

INTERVIEW ON » PAGE 9

NEARBY

Senthilbalaji denies AIADMK's complaint to EC

TIRUCHI
Former Minister V. Senthilbalaji has denied charges in the AIADMK's complaint to the Election Commission that the DMK had erected sheds to confine voters in Karur constituency. » PAGE 2

IRCTC penalises caterer for poor service on train

CHENNAI
After a passenger complained that tea was not served on the Chennai-Hazrat Nizamuddin Duronto Express, the IRCTC slapped a penalty of ₹5,000 on the caterer. » PAGE 2

EDUCATION PLUS » PAGE 15

CPI(M) seeks time to discuss Stalin's offer of five seats

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

On a day when Tamizhaga Vazhvurimai Katchi leader T. Velmurugan exited the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam-led alliance in Tamil Nadu, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) left a small window of opportunity open on Sunday afternoon, saying it would revisit the DMK's offer of only five seats for the April 23 Assembly election.

CPI(M) State secretary P. Shanmugam told presspersons here that party leaders had met DMK president and Chief Minister M.K. Stalin to explain its State Committee's decision to contest six seats.

"But the Chief Minister has asked us to accept five seats, as new parties have joined the alliance. We will again discuss the Chief Minister's suggestion in our State Secretariat meeting and convey our decision to him," Mr. Shanmugam said after meeting Mr. Stalin.

P. Shanmugam

Meeting likely soon

The CPI(M) Secretariat meeting was likely to be held on Sunday evening or Monday.

He said the State Committee and Secretariat meetings held on Saturday had decided there was no need to increase the stakes beyond six seats. The party's general secretary, M.A. Baby, attended the meeting.

Mr. Shanmugam said the Chief Minister had explained to the CPI(M) seat-sharing committee the difficulties in parting with more seats.

"The CPI(M) would like to continue in the DMK alliance. But, the Chief Minister has asked us to settle for five. However, the mandate of the CPI(M) State Committee is for six seats. We have told him we cannot come to a conclusion immediately. The Chief Minister wants us to take a favourable decision," he said.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8
RELATED REPORT ON » PAGE 9

Assam police camp attacked by ULFA(I), four injured

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Four Assam police commandos were injured in an extremist attack in Tinsukia district of eastern Assam on Sunday morning.

District officials said the assailants fired indiscriminately and lobbed several grenades at the commando camp at Jagun, close to the boundary with Arunachal Pradesh.

The commandos retaliated and the gunfight continued for about 30 minutes before the attackers slipped away.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (Independent) claimed responsibility for the attack.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8

With deadline looming, Cong., DMK inch closer to seat-sharing deal in Puducherry

B. Kolappan
CHENNAI

The Congress and DMK on Sunday broadly agreed to share seats in double digits in the 30-member Puducherry Assembly, which goes to polls on April 9. The Congress candidates may enter the fray in 15 or 16 seats. However, the Congress is yet to officially ratify this arrangement.

The DMK would most likely accommodate the interests of allies such as VCK from its share of seats, sources told *The Hindu*. The agreement will be formally signed soon to facilitate candidates to file their nominations before the March 23 deadline.

P. Chidambaram met DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday to resolve the differences.

As the two sides were unable to agree on who would lead the alliance in the Union Territory, Congress veteran P. Chidambaram entered the scene yet again and met DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Sunday to iron out the differences.

The sources said Mr. Stalin insisted that the arrangement worked out for Tamil Nadu should be applicable to Puducherry too.

He felt that if anything went wrong in Puducherry, it would have serious consequences for Tamil Nadu. Mr. Stalin was not happy with the manner in which Girish Chodankar, AICC in-charge of the party affairs and head of the seat-sharing committee, handled the talks in Puducherry.

DMK MP S. Jagathrakshakan is in charge of the party in Puducherry.

The AIADMK on Sunday announced its candidates for the Oupalam and Orleanpeth Assembly constituencies. AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami named former MLA A. Anbalagan for Oupalam and A. Gandhi for Orleanpeth.

Meanwhile, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) president Vijay on Sunday announced the party's candidates for all 30 Assembly segments in Puducherry.

(With inputs from Dennis S. Jesudasan and Sai Charan)

INBRIEF

'Vidiyal Payanam' initiative will improve in DMK 2.0 govt.'

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK president M.K. Stalin on Sunday said the *Vidiyal Payanam* initiative, which provides free bus travel for women, would further improve in the Dravidian model of governance 2.0. Mr. Stalin said in a social media post that 897.82 crore free trips were undertaken on 7,712 buses till March 1 this year. He added that 95.86 crore trips were undertaken during 2021-22; 166.53 crore trips during 2022-23; 186.35 crore trips during 2023-24; 213.94 crore trips during 2024-25; and 235.14 crore trips during 2025-26. Noting the increase in such trips, the Chief Minister said: "Through their safe and independent travel, women have been able to scale greater heights." Mr. Stalin also underlined that apart from women, transpersons and persons with disabilities had also benefitted from the *Vidiyal Payanam* initiative.

Sri Lankan national held, says he was duped by travel agent

The Tamil Nadu police have arrested a Sri Lankan national who allegedly tried to hide at the Mandapam refugee camp in Ramanathapuram district. Acting on information that Ajeeban, 26, of Kudathanai in Sri Lanka, was found loitering near the camp for Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Mandapam, the 'Q' Branch CID apprehended him on Friday. Ajeeban informed investigators that he was cheated by Ravanan, a travel agent in Sri Lanka, who promised to get him a fake passport for travel from Nepal to Italy. Only after reaching Nepal did Ajeeban realise that he was cheated. He then entered India and took different trains to reach Rameswaram. Further investigation is on, police sources said.

Brahmin faces of Naam Tamilar Katchi in electoral fray, a shift from the past

Seeman's party has been trying to break the stereotype by fielding candidates of all castes. It has fielded six Brahmin candidates for the upcoming election, proportionate to the community's perceived population in Tamil Nadu. The upshot is that the party has admirers among the Brahmins

Udhav Naig
CHENNAI

Symbolic acts from political parties often signal an intent to change without disturbing the *status quo*. Several parties are into the politics of symbolism. For instance, they wax eloquent about empowerment of women and the Scheduled Castes. But it is not showing up in their daily affairs.

Film-maker-turned-politician Seeman's fledgling Naam Tamilar Katchi (NTK) is seeking to change this trend. The party has consistently fielded Scheduled Caste candidates in the general constituencies and an equal number of men and women since it entered electoral politics 10 years ago. Now, the party has gone a step further. It has fielded six Brahmin candidates (four women and two men) in the 2026 Assembly election, proportionate to the community's perceived population in Tamil Nadu. This has predictably resulted in accusations and counter-accusations. But what has surprised many is that the party has long-term admirers among the Brahmins.

The Hindu spoke to five of the candidates. They had some ideas articulated by Mr. Seeman. Among them are environmental politics and their shared belief in the creation of a Tamil nation.

V. Anusha

Revathi

R.L. Arun

V. Anusha, a 41-year-old lawyer who is in the fray in T. Nagar, Chennai, said she was drawn to the party, listening to Mr. Seeman acknowledge the contributions of the Brahmins towards the larger Tamil society. "Seeman talks about local administration, importance of agriculture, and protection of natural resources. I was in the legal wing of the BJP, but once I started to know about the NTK's principles such as fielding an equal number of men and women in the election and giving representation to all communities, I decided to join the party," she said.

Ms. Anusha feels that only the NTK offers a real alternative to the two national parties – the BJP and the Congress – and the two major Dravidian parties – the DMK and the AIADMK – which, she believes, are on the same page on most of the issues affecting the people.

"Even [TVK leader and actor] Vijay is following in their [Dravidian] footsteps. Competing with each other to give freebies. The AIADMK would give two LPG cylinders and the TVK says it would give six cylinders. What is the difference," she asked.

R.L. Arun, a Coimbatore-based machine design consultant, who has been fielded in Mylapore, became interested in politics during the jallikattu protests in 2017.

"I liked what Seeman *Anna* (elder brother) was saying. Until then, I didn't know what Tamil nationalism was. I started supporting the party on social media whenever it was criticised. In 2023, I joined the party and soon became the IT wing secretary for the Kavundampalayam constituency [in Coimbatore]. I soon started speaking on the stage...," he said.

Arguing that he wanted to help achieve the "liberation" of Tamils, Mr. Arun said, "The Dravidian parties [especially the DMK] thrive on Brahmin hate, and it is true that the Brahmins consider the AIADMK and the BJP as their natural ally. But, in the last 10-15 years, the BJP and the AIADMK are also sidelining the Brahmins. Now, people are slowly recognising that the NTK is accommodative of the Brahmins. It has been fielding Brahmin candidates since 2016. In 2026 too, it fielded Brahmin candidates...," he said.

Pointing out that the "Tamil Brahmin community doesn't indulge in caste killings", Mr. Arun says, "I consider myself a Tamil nationalist and not a Brahmin. I want to work to achieve Eelam [in Sri Lanka] and I want liberation of Tamils."

In 2009, when he was 38, Kasi Raman, the NTK candidate for Mayiladuthurai, was deeply affected by the indiscriminate killing of the innocent Tamils in the final stages of the Sri Lankan civil war. "That's when I started following him [Mr. Seeman]. I would attend the May 18 event he used to organise. I have participated in the *Maaverar Naal* on November 27. I used to accompany him during protests on various social issues – mainly against methane and ethane extraction in the Cauvery delta region. I was attracted to his environmental politics. His idea that *Bhoomi Thai* [land] is more important than *Saami* [god] appealed to me," he said.

Mr. Kasi Raman was upset at the lack of attention to Mr. Seeman's politics in the mainstream media, which instead focussed on "actors". "I sold a house and built temples, refurbished waterbodies, and installed solar lamps. Nature is god. Tamil Siddhars are our guides."

Sri Vidhya, contesting from Saidapet, said, "The Brahmins are also Tamils," and that she was attracted to "Seeman's unique ideology" of treating all communities on an equal footing. "He is giving representation to all communities. We are here as Tamils, not as members of a caste," she said.

Asked whether she was comfortable with certain ideas of Mr. Seeman, including his stand that only Tamils should rule Tamil Nadu, she says, "We agree that Tamil Nadu should be ruled by Tamils. There is nothing wrong in it. As a family engaged in farming in Chengalpattu, we naturally gravitated towards the NTK."

Revathi, 32, a mother of two, whose husband has been part of the NTK for long, grew fond of the party owing to her love for the "Tamil language". The NTK's Maduravoyal candidate said the Tamil Brahmins were sidelined in Tamil politics.

"In Tamil Nadu, Brahmins are not encouraged in politics. Jayalalithaa [a Brahmin] came up because she was a popular actor and was also known to MGR. At first, my family was against my entry into politics. Then, we took our families to NTK meetings. They got convinced over the time. My mother realised how respectful the party members were towards women. I took my three-month-old baby along with my family when candidates were introduced in 2021. My mother was impressed," she said.

The Hindu couldn't reach the NTK candidate for Alandur since she said she was going through a personal loss.

'Allegation of attempt to confine voters in Karur malicious'

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUCHI

Days after the AIADMK lodged a complaint with the Election Commission that the DMK had erected 48 "sheds to confine voters" in different parts of the Karur constituency, former Minister and sitting MLA V. Senthilbalaji on Sunday denied the allegation, describing it as a malicious propaganda to undermine the electioneering of the party.

He told reporters that it was a routine affair to establish party offices in every ward of Karur. Depending on the situation, election offices would be opened in rental buildings. If permanent buildings were not available, temporary structures were generally established for housing party offices.

'Fear of defeat'

This time, the DMK had decided to set up party offices at nine locations by securing permission from the concerned election authorities. It was wrong to claim that the party had erected "sheds" without permission, Mr. Senthilbalaji said. He added that the the AIADMK-BJP alliance was spreading the malicious propaganda in fear of defeat.

The former Minister, also the district secretary of the DMK, said the AIADMK had indulged in mud-slinging against the DMK in Karur, but could not garner support for the campaigns.

He further said that the DMK had implemented schemes to the tune of ₹5,000 crore in Karur district, and expressed confidence that it would win all four seats in the district.

Velmurugan's party exits DMK alliance, rules out joining NDA

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Tamizhaga Vazhvurimai Katchi founder and Panruti MLA, T. Velmurugan, on Sunday announced his party's exit from the ruling DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu, accusing its leader of displaying a "big brother attitude".

Mr. Velmurugan was seen as the Vanniyar face of the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance. The party was unhappy with the offer of a single seat, similar to what it received in 2016.

Addressing journalists in Chennai, Mr. Velmurugan said he would take a decision on the future course after consulting with Periyarist organisations, smaller Tamil nationalist outfits, and other outfits that work for ordinary people.

T. Velmurugan of Tamizhaga Vazhvurimai Katchi addressing the media in Chennai on Sunday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We took this decision trusting the judgment of the Tamil people. I officially declare that we will not feature in the NDA," he said.

Mr. Velmurugan added, "We placed our 10-point demands before the DMK, but they showed a big brother attitude towards us. They are unable to accept that we are placing demands before them... when bigger parties in the alliance haven't done anything in that regard."

'Demands unmet'

He specifically cited DMK's reluctance in providing 10.5% internal reservations for Vanniyars within the Most Backward Classes quota and its refusal to collate relevant caste data on the representation of Vanniyars.

Mr. Velmurugan charged the DMK with succumbing to the pressures of bureaucrats "influenced and guided by the RSS ideology" and not conducting the caste-wise census.

Sarath Kumar raises concern over lack of roles in BJP, unfulfilled assurances

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Actor-politician R. Sarath Kumar, who merged his All India Samathuva Makkal Katchi (AISMK) with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in March 2024, expressed concern that he and his supporters were not given responsibilities in the party as promised.

Speaking to reporters in Chennai on Sunday, after holding a consultation meeting with his supporters, the 71-year-old leader said his supporters, who had been with him for more than 30 years, had also expressed concern about him not being given any post in the party.

Mr. Kumar said since he joined the BJP, his supporters had been given 19 State-level office-bearer posts. While postings for 251 persons had been sought, only one-fourth of them had been granted, he said.

> Assurances [of postings] were given... Those have not been fulfilled yet. One can function only if a responsibility is given. They said I would be given a responsibility at the national level
>
> **R. SARATH KUMAR**
> Actor-politician

He further said his supporters were worried about how they could function in the party without being given responsibilities. "While expressing their concerns, they also told me why the Samathuva Makkal Katchi should not be revived," he said.

He had already taken up this issue with the State leadership and would submit a written letter to both the National and State high command expressing the concerns.

To a question on whether any promises regarding postings were given to him when he merged his AISMK with the BJP, Mr. Kumar said, "Assurances were given. They know it. Those have not been fulfilled yet. One can function only if a responsibility is given. They said I would be given responsibility at the national level."

He hoped the party high command would consider the concerns. If his concerns were not addressed, he would hold talks with his followers and announce his position later.

'Won't revive AISMK'

He has no intention of reviving the AISMK, he said, adding that neither he nor his wife Radikaa Sarath kumar would contest in the upcoming Assembly election, even if offered a ticket.

Alleged academic rivalry snowballs into caste-based clash between two families

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

The rivalry between two Class XI students began after the girl from a Scheduled Caste scored higher marks than the boy of a dominant caste three months ago

The Sulur police have registered two cases in connection with a fight between two families triggered by an alleged academic rivalry between two students at Peedampalli near Sulur in Coimbatore district.

According to the police, the two - a boy belonging to a dominant caste and a girl belonging to a Scheduled Caste - were Class XI students of a government higher secondary school near Sulur.

The boy allegedly grew jealous of the girl after she scored higher marks than him in an examination around three months ago. The rivalry escalated after the girl informed her teachers of a malpractice allegedly committed by the boy, the police said.

The girl's family alleged that the boy as well as his mother and sister had insulted her on caste grounds, on multiple occasions, in public places and during bus journeys.

They alleged that the three assaulted the girl and made casteist slurs against her at a bus shelter in Peedampalli on March 16, when she was waiting for the bus after classes.

According to them, the trio insulted the girl's mother and grandfather also on caste grounds.

The police said a fight broke out between the two families in a public place, after which the girl and her grandfather sought treatment at the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital, claiming injuries.

The Sulur police launched an investigation into the incident and registered two cases on March 20, based on complaints received from the two families.

A senior police officer said a case was registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act for the alleged assault and casteist remarks made on the girl, her mother, and grandfather.

A counter case was registered against the girl's family based on a complaint lodged by the boy's mother.

"Had the school teachers intervened at the very beginning by giving proper guidance and counselling to the students, the issue could have been nipped in the bud; it would not have escalated into a fight between the families on caste grounds," the officer said.

The girl's family submitted a petition to the Coimbatore Collector on March 19, alleging a delay by the police in registering a case.

IRCTC penalises caterer for not serving tea on Duronto Express

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

Not serving the morning tea to passengers proved costly for the contractor providing catering services on board the Chennai-Hazrat Nizamuddin Duronto Express.

After one of the passenger lodged a complaint that morning tea was not served in the train, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) slapped a penalty of ₹5,000 on the caterer.

The incident was reported on November 8, 2025, and the fine imposed 10 days later.

The action taken was communicated to the passenger, Unnikrishnan R.K. of Palakkad, in response to his petition filed under the Right to Information Act, 2005.

IRCTC provides morning tea/coffee as part of the onboard catering services, for which passengers are charged along with the ticket fare.

Duronto Express is one of the premium high-speed trains of the Railways with limited stops, and passengers rely more on the onboard catering services for food and beverages.

In a separate development, Indian Railways has introduced QR code on food packets, which would display the name of the kitchen, date of manufacturing, and other details.

To curb unauthorised vending, QR code-enabled identity cards have also been issued to contractual catering staff. Unauthorised vending on railway premises is punishable under the Railway Act, 1989.

This QR code has been linked to establish the authenticity of the staff by displaying the vendor's name, Aadhaar details, medical fitness, and police verification.

To ensure compliance with food safety norms, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India certification from designated Food Safety Officers of each catering unit has been made mandatory.

Besides deploying senior officers to conduct surprise checks in pantry cars, Railways has engaged third-party audit to ensure hygiene standards.

A major commercial hub plagued by inadequate civic infrastructure

The T. Nagar constituency suffers from infrastructure bottlenecks caused by rampant commercialisation; fire tenders and ambulances struggle to navigate the narrow lanes; multi-level parking facility in Pondy Bazaar is often non-operational

CONSTITUENCY WATCH

R. Aishwaryaa
CHENNAI

Beneath the bustling commercial facade of Chennai's premier shopping hub lies a civic infrastructure that has been struggling to match rapid urbanisation. We are talking about Thiyagarayanagar Assembly Constituency, popularly known as T. Nagar.

The constituency includes areas such as Kodambakkam, Ashok Nagar, West Mambalam, Pondy Bazaar, a portion of C.I.T. Nagar, and parts of Vadapalani.

Residents here primarily point to severe infrastructure bottlenecks caused by rampant commercialisation. Within two years of pedestrianisation, T. Nagar has seen a 15% to 20% increase in commercial sales and up to 20% rise in land value, according to the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC).

V.S. Jayaraman of the T. Nagar Residents' Welfare Association (RWA) said, "Plinth levels are rising due to rapid urbanisation, unchecked commercial and residential encroachments continue to increase. However, the capacity of the sewer and stormwater networks remains the same, leading to frequent overflows."

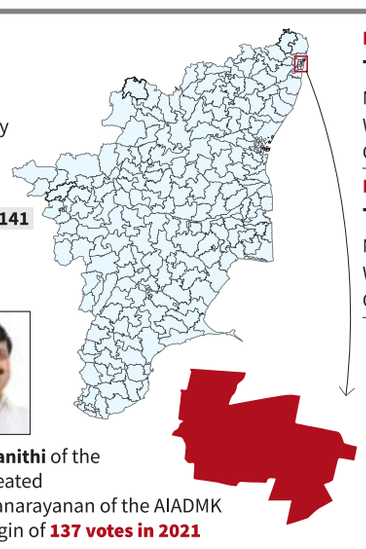
T. Nagar

A closely contested seat, the commercial hub of T. Nagar frequently shifts loyalty, with voters prioritising civic woes over party popularity

WARDS 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 141

KEY ISSUES:

- Outdated sewer networks and unchecked encroachments cause frequent sewage overflows
- Unchecked commercialisation strains infrastructure, leaving residents vulnerable to frequent waterlogging
- Narrow lanes and defunct multi-level parking worsen traffic congestion

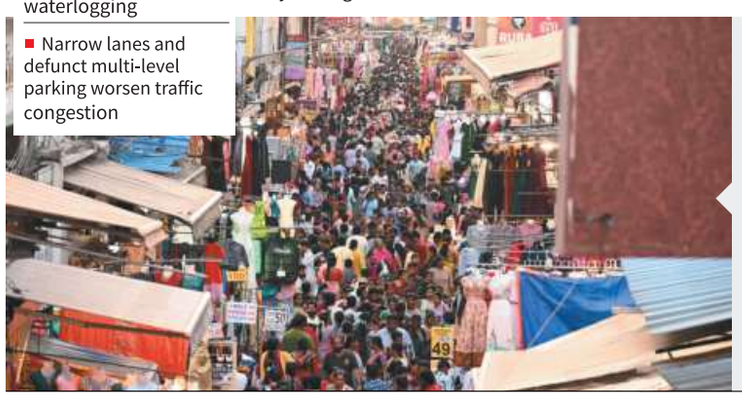


J. Karunanithi of the DMK defeated B. Sathyanarayanan of the AIADMK by a margin of **137 votes in 2021**

Electors before SIR:
Total : 2,35,497
Men : 1,15,687
Women : 1,19,755
Others : 55

Electors after SIR:
Total: 1,54,943
Men : 74,682
Women : 80,228
Others : 33

Number of polling stations
251



Popular spot: Ranganathan Street in T. Nagar is an urban, high-density commercial hub with a mixed-income, highly mobile electorate that pays close attention to local civic issues and urban governance. S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

V. Kumar, a Pondy Bazaar resident, agrees with this. He alleged that the incumbent DMK MLA has done little to ease traffic congestion, he said.

The multi-level parking facility in Pondy Bazaar is often non-operational, under maintenance, or in full capacity, while the pedestrian bridge is largely utilised only by morning joggers, he said.

Stating that elected representatives have failed to consistently inspect localities, he claimed that the previous MLA was more responsive to grievances than the current elected representative.

Narrow lanes

Many vehicles, including ambulances and fire tenders, struggle to navigate narrow lanes. Further, the newly constructed flyover named after former DMK MLA J. Anbazhagan has been inactive regarding basic civic works, citing uncleared garbage in interior lanes, poor roads, and the proliferation of posters on transformers.

Flooding woes

Murali, a resident of West Mambalam for 75 years, said the major Dravidian parties were responsible, over the decades, for unchecked commercialisation and that while candidates come and go, the core issues remain unresolved, forcing many long-time residents to relocate.

Muthulakshmi, another West Mambalam resident, said the felling of trees on Arya Gowda Road for the construction of stormwater drains by the Corporation failed to prevent rainwater from entering homes in the locality.

"Residents thought there would be no inundation, but my home suffered waterlogging all-night, and my two-wheeler was submerged during the December 2023 downpour. The minimal stagnation in 2025 was solely due to deficit rainfall," she said.

Responding to the grievances, sitting MLA J. Karunanithi said the parking issue, mainly due to the Metro Rail work for the past two years has been flagged to the GCC Commissioner for swift resolution. He maintained that overall traffic has reduced due to a shift towards online shopping.

To mitigate traffic congestion, the new flyover has made it easy to travel from Saidapet to T. Nagar, Kodambakkam, and Nungambakkam, he said. One-way traffic near the North Usman Road - Bazulla Road signal is being planned in coordination with the Chennai City Traffic Police.

Further, he said the ₹3 crore annual Member of Legislative Assembly Constituency Development Scheme (MLACDS) fund was used for upgrading bus stands and community halls.

Electoral history

T. Nagar is historically a competitive seat with INC, AIADMK, and DMK winning it.

The third front or the parties other than the DMK and the AIADMK have also played a role by splitting the votes.

The DMK, despite the anti-incumbency factor, would be hoping for a successive victory, and the selection of the candidate could become crucial to its chances of retaining the seat.

As the AIADMK secured three consecutive victories in 2006, 2011, and 2016, it would be hoping for a facile victory. In fact, this is the only area in Chennai in which BJP has a councillor, among the 200 wards in the city.

The entry of actor Vijay's TVK and the decreased number of voters after the SIR process could make the contest tighter.

Migrant worker dies as lift cable snaps at factory in Kodungaiyur

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A 50-year-old migrant worker was killed after the goods lift in a factory snapped near Kodungaiyur on Saturday.

The police said Sandeep, a resident of the Kodungaiyur, owns and operates a steel utensil manufacturing company located along the Kodungaiyur-Tondiarpet Highway. In his factory, Nantharam, a relative of Sandeep, hailing from Rajasthan, was employed as a helper.

On Saturday, Nantharam along with other workers was loading steel utensils into a commercial lift meant for loading.

When the lift was ascending to the first floor, the cables holding the lift suddenly snapped, causing the lift to fall to the ground.

Nantharam who was in the lift suffered severe injuries.

Nantharam was rushed to a private hospital in Tiruvottiyur for treatment. However, he died on Sunday.

The Kodungaiyur police, after filing a case, found that the the worker's death was caused due to loading of excessive weight. A case has been registered against the owner of the factory.

Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar speaking at a conference in the city on Sunday. J. JOHAN SATHYADAS

'Delay in judicial process has affected important decisions'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Justice must go beyond the mere application of law and must reflect human values, fairness, and accessibility for every citizen, said Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar at the Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT) in the city on Sunday.

Speaking at the valedictory function of 'Needhikkalam 2026 - Jurisprudence for 2047 igniting legal minds for a Developed Bharat' he said, "While law is a structured framework subject to interpretation, justice is the ultimate goal that must be delivered with compassion and a human touch."

The two-day conference was conducted jointly by VIT Chennai with Forum of Tamilnadu Law Students (FOTLAWS) where over 700 law students participated.

G. Viswanathan, founder and chancellor, VIT said India has been lagging behind in higher education. "India's gross enrolment ratio is 28% and in all the developed countries, it varies from 60% and over," he said.

He also requested the Governor to take action regarding the appointment of Vice Chancellor in the State as there are 15 universities without one which was causing difficulties.

Referring to this, the Governor noted that the delay in judicial processes has affected important administrative decisions, including the appointment of Vice-Chancellors in State Universities, thereby impacting the academic environment and the interests of students.

Addressing the gathering, Justice K. Kumaresh Babu, Judge, Madras High Court said, "The country's Constitution is the primary document paving the path for the attainment of good government."

VIT vice president G.V. Selvam also spoke at the event.

Chennai Weather	max	min
Tiruvallur	34	24
Chennai Airport	35	25
Chennai City	33	26

Chennai Airport Today
35°C Morning will be pleasant. Day will be warm. Night will be pleasant. Mostly dry weather to prevail.

Chennai Airport Tomorrow
36°C The weather will be dry. Day will be very warm. Night will be pleasant.

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Timings
CHENNAI

MONDAY, MAR. 23		
RISE	06:12	SET 18:20
RISE	09:18	SET 22:39
TUESDAY, MAR. 24		
RISE	06:11	SET 18:20
RISE	10:16	SET 23:45
WEDNESDAY, MAR. 25		
RISE	06:10	SET 18:20
RISE	11:18	SET 00:00

THE HINDU
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CINEMA ❖ ARTS ❖ EVENTS

MUSIC DANCE DRAMA

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4.00 P.M: DISCOURSE BY M.K.PRABHAKARAMURTHY
5.00 P.M: THEVARA INNISAI BY P.SARGURUNATHA OTHURVAR
6.00 P.M: DISCOURSE BY Dr.M.K.RAMANAN
7.00 P.M: OOTHUKADU SAHITHYANGAL BY SAVITHA SREERAM
(ALL ARE WELCOME)
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Sri Thiagaraja Sangeetha Vidwath Samajam, Mylapore
Today 9 am Muthuswami Dikshitar Jayanthi. Navavarna Pooja. Navagraha and Navavarna Krithis rendering by Kalakkad brothers Sri R Thiagarajan and Sri R Srinivasan - Vocal. Parur M A Krishnaswami - Violin, Ajeet Sridhar - Mridangam. Followed by Aganda Ganam of Muthuswami Dikshitar Kritis by Vidwans and Vidushis till 9 pm. All are welcome. Sponsored by Mannargudi Smt. Lakshmi Ammal trust and Dr. B. Rajam Iyer trust.

Sringeri Bharathi Vidyashram, T.Nagar. Ph: 24348964
Vardhanti / Sri Ramanavami Music, today 6.30 pm, Shri Delhi Muthukumar - Vocal, Smt Usha Rajagopalan, Shri Kumbhakonam Swaminathan. All are welcome.

Sri Ramanjaneya Trust, Tambaram Sanatorium, Ch-47. Ct: 9445105533
Sri Ramanavami Festival 2026 Today at 7 pm Shenkottai Shri Hariharasubramanian - Vocal, Shri V L Kumar - Violin, Shri Vedharaman - Mridangam.

MISCELLANEOUS

Sringeri Bharathi Vidyashram, T.Nagar. Ph: 24348964
H.H. Sringeri Jagadguru Sri Sri Bharati Tirtha Mahasannidhanam 76th Vardhanti / Sri Ramanavami Mahothsavam 2026, Tomorrow 76th Vardhanti of His Holiness 7 a.m Veena Sharada Alankaram, 8 a.m onwards Rudhra Ekadasani, Ayushya Homam, 11.45 a.m Vasothara, 12 Noon Mahadeeparadhanai, Puspha Samarpanam To Paduka of His Holiness Mahasannidhanam, 12.15 p.m Mahaprasadam, 8.30 p.m Mahadeeparadhanai. All are welcome.

