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No unusual pattern for HMPV, says WHO
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IN BRIEF



AAP, BJP spar over expenditure on govt. residences

NEW DELHI

The politics over opulence continued to play out in the national capital on Wednesday, with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party and the BJP accusing each other of extravagant expenditure on government residences. » Page 13

Congress promises ₹25 lakh health cover to Delhiites

NEW DELHI

A day after the Delhi Assembly poll schedule was announced, the Congress on Wednesday promised ₹25 lakh health insurance cover under its proposed 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana' for every resident if voted to power. » Page 2

6 killed, 20 hurt in Tirupati stampede

Thousands of people had gathered to collect tickets for temple festival tomorrow; Naidu directs action against TTD employees found guilty

The Hindu Bureau

TIRUMALA



Rush for darshan: People gather near a ticket counter at Vishnu Nivasam in Tirupati on Wednesday. ANI

Six persons were killed and more than 20 critically injured in a stampede at Tirupati late on Wednesday evening as people jostled for tickets for the Vaikunta Ekadasi festival at the Tirumala temple on Friday, the Chairman of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Trust Board, B.R. Naidu, said.

The TTD had set up around 90 counters at various locations in Tirupati and announced that tickets would be made available from 5 a.m. on Thursday. The announcement drew tens of thousands of people, eager to ensure their place for darshan.

However, the overwhelming crowd at the

counters, including Vishnu Nivasam, Bairagipetteda, and Ramachandra Pushkarini, led to chaos as the arrangements were reportedly not adequate. The police had a tough time controlling the crowd.

The injured were rushed to the government-run Sri Venkateswara Ramnarain Ruia Hospital for treatment. Authorities have yet to confirm the identities of the deceased and the injured.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu expressed shock over the incident and instructed the TTD and police officials to extend the best medical care. He called for strict action against the employees responsible for the incident.

Data Rules to be rolled out by mid-2025, says Vaishnaw

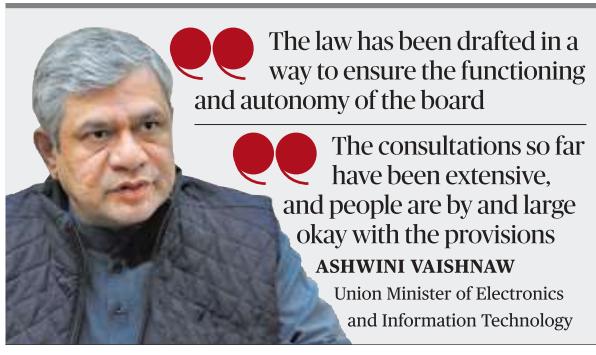
Varghese K. George
Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Union government is aiming at finalising and notifying the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, currently in a draft state, by the middle of the year, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw has said.

"The consultations so far have been extensive, and people are by and large okay with the provisions," Mr. Vaishnaw said in an exclusive interview with *The Hindu* on Wednesday. "I don't see too many amendments coming in the final notification beyond some tweaks."

While large firms are prepared to comply quickly with most of the Rules, Mr. Vaishnaw said that a maximum of two years are being given for implementation. This will allow certain categories of data fiduciaries some more time to prepare for the full implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, which the Rules seek to operationalise. The government is currently accepting stakeholder comments on the draft until February 18.

"The law has been drafted in a way to ensure the functioning and autonomy of the board," Mr. Vaishnaw said, adding that the implementation of the Act would be digital in nature. The same approach has been followed in at



The law has been drafted in a way to ensure the functioning and autonomy of the board

The consultations so far have been extensive, and people are by and large okay with the provisions
ASHWINI VAISHNAW
Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology

least one other institution: the Grievance Appellate Committee, which deals with social media complaints under the IT Rules, 2021.

Promoting components
On electronics manufacturing, Mr. Vaishnaw said, "We are working on a programme for promoting and incentivising component manufacturing in our country", adding to existing schemes for IT hardware and semiconductors.

FULL INTERVIEW ON
» PAGE 13

Army retrieves one body from Assam mine; no sign of others

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Army divers on Wednesday retrieved the body of a Nepalese miner from a flooded coal mine in Dima Hasao district of Assam. Despite efforts by multiple agencies and a remotely operated search vehicle, no signs have yet been found of the other eight miners who have been trapped over 48 hours.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that Army's 21 Para divers had recovered a body from the bottom of the coal mine on Wednesday morning. "The body recovered has been identified as that of Ganga Bahadur Sresth from Udayapur district in Nepal," he said.

Meanwhile, the BJP-ruled North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council has come under fire for allegedly allowing illegal coal mining in the area.

Simultaneous elections: MPs on House committee seek more time for deliberations

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

At the first meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on two Bills on conducting simultaneous polls on Wednesday, Opposition members argued that the panel should be given at least a year to complete its work, considering the scope and scale of deliberations required.

The committee has time till the first week of the next session of Parliament, which is likely to begin on January 31, leaving it with just three weeks.

The meeting began with a presentation by the Union Ministry of Law and

Opposition members argued that the panel should be given at least one year to complete its work

Justice on the provisions of the Bills. Opposition members said the two Bills violated the basic structure doctrine of the Constitution, since they sought to make the State legislature subordinate to the national legislature.

Several members questioned the government's argument that simultaneous polls are better for the economy. According to sources, Lok Sabha mem-

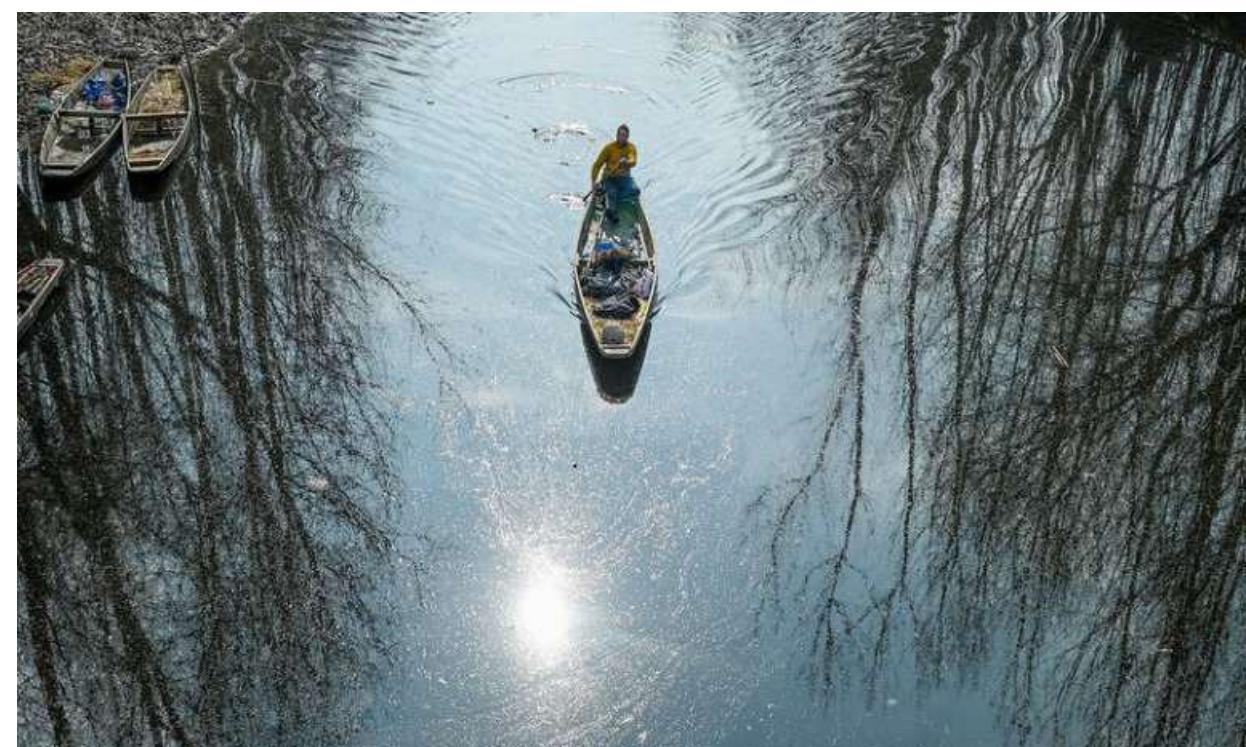
ber and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said all the studies quoted by former President Ram Nath Kovind-led high-level committee to claim that simultaneous polls will significantly reduce expenditure, are from the pre-EVM era.

Members also asked if the cost of holding elections has come down since the 2004 Lok Sabha election when EVMs were used for the first time in all 543 seats. Seeking answers from a different perspective, BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj and Shiv Sena (Shinde) MP Srikant Shinde wanted the Law Ministry to give an exact estimate of the jump

expected in per capita GDP with simultaneous polls.

Key BJP ally Janata Dal (United) questioned the efficacy of the legislation in a multi-party polity such as India. According to sources, the party's national working president and Rajya Sabha member Sanjay K. Jha said, "If a State government falls in three years, then as the legislation says, the new government will hold office only for the remainder of the five-year period. Doesn't this dilute the mandate of the new government which will only have a two-year term? Why would the voters take such a government seriously?"