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PERSONAL

CHANGE OF NAME

GV ANANTHAKRISHNAN s/o G Vishnukumar r/o No201, Value Asset Prop. , 16th Venkatesa st, Balaji Ngr extn, Pallikaranai , Chennai – 600100, TamilNadu, have changed my minor daughters name aged about 7 years from Shakshi to Shanvi A , vide affidavit No EU 518473 dated 20–03–2026 for all purposes.

I, Teena Kumari Udaya Shankar W/O Manikandan S R/o Plot no IX, Elangovadigal Street, St.Francis Nagar, Kovilpathagai, Tiruvallur 600062, India have changed my name to Teena Kumari Udaya Sankar for all purposes.

I, Surya Ragavan W/O, Vimal Raj M R/o No 12-k Sri Jai Illam Rajaji Nagar Dinnur Krishnagiri Tamil Nadu- 635109 have changed my name to Surya Murugan for all purposes.

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ISSN 0971 - 751X

INBRIEF

Samsung workers detained for attempt to stage protest

A section of Samsung workers were detained by the police on Sunday when they attempted to take out a protest march. E. Muthukumar, president of Samsung India Workers' Union, said that Labour Minister C.V. Ganesan had promised in the Assembly that the workers suspended 13 months ago would be reinstated. But the management has not taken any steps to reinstate the 27 employees. They were suspended for being a part of the union, he added.

Two workers electrocuted at polymer factory in Manali

Two workers of a polymer manufacturing unit in Manali were electrocuted on Saturday. They were identified as Deepak, 19, a native of Odisha, and Sakthivel, 21, a native of Tiruchi. As the two were carrying an iron rod, it accidentally came into contact with a live electrical wire of a mini transformer in the factory. The Manali police have filed a case and are investigating.

Text & Context and Science

Weekday features on *The Hindu* epaper (epaper.thehindu.com) carries explainers, special articles and quizzes. In the latest issue (March 23, Monday), the following articles are available:

- What insurance numbers do not reveal **newsth.live/insurancenumbers**
- How agriPV can turn India's farms into dual-purpose powerhouses **newsth.live/agripv**

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

Residents of this Assembly segment seek more support to improve their livelihood

Farmers, who recently set up a producer organisation and started growing millets, complain that they still do not have machinery needed to process the crop. Residents say work to lay a second access road to Subramaniaswami Temple is yet to be completed, with land acquisition still under way

CONSTITUENCY WATCH

Deepa H. Ramakrishnan
CHENNAI

Hundreds of power looms rattle and hum throughout the day to make cotton lungis and sarees in this Assembly constituency that is home to the hill shrine of Sri Subramaniaswami in Tiruttani. They are part of a larger cluster of power looms spread across Arakkonam and Sholingur.

Over the last few years, the number of looms in Murugur, which is about 3 km from the heart of the town, has come down. "It was in 2000 that many weavers switched from handlooms to power looms. Since I've grown old, I prefer to get the thread and *paavu* from a company, stitch the lungi, and get paid ₹14 per metre as wages. I don't have the strength to manufacture and sell them on my own. I don't have the money to convert the loom into one for weaving saris either," he said.

A local politician said apart from the 1,000 free units of electricity provided to each power loom, there was hardly any government scheme for the weavers here. "In Kancheepuram, there is a *zari* factory, and there are shops selling saris. Here, at the most, lorry drivers who need lungis visit the weaver's houses, which serve as production centres, to buy the garment. The more enterprising among the weavers sell their products at nearby markets."

In Tiruttani, the lives of the residents are intertwined with the temple. Jamuna, a tailor and single mother of three, who said it would be helpful for her if she got a sewing machine without the pedal, wanted the temple administration to designate a separate darshan time slot for the local residents.

Growing crowds

"After the pandemic, the temple has been getting lots of devotees. I would like to request a specific time slot for residents of Tiruttani, as is done at other temples." She added that small ponds in residential areas such as Murugur should not be filled up.

Ravikanth, a devotee from Andhra Pradesh, said crowd management was quite poor in the temple. "The queues here are organised poorly. I visited the temple on an ordinary non-festival Thursday but the arrangements were unsatisfactory. It is lucky that there have been no stampedes. I visit Swamimalai once a year for a festival. The crowd is managed better there," he said.

The town only has a couple of decent accommodations for visitors, which were only opened recently on National Highway 716. One can see devotees sleeping on roadsides in front of the entrance of the hill.

Residents have been demanding better street lights, speedy completion of drainage work, and improved municipal waste management

Work to lay a second access road to the temple is yet to be completed, with land acquisition still under way. Vehicle parking and traffic management are problems that need to be addressed, residents said.

Alongside weaving, farming is another major occupation in the Assembly constituency. Farmers grow paddy (three harvests), sugarcane, groundnuts, and millets in areas including Tiruttani and R.K. Pettai.

"Only in the last two years, after we established a farmer-producer organisation did were start growing millets. But we still do not have machinery to process the crop. We will be happy if the irrigation tanks are deepened so we need not depend on borewells. We need online facilities to market our produce," said Venkatesan N., a farmer who is part of the Tiruttani Young Generation Farmer Producer Company Limited.

"All our directors are aged under 35. We are doing value addition to traditional rice varieties. We would like more training for young farmers," he added.

The constituency, traditionally an AIADMK stronghold, saw the DMK winning the seat in 2021.

Other than Tiruttani, Pallipattu, and Podhanur are the major towns, and the constituency comprises Tiruttani, R.K. Pettai, Pallipattu, and portions of Thiruvalangadu.

Drinking water scheme

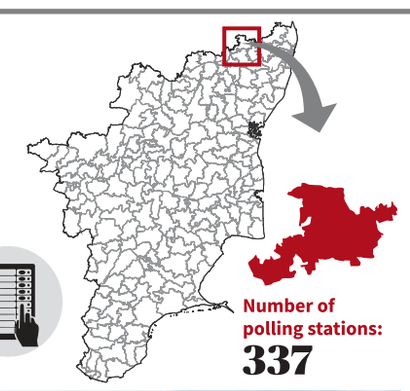
Former MLA P.M. Narasimhan said that during his term between 2016-21, he implemented a ₹149-crore drinking water scheme in the constituency and got a bypass laid at a cost of ₹34 crore.

"The people were suffering without the drinking water scheme. I also helped bring in town bus services," he said.

Residents now demand better street lights, construction of a rail overbridge and the closure of a railway gate inside the town, speedy completion of work to construct drainage, and improvement in the management of municipal solid waste.

Tiruttani

Alongside weaving, farming is another major occupation in the Assembly constituency. Farmers grow paddy (three harvests), sugarcane, groundnuts, and millets



KEY ISSUES

- No weavers' cooperatives or clusters to provide financial and material assistance to weavers
- No textile park to help weavers improve and market their products
- No major industries to provide jobs to educated youth
- Not enough accommodation for people visiting the temple
- Haphazard parking of vehicles and poor traffic management

Number of polling stations: **337**

Electors before SIR
Total: 2,90,452
Men: 1,41,923
Women: 1,48,501
Others: 28

Electors after SIR
Total: 2,60,096
Men: 1,28,642
Women: 1,31,417
Others: 37

2021 Assembly election result
- S. Chandran of the DMK defeated G. Hari of the AIADMK by a margin of **29,253** votes

Safety concern: Devotees complain that the crowd management at the Sri Subramaniaswami Temple is poor, and call for better regulation. G. MOORTHY

All-party autorickshaw union meet held in city

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

An all-party auto union meeting organised in Thiruvanmiyur on Sunday.

Congress MP Karti P. Chidambaram, chairing the meeting, interacted with the autorickshaw drivers regarding their livelihood issues, including the impact of online travel aggregators and the failure of the State government to revise auto fares. Americai V. Narayanan, honorary president of the Federation of All Party Auto Union, said the meeting was held to enable policy making.

Chennai is no exception to the niche of 'Kidult' culture

Sahana Mira
CHENNAI

A 24-year-old Sidhant Nichani from Chennai has taken it upon himself to start the first diecast club of miniature toy cars in the city. He says Lego, Hot Wheels, and blind box toys are currently swelling among adults, and it is no child's play.

Likewise, Fazila, founder of Journal Owl from the city, sat for 15 hours to complete a 3D wooden puzzle of a Sakura tram model entirely by herself.

The toy aisles for children have adults lingering, buying toys for themselves these days, and the toy industry calls them 'kidults', especially those with a more pronounced affinity for games and toys, and Chennai is no exception.

According to market research company Circana, 'kidults' mainly contribute a substantial share of the toy industry, accounting for 28% of global toy sales in 2024, an increase of 2.5% since 2022.

Well, Chennaiites have their own reasons for flocking to toy aisles in malls and online stores. "We think more from a collectible perspective when we buy, and not as though this is a toy. Most of us don't 'play' with them. Lego is assembled once and then just admired," says Mr. Nichani. He also observes that, growing up in Indian household, children are usually permitted toys only if they fulfil academic demands. "Those who were fortunate enough to do well got everything they wanted; those who didn't continue to yearn. In my opinion, this is why they gravitate towards it with adult money," he adds.

Breaking age barrier: A collection of miniature toy cars by 24-year-old Sidhant Nichani from Chennai.

Ms. Fazila also collects the third category of toys that are sneaking into the mainstream. She saves money slowly, incrementally and purchases a blind box once in six months. "You would not know what is inside the blind box but they are figurines of Pop Mart such as Skullpanda, Chaka, Molly. I like the art behind the figurines but not a big fan of Labubu," says her, adding the items she collects were once largely available only in the U.S. markets. From being a passive viewer on social media to getting her hands on them gives her an ineffable satisfaction that she too is part of the community.

Many adults in Chennai are leaning towards puzzles too, mainly to unwind from the mundanities of routine and to keep the last vestige of the inner child alive, among other reasons. Subhatra Priyadarshini K., Co founder of Untangled, a puzzles and board games cafe, says that they have customers above 18 showing up to solve puzzles more than children. "It is distinctly meditative to engage with these for the adults. When it is a 2000 piece puzzle, we have had solvers for up to two weeks to just complete what they have begun, and we frame it too," adds Ms. Priyadarshini.

There is also an issue when it comes to collectible of any kind – it is the scalpers who procure multiple units of these and resell them with threefold or higher marker ups, which remains a hurdle for these collectors, notes Mr. Nichani.

₹60.63 lakh in cash, liquor, and narcotics seized in city

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Unaccounted cash of ₹60.63 lakh, along with 4.2 litres of liquor, 28 grams of narcotics and precious metals, were seized in Chennai over Saturday and Sunday during election surveillance. Major cash seizures were reported from Virugambakkam (₹34.75 lakh), Thiru.Vi.Ka. Nagar (₹7.78 lakh), Egmore (₹2.86 lakh) and Harbour (₹4 lakh). The action follows norms mandating seizure of cash above ₹50,000 and valuables without valid documents.

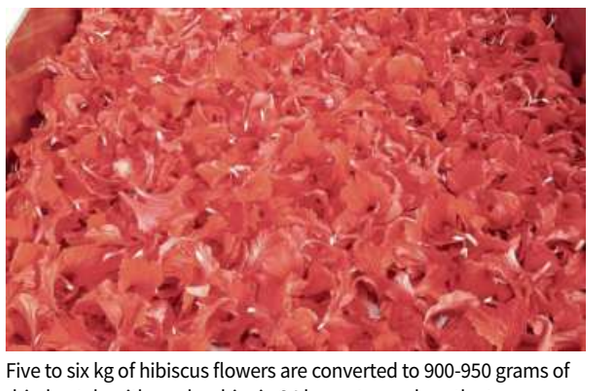
Horticulture department's farm at Chengalpattu starts making herbal tea branded as *Idhazh*

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Soon, you will be able to drink herbal tea, called *Idhazh*, brewed with hibiscus flowers grown at the 32-acre State horticulture farm at Athur in Chengalpattu district in Tamil Nadu. The farm has recently begun producing the tea on a small scale.

Blending sun-dried organic native hibiscus petals with herbs, including dry ginger and pepper, the workers at the farm are packing tea in small packets that will be sold at tea shops and the Tamil Nadu Horticulture Development Agency (Tanhoda) outlets, said an official.

Over 4,000 saplings planted in March 2025 form the basis of the project in which hibiscus tea is being made in two variants. One variety has green tea, cardamom, amla, black pepper, cinnamon, fennel seeds with hibiscus – and the other contains cardamom, cloves, black pepper, dry ginger, fennel seeds and hibiscus. "Hibiscus helps boost metabolism, aid digestion and calms down the body," said an official.



Five to six kg of hibiscus flowers are converted to 900-950 grams of dried petals with a solar drier in 24 hours to produce the tea.

Five to six kilograms of fresh flowers are converted to 900-950 grams of dried petals with a solar drier for 24 hours. "Apart from the native hibiscus, hybrid varieties too have been planted on another two acres. A mist chamber, drip irrigation, tractors, and solar drier are facilities created to cultivate hibiscus plants," said another official.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

Jai Shree Krishna
In Everlasting Memory

With deep sadness, we share that our beloved mother, grandmother, friend & guide,
VASU KISHAN SHAH
passed away on 22nd March, 2026.
"From you, we learnt the meaning of strength."
Fondly Remembered by:
Anika, Aadhya, Shilpa & Nishant Shah.

IN MEMORY OF YOUR LOVED ONES
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DEATH

IN LOVING MEMORY

G.N GOPALARATHNAM
Chartered Accountant
27.06.1945 - 21.03.2026
With great sorrow we announce the passing of Mr. G. N. Gopalarathnam, a visionary Chartered Accountant, revered Guru, and beloved friend. His professional brilliance was a guiding light to clients and colleagues.
His humane nature and benevolence have inspired many, and he leaves behind an indelible mark on all of our hearts.
Deeply mourned by
Partners, Staff & Students of
N.C. Rajagopal & Co.,
and family & friends, near and dear.

REMEMBRANCE

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Dr.R. SIVARAMAKRISHNAN
Prof & HOD: Production Tech.Dept.MIT, Anna University
DOD: 23.03.2021
Forever in our hearts.
Rest peacefully in Heaven.
Friends and Relatives.

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

12th Anniversary

Padmashri
Dr.B.PALANIAPPAN
DOB:09.10.1929 DOD: 23.03.2014
Better to light a candle, than to curse the darkness
Seralathan Ph: 98403 82778

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

6th ANNIVERSARY

Dr. C.KOMALAVALLI, M.A. Ph.D (Vaishnavism)
06.01.1942 - 23.03.2020
(W/o. Shri C.L. Narasimhan)
Fondly Remembered by:
Sons: C.L. Baradhwaj, C.L.Balaji & Family Members
Triplicane, Chennai - 600 005.

TWENTY EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY

V.S.RAMACHANDRAN
Expired:23.03.1998
Fondly Remembered by :
V.R. Balasubramanian, V.R. Yuvaraj

20th Anniversary
In Ever Loving Memory

B.JACOB PET (Retd) Ambur
Called to Heaven on 23.03.2006
Dear Appa, We always remember you
Children, Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren

INBRIEF

Police issue notice to son of ex-gangster in car stunt case

The Bengaluru City Police have summoned Ricky Rai, son of former underworld operative Muthappa Rai, in connection with a case involving a Lamborghini car performing dangerous stunts at the Anil Kumble Circle on Saturday, putting the lives of the public at risk. A senior police officer told *The Hindu* that the car was traced to Rai's residence. However, there is no clarity on who owns the car as the registration number does not match the owner's details.

Alert issued against Nipah in Kerala till September

Health officials in Kerala have issued an alert against Nipah infections in the State from April to September. With cases being reported frequently since 2018, the focus is on Kozhikode, Malappuram, Palakkad, and Thrissur districts. According to a health official, the Nipah virus is found to have been active in State in the six-month period starting in April every year. Awareness campaigns for children are planned as some victims have been from that age group.

V.D. Satheesan writes to PM to bring back bodies from Oman

Kerala's Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan on Sunday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking his intervention for the repatriation of the mortal remains of two Keralites who died in the flash floods in Oman. The victims, Shamla and Yusuf, natives of Thrithala, lost their lives when their vehicle was caught in a flash flood at the Al Batinah Governorate. He requested Mr. Modi to urge authorities to expedite rescue operations for a missing woman, Ramla.

Parties in Kerala increase focus on Christian votes

Accounting for 18% of the population, the community has voting pattern that varies across denominations and is shaped by regional presence

Hiran Unnikrishnan
KOTTAYAM

As Kerala prepares for yet another election, the focus has turned to the likely voting patterns of its key minority communities.

Political observers and parties believe that Muslim votes, which carry considerable influence in the northern districts, are expected to largely favour the United Democratic Front (UDF). The real uncertainty, however, lies with the Christian electorate.

Accounting for just over 18% of the population and spread primarily across central and southern Kerala, the Christian vote does not follow a uniform pattern. Its preferences vary across denominations, shaped by regional presence and institutional influence. This makes it one of the most watched segments in the electoral landscape.

A common thread

A common thread, however, runs across denominations. The question of representation remains central. Churches have consistently sought a political voice through candidates from within the community. It is in this context that dissent over candidate selection in certain constituencies has gained prominence. "It is quite natural for every Church to expect one of its members to be fielded in seats where the community has a decisive role," said Kuriakose Theophilose Metropolitan of the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church.

A worker arranging election materials of different parties at a publicity materials store in Thiruvananthapuram. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

Attacks on Christian missionaries in North India have largely remained confined to statements in Kerala

The Jacobite community, which has a sizeable presence in several constituencies views the 2017 Supreme Court verdict on the Malankara Church dispute as the defining issue this election. Observers point out that the community is broadly aligned with the position taken by the Left Democratic Front (LDF) and is therefore likely to extend its support to it.

While the two factions of the Malankara Church appear to have different choices, attention has now shifted to the Catholic Church, particularly the Syro Malabar Church. There is a perception that the community is dissatisfied with the consideration it has received from the LDF government and is looking for a change.

K.M. Seethi, a political scientist, observed that there is a tendency for Christian votes to be distributed across political fronts, including the NDA, which could have implications for the UDF.

He noted that reports of attacks on Christian missionaries in north India have largely remained confined to statements and have not translated into a major electoral issue in the State.

Cong. keeps it within family for Karnataka byelections

The Hindu Bureau
BELAGAVI/BENGALURU

Amid several claimants and fierce competition among family members, the Congress in Karnataka on Sunday announced Umesh Meti and Samarth Mallikarjun as its nominees for the Bagalkot and Davangere South Assembly constituencies, respectively, which are going to the polls on April 9.

The byelections to Bagalkot and Davangere South have been necessitated following the death of Congress leaders H.Y. Meti and Shamanur Shivashankarappa, respectively.

'Party tradition'

Mr. Umesh is the younger son of the late Meti and Mr. Samarth is the son of Mines Minister S.S. Mallikarjun and grandson of the late Shamanur Shivashankarappa.

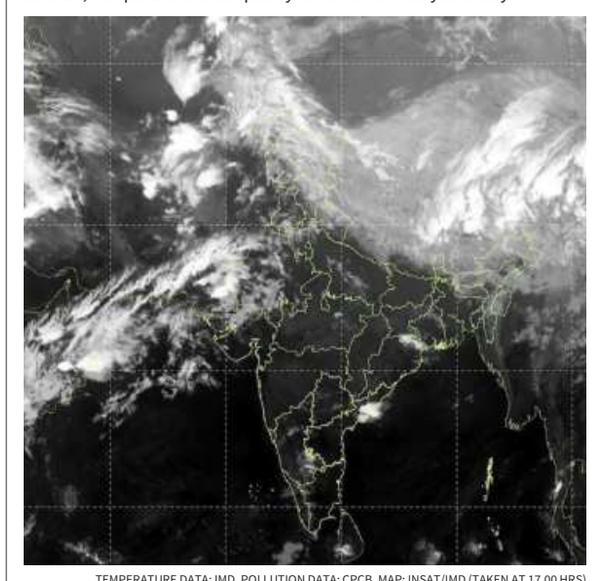
The Congress is staring at trouble from a rebel candidate in the fray in Davangere South. The party was under pressure from Muslims to provide ticket to a leader from the community for the seat, finally zeroed in on Mr. Samarth.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister and KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar are scheduled to be present when the two candidates file their nomination papers on Monday.

Mr. Shivakumar on Sunday called it a "tradition" of the party to provide ticket to the families of deceased leaders.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday


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

Forecast for Monday: Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning and gusty winds very likely at isolated places over coastal Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Maharashtra, Marathwada and Uttarakhand. Hot and Humid weather very likely at isolated places over Kerala, Mahe, Konkan and Goa.

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	10.0	28.2	19.0	Kozhikode	—	35.6	26.3
Ahmedabad	—	36.0	20.6	Kurnool	—	38.5	25.4
Aizawl	16.8	26.1	14.4	Lucknow	0.1	30.3	18.0
Allahabad	—	31.8	15.8	Madurai	—	37.4	24.6
Bengaluru	—	32.8	22.7	Mangaluru	—	34.2	23.9
Bhopal	—	33.0	14.9	Mumbai	—	34.2	22.2
Bhubaneswar	—	32.6	19.4	Mysuru	—	34.6	18.8
Chandigarh	—	28.1	13.1	New Delhi	—	29.6	15.0
Chennai	—	35.1	25.0	Patna	7.7	26.9	17.6
Coimbatore	—	35.2	24.2	Port Blair	—	31.9	25.4
Dehradun	—	27.5	12.6	Puducherry	—	32.6	25.0
Gangtok	8.0	16.6	7.5	Pune	—	36.2	21.5
Goa	—	33.4	22.9	Raipur	—	33.7	18.7
Guwahati	10.0	27.2	18.9	Ranchi	—	25.7	13.0
Hubballi	—	36.0	21.0	Shillong	5.0	17.2	9.8
Hyderabad	—	34.0	22.6	Shimla	—	18.0	7.4
Imphal	—	23.5	14.8	Srinagar	—	20.4	3.6
Jaipur	—	31.2	19.7	Thiruvananthapuram	—	35.1	26.0
Kochi	—	33.2	26.2	Tiruchi	—	36.0	25.0
Kohima	—	16.6	12.9	Vijayawada	38.0	34.2	24.0
Kolkata	3.0	27.2	19.7	Visakhapatnam	—	32.5	25.6

(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	8	32	21	51	140	
Bengaluru	9	15	22	88	91	
Chennai	5	4	34	22	40	
Delhi	7	53	70	140	187	
Hyderabad	13	13	29	56	82	
Kolkata	6	15	25	49	47	
Lucknow	12	14	29	69	76	
Mumbai	22	25	35	39	56	
Pune	32	79	50	72	97	
Visakhapatnam	13	39	20	32	86	

Yesterday

High levels of particulate matter pollution recorded in most cities across the country. Going by Central Pollution Control Board data, Lucknow the worst with PM2.5 pollution levels touching a dangerous 369. Kolkata was a close second with PM10 readings of 352.

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

Fuel ships begin unloading in Mangaluru

The Hindu Bureau
MANGALURU

The crude oil vessel *Aqua Titan* from Russia which arrived in Mangaluru with 1.1 lakh tonnes of cargo and anchored at Single Point Mooring (SPM), off the Tannirbhavi coast, at 9 p.m. on Saturday, began discharging the crude for Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) on Sunday. In addition, another vessel *Pysix Pioneer*, carrying LPG, arrived at Berth No. 13 in New Mangalore Port at 6 a.m. on Sunday, and began unloading 16,714 tonnes of cargo for Aegis Logistics Ltd on Sunday.

Aqua Titan, sailing under the flag of Cameroon, carried approximately 7.7 lakh barrels (1.1 lakh tonnes) of crude oil. The vessel from Russia was initially bound for China.

Pyxis Pioneer, sailing under the Singapore flag, had sailed out of Port of Nederland, Texas, in the U.S. on February 14. The New Mangalore Port Authority had announced waiving of the cargo-related charges for handing crude oil and LPG up to March 31.

NDA parties must work unitedly, says TDP chief

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

State TDP president Palla Srinivasa Rao emphasised the need for effective coordination among National Democratic Alliance partners. Addressing NDA leaders here on Sunday, he said there was a need to work unitedly take Andhra Pradesh government's agenda to the grassroots level.

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A.P. man electrocuted by snare laid by poachers

The Hindu Bureau
MADANAPALLE

A 46-year-old man died after allegedly coming into contact with an electrified snare laid by poachers in a forest area near Pyarampeta village in Annamayya district of Andhra Pradesh.

The deceased, identified as Subrahmanyam Yadav, is a resident of Valmikipuram mandal. According to preliminary information, poachers had set up an electric trap to hunt wild boars and antelopes.

The police said that in a bid to cover up the incident, those involved dumped the body in a nearby paddy field to make it appear as an accidental death. An investigation is under way.

BUSINESS TO BUSINESS

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Harvesting anxiety

Assam goes to the polls amidst another political churn

The BJP is seeking a third consecutive term in Assam in Assembly polls on April 9, while the Congress is fighting to make a comeback after 10 years in the wilderness. In 2021, the coalition of BJP, AGP and UPPL won 75 of 126 seats, with the BJP alone winning 60. Communal mobilisation and welfare schemes make the standard BJP toolkit here too, but Assam is a unique theatre of political experimentation for the party and its governments at the State and the Centre. Conflicts over large-scale migration of Bengali-speaking people have long shaped Assam's politics. Nativist politics developed primarily in opposition to this migration. The BJP's growth has come by recasting that nativism into a question of Hindu-Muslim conflict, creating a new political dynamic weakening subnational outfits and pressuring the Congress. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 enacted a communal eligibility clause for people who entered India from Bangladesh. Nativist opposition to citizenship for any immigrant – including Hindus – and other factors stalled the large-scale rollout of the law, but rhetoric over demographic change remains the mainstay of politics. This will be the first Assembly poll after the 2023 delimitation of constituencies, which has displayed patterns of communal gerrymandering, reducing the impact of Muslim voters and enhancing representation for indigenous communities. BJP functionaries, including Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, have been open about the intended impact.

Meanwhile, the BJP continues to recruit leaders from the Congress. The AIUDF, mainly representing Bengali-speaking Muslims in lower Assam and the Barak Valley, contributed to the collapse of the Congress in 2016, now fights for survival, contesting alone after exclusion from the Congress-led Opposition alliance. The Congress has allied with the Raijor Dal, led by activist Akhil Gogoi, and the AJP, a party born from the anti-CAA movement that channels renewed Assamese subnationalism among younger voters. Their common ground is the promise of democratic governance, land rights, and inclusive development. The AGP, once the torch-bearer of Assamese regionalism, is a junior NDA partner contesting 26 seats, its independent ideological space largely absorbed by its larger ally. In Bodoland, the BJP has replaced its 2021 partner, the UPPL, with the BPF, an older formation. In 2021, the BJP had managed to subsume most regional sentiment through alliances and the recasting of the migration debate. Big infrastructure projects are presented as milestones, but allegations of crony capitalism and disregard for the environment are serious. Such substantive questions get sidelined as fear rather than hope dominates.

Digital exile

The government could be creating a system of arbitrary censorship

A decade-long trend in digital governance in India crescendoed last week when a slew of social media accounts operated by independent activists and journalists were blocked apparently for criticising the Union government and Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his government's West Asia policies and the LPG crisis. In seven years, from 2014 to 2021, the number of URLs, posts, and accounts blocked ballooned from 470 to 9,800; since then, there is evidence that entire accounts, especially if they were publishing politically unfavourable comments, were being blocked. There was a wave of censorship during the farmers' protest in 2020-21; the government restored many accounts after international outcry but this also demonstrated that it was not beyond mass censorship. Similarly, the government used emergency powers under the IT Rules to block links to a BBC documentary in 2023, which also expanded the definition of what constituted a "threat to public order". But when Twitter (now X) challenged several blocking orders, between 2021 and 2022, in the Karnataka High Court, the High Court dismissed the plea and fined Twitter, further emboldening the state to censor accounts.

In *Shreya Singhal* (2015), the Supreme Court of India upheld Section 69A of the IT Act 2000 precisely because of its procedural safeguards, including requiring reasoned orders and judicial review. In practice, however, the government has been diluting the safeguards through an expansive use of Rule 16 of the 2009 Blocking Rules, which requires blocking proceedings to be confidential. When this stipulation is invoked to withhold blocking orders or their reasons from affected parties, it undermines their ability to challenge the action in court, eroding the very safeguards that justified the constitutionality of Section 69A. The 2009 Rules also require blocking orders to be reviewed by a committee composed under the IT Rules 2009, yet this is an entirely executive body and has never overturned a government blocking order. In effect, the government is openly and systematically bypassing the right to be heard and violating the doctrine of proportionality. Rule 16 is a procedural rule, yet the government is using it to override the constitutional right to free speech while shielding itself from judicial review. A person's entire account being blocked amounts to a digital exile, removing the person from the public square, which is a hallmark of an authoritarian government rather than of a liberal democracy. The government's plan to decentralise blocking powers to multiple Ministries could effectively create a regime of arbitrary censorship, where any department can silence a critic without the specialised oversight, however flawed, of the IT Ministry.

'Double engine' — cute slogan, a serious federal question

S.Y. Quraishi

is a former Chief Election Commissioner of India

Every election season produces memorable slogans. Most fade once the votes are counted, but some linger and begin to shape how citizens think about governance itself. One such phrase is the "double-engine *sarkar*". At first hearing, it sounds harmless, even cute: two governments working in tandem to accelerate development. Yet, behind the metaphor lies a serious constitutional question about India's federal compact.

The idea is simple: if the same party governs both the Union and the State, development will move faster because the two governments will work in harmony. Taken at face value, this is unexceptionable. Of course governments at different levels should coordinate. That is indeed cooperative federalism. The real question is what happens when they do not share the same political ideology. But the "double-engine" slogan carries a deeper implication. It suggests that development flows preferentially to States governed by the same party as the Union government.