Merry morning



Beating on: A person rows his boat on the outskirts of Srinagar on a cold winter morning on Wednesday. IMRAN NISSAR

Centre's move to replace post of Adviser to Chandigarh Administrator with Chief Secy. sparks row in Punjab

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

A political controversy erupted in Punjab on Wednesday over the Centre's decision to abolish the post of the Adviser to the Chandigarh Administrator and replace it with the post of the Chief Secretary of the Union Territory, which is the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana.

The announcement came through a gazette notification on January 3 by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances, and Pensions.

Political parties in Punjab, including the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Congress, and the Shromani Akali Dal (SAD), criticised the BJP-led Centre and demanded an immediate rollback of the



The Union government's decision is an attempt to weaken Punjab's claim over Chandigarh. The appointment of a Chief Secretary is meant for a State. Chandigarh is not a State, nor does it have a Chief Minister.

NEEL GARG
AAP spokesperson

decision.

Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Partap Singh Bajwa of the Congress termed the development "an assault on Punjab's rightful claim over Chandigarh" and "an attack on Punjab's dignity and rights".

He said, "I strongly con-

Punjab and marginalise Punjabis. By bypassing Punjab in this critical decision, the BJP is once again showcasing its utter disregard for federalism and its dictatorial mindset," he added.

SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal warned the Central government against proceeding in the matter and accused it of "actively colluding" with the ruling AAP in the decision-making process.

Mr. Badal said that the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab is "a settled issue committed by two Prime Ministers of the country and endorsed by the Union Cabinet as well as by both Houses of the Parliament", following the Memorandum of Settlement on Punjab in July 1985.

Senior Akali leader Dal-

jit Singh Cheema said Chandigarh "belongs to Punjab" and demanded that the Centre reverse its decision without delay.

The AAP unit of Punjab also opposed the decision, saying it "once again exposes the anti-Punjab attitude of the Central government".

Addressing a press conference, AAP spokesperson Neel Garg said, "The decision is an attempt to weaken Punjab's claim over Chandigarh. The appointment of a Chief Secretary is meant for a State. Chandigarh is not a State, nor does it have a Chief Minister. Then why was there a need to appoint a Chief Secretary?"

"The people of Punjab won't accept the decision. The Centre must withdraw it," he added.

Forecast for 2023 Delhi floods was inaccurate as flow of Yamuna was marred by silt, muck: Centre to NGT

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Water Commission's (CWC) forecast ahead of the 2023 floods in Delhi, the worst in the national capital's history, was "not as accurate as expected", the panel has said in a report to the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

This was so, the CWC said in its January 4 report, because floodwaters could not flow freely along the Yamuna river stretch between Wazirabad and Okhla. It stated that for the flood forecasts to be accurate, river channels need to be in a "free flow condition".

However, the report added, the river flow was found to be impaired due

to the "non-opening of all the gates of the ITO barrage, formation of islands of silt deposits, growth of trees in the river, and muck disposal at various locations due to construction activities across the river".

In response to a suo motu NGT case, based on an article by *The Hindu* published last year about how the CWC had forecast Yamuna's level to "remain steady" even as it continued to rise through July 12 to reach the highest-ever level – 208.66 metres – the following day.



Floodwaters in central Delhi's ITO in July 2023. FILE PHOTO

to the "non-opening of all the gates of the ITO barrage, formation of islands of silt deposits, growth of trees in the river, and muck disposal at various locations due to construction activities across the river".

The submissions by the panel, which monitors floods in the country, came

Kejriwal thanks TMC for 'backing' AAP; rift with Cong. widens

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said its INDIA bloc partner, Trinamool Congress (TMC), has extended its support to AAP for the upcoming Delhi Assembly election.

The TMC is the second INDIA bloc party to back AAP, isolating the Congress, which is also part of the alliance.

"TMC has announced support to AAP in Delhi election. I am personally grateful to Mamta Didi. Thank you Didi. U have always supported and blessed us in our good and bad times (sic)," Mr. Kejriwal said in a post on X.

Replying to Kejriwal, TMC's Rajya Sabha member Derek O'Brien said, "We have your back, Aam Aadmi Party."

However, there was no official statement from the TMC on the development. Talking to the media, TMC leader Kunal Ghosh said the party wants the BJP to lose everywhere, but the final decision and strategy about Delhi will be an-

nounced by party chief Mamata Banerjee.

Generally, the TMC does not field any candidates for the Delhi Assembly election.

On Tuesday, reacting to news that Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav has offered his support to AAP, Mr. Kejriwal had said in a post on X, "Thank you very much Akhileshji. You always support and stand with us. I and the people of Delhi are grateful for this."

Cong-BJP cooperation'

Responding to a video in which Congress leader Ashok Gehlot could be seen saying that AAP is the opposition in Delhi, Mr. Kejriwal said in a post on X, "Gehlotji. You made it clear that AAP is the opposition for Congress in Delhi. You remained silent on BJP. People had also felt that AAP is the opposition for Congress and BJP is its partner. People also believed that BJP and Congress are fighting the elections together against AAP. Till now this cooperation between you two was secret. Today you have made it public."

Congress unveils second poll guarantee, promises ₹25 lakh health insurance to residents

Ashok Gehlot says scheme to be modelled after Rajasthan Mukhyamantri Chiranjeevi Yojana introduced during his tenure; AAP govt. has reduced healthcare services to a shambles: Yadav

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after the Election Commission announced the schedule for Delhi Assembly poll, the Congress on Wednesday promised a ₹25 lakh health insurance cover for every resident under its proposed 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana' if voted to power.

This is the second such guarantee announced by the party. On Monday, it announced the 'Pyaari Didi Yojana' to give monthly financial assistance of ₹2,500 per month for women in the city. The party is expected to announce three more guarantees in a phased manner.

Senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot announced the proposed scheme at a press conference in the city and said the initiative will be modelled after the Chiranjeevi scheme from Rajasthan,



Poll-ready: Senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot, AICC Delhi in-charge Qazi Mohammad Nizamuddin and Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav in New Delhi on Wednesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

which was launched during his tenure.

Calling it a game changer, Mr. Gehlot said the scheme will provide free medical treatment to the people of Delhi, regardless of their economic status, through universal health insurance of up to ₹25 lakh.

"People have faith in the credibility of the Congress to deliver on its promises, especially after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) misled the people with false

promises and ruined the Capital with 10 years of misrule," Mr. Gehlot said.

He said Rajasthan's universal health insurance scheme to all families living in the State, implemented when he was the Chief Minister, offered coverage of up to ₹25 lakh and provided cashless claim facilities at all network hospitals (medical facilities that have a direct agreement with health insurance provider) for an annual premium of ₹850, which is waived for families

living and earning below the poverty line.

Highlighting that 30 lakh people had benefited from this scheme during his tenure, Mr. Gehlot said, "The [Narendra] Modi government at the Centre should implement the right to health scheme throughout the country as it will provide complete health care, including organ transplants, CT scan, MRI, free medicines, accident treatment etc., free of cost."

'Health risks to people'

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said the 'Jeevan Raksha Yojana' is a necessity to protect the people of Delhi who face severe health risks from air and water pollution, and adulteration in food.

"The AAP government has reduced healthcare services to a shambles in the Capital, with Mohalla Clinics mocking at the people without staff, equipment and medicines," he said.

Atishi again seeks meeting with CEC over electoral roll

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Atishi on Wednesday sought an appointment with the Chief Election Commissioner for the second time this week, on the issue of alleged large-scale fraud in electoral roll in New Delhi Assembly constituency.

"I had sought an appointment from your good office for a meeting to apprise you of the issue in person. However, in response to my letter, my office has received a correspondence (attached) from Lalit Mittal, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Delhi, stating that the office is ascertaining the facts mentioned in my letter," the letter read.

On Monday, the Chief Minister had accused the BJP of committing "a large-scale fraud" in the electoral roll of New Delhi Assembly constituency while also remarking upon the Election Commission of India's (EC) "highly suspicious approach" in the matter.

The Chief Minister, in



her letter, said with less than 27 days left for the Delhi Assembly election, the matter "should be considered with highest priority".

"Delhi is the only State going to polls during this time, and the entire country and its media will closely follow the election and its processes. We place our trust in the Election Commission of India to uphold the principles of free and fair elections. Once again, I would like to ask you to please give an appointment as soon as possible to ensure free and fair election," she said.

AAP claims some members of BJP cell now in its ranks



Spiritual mode: AAP national convener with spiritual leaders at an event in New Delhi on Wednesday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday said some members of the Bharatiya Janata Party's 'Pandit Prakoshth' (priest cell), joined AAP's 'Sanatana Sewa Samiti'. Welcoming the new members at a press conference at the party headquarters, Mr. Kejriwal, se-

nior party leader Manish Sisodia and others took part in Hanuman Chalisa recitation at the event.

"After the elections we will implement the 'Pujari-Granthi Samman Yojana' in Delhi. The guidance of all saints and devotees of Sanatana Dharma will be vital. Following that guidance, we will carry this forward. I believe this is a

great moment of pride and fortune for AAP, and I express my heartfelt gratitude for this," Mr. Kejriwal said.

"Today, I consider myself extremely fortunate that our platform is graced by the presence of jagatgurus, mahamandaleshwars, and so many saints and spiritual leaders," the AAP chief added.

Delhi CEO urges parties to maintain transparency in campaign finance

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

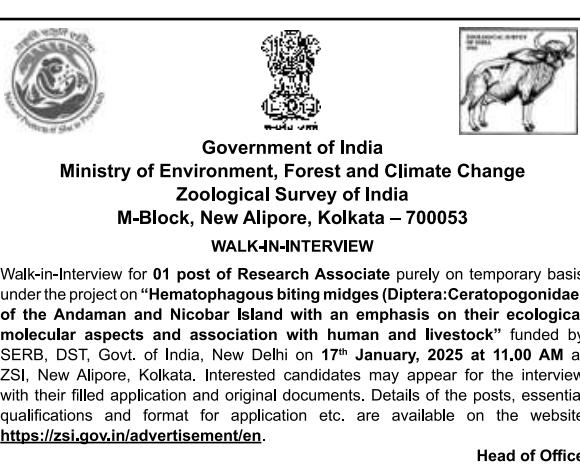
Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) R. Alice Vaz on Wednesday convened a meeting with the representatives of various political parties and briefed them on the implementation of the model

code of conduct (MCC) and election expenditure monitoring measures to ensure free, fair, and transparent polling.

On Tuesday, the Election Commission fixed February 5 as the polling date for Delhi Assembly, with results set to be declared on Febru-

ary 8. During the meeting, Ms. Vaz emphasised the importance of the MCC, which came into effect after the poll schedule was announced. The CEO also urged the parties to maintain transparency in campaign finances and to submit expenditure details.

Himachal Pradesh Public Works Department Standard Bid Documents for NABARD SECTION-I Executive Engineer HPPWD Kasauli Distt Solan (Name of Authority Inviting Bids) NOTICE INVITING TENDER (NIT)									
The Executive Engineer HPPWD PWD Kasauli Distt Solan HP on behalf of Governor of HP invites the percentage rate, in electronic tendering system, for construction of roads under National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development for the following works including maintenance for five years from the eligible and approved contractor registered with HPPWD and HP Jal Shakti Vibhag (Contractor of HP Jal Shakti Vibhag are eligible to participate for the works having amount put to tender above Rs.100 Lacs)Non registered contractor may submit the bids, however successful bidder has to register in appropriate class with appropriate authority in HPPWD.									
Sr. No	Division	RIDF	Name of work		Estimated cost (Rs. Lacs)	Total cost (Rs Lacs)	Period of completion (Months)	Bid Security (Rs. Lacs)	The bid security is 2% of the total cost, rounded to the nearest thousands
			Constr-uction	Mainte-nance					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Kasauli	XXX	Upgradation of Goni to Sari road via Bohron in Km. 0/00 to 6/50.(SH-Formation cutting, Retaining Structures, P/L Cross drainage Works, P/L GSB, WMM, Tarring, road side drain, C/O Parapets, sign boards, and road safety works etc. in Km. 0/00 to 6/50)Under NABARD RIDF-XXX.	567.75 Lac	48.47 Lac	616.22 Lac	Eighteen Months	12.32 Lac	
2.	Kasauli	XXX	Improvement and Strengthening of Kimmughat to Chakkhi Ka Mod road in Km. 0/00 to 16/380.(SH- Removal of Formation deficiency, Retaining Structures, P/L Cross drainage works, P/L GSB, WMM, Tarring, road side drain, C/O Parapets, sign boards, and road safety works. Etc. in Km. 0/00 to 16/380)Under NABARD RIDF-XXX.	1315.90 Lac	121.96 Lac	1437.86	Eighteen Months	28.75 Lac	



RE-TENDER-CUM-AUCTION SALE NOTICE UNDER SARFAESI ACT 2002

The following property/ies mortgaged to City Union Bank Limited will be sold in Re-Tender-cum-Public Auction by the Authorised Officer of the Bank, under Rule 8 (6) & 9 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, under the SARFAESI Act, 2002, for recovery of a sum of Rs.71,81,512/- (Rupees Seventy One Lakh Eighty One Thousand Five Hundred and Twelve only) as on 05-01-2025 together with further interest to be charged from 06-01-2025 onwards and other expenses, any other dues to the Bank by the borrowers / guarantors No.1) Mrs. Mumtaz, W/o. Imtiaz Ahmed, at 3053, Gali Topi Wali, Sita Ram Bazar, Behind Kali Masjid, Delhi - 110006. (No.2) Mr. Mohd Ali, S/o. Imtiaz Ahmed, at 3053, Gali Topi Wali, Sita Ram Bazar, Behind Kali Masjid, Delhi - 110006.

Immovable Property Mortgaged to our Bank (Property Owned by Mr. Mohd Ali, S/o. Imtiaz Ahmed)

Entire Second Floor, with its roof having area measuring 58 Sq.yds. part of property bearing 3115/A, situated at Dhamar Gali, Ganesh Kalan, Kali Masjid, Delhi - 110006. Bounded as under: East: Gali, West: Others Property, North: Others Property, South: Property No.311.

Reserve Price : Rs. 14,00,00/- (Rupees Fourteen Lakhs only)

RE-AUCTION DETAILS

Date of Re-Tender-cum-Auction Sale	Venue
27-01-2025	City Union Bank Limited, New Delhi-Laxmi Nagar Branch, U-198, Shakarpur, Vikar Marg, Near Laxmi Nagar Metro Station, New Delhi - 110092. Telephone No.011-22501110, Cell No. 9312620592.

Terms and Conditions of Re-Tender-cum-Auction Sale:

(1) The intending bidders should be present in person for the auction and participate personally and give a declaration in writing to the effect that he/she is bidding for himself / herself. (2) The intending bidders may obtain the Tender Forms from The Manager, City Union Bank Limited, New Delhi-Laxmi Nagar Branch, U-198, Shakarpur, Vikar Marg, Near Laxmi Nagar Metro Station, New Delhi - 110092. (3) The intending bidders should submit their bids in the Tender Form prescribed in sealed envelopes addressed to The Authorised Officer, City Union Bank Ltd., together with a Pay Order / Demand Draft for an EMD of 10% of the Reserve Price, drawn in favour of "City Union Bank Ltd.", or on or before 12.00 Noon on the date of Tender-cum-Auction Sale hereby notified. (4) For inspection of the property and other particulars, the intending purchaser may contact Telephone No.011-22501110, Cell No. 9312620592. (5) The property/ies are sold on "As-is-where-is", "As-is-what-is" and "whatever-there-is" basis. (6) The sealed tenders will be opened in the presence of the intending bidders at 01.00 p.m. on the date of Tender-cum-Auction Sale hereby notified. Though in general the sale will be by way of closed tenders, the Authorised Officer may, at his sole discretion, conduct an Open Auction among the interested bidders who desire to quote a bid higher than the one received in the closed tender process, and in such an event, the sale shall be conferred on the person making highest bid. The sale, however, will be subject to confirmation of City Union Bank Limited. (7) The successful bidder shall have to pay 25% (inclusive of EMD paid) of the sale amount immediately on completion of sale and the balance amount of 75% will be forfeited. (8) The Sale Certificate will be issued by the Authorised Officer in favour of the successful purchaser only after receipt of the entire sale consideration within the time limit stipulated herein. (9) The successful purchaser shall bear the charges/fees payable for conveyance, such as stamp duty, registration fee etc., as applicable under law. (10) The successful bidder should pay the statutory dues (lawful house tax, electricity charges and other dues), TDS, GST if any, due to Government, Government Undertaking and local bodies. (11) The Authorised Officer shall have all the powers to reject the bids or postpone or cancel the sale without assigning any reason whatsoever.

Place : Kumbakonam, Date : 07-01-2025

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY E-TENDERING TENDER NOTICE

Open e-Tenders on "Single Packet System" through E-Tender notice No. MCW-1ZN-OT-Crane Hiring are invited by Sr. Divisional Mechanical Engineer (C&W), North Eastern Railway, Itaznagar for and on behalf of President of India for the following work:

Name of work:- Hiring of One Hydraulic Road Mobile Crane for loading and unloading of Coach assembled bogies to/from the trailer at Coaching Depot Kathgodam and Rammagar for a period of one year. Estimated Value of work (Rs.): ₹ 14,86,663.6, Earnest Money (Rs.): ₹ 29,700/-, Cost of tender form NIL, Period of 12 Months from the date of issue of LOA.

• Date and time for closing of E-Tender: 28-01-2025 at 17:00 hrs.

- Tenderer may submit their E-Tenders online up to 17:00 hrs. on 28-01-2025.
- Please go to the Indian railway website www.reps.nic.in to see the complete details and upload/submit the E-Tender.
- DME (C & W) Head Office, Itaznagar
- CPOR/Jantri-101
- Izatnagar
- Never travel on roof and foot boards.

WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY OPEN TENDER

E-Tenders are invited on behalf of the President of India acting through Sr. Divisional Mechanical Engineer (Co-ordination), Divisional Railway Manager (Works), West Central Railway, Jabalpur for the following works: (1) Nit No.: DRMW-JBP-03-2025, Dated: 03/01/2025 Name of Work with Location: Mobile flush welding - 193 units in Jukehi-Kymore section under Divisional Engineer (North) Jabalpur section. Approx. cost of the work: ₹ 2,25,38,7

Is organising a protest enough for UAPA, HC asks Delhi Police

While hearing bail pleas of Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in the 'larger conspiracy' case of 2020 north-east Delhi riots, High Court says intent under the anti-terror law has to be established

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



The Delhi High Court on Wednesday asked the police if organising protests was enough to attract provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), an anti-terror law, in a February 2020 communal riots case.