'Aligned States' benefit

During election campaigns the message is often made quite explicit: elect the party ruling at the Centre so that your State can benefit from faster development. If you do not, you will be starved of funds. This is where the constitutional difficulty begins.

India's Constitution does not envisage a system where State governments depend on the goodwill, or charity, of the ruling party at the Centre. It creates a federal structure in which the Union and the States are partners within their respective spheres. The Union government represents the Republic as a whole, not merely those States governed by the party in power in New Delhi.

Public money collected through national taxation belongs to the Union of India, not to the ruling party. Taxes are collected in the name of the Republic, from citizens of every State regardless of how they vote. The distribution of these resources cannot depend on which party governs a State. A citizen in Kerala or Tamil Nadu pays the same taxes as a citizen in Uttar Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. The constitutional promise is that both will receive their fair share in return.

India's constitutional framers understood this danger. That is why they built institutional safeguards into the system. The most important is the Finance Commission. Under Article 280, the Finance Commission is appointed every five years to recommend how Union revenues should be shared with the States. Its purpose is vital: fiscal transfers must be rule-based, not politically negotiated. The Commission evaluates States on objective criteria – how far their incomes lag behind the national average, their population, geographic size, and fiscal capacity – so that politics cannot determine who gets what.

> Fairness, not political alignment, must guide India's federal balance

Issues raised by States, federal friction

Recent debates around fiscal federalism show how sensitive this issue remains. Southern States have expressed concern that the use of more recent population data in allocation formulas may penalise them for having successfully controlled population growth. Another issue is the increasing resort of the Union government to cesses and surcharges, which fall outside the divisible pool and are not shared with States. This effectively reduces the quantum of resources available for constitutionally mandated sharing, concentrating more fiscal power in Union hands and weakening the financial autonomy of States. The Sixteenth Finance Commission, which is currently deliberating, will have to grapple seriously with these concerns if it is to restore confidence in the fairness of the fiscal federal arrangement

Governments in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have argued that States which acted early to stabilise population should not be penalised in the distribution of national resources. Senior Ministers from these States have at times remarked, in visible frustration, that they feel reduced to "beggars", pleading for funds that constitutionally belong to them. This is not the language of political theatre. It reflects a genuine structural grievance about the terms on which States participate in the Indian Union.

Federal friction is visible not only in financial matters but also in the legislative process. In recent years, Governors in some States have sat for long periods over Bills passed by elected legislatures, effectively using the constitutional office as an instrument of political sabotage. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have witnessed particularly prolonged delays. The pattern is difficult to ignore: the delays have been in States that are governed by parties opposed to the ruling dispensation at the Centre. A Governor who withholds assent to legislation passed by an elected Assembly is, in effect, a second engine running in reverse.

Such delays have drawn judicial attention. In *State of Punjab vs Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab* (2023), the Supreme Court of India made it clear that a Governor cannot use inaction to stall the legislative process. The Court emphasised that the Governor's office is not meant to function as a parallel political authority over an elected legislature.

More recently, in *State of Tamil Nadu vs Governor of Tamil Nadu* (2025), the Court observed that prolonged inaction by a Governor in assenting to Bills is constitutionally impermissible. These rulings together signal a firm judicial commitment to protecting the legislative sovereignty of elected State assemblies.

The experience of Delhi over the past decade provides a further illustration. Many initiatives of the elected government became entangled in disputes with the Lieutenant-Governor and the Union government. Courts eventually had to intervene. The lesson is not merely about one city; it is about what happens when the machinery of federal governance is used to punish a political opponent rather than serve the public.

Seen together – fiscal transfers, gubernatorial delays, and the Delhi impasse – these developments form a coherent pattern. The "double-engine" slogan is not merely a campaign metaphor. It is a description of how governance actually functions when political alignment is absent. And that is precisely the constitutional problem. The form of federalism survives; its spirit is quietly hollowed out.

India's federal system has faced similar tensions before. In earlier decades, Article 356 was frequently misused to dismiss elected State governments. The Court's landmark judgment in *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* placed important limits on that practice. The challenge today is subtler: governments may remain in office, yet, governance itself may become hostage to political alignment.

Structural reform needed

What is needed is not merely judicial intervention, but structural reform. The Finance Commission's recommendations could be made more binding. A fixed statutory timeline, say, three months, could be prescribed for Governors to act on Bills, failing which assent would be deemed granted. Inter-State/governmental councils, already provided for under Article 263, could be revitalised as genuine forums for cooperative federalism rather than ceremonial gatherings. These are not radical proposals; they are logical completions of the constitutional architecture that the framers intended.

Political slogans will continue to animate election campaigns. But a slogan that implicitly threatens citizens with slower development if they choose the "wrong" party at the State level does not merely distort electoral choice; it corrodes the constitutional promise of equal citizenship. Development cannot depend on political alignment. It must rest on rules and institutions that treat every State, and every citizen, with equal fairness. That constitutional balance, not the number of engines pulling the same train, is the only engine India's federal democracy truly needs.

Trump's Section 301 weapon, lessons from the past

R.V. Anuradha

is a Partner at Clarus Law Associates, New Delhi, specialising in international economic laws

Within hours of the February 20 ruling of the United States Supreme Court that U.S. President Donald Trump lacked authority to impose his infamous reciprocal tariffs, the U.S. administration invoked Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose a 10% temporary surcharge on imports, effective February 24 to July 24, 2026. Section 122 requires the existence of a "balance of payment" (BOP) crisis. This has already been challenged by 24 U.S. States in the United States Court of International Trade, on the ground that, like the preceding tariffs, these too have no legal basis, nor is there any BOP crisis facing the U.S.

Under World Trade Organization (WTO) rules of international trade, import restrictions, not tariffs, are permissible in limited situations involving serious BOP difficulties, which could arise due to actual or any imminent threat of serious decline in a country's monetary reserves. None of these situations exists for the U.S.

In any event, since the Section 122 tariffs have a limited 150-day shelf life, Mr. Trump promised "other tools" and initiated two sets of "Section 301" proceedings – one alleging "Structural Excess Capacity and Production in Manufacturing Sectors", and another alleging "Failure to Impose and Effectively Enforce a Prohibition on the Importation of Goods Produced with Forced Labor". India is listed in both proceedings, along with the European Union (EU), Japan, Singapore, South Korea, China and many others. The factual and economic rationale for both, at best, is specious.

Furthering unilateral action

Section 301 sits under "Title III" of the U.S. Trade Act in the chapter "Enforcement of United States Rights under Trade Agreements and Response to Unfair Trade Practices". Section 301 authorises the Office of the United States Trade Representative to investigate foreign trade practices and impose unilateral tariffs based on a determination that such practices are unjustifiable, discriminatory, or restrict U.S. commerce, or violate trade agreements.

> The Section 301 proceedings demand action from India and other developing nations to revive multilateral rules

A clear anomaly in Section 301 is that it provides the U.S. the right to unilateral determination of what is governed by rules of international trade. To state the obvious, one cannot be the judge of one's cause. To address this, soon after the WTO came into being in 1995, the EU initiated a dispute against the U.S. arguing that because Section 301 provides unilateral rights to the U.S. without any assessment of its international obligations, such a provision violated WTO law.

The WTO disputes panel agreed that even the threat of conduct prohibited by the WTO would enable one country to exert undue leverage on others. It compared Section 301 to a "big stick", that, merely by being carried could be "as effective a means to having one's way as actually using the stick".

The panel, however, refrained from holding Section 301 as illegal based on an assurance from the U.S. administration that it would render determinations "in conformity" with its WTO obligations. This deference to the U.S. was predicated on the U.S.'s standing by that assurance. That deference has today come to haunt WTO members.

Now, key decimator

A 2020 report of the U.S. Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes that until the start of the Trump administration (in 2016), the U.S. stood by its word and used Section 301 primarily to build cases and pursue dispute settlement at the WTO. The report acknowledges that the Trump administration changed that and started using Section 301 as a weapon to impose tariffs as punitive measures. Pursuant to Section 301 proceedings against China in 2017, unilateral tariffs up to 25% were imposed. A WTO panel held in 2020 that these tariffs violated the U.S.'s commitments under the WTO. The U.S. did not blink and appealed the panel ruling to the WTO's appellate process. The only catch was that there was no WTO Appellate Body by 2020, since the U.S. had, single-handedly, blocked its constitution.

The U.S., as the chief architect of the WTO, including its enforceable dispute settlement mechanism, has been its chief decimator. Had the panel in 1999 ruled that Section 301 required amendment to ensure WTO consistency, the U.S. – then a trustworthy member of the multilateral system that it had helped create – would very likely have amended the section to eliminate any possibility of unilateral tariff imposition. And Mr. Trump's toolkit would have fallen short of one potent weapon.

The issue of trade agreements

Events over the past year have especially demonstrated the fragility of multilaterally agreed rules, and the significant systemic leverage the U.S. has been able to exercise by unabashed violation of those rules. And yet, we are also seeing some limits to that leverage. Malaysia has officially called its reciprocal trade agreement with the U.S. "null and void" after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision. Unlike Malaysia, India had not yet signed an agreement with the U.S., and the government has indicated that it hopes for a "mutually beneficial trade agreement". The pressures of the Section 301 proceedings will, no doubt, play a role in the conclusion of any negotiation.

Indian businesses need to actively participate in both Section 301 proceedings and make clear submissions exposing the absurdity of these so-called investigations. At the broader level, the core challenge for India and other developing countries is the need to revive multilateral rules. There is no substitute for the strength that comes from coalition-building to dilute the U.S.'s raw power advantage. India must step up and play that role.

The views expressed are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Trump and war

The prosecution of the conflict with Iran under U.S. President Donald Trump reveals a disconcerting absence of strategic coherence and foresight. The presumption that targeted elimination of leadership would catalyse regime transformation has proven fundamentally flawed, as Iran has exhibited considerable resilience against the United States-Israel offensive. Compounding this miscalculation is the administration's oscillatory rhetoric — simultaneously proclaiming operational success while augmenting military deployments — thereby betraying policy inconsistency.

Mr. Trump's disparagement of NATO allies for their reluctance to engage underscores growing diplomatic estrangement. Concurrently, internal dissent, exemplified by the resignation of Joe Kent, accentuates institutional unease.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy,
Bengaluru

U.S. President Donald Trump appears to recognise no limits. Earlier it was Venezuela; now it is Iran, and he has openly suggested that Cuba could be next — without clear justification.

These actions risk plunging entire nations into crisis and instability. Mr. Trump seems to view global resources, particularly oil, as instruments of power. The international community must respond firmly to check such unilateralism. Otherwise, there may be no end to these escalating, authoritarian impulses.

N.G.R. Prasad,
Chennai

Military action without a clearly articulated endgame risks prolonged instability, rising human and economic costs, and unintended geopolitical consequences. The concerns raised within the United States Congress reflect not just partisan debate but the need for strategic clarity, defined objectives, and an exit plan. As tensions with Iran escalate, restraint, transparency, and diplomacy must prevail over open-ended military engagement.

Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

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

India must use the AYUSH opportunity

Suchika Chopra
Assistant Professor of Economics at Krea University

Sabah Siddiqui
Assistant Professor of Psychology at Krea University

The 2026-27 Union Budget and India's new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the European Union (EU) signals Ayurveda's ambitious leap into the global mainstream. The Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) Ministry's budget has nearly doubled in the past five years, reaching ₹4,408 crore this year. Further, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has announced three new All-India Institutes of Ayurveda, aiming to set top standards for traditional medicine, similar to how AIIMS leads modern medicine in India. These institutes will not just treat patients, they will teach and conduct advanced research as well. The Budget also turbo-charges the National AYUSH Mission, raising its funding by 66% to modernise dispensaries, establish AYUSH clinics inside government hospitals, and upgrade drug-testing laboratories.

Together, these measures reflect an effort to bring traditional medicine into the mainstream health ecosystem rather than treat it as an alternative silo.

Global reach

If the Budget gives Ayurveda depth within India, the India-EU FTA gives it global reach. In EU countries that don't specifically regulate traditional medicine, the trade deal allows Indian AYUSH practitioners to provide their services using qualifications obtained in India. It guarantees that Indian companies can open Ayurvedic clinics across Europe without the fear of sudden policy reversal. It also sets up a system where Indian safety certifications could eventually be accepted in Europe, which means that products approved in India might not need extra testing.

However, this policy is also a moment which will test whether the country can merge faith in heritage with the discipline of evidence. For this is not just an economic expansion; it is a structural repositioning of Ayurveda within India's health system and the global market. When the alternative moves from local clinics to international markets, it enters regulatory and scientific arenas that demand proof. These treatments, understood as Traditional, Complementary, and Alternative Medicine (TCAM), will be evaluated within stringent regulatory and vigilance frameworks. This is precisely the moment when regulatory harmonisation becomes essential. If AYUSH products are to circulate in EU markets, they must meet international standards of safety, manufacturing quality, and claims regulation. Global ambition demands scientific accountability.

Need for scientific evidence

If claims outpace evidence, India risks legal disputes, reputational damage, and the reinforcement of stereotypes about 'unscientific traditionalism.' For Ayurveda and other AYUSH systems to enter the global mainstream credibly, they must submit to rigorous, independent, and transparent scientific evaluation conducted by third-party research organisations. At present, many assessments are funded, designed, or overseen by the same Ministry that promotes AYUSH, creating a structural conflict of interest. Global credibility requires independently funded clinical trials, transparent methodologies, peer-reviewed publications, and the willingness to publish negative findings.

A common defensive move in debates around traditional medicine or cultural knowledge is to frame scientific scrutiny as colonial bias or Western epistemic dominance. Certainly, the history of colonial medicine in India involved the marginalisation and delegitimisation of local systems of healing. While that history should not be forgotten, it does not follow that all demands for empirical evaluation are acts of epistemic domination. Demanding evidence is not cultural betrayal, and scientific evaluation does not diminish tradition.

> For Ayurveda and other AYUSH systems to enter the global mainstream credibly, they must submit to rigorous, independent, and transparent scientific evaluation

Coexisting systems

Furthermore, TCAM systems endure not simply because of cultural loyalty, but because they carry different imaginations of the body, health, and illness. To engage with TCAM seriously is to recognise that they are not merely collections of remedies but coherent epistemologies. Systems such as Ayurveda are organised around ontological commitments about what the body is, how it is constituted, and how disorder emerges. The body in Ayurveda, for instance, is not a collection of discrete organs but an interdependent system embedded in environment, diet, season, and social life. Health is a state of equilibrium across physiological, psychological, and ecological registers, and illness is a disturbance in patterned relations rather than a discrete lesion.

This stands in contrast to modern medicine, which has historically been grounded in anatomical localisation. Biomedicine excels at identifying specific causal mechanisms and intervening with precision at targeted sites. TCAM systems, by contrast, often operate through systemic logics. But the question is not biomedicine versus TCAM. The conceptual frames in TCAM do not need to replace biomedicine to be valuable. They can function as counterpoints that expand questions about what it means to be healthy. They offer alternative models of embodiment – models in which the body is ecological and dynamic.

Thus, the goal is not substitution but dialogue. In that dialogue lies the possibility of strengthening scientific inquiry across the spectrum of care. Therefore, public investment should fund intellectual openness and scientific freedom. Global ambition will be sustained not by assertion, but by evidence, transparency and the courage to be rigorously examined.

Building his own band of loyalists

The Telangana CM intends to shape the party's future with young faces

STATE OF PLAY

R. Ravikanth Reddy
ravikanth.ramasayam@thehindu.co.in

The Chief Minister of Telangana Revanth Reddy appears to be steadily consolidating his position within both the Telangana government and the State unit of the Congress, sending clear signals that he intends to shape the party's future leadership with young faces and create his own band of loyalists. This has been apparent in his appointment of party Whips to the Assembly and the Legislative Council.

The three newly appointed Assembly Whips, Vemula Veeresham, Vijaya Ramana Rao and Yennam Srinivas Reddy, are relatively recent entrants to the Congress, from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), Telugu Desam Party (TDP), and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) respectively.

Similarly, Addanki Dayakar and Venkat Balmoor, both first-time legislators and known loyalists of the Chief Minister, were appointed as Whips to the Legislative Council. All are young as well.

Patnam Mahender Reddy, who defected from the BRS and shares long-standing ties with Mr. Reddy, will continue as the Government Chief Whip in the Council.

Active consolidation

Sources indicate that the recent decisions were influenced by Mr. Reddy despite the constitution of a coordination committee to bridge the gap between the government and the party. Alongside Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka and Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) president Mahesh Kumar Goud, the committee includes senior ministers N. Uttam Kumar Reddy and Damodar Raja Narasimha. The inclusion of Minister Seethakka, regarded as a close confidante of Mr. Reddy, had drawn attention, particularly as several long-serving veterans were left out.

Moreover, the recent developments involving senior leader T. Jeevan Reddy have added another dimension to Mr. Reddy's purported consolidation. Considered one of the most senior Congress figures in Telangana, Jeevan Reddy expressed dissatisfaction over the induction of a BRS MLA from his constituency without his consultation. Despite voicing his displeasure, he received little to no reassurance on the matter.

Within party circles, the episode is viewed as a signal that any resistance to the Chief Minister's political strategy will not sit well with him.

These measures also lay out the roadmap for the Chief Minister's long-term plan and repeated assertion – that his government will remain in power for 10 years. Senior Congress leaders interpret this not merely as political optimism but as a declaration of intent. His recent sharp exchanges with the Opposition in the Assembly reinforced this perception. While responding to taunts from BRS legislators, he declared that he would "crush" his opponents in the next elections, as he did in December 2023. Though triggered by Opposition remarks, many within the Congress believe the message underscored his undisputed authority within the party.

At present, there is no visible challenger to Mr. Reddy in the State unit. And his recent organisational decisions suggest that he is determined to ensure there are no parallel centres of power.

Congress loyalist

Despite consolidating power within the State, Mr. Reddy has consistently underlined his loyalty to the Congress high command. He frequently credits Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra for reposing confidence in him at a critical juncture, attributing the formation of the Congress government in Telangana to their trust.

He earned the confidence of the Gandhi family by bringing back Congress rule after 10 years of BRS rule. His elevation as TPCC president about a year or so before the 2023 Assembly elections marked a decisive shift in the party's fortunes. At the time, Congress's morale was at an all-time low, with a steady stream of defections to the BRS.

Mr. Reddy's appointment injected fresh enthusiasm into the cadre. He projected confidence that the Congress could wrest power from the invincible K. Chandrashekar Rao. In a national climate where Congress was facing repeated electoral setbacks, the Telangana unit under his leadership defeated the BRS. The victory was viewed as one of the Congress's most significant State-level comebacks. Now, by building a cohort of younger leaders and trusted loyalists, he appears intent on shaping both governance and the party's future on his strengths.

India's dual dependence on West Asia for urea production

Data indicate that the West Asian conflict threatens both domestic urea production and the stability of its global supply chain

DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

The ongoing conflict in West Asia has disrupted global trade, leading to LPG shortages and a surge in crude oil prices. Data show that the crisis could also affect India's supply of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), putting at risk the production of urea, a key fertilizer in the country's majorly agrarian economy.

The conflict has already started to impact India's urea supply. As of Sunday, industry sources told *PTI* that the country's urea plants are running at half capacity, with Petronet LNG Ltd, which operates India's largest liquefied natural gas receiving terminal, declaring force majeure amid disruptions to cargoes. The move triggered supply curtailments by state-owned gas distributors GAIL (India) Ltd, Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd.

India is heavily dependent on imports for its LNG supply, exposing many of its sectors to global shocks such as the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran. Data show that in 2025, India bought more than 50% of its natural gas from the international market **(Chart 1)**. In fact, India is the fourth largest buyer of natural gas in the world, with an imported supply of 261 lakh metric tonnes in 2025.

A majority of these imports – more than 40% of it – are tied to long-term contracts with suppliers in Qatar **(Chart 2)**. This supply may be in jeopardy as Qatar's LNG cargoes pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which has now become a central chokepoint in the Iran-Israel conflict. The UAE and Oman also ship LNG along this route, and both countries contribute to India's imported LNG supply. Overall, more than 60% of India's imported LNG could be affected by the closure of the Strait.

In India, natural gas is primarily used to produce ammonia, which in turn is used to produce fertilizers. In FY26, about 30% of India's LNG supply was used for the production of fertilizers **(Chart 3)**. Demand also comes from industry and gas-fired power and city gas networks which supply to households and vehicles.

LNG is the main feedstock for the production of urea, which is the most widely used fertilizer in India. Many urea plants use naphtha or fuel oil – both derived from crude oil - as their main input. However, as urea production is a highly energy-intensive process, these plants have switched to natural gas, which produces fewer emissions.

National urea consumption hit 387 lakh metric tonnes in 2025, following a decade of steady growth. While domestic production has also been increasing (India produced about 306 lakh metric tonnes of urea in 2025), it does not cover the country's demand. Due to this, India also relies on imports of urea.

Data indicate that the West Asian conflict threatens both domestic urea production and the stability of its supply chain. In 2025, India's urea imports exceeded 2,300 lakh metric tonnes, with a staggering 71% of these imports coming from West Asia **(Chart 4)**. This total comprises 45% from Oman and a combined 26% from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE, all of which rely on the Strait of Hormuz for transit.

Amidst this scenario, the Government of India issued the Natural Gas (Supply Regulation) Order, 2026, officially including the fertilizer sector in its priority list.

The government also stated that as of March 10, India's urea reserves have reached 61.51 lakh metric tonnes, about 10 lakh more than last year, ahead of the Kharif sowing season. However, only time can tell if India's import dependence for both domestic production and global supply trade will weather the ongoing geopolitical instability.

Distressed supply: A farmer sprinkles fertilizer on a paddy field in the Nagaon district, Assam

Crop **hazard**

The data for the charts were sourced from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, the Department of Fertilizers, and the International Gas Union

Chart 1: The composition of India's LNG supply in 2025-26 (in %)

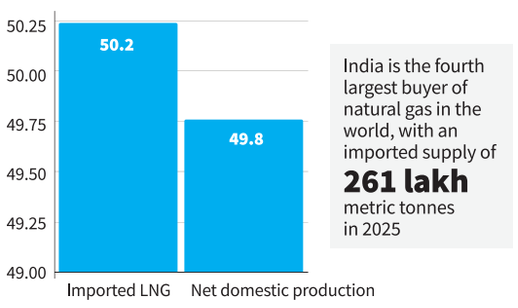


Chart 2: Country-wise share (%) of India's LNG imports in 2024-25

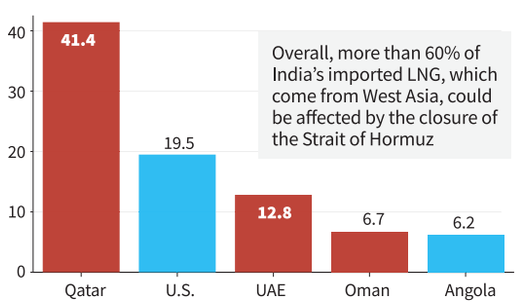


Chart 3: The distribution of LNG use in India in 2025-26 (in %)

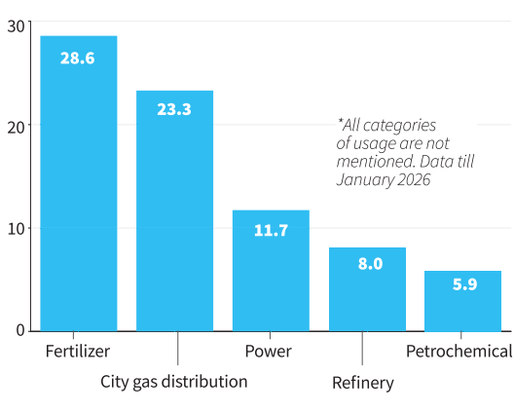
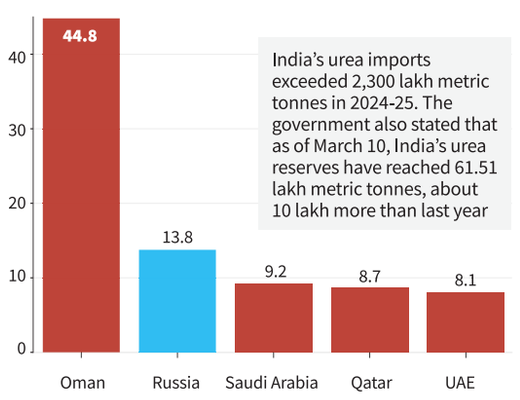


Chart 4: Country-wise share (%) of India's urea imports in 2024-25



1 Industry sources said that the country's urea plants are running at half capacity

2 Natural gas is used to produce ammonia, which in turn is used to produce fertilizers

3 LNG is the main feedstock for the production of urea, which is the most widely used fertilizer in India

4 Chart 3 and 4 only include the top 5 exporting countries

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 23, 1976

Heavy fighting in Beirut's streets

Beirut, March 22: Lebanon's war-scarred capital exploded in its worst-ever violence to-day as rival forces battled with shells, mortars, and gunfire over demands for the resignation of President Franjieh. The hardpressed Head of State called an emergency cabinet meeting.

It was the fiercest outburst of fighting in Beirut in 11 months of murderous civil conflict in which more than 10,000 people have died.

The clashes between the President's supporters and those who want him to go raged all night, with heavy weapons taken over from the fragmented Lebanese Army.

Rival left-wing Nasserite and right-wing Phalangist radio stations disputed which side was in possession of the battered Holiday Inn hotel, a strategic and psychological strongpoint near the seafront.

The Nasserites said they had carried the battle several hundred metres further east to Phalangist territory. But the right-wing radio said its gunmen had recaptured the Holiday Inn.

The situation was so dangerous that a military command council set up last night by the General who staged an anti-Franjieh revolt on March 11 was unable to meet.

General Aziz al-Ahdab, who is still Beirut garrison commander, but had so far failed to unseat the President, set up the command last night to "co-ordinate expected military operations should a political situation fail".

The pro-Ahdab radio said to-day the first aim of the council was to restore cohesion to the army, bringing together left-wing deserters and the official Army Command.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 23, 1926

Fall in the rupee

The recent sudden fall in rupee exchange has been due to heavy bullion enquiry in Bombay. This demand was accompanied by considerable speculation and the natural outcome was a fall. When advice of this was received in the Calcutta market, undue nervousness was displayed, with the result that in this centre Thursday's closing rate stood at 5 31/32d or one point lower than in Bombay. Since then the market has steadied, indicating the purely temporary character of the fall. All the factors point to the improbability of any further sudden drop. – "The Pioneer".

From Page One

Will completely close Hormuz Strait: Iran

A crater in a residential neighbourhood, following Iranian missile strikes in Arad, southern Israel, on Sunday. REUTERS

The military command said it would also strike Israel's "power plants, energy, and information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure", along with power plants in regional countries hosting U.S. bases and companies with U.S. shareholders.

The Islamic Republic's power grid is deeply intertwined with its energy sector. Striking major plants could trigger blackouts, crippling everything from pumps and refineries to export terminals and military command centres. While some Gulf desert states such as Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE have access to more than one sea to draw water from for desalination, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait are crowded along the shoreline of the Gulf with no other coastline.

Earlier in the day, Iranian media reports quoted Iran's representative to the U.N. maritime agency as saying that the Strait of Hormuz remains open to all shipping except vessels linked to "Iran's enemies". Ali Mousavi's comments came from an interview published on Friday by the Chinese news agency Xinhua, much before Mr. Trump's ultimatum.

Meanwhile, Iran's Parliament is mulling imposing tolls on shipping through the strait, with Speaker Ghalibaf saying maritime traffic would "not return to its pre-war status".

Traffic through the vital strait has been brought to a near-standstill since the start of the war, that has so far killed over 2,000 people. A relatively small number of vessels have been able to transit it – around 5% of its pre-war volume, according to analytics firm Kpler. Iranian forces have attacked multiple vessels, saying they failed to heed "warnings" against transiting the waterway.

In recent days, Iran has allowed some vessels from countries it considers friendly to pass, while warning it would block ships from countries it says have joined the "aggression" against it.

Meanwhile, the exiled son of Iran's last shah Reza Pahlavi called on Mr. Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to refrain from targeting Iran's civilian infrastructure, because it "belongs to the Iranian people and to the future of a free Iran."

CPI(M) seeks time to discuss Stalin's offer

Asked whether the meeting would serve any purpose, since both sides were firm on their stands, Mr. Shanmugam said though both parties had been holding talks, a meeting with the Chief Minister had taken place only now. "As he has requested us, we have to respect his words and hold further talks," he said.

Mr. Shanmugam said the Chief Minister himself had explained the difficulties arising from the allocation of three additional seats to the Congress and the inclusion of more parties in the alliance. "There is no secrecy in the talks. They are transparent," he added.

To a question on whether the numbers were reduced because the CPI(M) had won only two seats last time, he said the party was not allotted constituencies where it had a strong base, including in Kanniyakumari, Tiruppur, and Coimbatore. "Had we been allotted seats in these districts, we would have won all six. There were many reasons that contributed to our defeat," he said.

Mr. Shanmugam said the priority was to finalise seat-sharing, and the question of preferred constituencies would be discussed later.

"I cannot answer presumptive questions," he said when asked what the party's stand would be if the State Committee did not agree.

Asked whether the party would demand seats in Chennai, he said Chennai was also part of Tamil Nadu.

Assam police camp attacked by ULFA(I)

Three of those wounded were rushed to the hospital with grievous injuries. "We have launched an operation in coordination with other forces to find the attackers," an official said.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma condemned the attack. "Those who have done this will be caught," he said.

The ULFA(I) said that Operation Bujoni was carried out in retaliation for the police's repeated action against the banned outfit, and alleged drone attacks by the Army on its camps last year. It asked the State police force to "refrain from subversive activities" against the outfit, warning of retaliatory action.

Jagun is less than 50 km from the nearest point of Arunachal Pradesh's border with Myanmar, where the ULFA(I) has its camps.