A Bench of Justices Navin Chawla and Shalinder Kaur posed the query to the Special Public Prosecutor, Amit Prasad, while hearing the bail pleas of former Jawaharlal Nehru University student Umar Khalid and student activist Sharjeel Imam, among oth-

The peaceful protests by the accused were merely a facade and the actual plan was to commit mass violence.

AMIT PRASAD
Special Public Prosecutor

ers, in a case of "larger conspiracy" behind the violence.

The court said if there is evidence that the accused planned a violent act and executed it, provisions of the anti-terror law could be invoked.

"But when you draw at-

tention to something like a JACT (a WhatsApp group), and your argument is that they are organising protest sites, is that good enough?" said the Bench.

It added, "Most importantly for us, it is the intent under the UAPA that has to be established."

Mr. Prasad said that based on the evidence, including the statements of witnesses, the role of each accused in the case had been identified, which is why not all members of the WhatsApp group were named as accused.

To this, the court asked the Special Public Prosecutor to "come to the specifics then" and establish

how the accused were "instigating violence rather than having a protest".

Mr. Prasad argued that peaceful protests by the accused were merely a "facade" and that "the actual plan was to commit mass violence".

Hearing on Thursday
The court scheduled the next hearing of the case for Thursday.

Mr. Khalid, Mr. Imam and several others were booked under UAPA and provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

DU students clash over protest against professor accused of harassment

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Students from Delhi University's Left groups alleged that they were beaten up by members of the RSS-linked Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Wednesday.

Anosruto Dey, a member of the All India Students' Association (AISA), said they were planning to stage a demonstration against the presence of a professor of Ramjas Col-

lege on the campus despite being suspended for six weeks pending inquiry in a case of sexual harassment.

Left group students said they were assaulted by the ABVP members in an attempt to "protect the accused professor", ABVP, however, denied any role in the incident, adding that they have been protesting over the same issue.

Harsh Attri, the ABVP State secretary, said, "No ABVP member was involved in the violence."

Two more educational institutions get hoax bomb threats in Delhi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Two educational institutes in south Delhi, including Lady Shri Ram College, received bomb threats via emails received by Lady Shri Ram College. Another bomb threat call was received from Tagore International School in East of Kailash area at 11.17 a.m., the officer said.

A senior DFS official said that teams were immediately rushed to the site, but nothing suspicious was found. A dog squad and bomb disposal squad were part of the teams rushed to the spot, a police officer

said.

"We received two different calls informing us about the bomb threat emails received by Lady Shri Ram College. Another bomb threat call was received from Tagore International School in East of Kailash area at 11.17 a.m.," the officer said.

"We did a thorough check and assured the administrators that there was nothing suspicious on the premises," a senior Delhi police officer added.

Police oppose bail plea of AAP MLA Naresh Balyan

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Delhi police on Wednesday opposed the bail plea of AAP Uttam Nagar MLA Naresh Balyan in a case lodged under the stringent MCOCRA and alleged that he was a facilitator in the organised crime syndicate.

If bail was granted, Mr. Balyan could influence witnesses, destroy evidence and hamper the ongoing investigation, the police said.

"They (witnesses) have confessed that accused Naresh Balyan is facilitator/conspirator in the organised crime syndicate of Kapil Sangwan and he has provided money to one of member of syndicate after commission of crime for expenses during evading his arrest," special public prosecutor Akhanda Pratap Singh said.

The prosecutor cited 16 FIRs lodged against the alleged syndicate members in various parts of Delhi and claimed it had "created the havoc in the society and has amassed huge illegal wealth".

The matter will be heard next on Thursday.

CORRIGENDUM

In the advertisement published by Flaviant Network Private Limited dated January 8, 2025, it is hereby clarified that the phrase "more than 3500 students" should be read as "hundreds of students." The inadvertent error is deeply regretted.

Flaviant Network Private Limited

India's first battery energy storage system to go live in south Delhi's Kilokri in March

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Kilokri village.
BSES Rajdhani is the largest power distribution company in Delhi. It is a joint venture between the Reliance Group and the Delhi government.

₹120-crore project

Akash Gupta, a senior executive at BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd., told *The Hindu* that the electricity used to charge the system's batteries will come from the power company's renewable power purchase agreements. The Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission has approved the project.

The total outlay for the project is \$14 million, or nearly ₹120 crore, said Saubh Kumar, the vice president of the Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet (GEAPP), the principal funders of the project.

A visit to the location shows that the required batteries, being procured from China, have already been tested and are ready to be shipped. These will be housed in containers at Kilokri, said Pinkesh Kumar, head of regulatory affairs at IndiGrid Ltd., the company implementing the project for the discom.

Dr. B.R. AMBEDKAR SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY, BENGALURU

No: BASEU/34/2024

Date: 06/01/2025

ADMISSION NOTIFICATION: 2025-26

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Candidates are required to fill in a Common University Entrance Test (CUET) 2025-26 online application form and appear for the test conducted by National Testing Agency (NTA). Further details please visit <https://exams.nta.ac.in/CUET-PG/> or <https://cuetpg.ntaonline.in>. Admissions to the above-mentioned courses are based on performance in CUET 2025 and as per the eligibility criteria and other details please visit <http://base.ac.in>.

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- Start date for online application: 02/01/2025
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*All dates are subject to change depending on Government regulations.

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Join the Summit that powers progress in India's most vital sector.

SESSION LINE-UP

9:45 AM - 10:45 AM

Inauguration & Special Address

Devesh Chaturvedi (Secretary, Department of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare)

Ashish Kumar Bhutani (Secretary, Ministry of Co-operation)

Shaji KV (Chairman, NABARD)

Session 1: 10:45 AM - 11:30 AM

Why Monsoon Has Been Raining Woes Over The Last Few Years

Dr D S Pai (Scientist-G, India Meteorological Department)

Dr Nabansu Chattopadhyay (Director, Agricultural Meteorology Division, World Meteorological Organisation)

Ajai Rana (Chairman of Federation of Seed Industry of India and CEO, Savannah Seeds)

Neha Kumar (Head, South Asia Programme, Climate Bonds Initiative)

Moderated by Subramani Ra Mancombu (Head - Commodities & Agri-Business, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 2: 11:45 AM - 12:30 PM

Overcoming Climate Change with New Seeds, Strategies

Dr Venkatram Vasantavada (Director of Federation of Seed Industry of India & MD & CEO, SeedWorks International Ltd)

Ajeet Chahal (Rice Team Lead - Asia, Crop Science Division, Bayer)

S Soundararajane (Chief Executive Officer, HyFarm)

Sanjiv Kanwar (Managing Director, Yara South Asia)

Moderated by Vishwanath Kulkarni (Senior Deputy Editor, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 3: 12:30 PM - 1:30 PM

Interaction with Drone Didis

Moderated by Poornima Joshi (Chief of Bureau, Delhi, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 4: 2:00 PM - 2:45 PM

Tapping Digitisation, Technology for Agri Development

Arjun Ahluwalia (Founder & CEO, Jai Kisan)

Hemendra Mathur (Co-founder, ThinkAg)

Partha Ghosh (Program Lead, Social Alpha)

Dr Pares Verma (Executive Director, Shriram Bioseed Genetics)

Moderated by KV Kurmanath (Associate Editor, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 5: 2:45 PM - 3:15 PM

Interaction with Solar Didis

Moderated by Rishi Ranjan Kala (Senior Assistant Editor, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 6: 3:15 PM - 4:00 PM

Making Way for Biomass-Based Bio-Energy

Madhur Jain (Co-founder and CEO, Varaha)

Maninder Singh Nayyar (Founder & CEO, CEF)

Moderated by Richa Mishra (Chief of Bureau, Hyderabad, *The Hindu businessline*)

Session 7: 4:00 PM - 4:45 PM

Challenges in Price Risk Management

Kedar Deshpande (Chief Business Officer, NCDEX)

Rajesh Paharia Jain (Chief Manager, Business Development, Kribhco)

Sanjai V S (General Manager, ABU, State Bank of India)

Dr Ashutosh Kumar (General Manager, NABARD)

Moderated by Prabhudatta Mishra (Deputy Editor, *The Hindu businessline*)

4:45 PM - 5:15 PM

Valedictory Address

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IN BRIEF



Will adopt the best practices of Kumbh for Simhastha: M.P. CM

The Madhya Pradesh government will adopt the best practices of the Kumbh at Prayagraj and Haridwar during the Simhastha fair to be held in Ujjain in 2028, Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said. After the completion of the upcoming Kumbh in Prayagraj, a conference of companies and start-ups engaged in crowd management, drone survey and use of artificial intelligence will be organised in Ujjain, he said on Tuesday. This year, the Maha Kumbh will be held in U.P.'s Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26. In 2021, it was held in Haridwar in Uttarakhand. PTI

Uttarakhand students protest against 'privatisation' of college

The MBBS students of Haridwar Medical College on Wednesday staged a demonstration against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led State government for 'privatising' the recently inaugurated government institution. According to a communiqué from the State authorities, the government has decided to hand over the Haridwar Medical College to Sharda Educational Trust, which will run it under PPP mode. Anticipating a fee hike after the 'privatisation', the students demanded that the institution remain under the government's control.

Jarange-Patil, Dhas 'politicised' sarpanch murder: OBC activist

OBC activist Laxman Hake on Wednesday lambasted Maratha quota campaigner Manoj Jarange-Patil and BJP MLA Suresh Dhas for allegedly downplaying the seriousness of the murder of Santosh Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog village in Maharashtra's Beed district. Speaking at a condolence meeting in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district, Mr. Hake accused Mr. Jarange-Patil and Mr. Dhas of politicising the incident. "Where was Mr. Dhas when police personnel were assaulted in Antarpar Sarati during Jarange-Patil's quota agitation?" he said.

Bombay HC grants bail to two accused in Elgar Parishad case

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted bail to Delhi-based researcher Rona Wilson and activist Sudhir Dhawale, arrested in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case in 2018, stating that the trial in the case was yet to start. Granting the bail against a surety of ₹1 lakh each, a Division Bench of Justices A.S. Gadkari and Kamal Khata noted that the two had spent more than six years in jail as undertrial prisoners. The accused were directed to appear before the special NIA court during the trial, surrender their passports, and not leave Mumbai until the trial is over. PTI

Modi launches projects worth ₹2 lakh cr. on first Andhra trip since LS poll

PM says one of two green hydrogen hubs in the country will come up in Visakhapatnam; accompanied by Andhra Pradesh CM and Deputy CM, he also undertakes a brief roadshow

The Hindu Bureau
VISAKHAPATNAM

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday virtually laid the foundation stone and launched projects worth over ₹2 lakh crore in Visakhapatnam in what was his first visit to Andhra Pradesh after assuming the office of Prime Minister for the third consecutive term in 2024. The NDA alliance in Andhra Pradesh, consisting of Telugu Desam Party (TDP), BJP and Jana Sena Party (JSP), played a key role in forming the Union government.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan during a roadshow in Visakhapatnam on Wednesday. PTI

Amid cheers from the public, Mr. Modi, accompanied by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu and his deputy Pawan Kalyan, also undertook a brief roadshow here. Starting from Samarth Vinayak temple in the port city, the roadshow reached Andhra University College of Engineering grounds at Maddilapalem here, the venue of a public

meeting. Almost all the localities, especially the roads where PM was supposed to travel, were decorated with flags of TDP, BJP and JSP.

The Prime Minister said two green hydrogen hubs will be set up in the country out of which one will come up in Visakhapatnam as part of the National Green Hydrogen Mission and the country is aiming to produce 5 million tons of green hydrogen by 2030.

"The country launched the National Green Hydrogen Mission in 2023. Our aim is to make 5 million metric tons of green hydrogen production annually by 2030. As a first step, two green hydrogen hubs will be set up, out of which one is in Visakhapatnam," he said.

'Swarnandhra Pradesh'
As part of "Swarnandhra Pradesh", by 2047, the State is aiming to become approximately a \$2.5 trillion economy and the Centre will work with it in realising that vision, he said. Describing Andhra Pradesh as a "land of possibilities and opportunities", Mr. Modi said the time has come for it to become a centre of new futuristic technologies. Among other projects, he virtually laid the foundation stones for a railway zone in Visakhapatnam, the ₹1,518-crore Krishnapatnam industrial hub and a ₹1,877-crore bulk drug park in Nakkapalli.

Investment proposals trifurcated in Rajasthan after dissolution of nine districts

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

Amid indications that the dissolution of nine newly created districts could deter potential investors, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Rajasthan has decided to trifurcate the memorandums of understanding (MoUs) signed during the recent Rising Rajasthan Global Investment Summit-2024. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the three-day summit on December 9.

The three categories will be based on the levels of commitment and interest expressed by the investors.

MoUs worth ₹35 lakh crore were signed during the summit. A three-layer monitoring structure has already been formulated for smooth implementation of the proposals signed at the summit.

The State government had last month dissolved nine of the 17 districts created during the previous Congress regime and also annulled three new divisions carved out in 2023.

Following the controversial decision, several investors have reportedly expressed reservations about the projects proposed in the districts which no longer exist.

The categorisation sys-

tem introduced for the investment proposals has trifurcated the MoUs to enable the government officials to pursue the implementation of various projects with different strategies. The highest priority will be accorded to the top category, for which dedicated steps will be taken for the project grounding and implementation.

A high-level meeting, chaired by Chief Secretary Sudhanshu Pant, focused on the investment MoUs ranging from ₹100 crore to ₹1,000 crore, while Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma had reviewed the MoUs exceeding ₹1,000 crore earlier this week.

No mercy for accused in Anna varsity sexual assault case, says Tamil Nadu CM

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu police will have no mercy for the accused in the Anna University sexual assault case and spare no one if more persons are found to be involved in the crime, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin said in the State Assembly on Wednesday.

He further said that the man arrested in the case was not a DMK member, but a "sympathiser of the party". "Whoever it may be, even if they are from the DMK, the police will have no mercy on them and take strong action," he said in the House, adding

Border fencing on in West Bengal despite BGB objections: BSF

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Border Security Force (BSF) has continued fencing along the international border at Kaliachak in Malda district despite Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) objecting to the initiative.



BSF personnel at the India-Bangladesh border. FILE PHOTO

BSF in a statement added, "The area in question is on the Indian side, in Ranaghat village of Bagda block, North 24 Parganas district."

MLA visits area

On Wednesday, Swapan Majumdar, the BJP MLA from Bongaon South, visited Angrail area and spoke to BSF officials as well as villagers.

The issue of fencing of the border with Bangladesh has gained fresh momentum after the political turmoil in Bangladesh and fall of the Sheikh Hasina regime. West Bengal shares a 2,216-km border with Bangladesh and hundreds of kilometres of the border remain unfenced, making the border porous and susceptible to smuggling.



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin. FILE PHOTO

moved by the Opposition parties, Mr. Stalin said that the accused, Gnanasekaran, was arrested the very next day after a complaint was received in the Kottupuram police station on December 24.

As for the criticism from Opposition parties over the leak of the First Information Report in the case, Mr. Stalin said that the National Informatics Centre, which was under the Union government, resolved the technical glitch that caused the problem upon being alerted by the State government. "This government will crush offences against women with an iron fist," he said.

Atrocity complaint puts the spotlight on reservation debate within transgender community

Abhinav Lakshman

NEW DELHI

As the movement for horizontal reservation for transgender people in government jobs and education picks up pace in northern India, taking cue from activists in southern States, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) has now taken cognisance of an atrocity complaint against Uttar Pradesh's Transgender Welfare Board member Devika Devendra S. Manglamukhi, a strong proponent of vertical reservation, "because the Dalit trans community lives with fear in U.P. because of her", as per the complainant.

While vertical reservations would translate into a separate quota category under which all trans people would qualify, irrespective of their socio-economic category, many trans activists across the country have stressed that horizontal reservations are the need of the hour as vertical quotas ignore the layered nature of discrimination

Ms. Devika rebutted the allegations. "First, the



A caste atrocity complaint was registered against Uttar Pradesh's Transgender Welfare Board member Devika Devendra S. Manglamukhi, who strongly advocates for vertical reservation for transgenders.

voice in the recording is not mine as is being alleged. Second, there are no details of when the call recording is allegedly from, and third, is it legal to record calls in such a manner?" she told *The Hindu*. Ms. Devika also accused the complainant of "misusing the Constitution, and the transgender identity", and insisted that the NCSC

is "being taken for a ride". "I am also approaching the NHRC and NCSC to file a complaint," she added.

Ms. Devika continued, "The NALSA judgement (2014) calls for us to be treated as socially and educationally backward classes (SEBC). So then, being a trans woman makes me an OBC (Other Backward Class). How can the com-

plainant call me 'upper caste' or 'Savarna'?"

In her complaint against Ms. Devika, Ms. Yashika, who also runs an Instagram page named the Bahujan Queer Collective, has called for action to be taken under relevant Sections of the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs, Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act. The National Commission has asked the Saharanpur district administration and police to submit Action Taken Reports by January 17.

After the NCSC issued notice on the complaint, Ms. Devika has been posting on her profile about the social work she has undertaken to uplift and empower the Valmiki community.

Since the 2014 judgment of the Supreme Court that directed governments to provide reservation to trans people in government jobs and education, the demand for quotas from the community has only grown. But an arguable ambiguity in the Supreme Court's direction, which called for transgender people to be treated as "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens", has divided opinion within the transgender community on what kind of reservations should be provided.

Ms. Devika, a trans woman herself, is of the view that the community should instead be fighting for equality in society, and vertical reservations. In Facebook posts, most recently on Monday, she said: "We are equal, that's why we want vertical reservations for Transgenders".

No caste discrimination'
"When trans people are abused and discriminated, it is not based on caste, it is based on gender," she said.

Based on the 2014 judgment, she further insisted that a person could not continue with their socio-economic category's caste identity after identifying as a transgender person. "Because the judgment says transgender people are SEBCs, they cannot also then continue to be SC," she said.

The Supreme Court of India had in March 2023 refused to entertain a petition that asked for a clarification on the ambiguity in the 2014 direction for reservations. One interpretation of this direction has already resulted in the Madhya Pradesh govern-

ment including transgender people as a community within its State OBC list in April 2023.