'Positive' talks with Kuki-Zo Council, says Manipur CM

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Sunday said that his meeting with leaders of the Kuki-Zo Council in Guwahati on Saturday was a step toward rebuilding trust between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities.

He told journalists in Imphal that the two communities need to "forgive and forget" to help restore normalcy in the State.

"The engagement with the Kuki-Zo Council was a positive beginning towards bridging the trust deficit and bringing lasting peace in Manipur," he said, lamenting that displaced people were still unable to return to their native villages.

Mr. Singh noted that fear continues to affect the movement of people, particularly along National Highway 2, linking Imphal and Kohima, the capital of Nagaland. "How long can the central forces keep guarding people? We cannot move forward until we forget and forgive what has happened," he said.

He said the Centre had assured that Manipur's territorial integrity will not be compromised.

Modi assesses impact of West Asia conflict on India

Cabinet Committee on Security discusses diversifying sources of imports, including fertilizers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and petrochemicals; PM directs 'whole-of-government approach'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

As tensions continue to escalate in West Asia, threatening energy and commodity supply routes, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday chaired a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) to review the situation and suggest mitigating measures.

A government statement said the meeting assessed the ongoing conflict's short-, long-, and medium-term impact.

Furthermore, the committee also discussed potential measures, both immediate and long-term, to manage the crisis.

"The ongoing conflict in West Asia will have significant short, medium and long-term impact on the global economy. Its effect on India was assessed, and counter-measures, both immediate and long-term, were discussed," the statement said.

Mr. Modi directed that a Group of Ministers (GoM) and a group of secretaries be formed to work exclusively on a "whole-of-government approach" to the crisis.

Taking stock: Prime Minister Narendra Modi chairs a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security to review the situation, in view of the escalating tensions in West Asia, in New Delhi on Sunday. DPR PMO

The Prime Minister urged sectoral groups to work in consultation with all stakeholders.

Alternate sources

The CCS discussed diversifying sources of major imports, including fertilizers, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and petrochemicals.

Fertilizers assume significance ahead of the coming kharif season, and in view of the disruptions to natural gas imports after Tehran's missile attacks devastated energy infrastructure in Qatar, which is among the biggest importers of LNG globally.

"The measures taken in the last few years to maintain adequate stocks of fertilizers will ensure timely availability and food security. Alternate sources of fertilizers were also discussed to ensure continued availability in the future," the statement read.

The Cabinet committee also called for ensuring an "adequate" supply of coal stocks at all power plants.

The carbon commodity becomes essential with power demand expected to peak in summers and the potential constraints of natural gas supplies due to the ongoing conflict.

Modi sets new record with 8,931 days in public office

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday became the longest-serving head of a government in India, serving 8,931 days in office, first as the Chief Minister of Gujarat and now as the Prime Minister. He has surpassed former Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Chamling's record of 8,930 days in office.

Cabinet colleagues congratulated Mr. Modi, with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh lauding his "pure devotion to the nation and its people" and Home Minister Amit Shah terming it a "milestone rooted in service, hard work and unwavering commitment".

"Modi*ji*'s decades of *seva* have shaped an era of their own. Whether it is giving the poor their rights, setting new landmarks in development or enhancing the nation's pride on global platforms, the Modi Era has transformed India unrecognisably," Mr. Shah said in a post on X.

Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said it "stands as a testament to enduring public trust and a lifelong mission devoted to Bharat's growth and progress".

Tyagi joins Rashtriya Lok Dal after leaving JD(U)

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Former Janata Dal (United) leader K.C. Tyagi on Sunday formally joined the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in the presence of party chief and Union Minister Jayant Chaudhary in New Delhi.

Mr. Tyagi, a founding member of the JD(U), did not participate in the party's membership renewal drive, signalling his exit from the JD(U) on March 17.

He had clarified at that time that he held no animosity regarding the JD(U) or Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, who has been elected to the Rajya Sabha, making it clear that he would not be remaining CM in the State in future.

Mr. Tyagi also addressed speculation regarding his parliamentary ambitions, denying that his exit was linked to a desire for a seat in the Rajya Sabha. "There is not a single instance of me trying for a Rajya Sabha ticket. Even in 2013, Nitish Kumar called me and offered me a ticket," he said.

Auction of 19 blocks of critical minerals set to begin today

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government will launch the seventh tranche of auctions for critical and strategic minerals on Monday, placing 19 blocks on sale across several States.

The development assumes significance as the government aims to bolster India's self-reliance in clean energy, advanced technologies, fertilizers, and strategic sectors amid global supply chain disruptions.

So far, the government has conducted six rounds of auctions, with 46 critical and strategic mineral blocks already sold. "Building on this momentum, the seventh tranche will offer 19 blocks across several States under mining lease and composite licence," the Union Ministry of Mines said in a statement.

Critical minerals are important for the country's economic development and mineral security.

Critical minerals are crucial for India's economic development and mineral security.

The global transition towards clean energy and advanced technologies has significantly increased the demand for minerals, including lithium, graphite, rare earth elements, tungsten, vanadium, titanium, and other rare metals.

"Union Minister of Coal and Mines G. Kishan Reddy, along with the Minister of State for Coal and Mines Satish Chandra Dubey, will launch the 7th tranche of auction of critical and strategic mineral blocks on March 23," the Ministry said.

Opposition seeks arrest of AAP leader in Punjab

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

The Opposition parties in Punjab on Sunday mounted pressure on the ruling Aam Aadmi Party for the arrest of its senior leader Laljit Singh Bhullar, who stepped down as Minister after his name surfaced in connection with the death of an official.

Gagandeep Singh Randhawa, district manager of the Punjab Warehousing Corporation in Amritsar, allegedly committed suicide on Saturday. In a purported video linked to the incident, Randhawa accused Mr. Bhullar of putting pressure on him to award a tender to the Minister's aide.

Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa said: "The facts clearly establish cognizable offences, and the law must take its due course without delay or dilution." Bikram Singh Majithia of Shiromani Akali Dal said the accused must be arrested and the probe handed over to the CBI.

Justice Bhuyan flags reticence shown by courts to grant bail

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Supreme Court judge, Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, on Sunday said there were many within the judiciary who continue to suffer from the "more loyal than the king syndrome", while pointing to the reticence shown by courts to grant bail, leading to prolonged incarceration for undertrials.

"The judiciary must remain judiciary. Judiciary can neither be an eternal critic nor a cheerleader. It is the sentinel on the *qui vive* (alert)," Justice Bhuyan said at the First Supreme Court Bar Association National Conference 2026 on the topic 'The Role of Judiciary in Viksit Bharat' in Bengaluru.

"For trivial matters, such as public demonstrations, agitations, even by students, sometimes even for putting up memes and social media posts, FIRs (First Information Reports) are registered, and investigations go on. Matters come up to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court has to constitute Special Investigation Teams. This consumes sufficient judicial time," Justice Bhuyan pointed out.

He said the judiciary was also partly responsible for prolonged incarcerations without bail.

"I must admit, many within the judiciary continue to suffer from the 'more loyal than the king' syndrome. As a result, people continue to languish in jails for months and months together," the apex court judge said.

The judge spoke of the "overuse" of draconian laws, including the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). As of March 2025, 7,771 Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIR) had been filed, he said.

"In Viksit Bharat, there should be more space for dissent and debate. Dissent should not be criminalised...," he said.

India watches closely as Gor visits Sri Lanka, Maldives

NEWS ANALYSIS

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

United States Ambassador to India Sergio Gor's visit to Sri Lanka – his first visit in the region in his role as U.S. Special Envoy for South Asia – is a "quiet strategic signal", said experts, as it comes amid the war in West Asia, and U.S. action in the Indian Ocean.

While the Narendra Modi government has made no comment about the visit, Mr. Gor met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval before embarking on the six-day (March 19-24) regional tour of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, and the government is understood to be watching its outcomes carefully.

India's response to Mr. Gor's position contrasts with the last time the U.S. nominated a Special Envoy for the region. In 2009, when the Obama administration nominated Richard Holbrooke, the government had protested vociferously, calling a "broad mandate" for the envoy "risky" and "interfering", according to diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks in 2016, and the U.S. had backtracked, appointing him and subsequently Zalmay Khalilzad only as Special Representatives for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAPs).

Prior to Mr. Gor, South Asia was dealt with bilaterally via U.S. Ambassadors in each capital, and by the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, a position currently occupied by S. Paul Kapur.

This time around, Mr. Gor has a much broader mandate, with U.S. President Donald Trump appointing him as his Special Envoy to South and Central Asia in August 2025. Mr. Gor has already made visits to Central Asian capitals as Special Envoy, and also travelled to Bhutan last week, although that was in his capacity as Ambassador to Bhutan, where he is concurrently accredited. All eyes will be on whether Mr. Gor would travel next to Pakistan and Bangladesh, and whether his role as Special Envoy would also include any attempts to mediate between India and its neighbours, which it would oppose. In addition, experts and officials said Mr. Gor's visit is being tracked particularly as South Asia appears to be drawn in to the U.S.-Israel war with Iran, with a U.S. submarine bombing the Iranian ship *IRIS Dena*, and the latest Iranian strikes towards the U.S.-United Kingdom's Diego Garcia base.

Sergio Gor

"Sergio Gor's visit to Colombo is best read as a quiet strategic signal rather than a substantive breakthrough: the United States is reasserting a calibrated presence in the Indian Ocean at a moment when tensions in [West Asia] are spilling into the maritime space," said former Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to the U.S. and China Nirupama Menon Rao, who pointed out that Sri Lanka had balanced the optics of the visit carefully.

Visiting the Colombo Port, Mr. Gor said in a post that it was "clear how this critical hub connects South Asia to global markets – and why maritime security here matters". Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake also "briefed" Mr. Gor's delegation on the "ongoing conflict situation in the Middle East, as well as the challenges faced by the country in light of these developments". Mr. Gor's travel to Sri Lanka came two weeks after the Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* was torpedoed by a U.S. submarine close to Sri Lankan waters, and Mr. Dissanayake refused U.S. warplanes permission to land in Sri Lanka's Mattala airport during the war.

Former Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary and Ambassador to the U.S. Prasad Kariyawasam said that the visit of Mr. Gor was a positive development.

"It's very good that high-level contacts are maintained actively with the USA in the context of the war, given that U.S. is a leading maritime power in the Indian Ocean and that Iran is highly connected with Indian Ocean countries", Mr. Kariyawasam told *The Hindu*.

ASSEMBLY POLLS

Cong. final list names seven for Assam polls

The Congress on Sunday announced its fifth and final list of seven candidates for the Assam Assembly election. With this, the party has declared candidates for 101 of the 126 seats in the State Assembly.

Among the candidates declared in the final list are Joseph Hasda from the Gossaigaon seat, Birkhang Boro from Dotma-ST, Rajat Kanti Saha from Bijni and Anchula Gwara Daimary from the Bhergaon seat.

In an official statement, the party also declared Narayan Adhikari as its candidate from the Mazbat, Nirmal Langthasa from the Haflong-ST and Amar Chand Jain from the Katigorah Assembly constituency.

The elections to the 126-member Assam assembly will be held on April 9. Votes will be counted on May 4. PTI

Congress cadre at a rally in Nagaon, Assam, recently. PTI

Bengal likely to get 2,400 CAPF companies

About 2,400 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) are likely to be deployed in West Bengal for the upcoming Assembly election.

The Chief Electoral Office (CEO) of West Bengal has set up a joint committee to oversee the deployment based on the assessments of vulnerability and sensitivity across polling areas. The committee held a meeting on Saturday at the CEO's office to decide on the number of personnel required in each Assembly constituency.

Since Saturday morning, Police Commissioners and Superintendents of Police have started visiting local police stations across the State to take stock of the ground situation.

About 480 companies of central forces have already been deployed by March 10.

The BJP's agenda was to use the SIR process to defeat Mamata Banerjee since she has defeated the saffron party for the last 15 years

SAGARIKA GHOSE
Trinamool Rajya Sabha member

7 candidates on Trinamool list for Assam

The Trinamool Congress has fielded an Assam MLA who stirred up a hornets' nest by suggesting a Miya Museum at a cultural centre in Guwahati five years ago. Sherman Ali Ahmed figured on the list of seven candidates announced by the Trinamool on Sunday. He is contesting from Mandia.

She [Mamata Banerjee] is emerging victorious, no matter how many officials are reshuffled by the Election Commission in collusion with the BJP

AKHILESH YADAV
Samajwadi Party leader

Poll rally: Mamata Banerjee addressing party workers in Kolkata on Sunday. X/@AITCOFFICIAL

Mamata begins Bhabanipur campaign with workers' meet

Shiv Sahay Singh
Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Sunday began her campaign for the Bhabanipur Assembly seat with a workers' meeting.

The meeting was held at Ahindra Mancha, with eight councillors of the Trinamool, including Minister Firhad Hakim, who is also a councillor from the area, among those present. With Bharatiya Janata Party leader Suvendu Adhikari contesting against the Trinamool chairperson, the Assembly seat in south Kolkata has become a prestige fight for both the parties.

The Trinamool shared photographs of the party chairperson addressing the meeting from its social media handles. "Today, Smt. @MamataOfficial set the tone for the battles ahead. Addressing party workers at Chetla, she called for relentless ground mobilisation, discipline, and an unbreakable connect with every household in Bengal," the West Bengal's ruling party said.

"At a time when Bangla-Birodhi forces are resorting to conspiracies, misinformation, and external interference, the message was unequivocal. We will not yield an inch."

The constituency located in the heart of Kolkata has electors from different communities, including Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains. Both Ms. Banerjee and her nephew, party general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, reside in the constituency. The Chief Minister has won three consecutive elections from the constituency in 2011, 2016, and 2021.

After losing to Mr. Adhikari in Nandigram in the 2021 election by a margin of 1,956 votes, Ms. Banerjee had contested and won from Bhabanipur in a byelection held in September 2021 by a margin of 58,832 votes, securing 72% of the total votes polled.

In the 2026 Assembly election, the contest has become interesting for two more reasons. First, the BJP had narrowed the gap with the Trinamool in the Bhabanipur Assembly seat during the 2024 Lok Sabha election, with the Trinamool's lead dropping to 8,297 votes in 2024 as against 58,832 votes in the 2021 Assembly election. In five wards of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (63, 70, 71, 72, and 74), the BJP polled more votes while the Trinamool led in three wards – 73, 77, and 82.

The second important issue has been deletion of voters during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. The SIR process, which has been controversial from the start in the State, saw the deletion of about 47,000 electors and another 14,000 being put to judicial adjudication in the constituency.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had earlier this month said that despite the deletions due to SIR, she would win from Bhabanipur.

"I will win from Bhabanipur even if there is only one voter left on the voter list," the Chief Minister said on March 3, while addressing a gathering here.

Mr. Adhikari, who started the campaign a few days ago in Bhabanipur, has been playing up his chances of winning against the Chief Minister. The BJP leader is also contesting from Nandigram.

Amid the challenge from Bhabanipur and the first supplementary list of electors under adjudication set to be published on Monday, the Chief Minister postponed her visit to north Bengal. Instead of Tuesday, she will start campaigning in north Bengal on Wednesday.

'BJP will draw a blank this time too'

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan does not see defections from the Left helping either the BJP or the Cong.; The Congress is BJP's 'B team', he says and rules out the BJP's Christian outreach working in its favour; The Left govt. should continue for the State to be in step with modern era, he adds

INTERVIEW

Pinarayi Vijayan

S. Anandan

Kerala Chief Minister and CPI(M) Polit Bureau member Pinarayi Vijayan is leading the Left Democratic Front's (LDF) charge on the hustings as the coalition seeks a third consecutive term in the State Assembly election on April 9. Just shy of 81, he exudes confidence of a win, pities the Congress for being the 'B team of the BJP' and predicts the BJP drawing a blank yet again, as he sits down for an interview with *The Hindu* at Pinarayi in his constituency, Dharmadam. Edited excerpts:

A large number of incumbent MLAs have been renominated by the Left front. No anti-incumbency?

There's no anti-incumbency because people feel that the government has strived to implement to the best of its abilities what the people wanted. Ten years ago, Kerala was in a shambles, but we brought about a sea change in all sectors. Now, our Vision 2031 delineates the achievable goals in each sector in order to develop Kerala in step with the modern times.

If no institution from Kerala featured among the 100 top institutions nationally in 2016, eighteen Kerala colleges are on the list now. It's the result of active interventions, which call for a continuance.

We have fostered research, modern-day courses and skill development of the youth, linking the academia to industries. Our industry-friendliness is attracting top players from all over the world and everyone, except red industries, is welcome. We have a pre-eminent startup ecosystem.

But despite this, the Left suffered a jolt in the recent local body polls.

Each election follows a unique pattern. It was a local election, and we suffered setbacks at a few places which do not reflect the public sentiment across the State. We sense a favourable atmosphere now.

The BJP advances the 'develop Kerala' slogan but the Left accuses the Centre of stifling the State.

While it harps on 'develop Kerala' now, has the Centre done anything to develop Kerala? Despite repeated appeals and the stupendous feats in public healthcare, we have not got an AIIMS. When the State was hit by disasters, the Centre not only turned its back, but blocked support from the countries which share a deep bond with Kerala. Did any other State in India receive such ignominious treatment in the face of a disaster? It was just us. Didn't it demonstrate a mentality that wanted to see the State perish?

THULASI KAKKAT

The Centre sided with those who opposed on political grounds the K-Rail project meant to augment our transport infrastructure.

The State is denied its rightful share of taxes and our borrowing limit has been slashed considerably. Doesn't all this smack of vendetta?

What's your take on the BJP's Christian outreach and the Left's relationship with the community?

We have a good relationship with all communities. All sections of Christians, together forming a substantial community in the State, have a good relationship with the government. The BJP may harbour many desires, but nothing is going to materialise and there will be no consolidation in its favour.

How do you stop the BJP in its tracks? Who is better poised to do that, the Congress or the Left?

The Congress is unable to do that. It acts as the BJP's B-team, even nationally. Only the Left has steadfastly resisted the BJP, which it will continue even more vigorously. And the BJP is unlikely to make any electoral gain this time either.

Nationally, only a united fight is possible against the BJP, but the Congress always foils such bids by vitiating the atmosphere, giving the BJP an edge. Congress leaders including Rahul Gandhi refuse to learn from their mistakes.

Is the Left in Kerala on the defensive following defections by past legislators to the Congress and the BJP? There is revolt in Kannur as well.

It's greed for positions and a loss of values that has driven them all. Despite being well recognised, G. Sudhakaran couldn't cope with the party's policy of age-bound retirement from committees. He betrayed the party, conspired with the UDF and is contesting the election.

The same is the case with others. S. Rajendran, it's heard, needed the BJP's help too to resolve some issues. T.K. Govindan's grouse was that no one in the committee proposed his candidature and he chose to become an axe in the hands of the UDF against the CPI(M).

There are allegations of collapse of the public health sector.

The public health sector in Kerala has grown considerably from 2016, when it was in a state of collapse, and this helped us overcome the challenges including the pandemic. We progressed further and attained an IMR (infant mortality rate) of 5, better than that of the US. Even the affluent are using public health institutions now. But multinational monopolies are acquiring our private hospitals, causing the health expenditure to spike. The smear campaign against the public health system is for their benefit.

On the Sabarimala gold theft – will it impact the polls?

It's not going to affect us as the people have understood the truth about it. The High Court is supervising the investigation and has made it clear that there's no external interference. The investigation is going on in the right direction and no guilty will go scot-free.

Your repeated utterances against Jamaat-e-Islami (Hind) are being interpreted as an attack on the Muslim community.

We will continue to speak against both majority and minority communalism regardless. Vast sections of majority and minority communities are secular and we stand with them.

(Full interview on https://fline.news/kerala-polls-vijayan)

DMK's allies find themselves politically squeezed

D. Suresh Kumar
CHENNAI

Alliances forged during elections often unravel within months of the results being declared. Parties routinely downplay such arrangements, describing them as mere "seat-sharing" exercises. This pattern has largely held true in Tamil Nadu as well.

An exception, however, has been the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance under Chief Minister M.K. Stalin, which has held together for nearly nine years. Its durability stems in large part from a shared anti-Hindutva ideological alignment among its constituents. Yet, this cohesion has not come without a cost. The ongoing seat-sharing negotiations for the April 23 Assembly elections have exposed underlying tensions, particularly among the alliance's smaller partners, who view the allocations as increasingly restrictive.

Of flexibility & firmness

In the case of its principal ally, the Congress, the DMK leadership had shown flexibility, conceding three additional seats and even a Rajya Sabha berth. This accommodation came despite publicly critical remarks by individuals close to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. The Congress also exploited the option of aligning with actor C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam to assert itself in negotiations.

Chief Minister M.K. Stalin with leaders of DMK alliance parties at an event in Kalaivanar Arangam in Chennai in June 2025. R. RAGU

By contrast, the DMK has adopted a firmer approach with its other allies, even reducing their seat allocations. The CPI, the CPI (M), the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), and the MDMK had aligned with the DMK in 2017. They found common ground in opposing the BJP's attempts to expand its footprint in Tamil Nadu, exploiting fissures in the AIADMK following Chief Minister Jayalalithaa's death in 2016.

These parties, along with smaller outfits such as the Manithaneya Makkal Katchi and Tamilaga Vazhvurimai Katchi, played a significant role in shaping an anti-Narendra Modi political narrative by mobilising protests against various central policies and projects. Mr. Stalin successfully built on this platform to channelise, anchor and capitalise on the political sentiment, benefiting the alliance as a whole in successive elections since 2019.

Smaller parties found common ground with the DMK in opposing the BJP's attempts to grow in Tamil Nadu

In the previous Assembly election, the CPI, the CPI (M), the VCK and the MDMK had settled for six seats each, even if they felt the number did not reflect their political weight. They justified the compromise as necessary "to keep the BJP at bay". This time, however, expectations were higher. Having remained loyal to the alliance, these parties anticipated a more favourable arrangement.

Instead, they have been offered fewer seats, with the DMK citing the need to accommodate new entrants. The CPI has been allotted five seats, the MDMK four (with three to be contested under the DMK's symbol), and the IUML two – down from three previously.

The Tamilaga Vazhvurimai Katchi leader T. Velmurugan on Sunday exited the alliance, dissatisfied with its allocation of just one seat.

Lack of alternatives

For many of these long-standing partners, the current exercise has proven politically constraining. Deprived of feasible alternatives and growth opportunities, they are compelled to accept the terms set by the dominant partner. Questions have been raised, privately, about the DMK's decision to accommodate late Vijayakant's DMDK by offering it a Rajya Sabha seat and an undisclosed number of Assembly seats. This is seen by allies as disproportionate to the DMDK's diminished vote share of below half-a-percent.

Allies remain puzzled as to why a party that has shifted alliance positions with ease is being extended a privilege not afforded to more ideologically consistent partners.

The DMK's broader objective is clear: to contest a sufficiently large number of seats, 165 to 175, to secure a majority on its own. This goal inevitably limits the space available for smaller partners.

The VCK, which has consistently articulated the concerns of Scheduled Castes and has been at the forefront of organising conferences against far-right positions, had sought eight to 10 seats in line with its recent growth in northern Tamil Nadu. The DMK, initially believed to be open to allocating eight seats, scaled it down to seven. On Saturday, party leader Thol. Thirumavalavan urged cadre to be prepared to accept the offer, emphasising the party's decisions are guided by long-term credibility, not short-term electoral gains.

The CPI(M), too, has found the reduced allocation difficult to accept. It held an extended meeting of its State secretariat on Saturday, attended by general secretary M.A. Baby. It entered discussions on Sunday with a mandate to seek at least the six seats it had contested last time. However, Mr. Stalin remained firm on placing it on a par with the CPI. For now, State secretary M. Shanmugam has said the offer would be discussed further within the party.

As the election approaches, the alliance leadership is likely to project unity and rally behind a common political narrative. However, the discontent at the cadre level may prove difficult to manage.

Defeat of BJP must to save Assam, says citizen forum

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Days after activist-turned-MLA Akhil Gogoi's Raijor Dal joined the Congress-led bloc, a citizens' collective said the Opposition unity must translate into an anti-BJP verdict in the April 9 Assembly election in Assam.

The Assam Nagorik Sanmilani, led by academic Hiren Gohain and retired IPS officer Harekrishna Deka, said that the BJP's divisive politics had "hollowed out the Assamese identity from within". It said that the BJP-led government handed over the State's vital natural resources to multinationals over the past 10 years.

"The rule of law has vanished; the Chief Minister's word now passes for law. The people of Assam have no choice but to remove this government, and another five years in power would spell disaster for ordinary citizens," it said in a statement on Sunday.

Insisting that six Opposition parties striking a seat-sharing deal was a relief for the people seeking an alternative, it said their unity "must ignite a mass awakening" to defend democracy and confront the BJP.

INBRIEF

PM writes to Nitish on Bihar Divas, hails State's rich culture

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday wrote to Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on occasion of Bihar Divas, extending his heartfelt greetings to the people of the State. Mr. Modi, in his three-page letter, said that Bihar Divas is a day to celebrate Bihar's rich history, its potential, and its traditions. "It is an opportunity to recall Bihar's invaluable contribution to India's robust identity. Since ancient times, the land of Bihar has enriched society through knowledge, spirituality, and moral values. The teachings imparted by Lord Buddha on this very soil remain an integral part of global consciousness today, continuing to guide humanity," he wrote in the letter.

Woman killed in ropeway trolley crash in Chhattisgarh

A 28-year-old woman was killed and at least 16 were injured when the cable of a ropeway trolley snapped and crashed at a temple compound in Mahasamund district of Chhattisgarh on Sunday morning, said officials. The accident happened around 10 a.m. at the Khallari Mata temple, which is located on a hill in the Bagbahra tehsil. Mahasamund Collector Vinay Kumar Langeh said that the trolley's cable snapped as it was bringing passengers from the hilltop. As it crashed, passengers of another trolley that was ascending were also injured.

Rice, wheat procurement is 'consistently' low: panel

Standing Committee led by DMK MP asks Food Ministry to strengthen its procurement planning and coordination with States to minimise the gap between estimated and actual procurement

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Expressing concern that actual procurement of rice and wheat has consistently remained below estimates in recent years and below targets in States such as Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution, headed by DMK MP Kanimozhi, has asked the Union Food Ministry to strengthen its procurement planning and coordination with States to minimise the gap between estimated and actual procurement of both the food grains.

In a report on the Demands for Grants of the Department of Food and Public Distribution, the panel noted that since 2022-23, the procurement of wheat and rice had been less than 30% of the total production.

"Moreover, actual procurement of wheat has been 76.71%, 71.35% and 87.29% of the estimate for the years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26 respectively. Similarly, the actual procurement of rice has been less than target since 2022-23," the report revealed.

The panel flagged that procurement of rice and wheat has remained below target in Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, and U.P. PTI

During the kharif marketing season of 2024-25, the procurement of rice from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Punjab was 25.60 lakh tonnes, 0.003 lakh tonnes, and 116.13 lakh tonnes against the target of 35 lakh tonnes, 5.29 lakh tonnes, and 124 lakh tonnes, respectively, the panel said.

Similarly, during the rabi marketing season of 2025-26, the procurement of wheat was less than the target in the States of Bihar, Gujarat, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh, it added.

Multiple factors at play

The government told the panel that any fluctuation in estimated production and actual production resulted in variation in procurement. "Procurement depends on multiple factors like production, market surplus, minimum support price (MSP), prevailing market rates, demand-supply situation, and participation of private traders, etc., the government informed.

Noting these factors, the panel asked the government to strengthen its procurement planning and coordination with the States to minimise the gap between estimated and actual procurement of wheat and rice.

"While noting the Department's submission that procurement levels are influenced by multiple factors, the Committee is concerned that actual procurement has consistently remained below estimates in recent years and below targets in several States," the report said.

The panel asked the Union government to review the methodology used for estimating procurement requirements, enhance real-time monitoring of production and market arrivals, and work closely with State governments – particularly in States where procurement has significantly fallen short of targets – to ensure that procurement operations are more realistic, responsive and effective. It asked the government to apprise it of the corrective measures taken on the suggestions.

Details sought on inquiry, prosecution wings of the Lokpal

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary committee has sought details of what is being done to fully operationalise the inquiry and prosecution wings of the Lokpal, over a decade after a law governing it was enacted.

The law governing the anti-corruption ombudsman – The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act 2013 – came into force on January 1, 2014. However, it began functioning only on March 27, 2019, following the appointment of its chairperson and members.

To discharge its statutory functions, Section 11 of the Act obligates the Lokpal to constitute an inquiry wing to be led by a director of inquiry for conducting a preliminary inquiry into corruption-related offences.

The Lokpal Act also has a provision for the constitution of a prosecution wing headed by the 'director of prosecution' for the prosecution of public servants.

Process ongoing

In its latest report, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice noted that the appointment of the director of inquiry and staffing of the inquiry wing in accordance with the approved organogram is still in process.

The panel noted that matters relating to prosecution are being handled through the CBI

The committee, therefore, desires to be apprised of the present status of appointment of the director and the steps taken to operationalise the inquiry wing in its full statutory form, while ensuring coordination with existing investigative agencies, it said.

The panel, in its 160th report, said the prosecution wing of the Lokpal had been formally constituted through an order dated June 6, 2025.

The committee noted that, at present, matters relating to prosecution are being handled through the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which has its own prosecution mechanism.

Bill to amend Transgender Persons Act faces criticism

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Opposition leaders and activists on Sunday spoke out against the Bill to amend the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, which proposes to remove the right to a self-perceived gender identity and introduces the requirement for a medical board to determine whether a person is transgender based on a new definition of "transgender person".

At a public hearing held at the Press Club of India, Rajya Sabha members from the RJD, Congress, and the CPI(M) spoke against the Bill and said there was an attempt to coordinate a strategy to oppose it within Parliament.

RJD MP Manoj Kumar Jha said the only explanation for such a "regressive" Bill was that "this government's thinking is regressive".