This, even though High Courts, including the Karnataka High Court, Madras High Court, and more recently, the Calcutta High Court, have interpreted it differently, and directed that the community be provided horizontal reservations.

Chennai-based trans rights activist Grace Banu, who has been spearheading the movement for horizontal reservation in southern States, told *The Hindu* that Ms. Devika's interpretation and understanding of the 2014 National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment is "casteist" and "reflects the dominant caste mentality" that the transgender people of the country continue to fight.

"This reading denies the reality that there are transgender people in all caste categories. How is bunching them up as OBCs serving the purpose of equality?" Ms. Banu said.

Hathras stampede:
ex-DM, SSP to appear in HC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court recently directed the former District Magistrate (DM) and the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) of Hathras district to personally appear in the court on January 15 and explain why they should not be held liable for a stampede that took place on July 2, 2024, which left 121 dead – 113 of them women.

A Bench of Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav, in an order issued on January 6, said such incidents were the result of poor arrangements made by the organisers.

"This has happened in the past as well. The organisers call innocent and poor people. Accidents happen due to a lack of proper arrangements. In this case, 2.5 lakh people had gathered at the spot and there were merely 50 or 51 policemen at the spot," the judge said while hearing the bail plea of Manju Devi, one of the followers of godman Suraj Pal, who was arrested days after the incident.

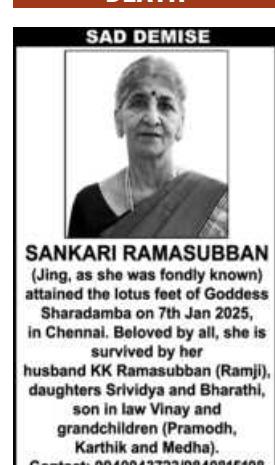
Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 21 07
Safdarjung 21 07
Palam 19 06

Delhi Palm Today
16°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be cold with dense fog. The day will be cool. Night also will be cold and foggy. Dry weather to prevail.

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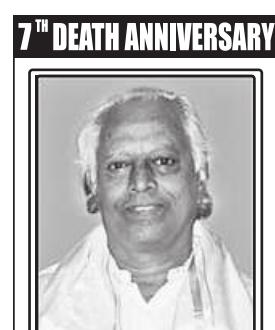
OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH



SANKARI RAMASUBBAN (Jing, as she was fondly known) attained the lotus feet of Goddess Sharadamba on 7th Jan 2025, in Chennai. Beloved by all, she is survived by her husband KK Ramasubban (Ramji), daughter Srividya and Bharathi, son in law Vinay and grandchildren (Pramod, Karthik and Medha). Contact: 9940043723/9840815108

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES



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C. R. NARAYANAN
Retd Deputy Director General
Geological Survey of India
DOB : 4th May 1936
DOD : 9th January 2023

He was our guiding light and lived life on his own terms, being the rock we all depended on. He shall be cherished in our hearts forever.

Dhruv Vijayram, Ramya Vijayram,

Priya Vijayram and C. Vijayram,

C. Vijayaram

Centre yet to wake up from its slumber on Dam Safety Act: SC

Court was hearing plea seeking lowering of the permissible water level at Mullaperiyar dam; 'Centre has not fully implemented the law'

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI



Safety check: Supreme Court-appointed monitoring committee members inspect Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala, on June 13, 2024.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday orally said the Union government was yet to wake up from its 'slumber' and fully implement a nearly five-year-old law to prevent disasters related to dams and ensure their safe functioning.

A three-judge Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant said the Dam Safety Act, 2021, was "existing on paper" after the State of Kerala argued that "nothing has been done", including the constitution of a National Committee on Dam Safety. "Despite Parliament having passed this Act, we are aghast that the Executive is yet to wake up from its slumber," Justice Dipankar Datta, on the Bench with Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, remarked.

The court was hearing a petition filed by advocate-

petitioner Mathews Nedumpara, who submitted that a breach at the 129-year-old limestone-and-surkhi built Mullaperiyar dam may lead to the deaths of lakhs of people spread across five townships. The lawyer sought a lowering of the permissible water level at Mullaperiyar dam from 142 ft to 120 ft.

Section 5 of the 2021 Act mandates the constitution of the National Committee on Dam Safety within 60 days of the commence-

ment of the Act. The committee is to be reconstituted every three years.

"Nothing has been done in the years between 2021 and 2025... The Centre did nothing on the basis of this Act," senior advocate Jai-deep Gupta, appearing for Kerala, claimed.

However, Tamil Nadu, represented by senior advocate V. Krishnamurthy, informed the Bench that the National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA) was formed under the Act.

HC says commenting on woman's body is sexual harassment

The Hindu Bureau

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has held that comments by a man on a woman's body constitute a sexually coloured remark and that amount to an offence of sexual harassment.

Justice A. Badharudeen made the observation recently while dismissing a petition by a former employee of the Kerala State Electricity Board in Aluva

seeking to quash a case registered against him on the complaint of a woman employee.

She had alleged that he had been sexually harassing her since 2013 and had used vulgar language against her in 2013 and sent objectionable messages and voice calls.

The court observed that the prosecution had specifically made out a *prima facie* case to attract the offences alleged against him.

CPI(M) workers' sentence in Periyar case suspended

The Hindu Bureau

KOCHI

A Division Bench of the Kerala High Court on Wednesday suspended the sentence of five years' simple imprisonment given to CPI (M) leader K.V. Kunhiraman and three others by the Ernakulam CBI Special Court for murdering Youth Congress activists Sarath Lal P.K. and Kripesh at Periyar in Kasaragod in 2019.

The Bench passed the order when an appeal filed by the convicts against the verdict came up for hearing.

The court ordered the suspension by executing a bond for ₹50,000 each with two solvent sureties each for the like sum to the satisfaction of the jurisdictional court and on condition that they shall deposit the fine of ₹10,000 each awarded by the CBI court.

APPOINTMENT

Recognised under section 3 of The UGC Act, 1956, vide Notification No.9-4/2024-U.3(A) by Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Government of India.
MALLA REDDY VISHWAVIDYAPEETH (DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
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APPLICATIONS ARE INVITED FOR THE POSITION OF VICE CHANCELLOR

Honorable Chancellor of Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth, (Deemed to be University) Hyderabad has constituted search cum selection committee to recommend suitable candidate from among the experienced and distinguished academicians who meet the qualifications and experience as prescribed in the UGC (Institutions Deemed to be University) regulations 2023.

About Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth

Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth, Hyderabad has been conferred as Deemed to be University vide Gazette Notification No 9-4/2024-U.3(A) under Section 3 of the UGC Act, 1956 by Ministry of Education dated 06 September, 2024. Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth, Hyderabad comprises constituent units in the fields of Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, Nursing and Engineering disciplines and aspires to offer new age programs that aligns with NEP2020 guidelines in the future.

Qualification/Eligibility

The incumbent shall be a distinguished academician with a minimum of ten years experience as Professor in a university or equivalent position in a reputed research organization. The candidate should also possess proven leadership and administrative qualities along with exemplary teaching and research credentials. He/She should also be willing to provide vision and direction to Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth, Hyderabad in its growth trajectory.

Interested candidates are required to send their updated curriculum vitae to hr@mrvv.edu.in along with their qualification, experience and other relevant documents with a digital photograph on or before **Jan 23, 2025**. The applicant shall be below 65 years.

Shortlisted candidates, fulfilling all the prescribed qualification and criteria, may be invited for an interaction with search cum selection committee.

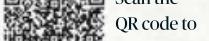
Chancellor
Malla Reddy Vishwavidyapeeth.

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Sr. Divisional Electrical Engineer/TRD, North Eastern Railway, Itzatnagar for and on behalf of the President of India, invites sealed "Open" E-Tender for the following work: S.N.1, Name of work.: Stenciling of all types of OHE Mast & Portal, earth resistance value and temperature marking at ATD and Supply & erection of Number Plates, ATD painting, painting & dressing of Bond and other miscellaneous works over IZN division, Tender reference no. SRDEE-TRD-IZN-2024-25-T16, Approx Cost (in ₹) : ₹ 48,67,45,99, Earnest money/Bid Security (in ₹) : ₹ 97,400,00, Cost of tender documents (in ₹) : 00 E-Tender closing date and time: 29.01.2025 11:00 hrs., Completion period: 06 Months, Note: 1. E-Tender Online will be submitted upto 11:00 hrs on date: 29.01.2025, 2. For full details and submission of bid kindly visit the official website of Indian railways i.e., www.treps.gov.in. Sr. Div. Elect. Engineer/TRD CPRO/EL-208 Izzatnagar
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Bids through aprocurement.gov.in are invited from eligible bidders for "ERECTION OF FOUR NEW 33/11KV OUTDOOR SUB-STATIONS AND ONE NEW 33/11KV SEMI-INDOOR SUB-STATION CONNECTED 33KV AND 11KV LINES AT DAMARAVARIPALEM, YANAMADALA, T NAIDUPALEM, KASINAPALLI AND NSP COLONY IN ADDANKI, ONGOLE AND MARKAPUR DIVISIONS OF BAPATLA AND PRAKASAM DISTRICTS IN APCPDCL ON TURNKEY BASIS" under System Improvement Project (SIP). The Tender information will be made available in AP E-procurement Portal from 09.01.2025, 18:00 Hrs, Last date for Bid submission online is 28.01.2025, 16:00 Hrs. Sd/- Chief General Manager/Projects, APCPDCL :: Vijayawada DIPR 3445PP/CL, Dt: 08/01/2025 Email: cgmpro.cpdcl@apcpdc.in