Even Muslim-majority nations don't allow *namaz* on roads, says RSS leader

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

"Even Muslim-majority countries do not allow prayers on roads and have designated places for worship," Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) national publicity in-charge Sunil Ambekar said in an interview with *The Hindu*.

Mr. Ambekar made the statement while responding to questions on how incidents in BJP-ruled States – such as FIRs over *namaz* on roads, Iftar on a boat in the Ganga, or the Char Dham temples asking for 'Sanatani' affidavits– impact the RSS's message of unity in diversity.

"When the government restricts *namaz* on roads, it should be seen as a law-and-order decision, not a religious restriction," he said.

On the temple issue, he added, "Arrangements at places of worship are made for those who have faith in that religion. In a democracy, if people feel these arrangements are not right, they can voice their opinion. We have media to raise our voice."

Sunil Ambekar

Asked whether the Sangh sees any ideological conflict with the appointment of Nitin Nabin as the BJP chief, given his lack of prior association with the RSS or its affiliated organisations, Mr. Ambekar said Mr. Nabin has worked in the BJP for years and that the party is capable of imparting the core ideology of the organisation.

National interest

On the ongoing West Asia conflict, he said it is a time for the Opposition parties to support the government and prioritise national interest above political ambitions.

Mr. Ambekar defended measures such as the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) as constitutional processes aimed at safeguarding national interest. "Illegal entrants face legal action, and the system allows review and correction for anyone wrongly excluded," he said.

House panel for fee rationalisation, greater inclusivity in Sainik Schools

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

A parliamentary standing committee on defence asked the Defence Ministry to address the issue of high annual fees in Sainik Schools on a priority basis.

The committee recommended creation of a dedicated fund to provide financial assistance or special concessions to students, particularly those from middle class and lower middle class or low income families. The aim is to ensure that deserving candidates, once selected, are not forced to give up their admission due to unaffordable fee structure, and can pursue their aspiration of studying in Sainik Schools without financial constraints.

It has also recommended certain reforms in Sainik Schools, calling for greater inclusivity, fee rationalisation, and curriculum modernisation to ensure wider access and future-ready education for cadets.

Students of Sainik School, Goalpara take aim in a shooting range, in this file photo. RITU RAJ KONWAR

While noting the existing reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, the committee emphasised the need to extend opportunities to students from economically weaker sections irrespective of their social background. It urged the Ministry to review the Sainik Schools Society Rules & Regulations, 1997 to introduce provisions for fee exemption or subsidies, enabling deserving students to access quality education and serve the nation.

Heavy burden

The panel also flagged concerns over the high annual fee structure, which includes expenses for tuition, boarding, uniforms, and other charges, along with a yearly 10% hike. It observed that this imposes a heavy burden on middle and lower income families and risks excluding meritorious candidates.

In addition, the House committee called for periodic updates to the curriculum to align with evolving defence and technology landscapes. It stressed the inclusion of subjects such as artificial intelligence, cyber and space warfare, drone systems, quantum technology and energy geopolitics to equip cadets with contemporary knowledge and skills.

The panel was informed that, with rising enrolment of girl cadets in Sainik Schools, proactive steps are being taken to ensure safe, hygienic, and suitable residential facilities in every school. One all-girls' school has also been approved at Mathura, which will be started along with some private trusts like Rani Chennamma Sainik School in Kittur, where only the girl students will be trained.

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(set by Gridzilla)

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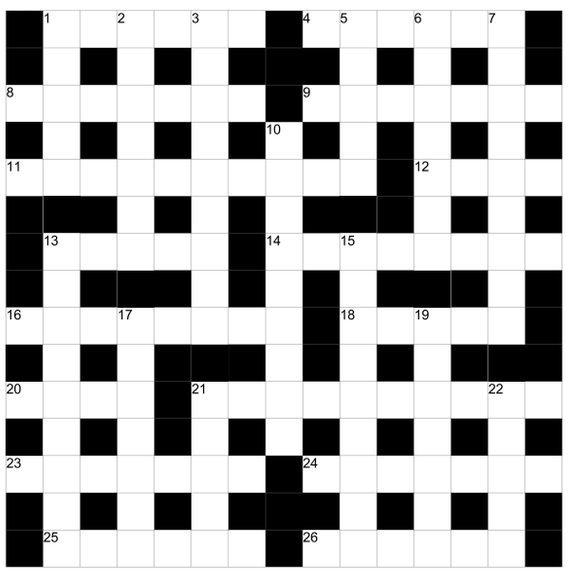
SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1. Think about Rose these days? (6)
4. Place to drink wine is off limits (6)
8. Couple in difficulty abandons daughter (7)
9. Part of legend is not a lie perhaps (7)
11. Great in Rock? (3,7)
12. Othello's greatest antagonist is basically twisted (4)
13. Means of communication that's out of reach in Dindigul (5)
14. Part of club is super cool according to the Reverend (8)
16. One regularly wetting the bed? (8)
18. Break eggs from one end to the other (5)
20. First of all, bro, men want sexy cars (1,1,1,1)
21. Negotiates with members involved in insurance (6,4)
23. Anybody could be putting tight noose around me (7)
24. Develop an American company, say (7)
25. Explosive report mainly implicates judge (6)
26. Order a fancy big fan (6)

Down

1. Heard you and I have to make up (5)
2. Figure of dragon on a gong (7)
3. Perhaps Korean man wanting anaesthesia is treated (4,5)
5. Pay when you eat lunch (5)
6. Washing hair in Singapore sucks! (7)
7. Timid one initially gets beaten in prison (5,4)
10. A thin girl injured in a minor fall (5,4)
13. Ahem...er... I can explain! (4,2,3)
15. Spooner's fans want the effect of a good punch perhaps (9)
17. Locked up Napoleon in America perhaps (7)
19. One is naturally alarming (7)
21. What makes the coating of confectionery sweet? (5)
22. This might keep you warm in East End's diner (5)

SUDOKU

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

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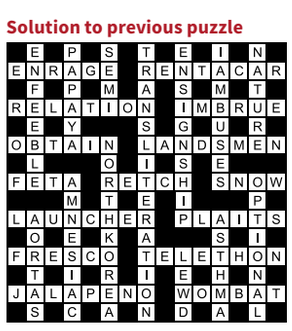
DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Hanuman's noble mission

Sundara Kanda is so named because it narrates Hanuman's remarkable and noble mission to search for and discover Sita. Hanuman possessed unwavering confidence that he would certainly succeed in locating Sita, particularly because Rama had chosen him for this sacred task and entrusted him with his ring, which was to be delivered to Sita as a symbol of recognition and assurance. Hanuman's confidence was further strengthened by Jambavan's encouragement. Sri Hariji explained that with renewed determination, Hanuman compared himself to Rama's arrow, which travels swiftly, strikes its intended target, and faithfully returns to its master. Hanuman resolved to cross the vast ocean with the same speed and precision to accomplish his task. Just as Rama's arrow bears the mark and authority of its master, Hanuman too carried the divine mark of Rama through his constant devotion and the sacred chanting of "Rama."

Hanuman possessed unwavering faith in the sacred ring given to him by Rama, which bore the divine name. With the blessings of Rama, Hanuman courageously crossed the vast ocean with remarkable ease. After sincerely praying to Sita, he soon found her in Ashokavana. Thereafter, Hanuman resolved to return to Rama as quickly as possible to deliver the joyful news of Sita's whereabouts, keeping Rama constantly in his thoughts.

Rama's act of giving the ring to Hanuman symbolises the profound concept of "*Abhaya Pradanam*," which means granting protection and removing fear. In this episode, Sita entrusts Hanuman with her head ornament as a token to convey her message and "*Saranagati*" to Rama.

MONEYWISE

Personal loan at lower cost

Santosh Agarwal

Personal loans are unsecured as lenders take risk by disbursing funds, without any collateral or guarantee. In this scenario, your credit score, which reflects past repayment behaviour, helps lenders in assessing the risk involved and taking a decision, as well as determining the interest rates in case the loan application is approved. Exhibiting strong creditworthiness generally helps borrowers get loans at better rates and terms.

Along with credit score, other pertinent factors also influence the likelihood of a borrower landing an offer with the best rates.

These factors include existing relationships with lenders, borrowers' debt-to-income ratio, income profile and more.

Maintain high credit score

Credit score is one of the primary metrics lenders use for pricing a loan. Credit score shows how dependable you are as a borrower.

Lenders usually prefer borrowers with scores above 750, signifying lower risk.

To maintain a good score, ensure timely repayments of all existing dues, keep your credit utilization ratio low and refrain from applying for multiple credit products within a short span of time. Consistent and disciplined behaviour helps build a strong credit score, giving you better leverage while negotiating interest rates and processing charges with lenders.

Compare multiple lenders

Comparing offers across lenders helps you easily scan and identify the best-suited offer. A simultaneous view helps in better analysis of rates and charges levied. A smarter approach involves comparing multiple loan offers in one place at financial marketplace platforms, rather than applying directly to several lenders, to minimise impact on the credit profile.

Relationship with lenders

Enquiring from the lender you have an existing relationship with can be a cost-effective way to borrow. Lenders extend pre-approved offers to select existing customers based on internal risk assessment. Your banking history or transaction record establishes the confidence of the lender in you. Because of this lower perceived risk, the lenders often provide better interest rates, faster approval, minimal documentation and sometimes lower processing charges on pre-approved loans.

Seasonal/festive offers

Keep an eye out for special offers from lenders from time to time. These personal loan offers are usually provided at discounted interest rates or with waived processing fees. Such offers are usually introduced during festive seasons for a limited period. Borrowers can time borrowing plans around such times to capitalise on these promotional offers and maximise their benefits.

Higher repayment prowess

Providing lenders with additional proof that shows higher repayment capability can also help in both the approval process and getting lower interest rates.

For instance, proof showing high income reduces the risk involved, as it shows higher repayment capacity. A higher income indicates a borrower is more likely to handle monthly repayments without financial strain. Additionally, higher income also reduces debt-to-income ratio, leaving the borrower with more disposable income to take on additional credit responsibly.

With low risk involved, borrowers can easily attract lower interest rates. Apart from these factors, another way to reduce your interest rate and processing fee is to negotiate with a lender when you have a high credit score, high income and fulfill all eligibility requirements.

In case your credit score is low, you can add a co-applicant with a stronger credit profile and stable income to increase the lender's confidence in your combined repayment capacity, which may help improve your eligibility, especially for high-ticket loans.

(The writer is CEO of Paisabazaar)

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

ILLUSTRATION-SAAI

NSEIX opens doors to U.S. stocks for Indian investors

From Apple to Alphabet, some of the world's biggest technology giants could soon find their way into Indian portfolios through NSEIX's Global Access platform

UNCLE SAM CALLING

Vaishali R. Venkat

For decades, buying U.S. stocks has been a Herculean task for most Indian investors. Strict remittance rules, a maze of paperwork, an arduous hunt for reliable and cost-effective overseas brokers, steep account-opening charges and the list of challenges goes on. On top of that, there are lingering concerns over overseas shareholdings' safety.

With technological advances, financial innovation and regulatory reforms, buying U.S. firms' shares from India may soon be an app/website away.

Thanks to the NSE International Exchange Global Access (NSEIX-GA). With NSEIX-GA, the line between Dalal Street and Wall Street blurs, bringing some of Silicon Valley's most valuable firms within Indian portfolios' reach.

Fully regulated

The NSEIX Global Access IFSC Ltd. is a subsidiary of NSE International Exchange (NSEIX), which in turn is owned by the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India. It's a fully regulated entity operating from Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City), Gandhinagar, under the regulatory framework of the International Financial Services Centres Authority (IFSCA). It enables investors to access global securities via IFSC ecosystem.

> Any Indian resident over age 18 can open an account with the NSEIX GA for free, through official website nseixga.com and get digitally onboarded

> The entire technology platform/ process is designed in a manner that trades would be executed and settled in real time based on nations' market timings

No paperwork

You can now directly buy stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) and Nasdaq via NSEIX-GA which acts as a super broker.

Any Indian resident above 18 years of age can open an account with the NSEIX-GA for free, through official website nseixga.com and experience fully-digital onboarding. PAN/ Aadhaar card details could be automatically fetched via Digilocker with the KYC process done digitally.

No demat account

There is no need to open a separate demat account. Once an account is opened with the NSEIX-GA, individuals can start investing via the app or website. Investors can download NSEIX global access' mobile app with both Android and iOS versions available. Financial experts say the NSEIX Global Access' initiative would democratise how Indians gain access to international bourses. The NSEIX-GA, being a government-promoted institution, ensures the security of overseas holdings.

More foreign markets

Currently, the NSEIX-GA is ready with the offerings of U.S. stocks, especially NYSE and NASDAQ with plans afoot to connect with several other big global bourses. It is likely that almost 30 big foreign markets would be included soon. Plans are on to include Europe, the U.K., Japan, Korea and Australian markets too. With this, investors would have huge choice to diversify holdings.

An official said, "For a hassle-free back-end process, we have tied up with many countries as well as foreign brokers. The entire technology platform and the process is designed in a manner that trades would be executed and settled in real time based on the market timings of the respective countries."

For instance, the U.S. equity trades ideally follow T+1 settlement viz. trades would be settled one business day after execution. Therefore, funds or U.S. Securities become fully settled only after this settlement cycle completes."

Investors can remit money from their bank accounts to the NSEIX-GA account in Gandhinagar Gift city and once the funds get reflected in the account, investors get trading limits power to buy shares.

Fractional investing

NSEIX-GA allows fractional investing viz. Indian investors can buy a portion/fraction of a U.S.-listed share rather than purchasing the entire stock. This can be particularly useful since many leading U.S. stocks trade at high prices.

Tax, RBI scheme

Capital gains on U.S. equities are not taxed in the U.S under the India-U.S. tax treaty. They are taxable only in India. Dividends attract a 25% U.S. withholding tax which can be later claimed as a foreign tax credit in India. Also, overseas investments are made under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) which permits individuals to remit up to $2.50 lakh/financial year. No Tax Collected at Source (TCS) applies on foreign remittances up to ₹10 lakh in a financial year while amounts above this attract TCS. Investors must also report overseas investments and income in Indian tax returns. Investors must, however, approach global markets with careful research, awareness of risks and understanding of cross-border regulations.

(The writer is an NISM & CRISIL-certified Wealth Manager and certified in NISM's Research Analyst module)

Choices drive your decision

THINKINVESTOR

The choice between lump-sum investment and RCA leads to different behaviour; for most, diversification is investing in multiple funds with an intent to moderate future regret

Venkatesh Bangaruswamy

Do you 'diversify' when making lumpy investments and face many choices? Or "diversify" as you have underlying strategy to cut downside risk? Here, we discuss diversification heuristics which behavioural psychologists describe as how we behave when faced with many choices with large investment capital.

Choice matters

Suppose you decide to invest ₹5 lakh in equity funds. It is highly unlikely you will invest the entire sum in a single active fund. You may want to spread the money across, say, five funds. But the funds could have overlapping stocks. Why? Most people invest in large-cap, mid-cap, flexi-cap and thematic funds. There may be an overlap in stock holdings between large-cap and mid-cap funds as large-cap and mid-cap funds can hold up to 20% and 35% in mid-cap and large-cap stocks. There could be huge overlaps in holdings between flexi-cap style and thematic funds. This is because thematic, strategy and style indices are carved out of broad-cap index, the benchmark for flexi-cap funds. Ignoring the overlap, you may have significantly reduced anxiety by investing across these funds.

What if you equally spread the investment over 10 months through a systematic investment plan (SIP)? This is referred to as rupee-cost averaging (RCA). It is highly unlikely you will spread ₹50,000/month SIP across five funds. At the extreme, you may even invest in only one fund. Why?

It is typical behaviour to choose multiple funds when you invest lump-sum money and have several investment choices. This is referred to as diversification heuristics. This is our brain's way of moderating future regret. What if you invest the entire money in one fund and the funds you considered but did not choose those performing better? "Diversifying" across funds reduces this anxiety. We are arguably unlikely to suffer from diversification heuristics with RCA as the investments are spread across time and therefore, the investment performance is not so obvious.

Conclusion

The choice between lump-sum investment and RCA leads to different behaviour. We choose multiple funds when faced with simultaneous choices (lumpy investments) but not necessarily with sequential choices (RCA). The above was meant to bring to the fore a point on diversification– for most individuals, diversification is about investing in multiple funds with an intent to moderate future regret.

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

Bank Fixed Deposit Rates

Bank Name	Interest Rates (%) Highest Slab	1-year Tenure	3-year Tenure	5-year Tenure
Small Finance Banks				
AU Small Finance Bank	7.10	6.35	7.10	6.75
Equitas Small Finance Bank	7.40	6.90	7.00	7.00
ESAF Small Finance Bank	8.00	4.75	6.00	5.75
Jana Small Finance Bank	8.25	7.00	7.50	7.77
Shivalik Small Finance Bank	7.80	6.00	6.75	6.25
slice Small Finance Bank	7.75	6.25	7.50	7.00
Suryoday Small Finance Bank	7.90	7.25	7.25	7.90
Ujjivan Small Finance Bank	7.45	7.25	7.20	7.20
Utkarsh Small Finance Bank	7.50	6.00	7.50	7.00
Private Sector Banks				
Axis Bank	6.45	6.25	6.45	6.45
Bandhan Bank	7.25	7.00	7.00	5.85
City Union Bank	7.00	6.80	6.50	6.25
CSB Bank	7.00	5.00	5.75	5.75
DBS Bank	6.60	6.30	6.40	6.25
DCB Bank	7.15	6.90	7.00	7.15
Federal Bank	6.75	6.25	6.75	6.40
HDFC Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.40
ICICI Bank	6.50	6.25	6.45	6.50
IDFC FIRST Bank	7.50	6.30	7.00	7.00
IndusInd Bank	7.00	6.75	6.90	6.65
Jammu & Kashmir Bank	7.25	6.75	6.65	6.60
IDBI Bank	6.50	6.20	6.35	6.25
Karnataka Bank	6.65	6.50	6.15	6.15
Kotak Mahindra Bank	6.70	6.50	6.40	6.25
RBL Bank	7.20	7.00	7.20	6.70
SBM Bank India	7.85	7.10	7.10	7.00
South Indian Bank	6.70	6.35	6.20	5.70
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.10	6.80	6.60	6.60
YES Bank	7.00	6.65	7.00	6.75
Public Sector Banks				
Bank of Baroda	6.45	6.10	6.25	6.30
Bank of India	6.60	6.25	6.25	6.00
Bank of Maharashtra	6.65	6.20	5.25	5.00
Canara Bank	6.60	6.25	6.25	6.25
Central Bank of India	6.50	6.20	6.00	6.00
Indian Bank	6.60	6.10	6.05	6.00
Indian Overseas Bank	6.60	6.50	6.10	6.10
Punjab National Bank	6.60	6.25	6.30	6.10
Punjab & Sind Bank	6.75	5.85	5.85	5.95
State Bank of India	6.45	6.25	6.30	6.05
Union Bank of India	6.60	6.30	6.25	6.00

Home Loan Interest Rates

(In %)

Name of Lender	Loan Amount (Rs.) Upto 30 lakh	Above 30 lakh & upto 75 lakh	Above 75 lakh
Public Sector Banks			
State Bank of India	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70	7.25-8.70
Bank of Baroda	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.25
Union Bank of India*	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50	7.15-9.50
Punjab National Bank	7.25-9.10	7.20-9.00	7.20-9.00
Bank of India	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.00	7.10-10.25
Bank of Maharashtra	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90	7.10-9.90
Punjab and Sind Bank	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70	7.30-10.70
Indian Overseas Bank	7.10 #	7.10 #	7.10 #
Indian Bank	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55	7.15-9.55
Central Bank of India	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15	7.10-9.15
Private Sector Banks			
Kotak Mahindra Bank	7.70 #	7.70 #	7.70 #
ICICI Bank	7.65 #	7.65 #	7.65 #
Axis Bank	8.00-11.90	8.00-11.90	8.00 - 9.10
HSBC Bank	7.45 #	7.45 #	7.45 #
South Indian Bank	7.20 #	7.20 #	7.20 #
Karur Vysya Bank	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65	8.50-10.65
Karnataka Bank	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68	7.30-11.68
Federal Bank	8.30 - 10.75	7.30 - 10.75	7.30 - 9.75
Tamilnad Mercantile Bank	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30	7.90 - 9.30
Bandhan Bank	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58	8.41-12.58
RBL Bank	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
CSB Bank	8.05 #	8.05 #	8.05 #
HDFC Bank	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
City Union Bank	8.25-9.50	8.50-10.00	8.75-10.50
Housing Finance Companies (HFCs)			
LIC Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Bajaj Housing Finance	7.15 #	7.15 #	7.15 #
Tata Capital	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
PNB Housing Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
GIC Housing Finance	8.20 #	8.20 #	8.20 #
SMFG India Home Finance	10.00 #	10.00 #	10.00 #
Aditya Birla Capital	7.75 #	7.75 #	7.75 #
ICICI Home Finance	7.50 #	7.50 #	7.50 #
Godrej Housing Finance	7.60 #	7.60 #	7.60 #

*Extra interest rate concession of 0.05% to borrowers opting for insurance policy
Rates as on March 18 #onwards Source:Paisabazaar.com

CAIRO

Seven killed in Qatar helicopter crash due to technical malfunction

AFP

Qatar on Sunday said four of its military personnel and three Turkish nationals, were killed in a helicopter crash in Qatar's territorial waters. The Qatari and Turkish Defence Ministries said the chopper had crashed after suffering a technical malfunction, which the Qatari Ministry said was during "routine duty". REUTERS

WASHINGTON

Patriot missile involved in Bahrain blast likely U.S.-operated: report

REUTERS

An American-operated Patriot air defence battery likely fired the interceptor missile involved in an explosion that injured dozens of civilians in Bahrain on March 9, according to an analysis by academic researchers. Earlier, both Bahrain and Washington had blamed an Iranian drone attack for the explosion. REUTERS

RIYADH

Saudi Arabia orders expulsion of Iran military attache, embassy staff

REUTERS

Saudi Arabia informed Iran's military attache, his assistant and three members of the embassy staff that they must leave the kingdom within 24 hours after being declared persona non grata, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said on Saturday, citing what it described as continued Iranian attacks on Saudi territory. REUTERS

LONDON

Britain sees no evidence that Iran is targeting Europe with missiles

AFP

U.K. Minister Steve Reed said on Sunday there was no assessment that backed claims Iran is planning to strike Europe. Mr. Reed earlier said one Iranian missile targeting Diego Garcia base fell short and another was intercepted. On Saturday, the Israeli military said Iran has missiles "that can reach London, Paris or Berlin". REUTERS/AFP

Russia claims takeover of border village in Ukraine

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

The Russian Defence Ministry said on Sunday its forces had taken control of Potapivka, a tiny village near the Russian border in Ukraine's northern Sumy region.

The Russian Army has been trying to establish a "buffer zone" in the Sumy region for months, making small, localised breakthroughs across the border. Ukraine says it is holding back Russia's advances and that Moscow has struggled to establish a meaningful foothold in the region.

"As a result of determined actions, units of the Northern grouping of soldiers established control over the village of Potapovka in the Sumy region," the Ministry said in a statement, using the Russian name for the village.

Ukraine did not immediately respond to Russia's claims.

Russia occupies around a fifth of Ukraine, most of which it seized following the launch of its 2022 full-scale offensive.

Scores hurt after Iranian missiles hit Israeli towns, including 'Little India'

At least 47 people were injured after an Iranian missile struck the Israeli town of Dimona, home to a large Indian Jewish population and located close to a secretive nuclear reactor; IDF says it is probing incident after air defences fail to intercept

Agencies
TEL AVIV/JERUSALEM

Southern Israeli towns woke to widespread damage on Sunday after air defences failed to intercept two Iranian missiles overnight that injured scores of civilians in one of the worst attacks of the war so far on Israeli soil.

As daylight broke, the scale of the damage in the desert town of Arad, where one of the strikes hit a multi-storey apartment bloc, came into clearer view, with entire floors blown open by the blast. Another city Dimona, which houses a large Indian-Jewish population was also hit. It is located close to Israel's secretive nuclear reactor and several military bases, including Nevatim Air Base, one of the country's largest.

Southern Israel's Soroka hospital described the attacks as a mass-casualty event. In Arad, 31 people, including 18 children, required hospitalisation, at least nine of them in serious condition, the hospital said. Uri Shacham, the chief of staff of Israel's ambulance service, said at least eight buildings were damaged in the strike.

War fallout: A drone view shows the damage in a neighbourhood after Iranian missile strikes in Dimona, Israel on Sunday. REUTERS

In Dimona, at least 47 people were injured in the missile attack on Saturday evening. Rescue services have listed a 12-year-old boy as seriously injured after being hit by shrapnel.

Military spokesperson Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani said both strikes had been carried out with conventional ballistic missiles. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) said the air defences engaged the missile, but the interceptors failed to knock it down.

"The incident will be investigated," it said.

Most Israelis receive alerts on their mobile phone when launches from Iran are identified. An air raid siren sounds and they then have a few minutes to go to safe rooms or public bomb shelters.

"It is a miracle that no-one was killed," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday, standing in a crater at the impact site in Arad.

"We are going after the IRGC (Iran's Revolutionary Guards), this criminal gang," Mr. Netanyahu said.

"We're going after them personally, their leaders, their installations, their economic assets."

Tit-for-tat attacks

Israel said Iran was targeting civilian population areas.

Iran said it is targeting Dimona as a "response" to an earlier strike on the Natanz nuclear enrichment site. The IDF, however, said it was not responsible for striking Natanz earlier in the day.

Dimona has a predominant Indian Jewish population, and the community members, mostly from the State of Maharashtra, maintain strong links with India and have consistently put efforts to solidify them. This has earned the town the nickname of "Little India".

Indian shops are spread across the town, and Marathi can be heard everywhere, with the 7,500 strong Indian community making up for some 30% of the town's population.

Cricket is popular in the town, and the younger generation is very familiar with local Indian snacks like 'sonpapdi,' 'gulab jamun,' 'papri chaat,' 'bhelpuri,' which several shops sell.

Meanwhile, the Israel's military said on Sunday that Iran had fired more than 400 ballistic missiles at Israel since the start of the war, with around 92% of them intercepted.

Since the joint U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28, Israel has come under daily missile fire from Iran. At least 20 civilians have been killed in Israel and the Palestinian territories, including one Israeli killed in an attack by Iran-backed Lebanese group Hezbollah on Sunday.

Israeli and U.S. strikes have killed at least 1,300 people in Iran, according to the Iranian government.

Brazil's Lula warns of foreign interference in developing nations

Associated Press
BOGOTA

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva criticised what he called the return of a colonial approach toward developing nations during a summit in Colombia on Saturday, pointing to the disposal of ex-Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro and the fuel blockade of Cuba.

"It's not possible for someone to think that they own other countries," Mr. Lula said, in an apparent reference to U.S. policy in the region, at a high-level forum with delegates from Africa and a summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. "What are they doing with Cuba now? What did they do with Venezuela? Is that democratic?"

The leader also criticised the war launched by the U.S. and Israel against Iran and drew a parallel with the Iraq War. "Iran has been invaded under the pretext that it was building a nuclear bomb. Where are Saddam Hussein's chemical weapons? Where are they? Who found them?"

Mr. Lula said that all countries present had already experienced being plundered for gold, silver, diamonds and minerals. He accused an unspecified "they" of seeking to own developing countries' critical minerals and rare earth deposits.

"After taking everything we had, now they want to own the critical minerals and rare earths that we have," Mr. Lula said. "They want to colonise us again."

Sphere of influence

Washington's history of intervention in Latin America goes back a long way – to when President James Monroe claimed the hemisphere as part of the U.S. sphere of influence more than 200 years ago.

While large-scale U.S. involvement in the region mostly petered out after the Cold War, Mr. Trump has rekindled the legacy.

Since assuming office last year, Mr. Trump launched boat strikes against alleged drug traffickers in the Caribbean, ordered a naval blockade on Venezuelan oil exports and got involved in electoral politics in Honduras and Argentina.

And in Brazil, Mr. Trump imposed a 50% tariff on Brazilian goods last year.

While such actions have thrilled right-wing leaders across the continent, they have raised fears among left-wing politicians who have voiced grave concerns over what they see as U.S. bullying.

"We cannot allow anyone to interfere and violate the territorial integrity of each country," Mr. Lula said.

Mr. Lula also criticised the United Nations. "What we are witnessing is the total and absolute failure of the United Nations," said Mr. Lula, pointing to the situations in Gaza, Ukraine and Iran.

Lebanon calls Israeli strikes a 'prelude to ground invasion'

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

Israel struck more targets in south Lebanon on Sunday, including a key bridge, triggering a warning from the Lebanese President that it could be preparing a full ground invasion.

Israel's military was ordered to destroy bridges it said are used by the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah to cross the Litani River.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun warned the attacks "represent a dangerous escalation and flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty, and are considered a prelude to a ground invasion."

According to Lebanon's state-run National News Agency (NNA), three strikes on the bridge near Tyre "caused extensive damage, rendering it unusable". It later reported a fourth strike.

Mr. Aoun "condemned Israel's targeting and destruction of infrastructure and vital facilities in southern Lebanon, particularly the Qasmiyeh bridge over the Litani River and other bridges".

Lebanon's Health Ministry said four people were killed on Sunday in two strikes in the south.

'Can't live like this': Cuba reels under second power grid collapse in a week

Agence France-Presse
HAVANA

Cuban authorities scrambled on Sunday to restore power to the island after the second nationwide blackout in less than a week, as the grid struggles due to an ageing infrastructure and a U.S. oil blockade.

Some parts of Havana began to have power again, but others were still dark early on Sunday, a day after the Energy Ministry reported a "total disconnection" of the national electric system in the country of nearly 10 million people.

Cubans face daily blackouts of up to 15 hours in Havana. "This is becoming unbearable," Ofelia Oliva, a 64-year-old Havana resident, said. "It hasn't even been a week since we experienced a similar situation. It is getting tiresome."

Dark times: A vendor uses a battery-powered lamp while waiting for customers during a blackout in Havana on Saturday. AP

"I wonder if we're going to be like this our whole lives. You can't live like this," Nilo Lopez, a 36-year-old taxi driver, said.

There have been seven nationwide blackouts since 2024. The breakdowns have intensified since Cuba's main regional ally and oil supplier, Venezuela's socialist leader Nicolas Maduro, was captured in a U.S. military operation in January this year.

Oil embargo

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened to impose tariffs on countries that sell oil to Cuba. No oil has been imported to the island since January 9, hitting the power sector while also forcing airlines to curtail flights to the island, a blow to the all-important tourism sector.

The latest blackout was due to an outage in a generating unit at one of the country's eight thermoelectric plants, triggering a domino effect in the system, authorities say.

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(A Government of Andhra Pradesh Undertaking & An ISO 27001-2022 Certified Company)
NOTICE INVITING TENDER
The APTRANSCO invites bids online for Spec. No: PMMTC1-e-14/2026 for floating of tender for Supply, Installation, Testing and Commissioning of 25 Nos. MPLS-TP type FOTE equipment for 25 Nos sub-stations along with NMS for replacement of the existing SDH-based FOTE equipment. Date & Time of availability of Tender on e-procurement platform i.e., **www.tender.apeprocurement.gov.in** is on 23-03-2026 @17:00Hrs. Contact No. Dy.EE: **9491008564.**
RO.No: GMCC/APTRANSCO/73/26. **Sd/- CHIEF ENGINEER, TELECOM & IT**

CSIR- INDIAN INSTITUTE OF CHEMICAL BIOLOGY
(Council of Scientific & Industrial Research)
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Name of work : SITC of neccssary HVAC system including additional supply air & Exhaust air system for the IVC ventilators (Existing & New) and upgradation & compatible integrated BMS system including PLC & field controller and devices at the existing operational Animal Resource Facility at CSIR-IICB, Salt Lake Campus on turnkey basis; **Estimated Cost :** ₹ 79,40,161.00; **e-Tender No. :** 2026_CSIR_266578_1; **Publication date in C.P.P. portal -** 23.03.2026; For further details please visit **https://www.iicb.res.in/tenders** and **https://etenders.gov.in/eprocure/app**

13 children among 64 killed in attack on Sudan hospital: WHO

Associated Press
CAIRO

At least 64 people were killed, including at least 13 children, in a strike on a hospital in Sudan's western Darfur region last week, the World Health Organization said on Saturday.

The strike on the Al Daein Teaching Hospital in East Darfur on Friday also injured at least 89 people and rendered the hospital non-functional, Tedros Ghebreyesus, the head of the WHO, said on X.

Sudan slid into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) exploded into war throughout the country. The RSF has blamed the military for the strike on the hospital. The Army has denied the attack, but two military officials said the strike was targeting a nearby police station.

The devastating war has killed more than 40,000 people, according to U.N. figures, but aid groups say the true number could be many times higher.

"Enough blood has been spilled. Enough suffering has been inflicted. The time has come to de-escalate the conflict," said Mr. Ghebreyesus.

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A LOT TO DO

Pant is under pressure to deliver in IPL 2026, feels du Plessis

FILE PHOTO: SANDEEP SAXENA

Rishabh Pant is probably one player who is under immense pressure in IPL 2026. Some guys flourish under the pressure of the price tag, while some don't. Last season was really tough for him. The team struggled, and he also struggled with the bat. This IPL will be crucial for him — Faf du Plessis about the LSG skipper.

BASELESS

Kohli laughs off chartered flights to London reports ahead of IPL 2026

K. MURALI KUMAR

Royal Challengers Bengaluru batter Virat Kohli rubbished the reports of him requesting the RCB management for access to chartered flights between India and London during IPL 2026. Taking to Instagram, Virat posted one of these reports on his story along with laughing emojis, indicating that these reports are false.

IN & OUT

Shanaka set to replace injured Curran at Rajasthan Royals

AFP

Sri Lanka all-rounder Dasun Shanaka is set to replace the injured Sam Curran at Rajasthan Royals for IPL 2026. Shanaka is said to have informed PSL franchise Lahore Qalandars about the move. Curran, who was part of a pre-auction trade between CSK and RR, has a groin issue, which ruled him out of the IPL.

TOUGH CALL

Humpy withdraws from the FIDE Candidates tournament

FILE PHOTO: G.N. RAO

After deep reflection, I have taken the difficult decision to withdraw from the FIDE Women's Candidates tournament. Despite the assurances provided, I do not feel fully secure under the current circumstances. This is a painful but necessary decision, and I stand by it — Indian GM Koneru Humpy.

Batting-heavy Sunrisers hope to bowl rivals over

The Hyderabad franchise boasts some of the world's best T20 batters; in the absence of regular skipper Cummins, medium-pacers Harshal and Unadkat must do the heavy lifting among bowlers

Anirudh Velamuri

Sunrisers Hyderabad enters IPL 2026 with a familiar identity and one built on enviable batting firepower.

On paper, it once again boasts the league's most formidable batting line-up that is capable of outscoring any opponent. Yet, some questions linger. Will this batting might be enough to carry it all the way? Can a largely inexperienced bowling unit, sans Pat Cummins for the opening matches, hold its own against IPL's big hitters? Focusing on its forte makes sense, but is it wise to be over-dependent on it?

Explosive line-up

To be fair to the team, Sunrisers' approach is not without logic. When your core features Abhishek Sharma and Ishan Kishan, two of the world's best T20 batters, you are naturally inclined to double down on that.

Add to it the explosiveness of Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen and Nitish Kumar, the blueprint becomes clear – overwhelm, outscore and outlast the rivals.

There is depth, too. Aniket Verma showed encouraging signs last year, while Liam Livingstone remains a high-upside gamble. R. Smaran arrives in great form, having topped the Ranji Trophy batting chart with 950 runs during Karnataka's resurgent campaign.

If the batting inspires confidence, the bowling raises concerns.

The overseas contingent is unsettled – Cummins is sidelined, Eshan Malinga awaits fitness clearance, and Kamindu Mendis is just returning from a shoulder injury that ruled him out of the recent T20 World Cup.

Historically, Sunrisers' most successful campaigns have been anchored by seasoned leaders (like Bhuvneshwar Kumar and T. Natarajan) in the attack. Now, Harshal Patel and Jaydev Unadkat will have to shoulder that responsibility.

At the auction, the Hyderabad outfit, despite having the third-largest purse, turned to a mix of domestic seamers and promising prospects. Among the lesser-known names, young left-arm spinners Krains Fuletra and Shivang Kumar stand out. Whether they are entrusted with meaningful tasks remains to be seen.

The home conditions, at least, offer some comfort. The Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium has traditionally produced flat, batting-friendly pitches, which the Hyderabad team used effectively in 2024 to win five of its seven home games en route a runner-up finish. Ultimately, Sunrisers' season may hinge on a simple yet decisive balance. Its batting will win it games, perhaps many. If the bowling unit can rise from a point of vulnerability to one of reliability, this could be a complete side. If not, it risks a familiar story: spectacular but short.

IPL-19 COUNTDOWN

Sunrisers Hyderabad

OVERALL NUMBERS

M	W	L	NR
196	94	101	1

BY OPPONENT

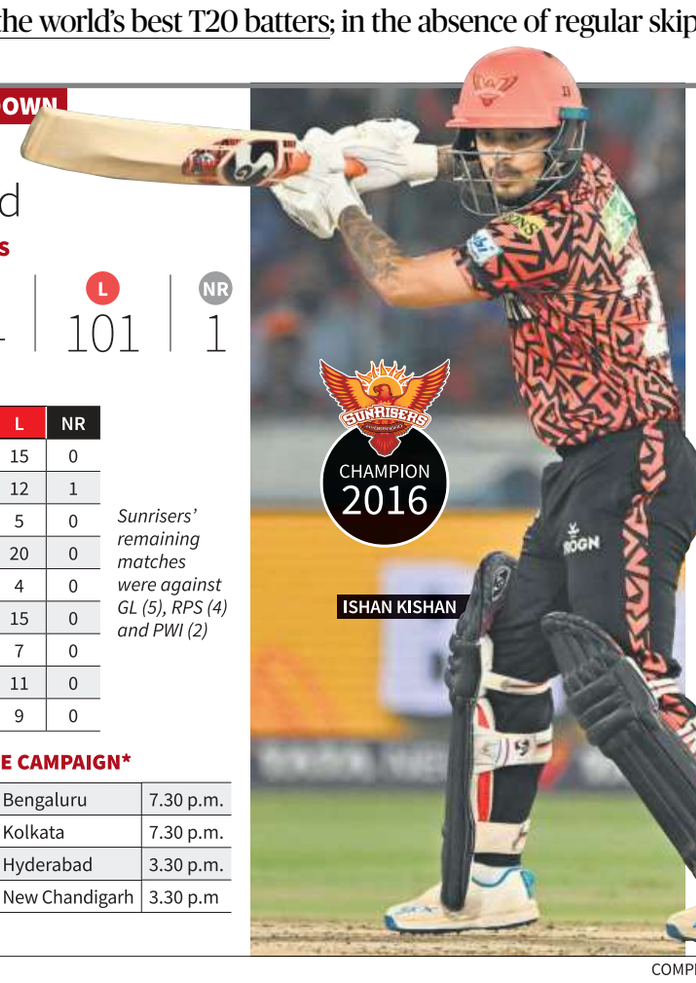
	M	W	L	NR
CSK	22	**7**	15	0
DC	26	**13**	12	1
GT	6	**1**	5	0
KKR	30	**10**	20	0
LSG	6	**2**	4	0
MI	25	**10**	15	0
PBKS	24	**17**	7	0
RCB	25	**14**	11	0
RR	21	**12**	9	0

Sunrisers' remaining matches were against GL (5), RPS (4) and PWI (2)

SRH'S 2026 LEAGUE CAMPAIGN*

March 28	vs. RCB	Bengaluru	7.30 p.m.
April 2	vs. KKR	Kolkata	7.30 p.m.
April 5	vs. LSG	Hyderabad	3.30 p.m.
April 11	vs. PBKS	New Chandigarh	3.30 p.m

**announced so far*



MIRACLE MAN

Taking the spotlight off 'Travishek' is no small task, yet Ishan Kishan enters IPL 2026 as Sunrisers' in-form batter. He rebuilt his game through domestic dominance and carried that momentum into the international arena. SRH's faith in his prowess is evident, with Kishan named stand-in captain while Pat Cummins works back to full fitness. Kishan leads by example as his Jharkhand teammates would attest. The 27-year-old could set the tone for a memorable campaign.

THE SQUAD

Ishan Kishan (Capt.), Abhishek Sharma (Vice-capt.), Pat Cummins, Travis Head, Aniket Verma, R. Smaran, Ishan Kishan, Heinrich Klaasen, Nitish Kumar, Harsh Dubey, Kamindu Mendis, Harshal Patel, Brydon Carse, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malinga, Zeeshan Ansari, Salil Arora, Shivang Kumar, Sakib Hussain, Onkar Tarmale, Krains Fuletra, Praful Hinge, Amit Kumar, Shivam Mavi, and Liam Livingstone.

** Cummins has been ruled out of the first few matches*

COMPILED BY G. PRASAD & ANIRUDH VELAMURI

Locked in: Kishan in a conversation with head coach Vettori. SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Anahat and Abhay make it a double delight at Indian Open

SQUASH

Sports Bureau
MUMBAI

It turned out to be a night of celebration for Indian squash fans as Abhay Singh and Anahat Singh won the men's and women's titles at the JSW Indian Open squash tournament on Sunday.

The men's title decider, an all-Indian battle, saw second-seeded Abhay overpower fourth seed Veer Chotrani 11-9, 11-8, 11-4 while Anahat cruised past Egypt's Hana Moataz 11-5, 11-6, 9-11, 11-6 in the women's final.

Abhay was in superb form on the big day. Although Veer put up a fight in the first two games, the second seed switched gears as the match progressed.

"Indian squash is very healthy right now with four men in the top 50 and Anahat is leading the charts in the Women's World Champs. Obviously, the goal individually is the Los Angeles Olympics, but we all have a big year ahead with the Asian Games," said Abhay.

Sublime show

Earlier, Anahat Singh produced a sublime show, coming up with a lethal combination of deception and speedy cross-court movement to leave her opponent in a daze.

Ruling the roost: Anahat and Abhay were hardly stretched in the title deciders. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"I think it's really amazing how Hana played. She was not well the past week, reached the finals after a tough full-hour match on Saturday. She still came out and put on such a great performance. It was amazing to watch. I'm glad we were able to put on a good fight for the audience and, hopefully, everyone had fun watching," said Anahat.

Araujo, 'keeper Garcia dazzle in Barca's win

EURO LEAGUES

Agence France-Presse
BARCELONA

Ronald Araujo's header proved to be the difference as LaLiga leader Barcelona bagged a tight 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano on Sunday.

Araujo nodded home Joao Cancelo's corner in the 24th minute to help the host earn the three points at Camp Nou, while goalkeeper Joan Garcia's superb display played just as big a part in the victory.

In Serie A, Como took control of the league's final Champions League spot by thrashing relegation-threatened Pisa 5-0 on Sunday. It was Como's fifth straight victory in Serie A.

In the Premier League on Saturday, Chelsea's hopes of Champions League qualification suffered another blow as Everton stormed to a 3-0 home win.

Beto struck twice before Iliman Ndiaye rounded off Everton's best win at its new home so far. Chelsea has now lost four consecutive games to put manager Liam Rosenior under pressure.

The results: LaLiga: Barcelona 1 (Araujo 24) bt Rayo Vallecano 0.
Premier League: Newcastle 1 (Gordon 10) lost to Sunderland 2 (Talbi 57, Brobbey 90); Aston Villa 2 (McGinn 15, Watkins 68) bt West Ham 0; Tottenham 0 lost to Nottingham Forest 3 (Jesus 45, Gibbs-White 62, Awoniyi 87).
Serie A: Como 5 (Diao 7, Douvakis 29, Baturina 48, Paz 75, Perrone 81) bt Pisa 0
On Saturday: LaLiga: Espanyol 1 (Fernandez 68) lost to Getafe 2 (Duarte 45+3, Arambarri 45+7).
Premier League: Everton 3 (Beto 33, 62, Ndiaye 76) bt Chelsea 0.
Serie A: Juventus 1 (Yidiz 14) drew with Sassuolo 1 (Pinamonti 52); AC Milan 3 (Pavlovic 37, Rabiot 54, Fofana 56) bt Torino 2 (Simeone 44, Vlasic 83-pen).
Bundesliga: Borussia Dortmund 3 (Bensebaini 73-pen, 84-pen, Guirassy 78) bt Hamburg 2 (Otele 19, Lokonga 38).

Top stuff: Araujo unlocks Rayo's defence with his headed goal. AFP

Taking his chance: Irfan punished Goa for committing a defensive blunder. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Jhingan's late leveller denies CFC a winning start at home

ISL

K. Keerthivasan
CHENNAI

FC Goa pulled off a 1-1 draw after scoring at the death in the Indian Super League thriller against Chennaiyin FC at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Sunday.

Just when Chennaiyin looked set for its first home win of the season, Sandesh Jhingan capped off the visitor's late surge with the equaliser in the 88th minute. The India international rose highest to deliver a thunderous header off Dejan Drazic's corner-kick.

Chennaiyin had seized the advantage through Irfan Yadwad as the substitute had punished Goa for committing a defensive blunder in the 48th minute. A casual back-pass from Sahil Tavora was pounced upon by Irfan, who intercepted it, surged forward and beat Goa goalkeeper Hrithik Tiwari.

The Clifford Miranda-coached side, which now has five points from as many matches, appeared in control for long spells of the contest but struggled to withstand Goa's late onslaught. Goa moved to 10 points from six games after dominating the closing quarter with crisp passing and sustained pressure in the box. The visiting side nearly completed the turnaround in stoppage time. Boris Singh forced a sharp save from 'keeper Mohammad Nawaz, before Daniel Lalhlimpuia fired narrowly over the crossbar moments later.

Earlier, the first half – though goalless – was far from dull, with both sides creating lively openings. Chennaiyin suffered a blow when striker Daniel Chima Chukwu was stretchered off following an injury. In the end, Jhingan landed another punch to deny Chennaiyin a winning start at home.

The results: Chennaiyin FC 1 (Irfan Yadwad 48) drew with FC Goa 1 (Sandesh Jhingan 88).
At Kolkata: Inter Kashi FC 1 (Alfred Planas 38) lost to Bengaluru FC 3 (Ashique Kuruniyan 20, Braian Sanchez 69, 90+8).

There is enough money in sports in India: Bindra

The Olympic gold medal-winning shooter reveals that a lot is going into athlete training at the grassroots level, and the bid for the 2036 Games has accelerated the process

FOCUS BIHAR

Sports Bureau
PATNA

Beijing Olympics gold medallist and former shooter Abhinav Bindra said India needs a holistic approach that synergises sports with education to improve its Olympic success.

At the Fireside Chat during the *Sportstar* Focus Bihar Conclave in Patna on Sunday, speaking with *Sportstar* Editor, Ayon Sengupta and Raveendran Sankaran, Director General-cum-CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority, Bindra took the highlight away from the excitement of the prospect of hosting the Games to the groundwork needed to make these dreams possible.

"We are seeing early signs of the legacy of the bid. We had the National Governance Act enacted; it would not have been so quick otherwise.

"The funding has increased. There is enough money in sports in India. There is so much going into athlete training at the grassroots level. That has been accelerated due to the bid," he noted.

"I will give you an example from the Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, though. Norway won 41 medals. India has 41 medals across all Olympics.

"In Norway, sport in childhood should be inclusive, enjoyable, development-focused, and not selection-driven too early. In Denmark, for kids below 11, there are no rankings in sports.

"Sports performance can't be a transaction. It is never going to be that you put in an amount of money and get a vending machine with assured returns. We are too focused on the top level right now, but until we have the base of the pyramid strong, which is not based on results, and getting kids active, we won't be able to make a difference."

He also underlined that development for an athlete needs to be more than just about sports.

"My worth is not dependent on that gold medal. I look back at the relationships I was able to build with my family, coaches, and competitors.

"I look back at what sports taught me, about failure and success, respecting outcomes, and dealing with internal conflict.

The *Sportstar's* Focus Bihar Conclave is presented by the Bihar Sports Authority and Department of Sports, Government of Bihar. Indian Oil Corporation Limited is the associate sponsor and State Bank of India the banking partner.

India's Olympic Moment: Building the Legacy Before the Games
Panelist: Abhinav Bindra (Olympic gold medallist)
Moderators: Raveendran Sankaran (Director General-cum-CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority) and Ayon Sengupta (Editor, *Sportstar*)

The root of the matter: Bindra feels that the base of the sports pyramid should be strong in order to create an impact at the top level. R.V. MOORTHY

We want to develop sports goods manufacturing in India: Khadse

Sports Bureau
PATNA

Raksha Khadse, Minister of State – Sports, Government of India, on Sunday, said the Sports Ministry wants to prioritise the development of sports goods manufacturing in India.

Delivering the Keynote Address at the *Sportstar* Focus Bihar Conclave in Patna, Khadse said: "We want to develop sports goods manufacturing in India. We have to rely on getting it from other countries. But if we can do this in our states, then we can take sports to every household.

"We see so much workforce from Bihar, we can take that into sports as well, which can then contribute to the state's growth."

Appreciating Bihar for its efforts to reach the grassroot level with sporting infrastructure, she said: "I do not agree that Bihar is a backward State. Bihar will be a booming sports hub.

"We have to develop the system and take it forward, and we have been able to start that with the international events that you hosted.

"I have to appreciate the state for using the MNREGA to develop sports infrastructure in smaller districts.

"The idea was put up by Mr. Raveendran Sankaran IPS (DG and CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority) at the *Chintan Shivir* (thought conclave) with the honourable Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, and we have put that in the sports budget as well.

"This will be used at a Central Government level now to uplift the rural areas across the country in sports".

Special gift: Raksha Khadse being felicitated by Mahendra Kumar, Secretary, Department of Sports, Bihar, as Shreyasi Singh and Raveendran Sankaran look on. R.V. MOORTHY

Bihar capable of hosting multiple events: Shreyasi

Sports Bureau
PATNA

Shreyasi Singh, Minister of Sports and I&T, Bihar, and Commonwealth Games gold medallist, said her State is capable of hosting multiple events if India wins its bid for the 2036 Olympics.

"We have hosted international events earlier and are capable of doing so again.

Exposure

"The youngsters of the state can learn and benefit from the exposure.

"I would request the Honourable Minister of State, Sports, Raksha Khadse *ji*, to take my request to the Honourable Prime Minister, that Bihar has its eyes on the Olympics and the 2030 Commonwealth Games."

The Olympian hopes to see more athletes from Bihar populating Indian contingents for multi-sport events.

"I was one of the only athletes from Bihar. We won the Junior World Cup in 2009. Haryana and Tamil Nadu usually dominate the contingents. When we reached the airport in Delhi, every State welcomed its athletes, but the one from Bihar was left alone. When I won the Commonwealth Games gold in 2018, I got the grand welcome I had hoped for.

Looking forward

"In India's sports map, Bihar barely made it earlier. But in 2024, I participated in the Paris Olympics. Now, we have to take it forward."

Shreyasi Singh, Minister of Sports and I&T, Government of Bihar. R.V. MOORTHY

Talk time: Sumariwalla, A.K. Samantaray, ED and State Head, Indian Oil Bihar and Jharkhand, Raghuram Iyer and Dhruva Prasad . R.V. MOORTHY

'In terms of hosting capabilities, we can do an excellent job'

Sports Bureau
PATNA

Raghuram Iyer, CEO of the Indian Olympic Association, on Sunday named the six other countries that are presently interested in hosting the 2036 Olympics during the *Sportstar* Conclave – Focus Bihar.

"We were recently in a meeting with potential future hosts. There are six others who are in the fray. I can name the ones in the meeting room. The countries are Chile, Turkey, Qatar, South Korea, and Hungary. Germany was also present. The Olympics is looking to make an impact. It resonates with their story. It's too early to know whether we are in pole position or not, but we are definitely in the race," he said.

Adille Sumariwalla, Vice-President, World Athletics, stressed that there are a number of factors that need to be accounted for before India can go full-throttle on its push to host the Summer Games.

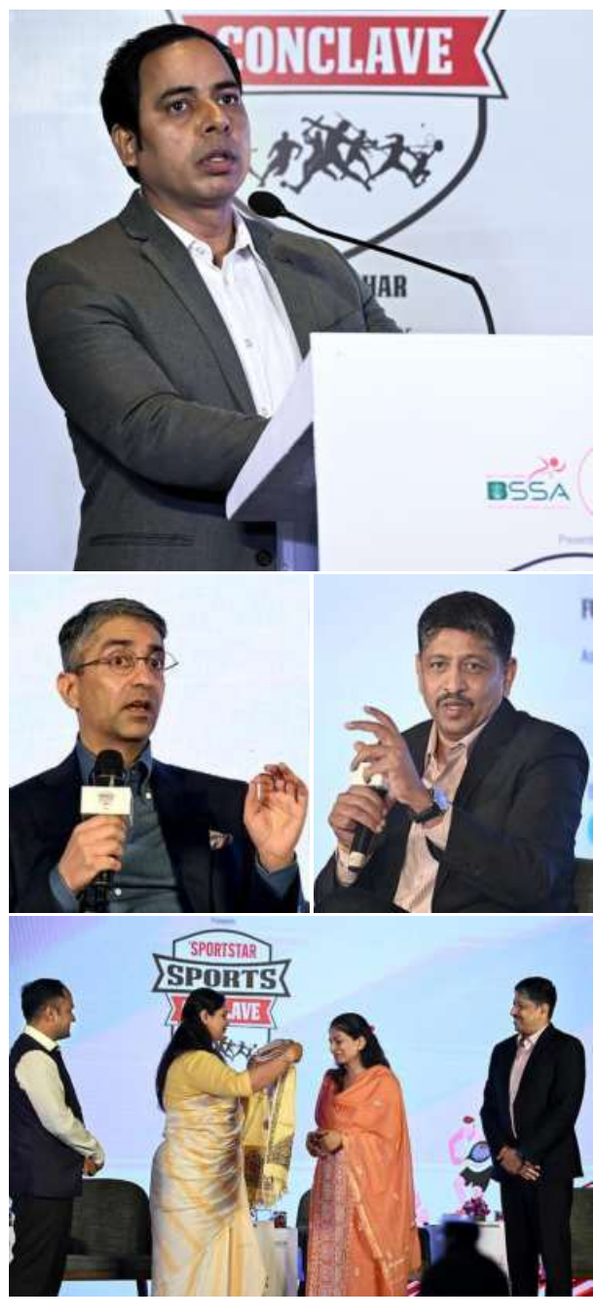
"They are looking at temperatures, air quality, sustainability, and legacy. Also, is this actually going to give a boost to the nation? Is your medal count going to improve? You need 40,000 volunteers. Where are they? Are you going to do it all in one place where the weather is too hot, or will you shift to somewhere where it is a bit more pleasant? All these need answers," Sumariwalla said.

He, however, clarified that the country, purely in terms of hosting capabilities, can do an excellent job.

"This is a misnomer that we don't host events properly. Okay, badminton was an aberration. I can tell you that the Commonwealth Games that we organised in India were the best. I have been to at least half a dozen of them. The food, the accommodation, the transport, the technical conduct, the hospitality, the airport, and the visas. Absolutely outstanding. In terms of delivery, there is no issue."

Inside the Olympic Room: Power, Politics and Negotiating with the IOC
Panelists: Adille Sumariwalla (Vice-President, World Athletics), Raghuram Iyer (CEO, Indian Olympic Association)
Moderator: Dhruva Prasad (Senior Reporter, *Sportstar*)

CONVERGENCE OF IDEAS



Eventful day: Amit Sinha, DGM-IP-cum-OSD to MD, Bihar Industrial Area Development Authority, Abhinav Bindra, and Raveendran Sankaran shared their thoughts. Shreyasi Singh felicitates Raksha Khadse. R.V. MOORTHY

In conversation: Jayesh Ranjan, J. Meghanatha Reddy and Raveendran Sankaran. R.V. MOORTHY

State governments, partners have to work hand in hand

Sports Bureau
PATNA

Administrators from Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Bihar outlined the shift towards grassroots sports and fundamental infrastructure building undertaken by their respective State governments.

Jayesh Ranjan, Special Chief Secretary for Youth Advancement, Tourism and Culture, Sports, Government of Telangana, endorsed a PPP model where different stakeholders play to their strengths in fostering sporting development.

"One of the biggest complaints we hear, and a very valid criticism, is that the Government pokes its nose far too much in sports administration. It should be left to people with expertise. That said, we should be clear about our responsibilities. "Infrastructure and grassroots development have to be our duty. Access to government land and funds is our space; grassroots talent development should be our mandate. But managing a sports facility and conducting a scientific coaching programme, etc., have to be done through partners," he said, explaining Telangana's tie-ups with FIFA and Juventus.

J. Meghanatha Reddy, Member Secretary, Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu, highlighted the impact of the Chief Minister's Trophy, which has provided a 'sustainable, reliable and continuous platform' for athletes. "Thirteen lakh sportspersons across the State participated in district-level competitions, of which 13,000 were from the school level, and 12,000 were from the college level. In just these two categories, we have expanded the scope to 24 Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines," he explained.

Raveendran Sankaran, Director General cum CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority, elaborated on the State's three-stage sports scholarship policy.

"The first stage is Prerna, the second one is Saksham, and the third one is Udaan. Under these three categories, 800 athletes are under the scholarship policy. Prerna works at the grassroots level; Saksham is for national-level athletes, and Udaan for the international level. Those under Udaan are given up to ₹20 lakh per annum as a sports scholarship for training and equipment. Under Saksham, it is ₹5 lakh, and at the grassroots level, it is ₹3 lakh".

Many States, One Dream: Fuelling India's Olympic Ambition
Panelists: Jayesh Ranjan IAS (Special Chief Secretary for Youth Advancement, Tourism and Culture, Sports, Government of Telangana), J. Meghanatha Reddy IAS (Member Secretary, Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu) and Raveendran Sankaran
Moderator: Ayon Sengupta (Editor, *Sportstar*)

EDUCATIONPLUS

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AI for inclusive education

While AI tools can help create an inclusive environment for students with disabilities, educators also should be aware of the problems involved

H. Kalpana Rao

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Earlier this year, I sent a New Year's card to a student who was visually impaired and was taken aback when he responded saying that he had used an AI tool that provided him with details of the layout, the colours, the pictures within the frame, and even the emotional framework of the image. The confidence with which he immediately pointed out that he was able to grasp the image's nuances through an AI-generated tool made a deep impression on me.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is today being viewed as an advantage and a disadvantage in relation to academic integrity, learning ability, and evaluation. But the above incident compelled me to rethink the capacities of AI and the range of its possible uses within the field of disability.

Persistent difficulty

For years, instructors have devised innumerable ways to teach, educate, and communicate with students with diverse disabilities. Yet, one of the persistent difficulties has been enabling such students to participate fully in the classroom. For instance, a visually impaired student who had to dictate to a scribe invariably took longer than others to complete a writing task. Added to this was the scribe's own ability to write the dictated material correctly.

With AI, such students can dictate and use generative tools to produce responses. Of course, there is potential for misuse but, with appropriate monitoring, this challenge can be addressed.

Similarly, AI can be used to understand maps and charts and assist with reading quickly. Teachers can also create assignments that match the students' intellectual abilities, thereby instilling appropriate challenges. AI can also assist other kinds of disabilities, such as students with cerebral palsy, allowing them to transcribe their thoughts and write meaningfully.