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTORATE OF MEDICAL EDUCATION, ASSAM SIXMILE, KHANAPARA, GUWAHATI-22

Web site : www.assamtenders.gov.in, www.dmeassam.gov.in, email: dmeassam@gmail.com

No. DME.E-586740/7

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The e-Tender is a Two-Bid System, to be submitted with affixed Court Fee Stamp Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight point two five paisa) only (for local bidders) or IPO of Rs. 10/- (Rupees Ten) only (in case of bidders from outside of the State of Assam) in favour of "Director of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmille, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

Important dates of the e-Tender

Sl. No.	Scheduled	Start Date	Start Time	End Date	End Time
1.	e-Tender Publishing	08-01-2025	12.00 PM	-	-
2.	e-Tender Download	08-01-2025	12.30 PM	20-01-2025	12.00 Noon
3.	Pre-Bid Meeting	10-01-2025	3.00 PM	Venue-Room No 4C, 2nd Floor, Directorate of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmille, Khanapara, Guwahati-22	
4.	Bid Submission	10-01-2025	05.00 PM	20-01-2025	02.00 PM
5.	Bid Opening	20-01-2025	05.00 PM		

The detailed information of bidding documents are available online through e-procurement system i.e. through website www.assamtenders.gov.in only. The bidders would be required to register in the website for submission of the bids. The bidders are required to have Digital Signature (DSC) from any of the Certifying Authorities. Aspiring bidders who have not obtained the user ID and password for participating in e-procurement may obtain the same by registering in the website indicated above. The tender fees is non refundable and payable in favour of the "Director of Medical Education, Assam, Sixmille, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022, at SBP-Dispur (Guwahati) Branch.

Sd/- Director of Medical Education, Assam

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER, PWD (ROADS)

ASSAM, CHANDMARI, GUWAHATI-3

No. CE/STBR/NIT/ SODP-G/163/2024-25/1

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Chief Engineer, PWD (Roads), Assam, Chandmari, Ghy-3 invites online bids on behalf of the Governor of Assam for 1 (one) No. of Bridge in Lakhimpur Naobiocha SC LAC under SODP-G for the year 2024-25 in Lakhimpur District amounting to **Rs. 844.26 Lakhs (aprx.)** including GST etc. under Dhakuakhana & Naobiocha Territorial Road Division, Dhakuakhana under Lakhimpur district, from approved & eligible Contractors registered with PWRD, Assam.

Details have been made available at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and the last date of submission of Bids is **03-02-2025**. Amendment/Addendum to the SBD, if any, and further notifications shall appear in this website and also at the office of the undersigned (State Bridge Design Branch) during office hours.

The Contractor/Bidder must be registered with the Electronics Tendering System (ETS) of PWRD, Assam website <http://assamtenders.gov.in>

Note:

1. The Scheme is being sanctioned from competent authority. In the event of non-sanction of the Scheme, the bids may be cancelled and no claim whatsoever on this account shall be entertained from the bidders.
2. The approximate N.I.T. Value is inclusive of GST (12%), L.C. (1%) etc.

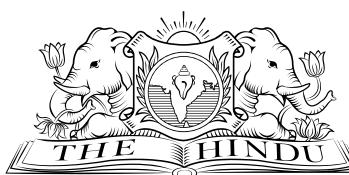
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Growth chill

The economy's sputtering engines necessitate urgent fiscal actions

The National Statistics Office (NSO) has confirmed emerging fears about the economy's evidently sluggish trajectory through this year in its first Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimates for 2024-25. While the election-focused first quarter hit public capital spending, the second quarter (Q2) was marred by weak demand and still underwhelming public capex, dragging GDP growth to a seven-quarter low of 5.4%. The Centre and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), which were projecting that India would log a fourth year of 7%-plus growth, had pared their hopes to 'about 6.5%' and 6.6%, respectively. This was predicated on a bump-up of about 7% in the second half of the year to offset the first half's 6% rise. The NSO, slightly less sanguine, expects GDP to grow at a four-year low pace of 6.4%, from 8.2% in 2023-24, with just agriculture seen rising significantly faster than last year. Manufacturing and mining growth may virtually halve, and though services sectors seem relatively better off, there is some concern of momentum loss. Purchasing Managers' Indices averaged lower than Q2 through Q3, for both manufacturing and services. The NSO expects private consumption to rebound 7.3% this year from just 4% last year. But Q3 trends do not indicate a significant lift-off in urban demand. So, this could be a tad optimistic despite inflation easing slightly since October.

The Finance Ministry has sought to link the demand slowdown to a "combination of monetary policy stance and macroprudential measures by the central bank". Slow wage growth has also been blamed for cramped household demand. The NSO's projection of gross fixed capital formation growth slipping to 6.4% this year from 9% in 2023-24 indicates that private capex – that is contingent on domestic and global demand – remains weak while public capex goals are unlikely to be met. Of course, these early NSO projections are largely conjured up for informing the Union Budget formulation, and some upgrades may happen later, but most economists see significant downside risks for now. Nomura economists, for instance, who have been arguing that India is in the grip of a cyclical slowdown for a while, reckon growth will end up around 6%, implying a flat-lined second half. With the global outlook also shrouded in uncertainty, winter seems to be here for India's economy. How far behind spring lags will depend on policymakers' actions, and inactions. The Union Budget 2025-26 needs to move from incremental tinkering to tailoring reforms and fiscal actions that can bring India's growth back to the 7% mark, if not 8%, at the earliest. If that entails some hard calls such as slashing income, fuel and consumption taxes, along with import tariffs, so be it. Just pining for interest rate cuts will not suffice anymore.

Cripple and scuttle

Governments are discouraging the exercise of the right to information

Nearly two decades after the passage of the Right to Information Act, it is quite apparent that governments, at least sections of it, are uncomfortable with the idea of transparency and empowerment associated with it. Amendments to dilute its efficacy and attempts to defeat it by delaying or denying information have been quite common for years. Another way to scuttle the law is to cripple the functioning of information commissions at the central and State levels. The issue has surfaced again, with the Supreme Court of India questioning the large number of vacancies in the central and some State Information Commissions. These commissions hear appeals from members of the public who have been denied access to information or have failed to elicit a response from designated information officers in various departments and institutions. A Division Bench has taken note of the fact that there are eight vacancies in the posts of Information Commissioners in the Central Information Commission (CIC), while 23,000 appeals are pending before it. In fact, some State-level Information Commissions are almost defunct for want of members to hear the public. Any court is bound to ask, as the Court has now done, how an institution can be of any use if it does not have persons to perform the required duties under the law.

The Court has sought to impart some urgency to the matter by directing the Department of Personnel and Training to spell out in two weeks the timelines for completing the selection process and notifying the appointments of the eight Information Commissioners in the CIC. It has also asked for details about the search committee and the list of applicants for the posts. Similarly, States that have initiated the appointment process but without any definite timeline have been asked to complete the process within a specified time. However, this may not be enough to bring about a revival in the fulfilment of the original purpose of the Act. Besides filling up vacancies, not all governments have complied with a Court verdict of 2019 that called for proactive efforts to fill up vacancies in time by advertising them early. The CIC's post was stripped of its autonomy some years ago when the government removed the fixed five-year tenure and made it open-ended. Not much has been done to appoint candidates from various walks of life, as retired civil servants continue to be chosen, a point noted by the Bench in the latest hearing. It is inevitable that a large number of vacancies will result in a huge backlog and ultimately discourage the people from seeking information. It is difficult not to conclude that this is what those in power want.

River interlinking, the fount of environmental disaster

In December 25, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the Ken-Betwa River Link Project, which aims to solve the water scarcity in the Bundelkhand region that covers parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The project also includes the construction of a dam located within the Panna Tiger Reserve, raising concerns about its submergence. Upon completion, this project will link the supposed water surplus Ken river with the Betwa in drought-stricken Bundelkhand – an area that had 58% forest cover in 1938.

A misplaced model

This project, which costs around ₹45,000 crore, was launched despite the objections raised by experts, including members of an empowered committee appointed by the Supreme Court of India, and by circumventing the law that has strict terms for allowing hydroelectric power projects. Models of grandiose technological fixes as the solution to all water-related problems have gathered momentum. Politicians are now touting the concept of river interlinking for inter-basin water transfers as a geoengineering solution to continued water depletion in India.

The concept of inter-basin transfer was proposed 130 years ago by Sir Arthur Cotton, who designed irrigation dams in the Godavari and Krishna river valleys. M. Visvesvaraya, an early icon among Indian engineers, further refined this idea. K.L. Rao and Captain Dinshaw J. Dastur subsequently expanded the scope of this concept in 1970 and 1980. Initially termed the 'National Water Grid', this concept re-emerged as the 'River-Interlinking Project' (ILR) from the Ministry of Water Resources to transfer surplus waters from the Ganga and the Brahmaputra to water-deficient regions in central and southern India.