While teaching postgraduate students, I often faced challenges when working with visually impaired learners. Although I often read passages aloud and encouraged discussions so that all students could follow what was happening, there were moments when I would sometimes write key terms and references on the blackboard, forgetting that visually impaired students could not access what was written. Over the years, I became more aware of their needs and would consciously speak louder so that they could record the audio. I also searched for e-books so that they could access the material independently.

But, in many Indian universities, teachers are not fully aware of how to create equitable and inclusive environments not because they lack the desire but because classrooms are often ill-equipped and have minimal technological access. Additionally, the heavy load of teaching and administrative work makes teaching feel like a burden rather than a pleasure.

It is high time that educators in India become aware of the various tools and strategies emerging through AI to support students. More importantly, curricula and syllabi need to be co-designed with disabled students and instructors so that lived experiences can shape more effective learning. The need of the hour is for university administrators to ensure that faculty are trained to meet the needs of disabled students. Training in the use of and understanding how AI can help innovate and support inclusive teaching practices is essential. Policymakers should also set guardrails to ensure that technologies remain unbiased and inclusive of diverse perspectives.

Cause of concern

While the use of AI is exciting, it is also a cause of concern. Many AI tools collect user data and store it and this could lead to unwanted data exposure. Moreover, there could be the potential for the data to be collected in methods that are not very transparent. As a result, it could create a risk between technological enhancement and surveillance, especially when data protection protocols are not well-crafted.

Yet another issue that needs to be tackled is that AI systems could be stereotypical, as they are generated using vast data sets and in cultures that may be different. As a result, it may misread the needs of individual students and create problems in assessment and evaluation. A third issue is that students could become too dependent on it and may not understand that it is only a tool to enable them to earn better. Yet, if teachers understand the principles of ethics, integrity, and moral responsibility, AI can become a powerful tool to enhance learning and knowledge among students with disabilities.

The writer is a former professor of English at Pondicherry University and now volunteers as the editor for the literary section of the online journal, *Muse India*.
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SCHOLARSHIPS

University of Bath School of Management Scholarships
Offered by the School of Management, University of Bath, the U.K.
Eligibility: Students who have accepted an offer for one of the eligible taught postgraduate Master's courses in 2026-27 and have applied for a scholarship within the deadline.
Rewards: Up to €10,000 fee waiver.
Application: Online
Deadline: April 8
www.b4s.in/edge/UBMS2

Masters' Union Scholarship
Offered by Masters' Union
Eligibility: Students who have passed Class 12 and want to do a full-time UG programme in Business Management; Technology; Leadership; Design; Sustainability; Finance and Economics; Marketing, or related fields and score in Masters' Union Scholarship Aptitude Test (MUSAT) or approved alternate test.
Rewards: Fee waivers ranging from 10-80%
Application: Online
Deadline: May 13
www.b4s.in/edge/MUSCASP1

ServiceScape Scholarship
Offered by ServiceScape.
Eligibility: Students above 18 years and enrolled or accepted in an accredited college, university, or trade school who submit an essay of 300-600 words on a topic provided by ServiceScape.
Rewards: $1,000
Application: Online
Deadline: November 30
www.b4s.in/edge/SSSZ2

Courtesy: Buddy4study.com

Women in STEM

Progress Software has opened applications for the 2026 Progress Akanksha Scholarship for Women in STEM in India. This is a renewable four-year scholarship of up to ₹150,000 annually to support education-related expenses.Two recipients will be chosen based on academic achievement, financial need, interest and experience in Computer Science, Software Engineering, IT and/or Computer Information Systems and other criteria.

Eligibility: Indian citizens who are women and enrolled in the first year of a Computer Science, Computer Science Information Technology or related courses with an aggregate of 75% or more in Class 12 and a family income not exceeding ₹500,000

Deadline: April 13

For details visit https://tinyurl.com/sr764hne

Approach is key

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

OFF THE EDGE
Nandini Raman

I am doing B.Sc. Biotechnology, but my goal is the Civil Services. I chose this without realising my true interests. I want to study Sociology, English, and Ethics at the PG level. How can I align this with my plans? Ayush

Dear Ayush,

Civil Services does not require a specific undergraduate degree, nor does it require continuity between UG and PG subjects.

Your interests in Sociology, English, and Ethics are highly aligned with UPSC.

Biotechnology will be very useful for General Studies to answer questions in science and technology. So it is also a helpful foundation.

Your Postgraduate choices could be M.A. Sociology (GS-I (Society) and GS-IV (Ethics) and the Essay paper. M.A. English will help in writing and articulation, the Essay paper and the possibility of choosing English as the optional paper.

A PG Diploma in Ethics or Public Policy will help with Ethics Case Studies, governance issues and also help in the interview stage.

I finished Class 10 in 2020 and chose PCMB, aiming to join the Indian Air Force. After Class 12, I missed the NDA's age eligibility. Due to CUET's introduction, I could not secure college admission, leading to a gap year. I enrolled in an online BCA programme. In 2024, I got admission to the B.Sc. Maths (Hons) and, due to financial issues, dropped the BCA. I am also preparing for the CDS and AFCAT. If joining the defence forces doesn't work, I plan to build a stable career as a data analyst. I have completed a data analytics bootcamp, developed skills such as Excel, SQL, Python, Tableau, Power BI, and cloud tools. What should my next steps be? Nitin

Dear Nitin,

Your path looks a little 'zig-zag' on paper but it showcases your resilience, adaptability, and clarity of intent. You already know CDS/AFCAT are the direct routes but keep a time-bound plan and don't put your life on hold for this.

Create blocks of two to three hours dedicated to preparing for each task. Keep your Plan B also alive and active since you already have great momentum.

Your Maths (Hons.) background, analytics tools stack, and bootcamp exposure give you a good foundation for a data analyst role. Now, you need to focus on projects, internships or live work and visibility.

Work on building four to five solid end-to-end problem-based projects and host them on GitHub, Medium/Notion. Get some analytics experience via internships, contract roles, or projects in NGOs, research organisations or start-ups.

Leverage your Maths (Hons) knowledge and learn statistics for data analysis, hypothesis testing, probability concepts, and basic econometrics.

Work on your resume and profile. Network and connect with analysts on LinkedIn.

I finished B.Com in 2025. Iam from a Hindi-medium background and aim to study in a top B-school. I attempted the CAT a year ago, but did not score well. I am working on improving my quantitative and logical reasoning skills. How do I improve my English? Rajnandan

Dear Rajnandan,

Being from a Hindi-medium background is not a disadvantage. Poor English is a skill gap, not an identity problem. You can fix it!

Work on speaking with clarity, confidence, expressing ideas logically, and comprehending what is being said.

Read comprehension passages and work on CAT-relevant grammar. Your vocabulary doesn't need to be fancy but you should be able to express what you think and feel.

Practise mock interviews in English where you answer structured views, opinions, and check your confidence in delivery.

Read the English newspaper every day out loud, underline the ideas, summarise them in English and get someone to check it.

Practise speaking for around 15 minutes daily and record yourself. Start with simple everyday topics like "Why MBA", "My favourite food" or "My Best Holiday". Focus on your thoughts and expression. Start to think in English and try not to translate from Hindi to English.

Also work on improving writing skills and write short essays on any topic twice a week. Use positive affirmations and be proud of your roots and where you come from.

I am a Class 11 Humanities student preparing for CLAT 2027. I am unsure about the opportunities and scope in Humanities. What are my options? Satyam

Dear Satyam,

Humanities builds critical thinking, reading and writing ability, and an understanding of society, law, politics, ethics ... all highly valuable skills in law, policy, media, education, research and governance.

Law is one of the strongest professional outcomes for Humanities students. After your law degree, you can get into litigation, corporate law, judiciary, policy and legislative roles, in-house counsel in companies, legal research, and think tanks.

The other options are undergraduate degrees in Political Science, History, Sociology, Psychology, English, Economics (if you have Maths) or Integrated B.A./M.A. or Integrated B.A./B.Ed. courses.

These can lead to multiple postgraduate and career options across public policy and governance, think tanks, research organisations, NGOs, print and digital content writing, corporate communication, civil services and other government exams, academia and so on.

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

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

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India is progressing, but so is everybody else: Joydeep

The CWG gold medallist demands focus on the rate of improvement in the country's sporting ecosystem; AIFF chief adds that an overnight change is difficult in a population of 150 crore

FOCUS BIHAR

Sports Bureau
PATNA

From India's Olympic ambition as a potential host to sports goods manufacturing in the country, the *Sportstar* Sports Conclave Focus Bihar at the Taj City Centre here on Sunday dealt with a wide range of issues.

"Kids today are taking up skating, sport climbing, football, and all the other new sports. But traditional sports continue to get a lot of focus and attention. We need to build a balance and see if the sports will be played over a period of time for the money being put in," Deepthi Bopaiah, Board Member at GoSports Foundation, said during a discussion titled, *The Host Nation Effect: Why Olympic hosts outperform and can India do it too.*

Joydeep Karmakar, Commonwealth Games gold medallist, acknowledged India's rapid strides in sports, but demanded focus on the rate of improvement.

"There is a chance of a 25 to 50% increase in medals as a host. Even if we go by a 25-50% rise, India will still win only 17 to 18 medals. There is no doubt that India is progressing, but everybody else also is," Joydeep said.

While a successful Olympic bid could galvanise India's sports manufacturing industry, there are several challenges still to be overcome.

Lakshita Mehrotra, Senior Team Lead at Foundation for Economic Development, highlighted these challenges, including cost disadvantages and a lack of visibility for Indian brands.

India accounts for just about 0.5% of the overall global trade in sports equipment. The key to increasing India's export footprint lies in expanding the domestic market, according to Shiv Prakash Singh, Founder at Shiv Naresh Sports.

Last-mile connectivity

"As an MSME, last-mile connectivity is a major issue. If you cannot sell a product in India, you cannot sell it anywhere else," Girish Venkatasubban, CEO at Imaxx Sports, added.

AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey presented the federation perspective, underlining the gap between expectation and reality in the ecosystem.

"Progress has no limit. But people always pick out faults. When you govern, you have to assume that you cannot deliver all things correctly... we try to give all the facilities that we wished we had as players. In a country of 150 crore population, we cannot expect an overnight change."

Exchange of ideas: Deepthi Bopaiah, Rajesh Rajagopalan, S. Satyanarayana, Joydeep Karmakar and Dola Banerjee during the panel discussion. R.V. MOORTHY

Talking point: Girish Venkatasubban, Shiv Prakash Singh and Lakshita Mehrotra engaged in a lively discussion. R.V. MOORTHY

Taking note: Pramod Kumar and Kalyan Chaubey during the conversation. R.V. MOORTHY

The Host Nation Effect: Why Olympic hosts outperform and can India do it too
Panelists: Deepthi Bopaiah (Board Member, GoSports Foundation), Cdr. Rajesh Rajagopalan (CEO, Dani Sports Foundation), Satyanarayana S (Chief Athletics Coach, Paralympic Committee of India), Joydeep Karmakar (Olympian, Commonwealth Games gold medallist), Dola Banerjee (Olympian, Commonwealth Games gold medallist)
Moderator: Jonathan Selvaraj (Assistant Editor, *Sportstar*)

Made for the World: Growing India's share in global sports manufacturing
Panelists: Amit Sinha (DGM-IP Cum OSD to MD, Bihar Industrial Area Development Authority), Girish Venkatasubban (CEO, Imaxx Sports), Shiv Prakash Singh (Founder, Shiv Naresh Sports), Lakshita Mehrotra (Senior Team Lead, Foundation for Economic Development)
Moderator: Raveendran Sankaran (Director General cum CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority)

Governance in Sports: Navigating challenges to become stronger federations
Panelists: Kalyan Chaubey (President, All India Football Federation), Pramod Kumar (Secretary, Boxing Federation of India)
Moderator: Jonathan Selvaraj (Assistant Editor, *Sportstar*)

The *Sportstar* Focus Bihar Conclave is presented by the Bihar Sports Authority and Department of Sports, Government of Bihar.

The associate sponsor is Indian Oil Corporation Limited, and State Bank of India is the banking partner.

One for the album: It was a grand reunion as Dhoni caught up with Raina while Samson received a rousing reception. R. RAGU

A sea of yellow as Super Kings' past and present gather at the den again

ROAR '26

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

It was a sweltering day in the city with the mercury rising to uncomfortable levels. However, it wasn't enough to deter nearly 23,000 passionate fans from raising the fever pitch at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium on Sunday as they welcomed the old and current stars of the Chennai Super Kings in a glitzy event.

The five-time champion took a trip down memory lane and set the ball rolling for the 2026 season of the IPL with a massive fan event titled ROAR '26.

Alongside the current squad, 14 former players who sported the yellow jersey rekindled fond memories of the franchise's early years and the IPL, and were given a rapturous welcome.

Parthiv Patel, L. Balaji, Shadab Jakati, Harbhajan Singh, Joginder Sharma, S. Anirudha, S. Badrinath, M. Vijay, Muttiah Muralitharan, Michael Hussey, Matthew Hayden, Ambati Rayudu, Dwayne Bravo and Suresh Raina were the 'OGs' present.

The biggest roar, unsurprisingly, was reserved for M.S. Dhoni, the one person who remains the fulcrum of the side and the bridge between the past and present.

While the scene of Dhoni receiving a thunderous reception is par for the course at Chepauk, Sunday offered a glimpse of what could unfold this year when another wicketkeeper batter and currently the toast of the nation walks on this hallowed turf sporting the yellow jersey.

Fans got their first glimpse of Sanju Samson, CSK's newest recruit at this venue. The Player-of-the-Tournament in the recently concluded ICC T20 World Cup promised to bring back the IPL Trophy to Chennai.

"It was a goosebumps moment. Winning the World Cup for the country is something I had dreamed of for many years. I'm glad I was able to contribute. Now, I'm excited and looking forward to the next couple of months in the IPL with my new team, CSK. My approach would be simple – see the ball and hit the ball.

"I will look to hit a lot of sixes. We will lift the trophy," said Samson.

Earlier in the evening, the OGs took on members of the current squad in an over of one-on-one duels with the challenge to hit at least three boundaries. Michael Hussey faced off against Ruturaj Gaikwad, who sent down some gentle off-breaks; Samson took on former Sri Lankan legend Muttiah Muralitharan while Raina batted against Noor Ahmad.

Later in the evening, the former players brought out CSK's seven trophies and displayed them on the stage.

In a first for the franchise, Hayden and Raina were inducted into its Hall of Fame.

Hayden was a key member of the team's first IPL title in 2010. Raina was involved in four IPL titles (2010, 2011, 2018 & 2021) and two Champions League titles (2010 & 2014).

The evening came to a close with a music concert by one of the city's icons and two-time Academy Award-winning composer A.R. Rahman.

For old time's sake: It was an occasion to remember for the OGs. R. RAGU

Elite club: Raina and Hayden were inducted into the CSK Hall of Fame in the presence of Rupa Gurunath, Director, CSK, and CEO K.S. Viswanathan. R. RAGU

AROUND THE CITY

Sriram sets up CUC's win

Left-arm spinner G. Sriram scalped six for 41 and set up a five-wicket win for CUC against Twentieth Century Club in the TNCA IV-A league held recently.

Sriram (CUC, 6/41); Kiran (GTUC, 6/42); Gopalakrishnan (National, 5/17); Shyam (Eagle, 5/31); Venkatesh (Kovai Knights, 5/37).

The scores: IV-A: Twentieth Century Club 188 in 46.3 overs (R. Rokith 51, C. Saffin 49, G. Sriram 6/41) lost to CUC 189/5 in 34.3 overs (U. Jakvis Yosaph 77, V. Prajeesh 50, Mithun 3/47).
V-C: Universal RC 104 in 27.5 overs (R. Kiran 6/42, Praveen 3/36) lost to GTUC 108/6 in 20.1 overs (J. Allen Joseph 4/26).
Eagle CC 195 in 40.2 overs (V.R. Kumanan 46) bt Triplicane RC 153 in 45.1 overs (E. Shyam Sambath 5/31).
CCL 220 in 46.4 overs (R. Ajit Kumar 56, Syed Sadiq Pasha 40, V. Ramalingam 36, C. Chinnamani 4/51) bt Bharathi SC 147 in 44.2 overs (S. Sachin 30, V. Ramalingam 3/16, A.H. Mohamed Appas Haajid 3/17).
National CC 215 in 47 overs (D. Shiva Shankaran 79 n.o, M. Gopalakrishnan 39, A. Sankar 4/44) bt NUC 134 in 35.3 overs (B. Sanjeevan 45, S. Sanjay Bhardwaj 43, M. Gopalakrishnan 5/17, M. Elavarasan 4/38).
V-D: Companions 134 in 29.2 overs (Mohammed Aaryan Sajid 31, S. Varun 66, R. Venkatesh 5/37) lost to Kovai Knights 135/2 in 15 overs (A. Vishvajith 34, G.S. Kowsigan 65).
Shivaji CC 225/9 in 50 overs (M. Mohith Singh 56, I. Junaid Mustaq 31, K. Srikanth 3/55, R. Prannav Raj 3/66) bt Sridhar CC 175 in 44.2 overs (K. Dhilepan 63, R. Prannav Raj 38, H. Balaji 4/29).
Youngsters CC 155 in 40.3 overs (Ela Porco 37, J. Manivannan 3/37) lost to Grove CC 157/4 in 35.2 overs (Deepak Shanmuganathan 53, Devesh 46 n.o.).
Indian Oil 284/7 in 50 overs (P. Kanish Prabhu 56, K.R. Shrreyas Raghavan 30, R. Abinandh 40, K. Tamil Selvam 74, M.P. Prithvineal 53 n.o., G.D. Dhanakoti 3/78, K. Buvaneshvaran 3/61) bt TVS MSC 275/6 in 50 overs (Senthilvel 75, T. Tejeshwara 30, D. Fabian Anand 39, V. Bharath Kumar 68 n.o.).
Free Lancers 160 in 36 overs (S. Mahesh 42, M. Jaya Prakash 3/13) bt TANGEDCO 121 in 28.1 overs (Tamizharasan 48 n.o., S. Sugumar 4/33, Aadhith Retnesh 4/33).

SNAPSHOTS

Spinners lead SA to victory against NZ

WELLINGTON: The South Africa spinners played a decisive role as the visiting team won the fourth T20I against New Zealand by 19 runs on Sunday to square the five-match series 2-2.
The scores:
South Africa 164/5 in 20 overs (Connor Esterhuizen 57, Kyle Jamieson 2/29) bt New Zealand 145 in 18.5 overs (Tim Robinson 32, Gerald Coetzee 3/31, Prenelan Subrayen 2/13, Keshav Maharaj 2/22).

Duplantis soars to fourth World indoor title

TORUN (POLAND): Sweden's pole vault king Armand Duplantis returned to the scene of his first world record here, to win a record-equalling fourth World indoor title in dominant fashion on Saturday. Duplantis, who set the first of his 15 world records (6.17m) in the Polish city back in 2020, vaulted six times and cleared the bar each time, winning with a best of 6.25m.
In a masterclass his rivals could only look on in awe as Greece's Emmanouil Karalis took silver (6.05m) and Australian Kurtis Marschall bronze (6.00).

ENGAGEMENTS

Cricket: TNCA I div. league, MRC-A vs. Globe Trotters (A.M. Jain); Nelson SC vs Alwarpet (Wahe Guru-A); Jolly Rovers vs. Sea Hawks (Tagore); Singam Puli vs. Vijay (Guru Nanak); Grand Slam vs. Young Stars (SRMC, turf); SKM vs. Jupiter SC (Vivekananda), day one, 9.30 a.m.

Dyf should make amends in Golconda St. Leger

HYDERABAD: The seven-year-old Dyf, who ran third in his last start, should make amends in the Golconda St. Leger, the feature event of Monday's (March 23) races.
1. OSMAN SAGAR PLATE (DiV. II) (1,100m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 3.00 p.m.: 1. Sargent (3) H.M. Akshay 60, 2. Shooting Star (8) B.R. Kumar 59, 3. Aquatone (6) Ashad Asbar 55, 4. Cypress (2) Kuldeep Sr. 54, 5. Golden Inzio (1) P. Sai K. 54, 6. Sugriva (7) Md. Ismail 53.5, 7. Farsiris (9) Afroz K. 52, 8. Pranava (5) B. Nikhil 52 and 9. Don Cherie (4) Md. Ekram 51.5.
1. AQUATONE, 2. CYPRESS, 3. GOLDEN INZIO.
2. YADADRI PLATE (1,100m), (Terms) Maiden, 3-y-o only, 3.30: 1. Buddy (11) Mukesh K. 56, 2. Cosmic Gift (2) P. Sai K. 56, 3. Rajendra (4) Kuldeep Sr. 56, 4. Vinfast (1) Neeraj 56, 5. Yali (3) Antony Raj 56, 6. Ashwa Jaffna (7) Gaurav 54.5, 7. Calista Babe (8) B. Nikhil 54.5, 8. Fiore (9) G. Naresh 54.5, 9. Miri (5) Mohit 54.5, 10. Quattro (6) Santosh Raj 54.5 and 11. Trishika (10) Trevor 54.5.
1. YALI, 2. QUATTRO, 3. TRISHIKA.
3. OSMAN SAGAR PLATE (Div. I) (1,100m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III), 4.05: 1. Briar Ridge (3) Surya Prakash 60, 2. Petra Act (6) Mukesh K. 59.5, 3. Roxxane (2) Akshay K. 56, 4. Clarity (9) Ajay K. 55, 5. Quality Warrior (1) Md. Ismail 54.5, 6. Real Star (8) G. Naresh 53.5, 7. Fortune Art (4) H.M. Akshay 53, 8. December Rain (7) B. Nikhil 52 and 9. The Purpose (5) Ashad Asbar 52.
1. ROXXANE, 2. CLARITY, 3. THE PURPOSE.
4. SEA BIRD PLATE (1,100m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 4.35: 1. Dubai Touch (5) Ajay K. 61.5, 2. N R I High Power (6) Mukesh K. 58, 3. Dontblockmyway (10) Abhay Singh 57, 4. Dashing Charm (13) 5. Mix The Magic (7) Mohit 54.5, 6. Sharanga (8) Antony Raj 54, 7. Foxy Girl (3) Afroz K. 53, 8. Only The Brave (4) H.M. Akshay 53, 9. Swiss Girl (2) P. Sai K. 52.5, 10. Suryavanshi (11) Surya Prakash 52, 11. Cosmico (9) B. Nikhil 51.5, 12. Mountain Touch (1) Santosh Raj 51 and 13. Lazarus (12) Rafique Sk. 50.5.
1. FOXY GIRL, 2. SHARANGA, 3. N R I HIGH.
5. GOLCONDA ST. LEGER (Gr. 2) (2,800m) (Terms), 5-y-o and upward, 5.05: 1. Dyf (1) Trevor 57, 2. Get Lucky (3) Mukesh K 57, 3. Ramiel (2) Antony Raj 57, 4. Victor Hugo (6) Akshay K. 57, 5. Pyrite (4) Sandesh 55.5 and 6. Star Of Night (5) B.R. Kumar 55.5.
1. DYF, 2. PYRITE, 3. STAR OF NIGHT.
6. DREAM GIRL PLATE (1,400m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II), 5.35: 1. Best Buddy (1) Md. Ekram 60, 2. Gloria (2) Kuldeep Jr. 59.5, 3. Sangreal (8) Ajay K. 55.5, 4. Knight Regent (3) Trevor 54.5, 5. Blue Pantheress (7) B.R. Kumar 53, 6. Lifes Journey (4) G. Naresh 53, 7. Miss Marvellous (6) B. Nikhil 52.5 and 8. Just Incredible (5) Surya Prakash 50.5.
1. KNIGHT REGENT, 2. BLUE PANTHERESS, 3. GLORIA.
7. POCHARAM PLATE (1,600m), 5-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45, (Cat. III), 6.05: 1. Take A Breath (1) Ajay K. 60, 2. Genie (11) Md. Ekram 58, 3. N R I Star (10) Trevor 56, 4. See My Attitude (4) Rafique Sk. 54.5, 5. Anemoi (8) Surya Prakash 54, 6. Desert Sultan (5) Md. Ismail 53.5, 7. Ilene (3) Santosh Raj 53.5, 8. Secret Option (2) P. Sai K. 53.5, 9. Alpine Girl (7) G. Naresh 53, 10. Silver Arrow (9) Abhay Singh 53 and 11. Bold Indian (6) B. Nikhil 51.5.
1. N R I STAR, 2. GENIE, 3. SECRET OPTION.
Day's Best: **KNIGHT REGENT**
Jackpot: 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7.
Mini Jackpot: (i) 1, 2, 3 &4, (ii) 4, 5, 6 & 7. Treble: (I) 2, 3 & 4, (ii) 5, 6 & 7. Tanala: All races.

I will go forward through runs and runs only

Smaran had a stupendous sophomore season as he accumulated a tournament-high 950 runs in the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy. After a sedate start to his domestic career in 2024, the 22-year-old from Karnataka has emerged as one of the brightest prospects in the country across formats

INTERVIEW

R. Smaran

N. Sudarshan

NIRMAL HARINDRAN

There is a studious zeal to how R. Smaran goes about his cricket. While batting, he is focused and efficient and not outrightly flashy and extravagant. While speaking, he is both poised and confident without sounding overtly cerebral and nerdy. These facets found wholesome expression in the 2025-26 Ranji Trophy as Smaran, 22, scored a chart-topping 950 runs in Karnataka's first run to the final in over a decade.

What made it all the more remarkable was the fact that the performance came when the side had accomplished batters Karun Nair and Devdutt Padikkal for a majority of the games, and K.L. Rahul for the last four.

The campaign may have ended in an anti-climax – he was out first ball to the sensational Jammu & Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi in the final and Karnataka lost out on adding to its eight Ranji crowns - but the last time anyone younger than Smaran finished as the highest run-getter in India's premier red-ball tournament was when a 21-year-old Shreyas Iyer made 1321 runs in 2015-16.

Smaran, under whose captaincy Karnataka won its maiden C.K. Nayudu (U-23) Trophy in 2023-24, spoke to *The Hindu* on his superlative season, his batting methods and mindset, and the upcoming IPL with Sunrisers Hyderabad. Excerpts:

How does it feel to be the highest run-getter in the Ranji Trophy?

It's a great feeling. I set out at the beginning of the season with certain goals - score 1000 runs or remain at the top of the run charts. I fell short by 50 runs, but to be top is great. I am really grateful to god for giving me the platform and that many games to get those many runs.

You debuted in 2024-25. How different was season two from season one?

This time we went till the final in Ranji Trophy and I got to play that many more games in different conditions. There were a lot of learnings as to how I can tackle spin better, play fast bowlers better on a green top. We had a lot of experienced guys who play for the country joining us from the knockouts. We missed out on winning, but I learnt a lot both by being there in the middle and in the dressing room.

How did you sustain your red-ball form, across nine matches and nearly five months? Ranji is now played in two parts and the white-ball competitions are sandwiched...

The preparation in the off-season is done in the same way. You quickly switch between formats and practice in such a way that you don't have much time to adjust. When you move from white ball to red, most batters tend to go for their shots and continue the same momentum. But red ball requires patience. You can still play your shots, but you need to know what your game is and how there's a pattern to scoring runs.

Do you have a favourite knock?

The Mumbai one (83 n.o. in the fourth innings) would be my favourite. It was against Mumbai in Mumbai and when the situation was against us. We were three down [for 119], and chasing 325 is never easy. There was a small amount of nerves going in because in the three innings before that I hadn't got runs. It was a do-or-die situation, but after I got a couple of boundaries in the first four-five balls, I eased a bit.

Rahul at the other end guided me as to what shots I could play and which bowlers to take on. We quickly put on 70-80 runs, and the field started spreading out. That knock is right up there.

What were you most pleased about?

The way I handled pressure after Rahul got out. Shreyas Gopal and Kruthik Krishna were also out quickly [with 40 runs needed], but the way I handled the pressure to take the game deep, rotate the strike and not go for the big shots... that is something I rate highly.

How have you progressed as a batter, from age-group cricket to the senior side?

Not many major changes technique-wise, but just about putting more value on your wicket. In the longest format, it is easy to throw away your wicket when you are settled.

It is important to know your gameplan, bat the opposition out of the game and give your bowlers the time to get 20 wickets.

I have had a lot of conversations with our coach Yere [Goud] sir, and with Karun and a lot of senior players about this.

Three of your six First Class centuries are double hundreds, and the three others are 135, 134 and 127. What's with you and big knocks?

It's just the hunger to convert hundreds into big hundreds. In India, you have so many talented players and almost every other guy gets a century.

The only way you can differentiate yourself from others is by scoring 160, 170 and double hundreds.

The emphasis is also on giving our bowlers enough time. If I get out immediately after my century, the new guy will find it hard.

In Karnataka's 2024-25 Vijay Hazare Trophy triumph, you made 433 runs including a century in the final. In two editions of Syed Mushtaq Ali T20, you have a strike-rate of around 160. What has worked for you across formats?

Preparation in the off-season. Like I said before, you bat two-three days of red ball and then switch to white ball. But even in the shorter formats, it's very important to know your game. For me, even if it's in T20s, it is essential to observe those initial four-five balls.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nowadays, you don't have that luxury, and that is something I'm really working on. But for playing different formats, a lot of credit goes to my coach Syed [Zabiulla] sir and the regimen he put forward.

Being an all-format batter in India is tough. India's Test and ODI captain [Shubman Gill] is not even there in the T20 team. How much work goes into compartmentalising your approaches?

A lot. When you make the switch, sometimes you still are in the past format.

Personally, I feel, anything that you do out there in the middle is a result of repeated practice.

The more repetitions you do, it becomes easier. Playing all three formats is never going to be easy. Practice has to be put into all three equally to ensure you excel.

I wanted to wind back a bit. Before you made your Karnataka debut in October 2024, your age-group teammates such as K.V. Aneesh, or the very young Hardik Raj, had already made the grade. Was there a feeling that your progress was slow? How confident were you that you will eventually get there, especially having once missed out on a U-19 India slot?

During that U-19 phase, I thought it was all about playing U-19 India. I didn't even think about Ranji because U-19 India had so much value. But immediately after that, I kept no expectations.

When I played C.K. Nayudu Trophy, I felt that good things will always come to good people. I just needed to keep my head down and keep scoring.

Even when guys around me were going ahead and playing Ranji Trophy, I felt that they were going there because they had scored a lot of runs and taken a lot of wickets.

I believed my due will come. Even now, the only way I'll go forward is through runs and runs only.

The C.K. Nayudu championship win really helped personally and I got my due.

Your first five Ranji Trophy matches were unremarkable, with a highest of 37. Can you talk about that period?

It's a very proud feeling to represent your State and a lot of expectations come with it. Like any other player, I felt that I needed to cement my place. But I forgot to enjoy the game and the process of getting those big runs. In those five matches, I was not in the right headspace. But after that, we went into the Syed Mushtaq Ali and Vijay Hazare trophies and I spoke to a lot of people. They told me to enjoy the game and not worry about the outcome.

I started doing that, and one thing led to the other. In the span of one-and-a-half months, we had the Vijay Hazare Trophy in our hands. It helped me build momentum for the second half of Ranji, and I got the double hundred against Punjab (203).

The IPL is next, and what are your expectations? You came in as a replacement player for Sunrisers in 2025 but didn't play because you got injured. But the franchise retained you, and you will now be with some of the best T20 players like Abhishek Sharma, Travis Head, Heinrich Klaasen...

I am very grateful to Sunrisers for having put their faith in me even though I was ruled out of the IPL last year.

They back a lot of youngsters, and I am looking forward to fulfilling whatever role is given to me.

The IPL is a long tournament and momentum is a big factor. With guys like Abhishek and Ishan [Kishan] coming in from the T20 World Cup win, it is going to help us.

To play with those who have dominated the T20 format over the past two, three years is a great thing.

It will help me assess my own game and improve. We reached the final two years back and we won in 2016. Hopefully, we can replicate 2016 in 2026.

How agriPV can turn India's farms into dual-purpose powerhouses

India's ambitious energy transition goals — to have 300 GW of installed solar capacity by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2070 — put land at a premium, and utility-scale solar projects require large tracts of land while agriculture is already under pressure from competing land use; agri-photovoltaics can ameliorate this conflict

Shantanu Roy

In the 2026-27 Budget, the outlay for the PM-KUSUM scheme nearly doubled to ₹5,000 crore, signalling the government's renewed emphasis on increasing solar power production centred on India's farmers. Specifically, the scheme aims to provide energy and water security to farmers, enhance incomes, and decarbonise the farm sector through decentralised solar pumps and power plants.

But as the scheme evolves, India also faces a question: how can solar be expanded on agricultural land without compromising food security?

Agri-photovoltaics (agriPV) is emerging as a promising answer to this question. AgriPV integrates solar systems with farming, allowing farmers to generate electricity and cultivate crops on the same parcel of land. The panels are mounted at a suitable height to allow farm operations below, and are spaced between crop rows or integrated into greenhouses to minimise conflict between agricultural production and energy generation.

Sheep graze under rows of solar panels on a farm. Representative image. PUBLIC DOMAIN

THE GIST

Agri-photovoltaics (AgriPV) integrates solar systems with farming, allowing farmers to generate electricity and cultivate crops on the same parcel of land

The panels are mounted at a suitable height to allow farm operations below, and are spaced between crop rows or integrated into greenhouses to minimise conflict between agricultural production and energy generation

In an economy that depends heavily on agriculture, the technology's appeal lies in both farmers diversifying their incomes and producing clean energy

Recent consultations on PM-KUSUM 2.0 have indicated that the government may include agriPV in a proposed 'National Agri-photovoltaics Mission' as a dedicated 10-GW component, with viability gap funding to offset the capital costs

Selecting right crops

The designs vary by crop and region. Elevated systems have panels mounted a few metres above ground to allow crops to grow below. Row-based systems have panels positioned between crop rows to minimise shading. Vertical systems use upright panels that can capture sunlight from both sides. Greenhouse-integrated systems feature solar panels on roofs or walls to maintain a controlled growing environment. The suitability of a design also depends on the local climate, irrigation practices, and the crop. So systematic and region-specific planning is essential to optimise both agricultural and energy yields.

Careful crop selection is also key to the success of agriPV systems because the amount of sunlight available changes based on how solar panels are placed. Shade-tolerant crops generally perform well in partially shaded areas under solar panels while crops that need more sunlight grow better in the spaces between rows of panels.

Crop selection also varies across India's diverse agro-climatic regions. For instance, suitable crop options include tomato, onion, garlic, turmeric, ginger, leafy vegetables, and tulsi in Madhya Pradesh, and ragi, jowar, grapes, tomato, potato, chillies, banana, and brinjal in Karnataka and Maharashtra – all of which can perform well in agriPV systems.

Beyond technical considerations such as crop selection, the scalability of agriPV hinges on developing viable business models. Farmers can own and operate agriPV systems, use a portion of the electricity generated, and sell the surplus. With the help of Farmer Producer Organisations or cooperatives, multiple farmers can also aggregate land and collectively develop projects, enhancing their bargaining power and access to finance.

Private developers could also lease farmland and share revenues or pay fixed rents to farmers. Alternatively, State governments or public agencies could develop agriPV systems to support local energy needs.

Why agriPV matters for India

India's ambitious energy transition goals – to have 300 GW of installed solar capacity by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2070 – put land at a premium. Utility-scale solar projects require large tracts of land while agriculture is already under pressure from competing land uses.

AgriPV can ameliorate this conflict. With more than half of India's land under agriculture, dual-use deployment is valuable. And in an economy that depends heavily on agriculture, the technology's appeal lies in both farmers diversifying their incomes and producing clean energy. Farmers can earn from selling electricity, leasing land or sharing revenues while continuing to cultivate.

AgriPV also delivers environmental co-benefits. In certain agro-climatic conditions, partial shading can reduce evapotranspiration – the combined loss of water to the atmosphere through evaporation and plant transpiration – and soils retain more moisture, thus enhancing the overall water-use efficiency. Solar panels can also protect crops against extreme heat, rainfall, and hail. By lowering the farm's need for diesel, such systems can also support rural entrepreneurship and local economic growth. AgriPV can power ancillary services as well, including cold storage, food processing units, and chaff cutters, strengthening rural value chains. However, this requires clear governance frameworks, tariffs, and accessible finance.

AgriPV's large-scale adoption in India faces economic, regulatory, and institutional barriers, which include high capital costs, lack of regulatory clarity and lack of design benchmarks

Status in India

There are around 50 pilot agriPV installations nationwide, with various panel-crop combinations and economic feasibility under evaluation. Recent policy discussions have also increasingly referenced agriPV but large-scale replication has yet to commence. Both policymakers and experts need more empirical evidence across agro-climatic zones to say which configurations, crop matrices, and financial frameworks are most suitable.

The technology's large-scale adoption in India does face economic, regulatory, and institutional barriers. Elevated structures and specialised mounting systems significantly increase capital costs, well above those of conventional solar systems. A crop's responses to shading can vary and poorly designed systems may even reduce agricultural yields.

System ownership between farmers and developers could also raise doubts, particularly if long-term land rights and revenue-sharing arrangements are not fully clear. Land classification, grid connectivity, and tariffs hinge on regulatory clarity and the lack of design benchmarks adds to investor uncertainty.

Policy pathways

With the right policy support, agriPV has the potential to scale beyond pilot projects. Recent consultations on PM-KUSUM 2.0 have indicated that the government may include agriPV in a proposed 'National Agri-photovoltaics Mission' as a dedicated 10-GW component, with viability gap funding to offset the capital costs. Such measures could remarkably improve the bankability of agriPV projects and reduce the financial risk. Clearly recognising dual-use configurations within PM-KUSUM 2.0 could help align agriPV with farmer-centric solarisation. States can reinforce this by identifying suitable clusters, streamlining approvals, and integrating agriPV into farmer training and advisory programmes.

As India rapidly advances in its energy transition, agriPV offers a pathway for renewable energy to complement agricultural productivity. Its inclusion under PM-KUSUM 2.0 could move it from scattered pilots to a more structured, scalable model, strengthening farmer incomes and easing land pressures.

(Shantanu Roy is the Sector Coordinator of the Renewables and Energy Conservation sector at the Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP), a research-based think tank. shantanu@cstep.in)

BIG SHOT

Ugandan rangers handle a rhino at the Kidepo Valley National Park following the first wildlife exchange between Kenya and Uganda as part of a wider effort by conservation groups and the Uganda Wildlife Authority to rebuild a national population wiped out by poaching, in the Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda on March 17. REUTERS

WHAT IS IT?

MPC: confirming new moons

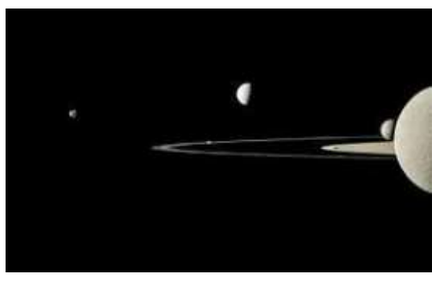
Vasudevan Mukunth

Last week, the Minor Planet Centre (MPC) announced 15 new moons had been found, four around Jupiter and 11 around Saturn. The Jovian moons were found by the U.S.-based Scott Sheppard and David Tholen and the Saturnian ones by a team led by Edward Ashton in Taiwan.

The MPC is the world's primary repository for all observations of small bodies in the solar system. Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, it operates at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory under the International Astronomical Union, and plays a vital role in tracking asteroids, comets, and the moons of the outer planets.

When astronomers discover a new object, they send their data to the MPC, where experts verify the observations and calculate the object's orbit. If the discovery is new, the MPC assigns it an official designation. This process ensures every known minor planet has a unique identity and a predictable path.

One of the MPC's most critical jobs involves monitoring near-earth objects (NEOs). NEOs are space rocks that could potentially threaten the earth. With support from NASA's Planetary Defense Coordination Office, MPC maintains a large database that allows scientists to predict if and when a rock might come close to the earth.



On July 29, 2011, the Cassini mission captured five of Saturn's moons in a single frame with its narrow-angle camera. NASA/JPL-CALTECH

The MPC also facilitates communication within the global scientific community by publishing electronic circulars that alert researchers to new discoveries or interesting celestial events. These updates allow observatories worldwide to coordinate their efforts and gather more data quickly.

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of trips under free bus travel scheme since inception

898 crore. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin on Sunday hailed the success of the '*Vidiyal Payanam*' free bus travel scheme for women, stating that the initiative has recorded nearly 898 crore trips since its inception. PTI

Number of dog-bite cases in Rajasthan in 2025

900 An RTI application revealed that the State reported more than 460 dog-bite cases in 2024, which rose to over 900 in 2025. Jaipur recorded the highest numbers both years, with cases surging from 307 in 2024 to 633 in 2025. PTI

Percentage increase in Sri Lanka's fuel prices due to conflict

25 in per cent. Sri Lanka raised fuel prices by 25% on Sunday, as the country prepared for more impact from the war in West Asia. Regular petrol was increased to 398 rupees ($1.30) per litre, up from 317 rupees, while diesel rose by 79 rupees to 382. AFP

Education systems with a national ban on phones in schools

114 More than half of the countries have banned phones in schools amid mounting concerns about declining attention in classrooms and cyberbullying, according to the UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring team. PTI

People killed in a strike on a hospital in Sudan

64 At least 64 people were killed, including at least 13 children, in a strike on a hospital in Sudan's western Darfur region last week, the World Health Organization said on Saturday. AP

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What insurance numbers do not reveal

Insurance penetration and density are widely used indicators, but they show premium collection, not how well households are protected against loss of income; as a result, premium growth is often mistaken for progress, even when financial protection remains limited

ECONOMIC NOTES

T.C. Suseel Kumar
R. Sudhakar

India is often described as an "underinsured" country. This claim is usually backed by two numbers that appear regularly in official speeches, policy papers, and media commentary: life insurance penetration and density. Low values of these indicators are taken as proof that insurance coverage in India is inadequate and that large sections of the population remain unprotected.

The problem is not that these numbers are wrong. The problem is that they are misunderstood – and then used to draw the wrong conclusions during public discourses.

In everyday economic language, penetration refers to how widely a product is used. Mobile phone penetration, for example, tells us what proportion of people or households have access to a phone. Density usually means how much of something exists per person.

In life insurance, however, these terms mean something quite different. Insurance penetration is defined as the total premium collected by insurers as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP). Insurance density is the average premium paid per person, usually expressed in U.S. dollars. These definitions are internationally accepted and are useful for comparing the size of insurance markets across countries.

But these measures do not tell us what most people assume they do. They do not reveal how many families are insured, whether those families would be financially secure if the main earning member were to die, or whether insurance is serving its most important social purpose – protecting households against sudden loss of income.

GETTY IMAGES

What the numbers show

Premium-to-GDP, for instance, is essentially a measure of industry revenue relative to the size of the economy. It can move up or down for many reasons that have little to do with household protection. If the economy grows rapidly due to infrastructure spending or increased exports, insurance penetration can fall even if more people are buying insurance.

On the other hand, insurers can push high-premium products and raise penetration figures without meaningfully improving protection.

Regulatory changes can further distort the picture. When product rules or commission structures are modified, premium growth often slows temporarily as insurers recalibrate. Penetration may then appear to decline. This does not mean fewer families are insured – it simply reflects a shift in how insurance is sold and priced. Treating such movements as evidence of poor coverage leads to confused diagnosis and poor decision-making.

Insurance density has similar limitations. It is often used to compare India with richer countries, leading to the conclusion that Indians are underinsured because they spend less on insurance. But such comparisons ignore income levels and cost of living. A family paying a modest premium in India may be making a far greater financial commitment, relative to income, than a family paying a higher premium in a developed economy.

Premium vs protection

More importantly, both penetration and density confuse how much is paid with how much protection is received. In India, insurance products have long been sold as savings instruments rather than as pure protection. As a result, premiums can be high even when the life cover provided is modest. Premiums rise, but the financial security of dependents does not improve proportionately.

This gap between premiums and protection becomes clearer when claims data are examined. According to the IRDAI Annual Report 2024-25, life insurers settled a little over 10 lakh individual death claims during the year, paying a total of about ₹33,000 crore. This translates to an average payout of roughly ₹3.3 lakh per claim, showing a 97% claim settlement ratio.

While this reflects efficient claim settlement, it also indicates the level of financial support that life insurance typically delivers to bereaved families. For most households, such an amount would replace income for only a short period, if at all. Yet these claim payouts fully count towards insurance penetration and density. The numbers look reassuring, even though the underlying protection is often thin. This is why headline indicators can suggest progress while households remain financially vulnerable.

This confusion matters because it shapes how the problem is framed.

Rethinking adequacy

When India is labelled "underinsured" on the basis of these metrics, the implied conclusion is that people lack awareness or access. In reality, many households – especially in the formal and semi-formal sectors – already own at least one life insurance policy, either individually or through employers. The real issue is not reach, but adequacy. Families may have insurance, but not enough to replace lost income if something goes wrong.

This is not an argument for abandoning penetration and density altogether. These indicators are useful for tracking the growth of the insurance industry and for making broad international comparisons. But they are poorly suited to guiding public policy aimed at household protection. When revenue-based measures are treated as indicators of social security, they obscure more than they reveal.

A more meaningful approach would begin with simpler, more direct questions: how many households actually have some form of life insurance cover – whether individual, employer-provided, or through government schemes? And for those that do, how much life cover do they have relative to their income? These questions focus on protection, not premium collection.

Such measures are often dismissed as difficult to compute. In reality, much of the required data already exists – in regulatory filings, census household counts, and records of group insurance schemes. The goal need not be perfect precision. For public policy, understanding broad gaps in protection is far more important than tracking exact premium flows.

As long as India continues to rely on penetration and density as shorthand for insurance adequacy, the debate will remain confused. Premium growth risks being mistaken for progress, and industry expansion will be equated with social security.

Clear thinking begins with clear measurement. In life insurance, that means shifting the focus from how much money is collected to how well families are protected.

(T.C. Suseel Kumar is a former Managing Director of LIC and R. Sudhakar is a former Executive Director of LIC)

THE GIST

- Insurance penetration and density are often misunderstood and do not reveal how many families are insured or whether they would be financially secure if the main earning member were to die.
- The real issue is not reach but adequacy, as households may have life insurance but not enough cover to replace lost income, leaving them financially vulnerable.

Is compulsory voting feasible in the Indian context?

How can voter turnout be increased without making voting mandatory?

Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The Election Commission has announced the poll schedule for five Assembly elections to be held in April-May 2026. In a separate hearing before the Supreme Court on a poll-related matter, the court raised questions regarding mandatory voting in elections.

What is the right to vote in India?

Article 326 of the Constitution grants every citizen the right to vote without any discrimination. It provides that any citizen who is not less than 18 years old and is not otherwise disqualified under the Constitution or any law on certain grounds is entitled to be registered as a voter.

Section 19 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, requires a citizen to be at least 18 years old and ordinarily resident in a constituency to be registered as an elector. Section 62 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, provides the right to vote to every person whose name is entered in the electoral roll of a constituency. In various cases, the Supreme Court has held that the right to vote is a statutory right.

Should voting be made compulsory?

Voting is essential for a functional democracy, but it is neither a fundamental duty nor a legal duty in India. Proposals for compulsory voting have long been debated.

The Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms, set up in 1990, did not favour compulsory voting, citing practical difficulties in implementation. Instead, it recommended improving voter participation through awareness campaigns.

The Law Commission, in its 255th report (2015), discussed the issue in detail. Compulsory voting does result in increased voter turnout by an average of about 7%. Nevertheless, this increase in participation is a direct corollary of the severity and strict enforcement of penalties for not voting.

Some democracies, such as Australia and several Latin American countries, have provisions for compulsory voting. In Australia, Argentina, and Brazil, voters may be fined if they fail to vote without valid reasons. In Peru, certain public goods and services are denied to non-voters.

Penalising non-voters by imposing fines or restricting their access to government services is an extremely harsh measure that will not work in the Indian context. From a constitutional perspective, compulsory voting could be seen as violating the fundamental right to freedom of expression under Article 19(1).

What can be the way forward?

Low voter turnout can result in candidates winning by securing a minority of the total votes in a constituency.

However, as discussed in the Law Commission report, compulsory voting is neither desirable nor feasible in India. The solution lies in fostering enthusiasm amongst voters to exercise their right to vote through innovative campaigns, especially using social media.

For migrant workers, stricter implementation of the statutory holiday on the day of polling, coupled with an increase in transport facilities by running special buses and trains, can effectively increase participation. With the advent of newer technologies, robust and secure methods acceptable to all stakeholders for remote voting should be considered.

(Rangarajan R. is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified.' He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views expressed are personal)

THE GIST

- The right to vote in India is a statutory right under Article 326 and the Representation of the People Act, and compulsory voting is neither a fundamental duty nor a legal duty.
- While higher voter turnout shows a more representative democracy, compulsory voting is neither desirable nor feasible, and the focus should be on awareness, enthusiasm, and better access for voters.

CACHE

AP

As West Asia war threatens gas supply, remembering a gas grid India never built

India's push for the National Coal Gasification Mission to secure energy independence recalls a visionary 1955 proposal by Syed Husain Zaheer; initially dismissed by policymakers, Zaheer's plan for a national gas grid was vindicated by the 1973 global oil shock

Dinesh C Sharma

The ongoing war in West Asia has plunged the world into a deep energy crisis. In India, the availability of domestic fuel, LPG, has been hit due to the disruption in supplies from the Persian Gulf. The global energy crisis is reminiscent of the Oil Shock of 1973, when members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cut oil production and slashed exports to protest the U.S.'s support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. India responded by exploring alternative sources of energy, offshore oilfields in Bombay High, and experimenting with new technologies.

One technological option that found a second life this way was coal gasification.

The idea of using gasified coal to meet some of India's fuel needs first emerged in 1955 when Syed Husain Zaheer, director of the Regional Research Laboratory Hyderabad (RRLH) – now the CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) – and later director-general of CSIR, submitted a plan to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru for a cross-country national gas grid. The plan envisaged the use of fuel gas produced from gasifying of coal and its supply through pipelines for domestic and industrial use. Zaheer believed fuel gas of high calorific value could be produced by completely gasifying non-caking fuels such as shale coal, lignite, and bituminous coal, all found in India.

'Town Gas Supply Scheme'

The technology involved gasifying coal using high pressure to form hydrocarbons and using oxygen to maintain a high thermal efficiency. It started with converting the sulphur present in the coal to hydrogen sulphide (H_2S) and small amounts of carbonyl sulphide (COS). Sulphur compounds are then removed from the gas stream and the separated acid gas is further processed to recover elemental sulphur.

The gas was further cleaned using water scrubbing to remove any remaining particulate matter.

In the 1940s, coal gasification was used at a commercial scale to provide town gas for street lighting in Europe and the U.S. But the concept's techno-economic feasibility had yet to be established for Indian coal.

Initially, Zaheer proposed a "Town Gas Supply Scheme" for Hyderabad based on gasifying coal found in the Singareni collieries and piping it to the city. If a gasification plant were established at Kothagudem, gas could be supplied not only to Hyderabad but also to towns along the 290-km-long route, per the plan. Based on surveys of fuel consumption, population and demand projections, family income, and fuel demand trends, Zaheer proposed a pressure gasification plant of 7.5 million cubic feet capacity, and suggested the gas pipeline could be laid along the railway track to facilitate easy maintenance and inspections.

Tough going

To demonstrate the technology's feasibility, pilot studies were needed, which in turn required funding. Zaheer's idea did not find any takers in the Central government or the CSIR. On the energy front, the policy focus at the time was on finding petroleum reserves and the development of nuclear energy, besides harnessing hydroelectric power from large dams. So in 1961, Zaheer urged Nehru to make a policy decision to establish several plants for manufacturing town gas based on coal gasification in select coal belts and linking them through a countrywide grid. Nehru liked the plan and observed that it was "a modern and more economical method, and it will bring enormous relief to the railways". But the Ministry of Steel, Mines and Fuel pointed to the "infeasibility of the plan for transporting gas over long distances". The Planning Commission, the Coal Council, and the CSIR, as well, remained cold to the proposal and were reluctant to fund a pilot plant to test coal gasification.

When Nehru appointed Zaheer the CSIR director-general in 1962, Zaheer got a chance to implement his idea to develop a pilot plant at RRLH. But the going was not easy as the plan required importing equipment. The wars of 1962 and 1965 did not help, delaying the procurement of machinery from Germany, and there was a massive cost overrun due to the devaluation of the rupee.

The project came to a halt as soon as Zaheer's term ended in 1966. His successor, Atma Ram, formed a committee to review the project. The panel gave an adverse report saying "it would not be advisable to establish and operate the plant in a manner proposed by RRLH" and suggested that the imported equipment be disposed of.

Back then, there was strong opposition to CSIR labs setting up pilot plants to demonstrate technologies they had developed. This was despite the RRLH having already been running a successful semi-commercial pilot plant on another coal technology: low temperature carbonisation. Following the RRLH model, the National Chemicals Laboratory in Pune and the Indian Institute of Petroleum in Dehradun erected pilot plants as well.

'Had we listened...'

After several reviews and controversies, the coal gasification project at RRLH received the go-ahead in 1972 and the crates of imported machinery were opened seven years after they had landed in Hyderabad. The project also received an unexpected boost: the Oil Shock in October 1973. The shortage of petroleum products sent the government scurrying for alternative fuels, recognising that "in the perspective of the country's long-term energy requirements, consideration should be given to installing small to medium coal gasification plants to produce gas".

"It is now abundantly clear that a coal-based energy strategy is the only realistic course for us," Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced, recognising the past mistakes. In her inaugural speech at the Indian Science Congress session at Bhubaneswar in January 1977, she admitted, "Had we listened, in the early '60s, to Dr. Husain Zaheer's plea, and based our chemical feedstock policy not merely on oil but on the abundant coal reserves, we would have withstood the oil crisis with much less strain."

However, by the time RRLH erected the coal gasification pilot plant, the technology had moved to the next level. The pilot plant was used as a test bed for research on the integrated gasification combined cycle (IGCC), in collaboration with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL), which commissioned the first such plant in 1985. Unlike coal gasification to produce town gas, IGCC combines gas production from coal with electricity generation. The syngas produced by gasifying coal was used to run a power plant generating electricity. Gas-fired turbines were used to produce electricity and the excess heat was routed to steam-driven turbines.

Second wind

Although India began early with fuel R&D with national laboratories engaged in coal, petroleum, and geophysics research, the funding was suboptimal and projects lacked the necessary industrial linkages. Policymakers and competing interests failed to see the need for long-term research in this area.

Interest in clean coal technologies has been revived as climate action has intensified. The National Coal Gasification Mission, which India launched in 2021, aims to gasify 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030. "The adoption of gasification technology in India will revolutionise the coal sector, reducing reliance on imports of natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential products," according to a government statement.

Massive investments to the tune of ₹85,000 crore have been committed to the Mission. Coal India Limited and BHEL also floated a new company, Bharat Coal Gasification & Chemicals Limited, in 2024 to work on clean coal technologies.

(Dinesh C. Sharma is a New Delhi-based journalist and author, and has written books on India's post-1947 science and technology journey)

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

A quiz to mark World Meteorological Day, observed annually on March 23

V. V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
In which European city is the World Meteorological Organization headquartered?

QUESTION 2
Expand GRIB, the concise data format commonly used in meteorology to store historical and forecast weather data.

QUESTION 3
To a meteorologist, what is an 'okta', a scale of measurement?

QUESTION 4
What is the term for rain that falls from a cloud but evaporates before reaching the ground, seen as streaks under a cloud?

QUESTION 5
Parts of Kerala witnessed 'blood rain' as recently as 2012. What was the prime cause for such a freak downpour?

QUESTION 6
What is the everyday two-word term for a strong, high-altitude wind band that pilots use to save time and fuel on long flights?

QUESTION 7
The recurring natural phenomenon characterised by fluctuating ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific, coupled with changes in the atmosphere, is the ENSO. Expand ENSO.

Visual Question:
Name the Indian scientist who in his capacity as the chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) received the Nobel Peace Prize, along with Al Gore, in 2007. REUTERS

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 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. **Ans: Red Dawn**
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 convicted in a U.S. Federal Court. What was the firm called then? And which U.S. President pardoned the four employees? **Ans: Blackwater; Donald Trump**
3. George W. Bush had insisted that Iraq was a "gathering threat" that had to be confronted. What did he say Iraq possessed? **Ans: Weapons of mass destruction**
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. **Ans: France**
5. Mr. Bush referred to an axis of evil — governments that he alleged had sponsored terrorism. Name the three countries he was referring to. **Ans: Iraq, Iran, North Korea**
Visual: A tapestry copy of this painting can be found at the United Nations headquarters. **Ans: Guernica**
Early Birds: Haridas Pal | Sunil Madhavan | Arun Kumar Singh | Dodo Jayaditya | Lalchand Bhutani

KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Organising the trip was like herding cats

She is in the doghouse for not calling her parents

S. Upendran

"Looks like the two-day conference has left you exhausted. What time did the delegates leave yesterday?"

"Some of them had a flight late in the evening. They left only around 9:00 PM."

"How were the delegates? Did they enjoy themselves or did..."

"We had a little over 200 people, and they gave us a pretty hard time. Getting all of them into a room was like herding cats."

"Herding cats? Never heard it before! What does it mean?"

"Have you ever managed to get a cat to do what you wanted it to?"

"I don't think anyone has managed to do that! It does what it wants to, and not what someone tells it to!"

"Absolutely right! Cats have a mind of their own and, therefore, cannot be controlled. And that's what the expression 'herding cats' means: trying to do the impossible."

"In other words, when you attempt to 'herd cats', you're trying to achieve the impossible. You're trying to bring about order and discipline among people who do not have those qualities."

"Very good! Here's an example. Trying to get two small kids ready for school is like herding cats."

"It certainly is. I've seen my sister struggle with her two brats! Here's another example. The photographer said that getting all my classmates to stand still and look at the camera was like herding cats."

"I can imagine. Getting twenty people to agree on a movie that we could all watch after dinner was like herding cats. Are you leaving already?"

"Have to do a bit of shopping. Would you like to come along?"

"You and shopping! That's pretty unusual, indeed! What are you..."

"I need to buy a pair of sandals. After that, I plan to visit Sujatha and ask her about...."

"In that case, I'm not coming. She's pretty mad at me."

"Mad at you?"

"As you know, last week was her birthday. I forgot all about it because of the conference."

"So, now you're in the doghouse."

"In the doghouse?"

"The expression suggests that you're in trouble with someone. You've done something to upset the person."

"The students landed themselves in the doghouse when the Principal caught them jumping over the wall."

"Good example! If I don't submit my project on time, I'll be in the doghouse."

"But tell me, what is the connection between being in a doghouse and being in trouble?"

"Where is the doghouse usually located?"

"A doghouse or a kennel is usually found outside a house – away from the warmth and..."

"Exactly! A dog is usually sent packing to its kennel when it has misbehaved or has done some mischief."

"So, when do you think you'll get back into Sujatha's good books?"

"Not for a while, I'm afraid!"

"Till then, we'll have to look for you in the doghouse, I guess!"

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Word of the day

Swanky:
imposingly fashionable and elegant

Synonyms: classy, trendy

Usage: *They moved into a swanky new apartment.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/swanky

International Phonetic Alphabet: /swæŋki/

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