Following this, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) was established in 1982 to conduct surveys and investigations, and to prepare feasibility reports for links under the National Perspective Plan. The NWDA identified 30 links for feasibility studies, divided into 14 Himalayan and 16 Peninsular river links. These links are anticipated to alleviate the impacts of floods and droughts, boost income in rural areas, and address water distress in agriculture.

The currently estimated cost of ₹5.5 lakh crore does not include the social, environmental and operational costs. Ultimately, all this will end up

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C.P. Rajendran

Adjunct Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru, and an author of the book, 'The Rumbling Earth – The Story of Indian Earthquakes'

as taxes on the common man. This lofty idea of interlinking the rivers, to connect surplus rivers of the country with the deficient rivers is fundamentally flawed as it overlooks the huge environmental costs and the eventual deaths of the rivers and deltaic regions.

The uncontrolled human-induced disequilibrium in natural hydrographic systems will destroy associated ecological niches with incalculable repercussions for the long-term well-being of society – an unpardonable disservice to future generations. We may also have to factor in the consequences of climate change impacting rainfall and river flow, which will aggravate the situation. It is unclear how the nation's declared commitment to mitigating human-induced climate change and river manipulation go hand in hand.

The eco-services of rivers

Policymakers ignore the point that there is no "free" surplus water in any river and simple elementary arithmetic rationalisations such as tapping the 'water lost to sea' do not consider the eco-hydrological dimensions of the issue. The supporters of these projects and the politicians do not understand or deliberately ignore viewing the river as a part of the drainage basin with constitutive ecological niches, which includes its final destination of deltaic plains, interfacing with the sea.

The eco-services of the free-flowing rivers include the flushing of silt from riverbeds to the coastal waters to form deltas. Flood water is not to be rationalised as 'surplus'. It needs to be seen as the carrier of minerals for land fertility, groundwater recharge and sustenance of biodiversity, which finally helps the livelihood of millions of marginalised people.

By diverting river water, deltaic regions are starved of water that could have helped balance saltwater from the sea. Now, however, the deltaic ecosystem will suffer from the change. The Indus Delta offers a crucial lesson. Alice Albinia, in her book, *Empires of the Indus: The Story of a River* (2008), narrates how a delta system at the mouth of the Indus – which was once "the richest in all Pakistan" – became impoverished when the British started barrage construction, which Pakistan continued after 1947.

Such examples are aplenty in India as well. The state of the downstream parts of the Narmada since the completion of the Sardar Sarovar dam is a modern example in the making.

The global examples of river channelisation have also proved to be major disasters. The channelisation of the Kissimmee river in the State of Florida, authorised by the U.S. Congress in 1954 to mitigate flooding, is an environmental disaster, resulting in the loss of wetlands. Massive resources are being spent to revive its original configuration. The current state of the Aral Sea – one of the world's largest lakes – is another example of how geoengineering projects destroy natural systems. The lake has now become a howling desert after the rivers that sustained it were diverted by irrigation projects implemented during the heady days of the Soviet Union.

The real reasons for India's water crisis

India's water crisis is spiralling out of control, primarily due to inadequate water management, poor environmental practices, law ambiguity, and corruption. A national water policy should embrace a holistic approach to watershed management, involving local citizens in monitoring the hydrological cycle and working alongside hydrologists, engineers, and biologists. The policy must incorporate effective aquifer management through the regulation of water usage. Farmers should be engaged to help devise strategies for efficient irrigation water usage. The government has limited control over wastewater management and should create innovative reuse programmes. A comprehensive study involving interdisciplinary expertise on river basins is essential before initiating significant water transfer projects.

In the book, *Let There Be Water: Israel's Solution for a Water-Starved World*, Seth M. Siegel notes that Israel's drip irrigation programmes save 25%-75% of pumped water. Israel's success story in water resource management lies in modernising irrigation techniques. This also compels farmers to use less water, fertilisers and pesticides, maintaining aquifer health at an optimum level. Along with such interventions, we must incorporate elements of vernacular practices in watershed management strategies.

Despite the current ruling regime's emphasis on 'Hindutva' and embedded Hindu belief system that extols the deityship of Indian rivers, the river interlinking project stands out as a stark contrast to such an ideology. Manipulated by dams that are in excess, mauled by human and industrial waste, and commodified for religious marketing, India's rivers are under existential threat. Who will save them?

The political class must note that the lofty idea of interlinking rivers overlooks the huge environmental costs and the eventual deaths of rivers and deltaic regions



Ananya Krishna

Field Researcher at the DEVISE Charitable Trust



Shailendra Kumar

Field Researcher at the DEVISE Charitable Trust

Problems with the PDS are not limited to enrolment and access. There is also the flow of corruption through the veins of the system. Households enrolled with the PDS have reported that FPS dealers have been releasing only four kilograms of food grain/person when a below poverty line (BPL) household which has a Priority Household (PHH) ration card is entitled to five kilograms a person. The four kilograms of grain being issued is rice, which is the lowest quality of 'Usna' rice. No amount of wheat is issued.

Documentation that has no legal basis

Coming back to the issue of enrolment in PDS. The Government of Bihar offers its citizens the option to file a ration card application using a paper-based application form or by filling in an online application form through its e-PDS portal. The first option requires the Aadhaar details of the applicant and their family members. The second option requires an extra set of documents, namely caste certificate, income certificate, and residence certificate. Even when the applicant uses the first method, the officials eventually demand these certificates.

The demand for such documents is not exclusive to Bihar. Jharkhand also makes such a demand while Uttar Pradesh makes it mandatory to provide an income certificate, and Madhya Pradesh requires the submission of proof of residence.

The requirements of these certificates do not have any legal basis. Neither the National Food Security Act (NFS) of 2013 nor the PDS control order of 2015 explicate the requirement of such documents. An officer from the Food and Consumer Protection Department in Bihar has confirmed that the requirement of those certificates is an oversight in the online system. Here again we see that in the race towards

digitisation and e-governance, governments have shed all and any conception of governance and citizen welfare.

The issue of exploitation

It is notable, and most unfortunate, that the government, which has complete awareness of its systemic flaws, has made no attempt at systemic change and that people continue to be crushed under the weight of official indifference. To make matters worse, this hubris of power has provided the perfect conditions for the creation of a market of exploitation.

Most of the people, especially in the Musahar community, who seek to avail the benefits of PDS, neither have the resources nor the knowledge to interact with online processes. This situation has been aggressively exploited by middlemen who charge a sum that is north of ₹3,000 to have a ration card made. Within this market of exploitation, it is not uncommon to hear that neither document was issued nor the middleman traceable after payment.

Amidst the myriad challenges, if the people are somehow able to file their application, there is still no guarantee that they will get their ration card. While the 2015 order states that ration card should be issued within 30 days of the application being filled, there are cases of people whose applications have been pending for long – between four to 18 months. These applications are not for an entitlement which goes above and beyond the diurnal needs of a person. They are for the basic means of subsistence. It has been 24 years since the right to food was recognised as a fundamental right in the case, *People's Union of Civil Liberties vs Union of India*. Since then, governments have wound bureaucratic red tape around it so tightly that it is choking the very people it was meant for.

Bureaucratic hurdles are a reason why a substantial number of households have found themselves removed from PDS rolls in parts of north, central and east India

Ban plastic flags

It is usually observed that after Independence Day and the Republic Day celebrations are over, miniature plastic flags are seen strewn all over. There is an urgent need to ban plastic flags. School students, especially NCC cadets, girl guides and boy scouts and other students should be assigned the task of disposal in an appropriate manner. There is a need for schools to teach students the dignity behind our national flag.

Cajetan Peter D'souza,

Mumbai

Roads in Chennai

The need of the hour in Chennai ("Chennai

Corporation plans to float tenders for over 5,000 road works for upcoming year in Jan," December 22) is to impose a ban on the laying of roads in all areas that are prone to flooding. The prime cause of flooding is repeated and unnecessary road-laying. The ease of mechanised road-laying and other factors are what have motivated the Greater Chennai Corporation to go on a road-laying spree. Once roads are 'brought down' to the level prior to the year 2000, miracles would happen. Roads will once again become the major channels to carry rainwater to the nearest canal. It is illogical and impractical to assume that

every drop of rain must be drained through storm water drains.

Sujatha Vijayaraghavan,

Chennai

The state of Indian cricket

I am one of countless cricket-crazy fans in India for whom playing the game is as important as how the sport is administered and run. The last few series have been very tough for the players, and we, as keen followers, have endured the adrenaline highs and dismal lows of Team India's journey. It does raise a few pertinent questions about the BCCI's approach, since it is the apex body that shapes Indian cricket. As the dust of the defeat in

Australia settles, it raises a few points about how the whole Test panned out. Our obsession with stardom and superstar status sounds clichéd, but past records and performances in other formats do take precedence over the purest form – Test cricket. No one can deny that the team management – read selectors – has to take a tough call to ensure that the team composition is spot on and adequate work-load balance gains precedence over the bloated egos of the people who call the shots.

Sunil Gadepalli,
Pune

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Role of the Governor

The episode of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, R.N. Ravi, walking out of the Legislative Assembly is unheard of. His excellency is bound under Article 176 to address the House. Article 163 makes it clear that he is bound to act on the aid and the advice of the Council of Ministers and not walk out, which is in violation of his constitutional duty. It is not as if the State Government refused to have the National Anthem being played. All that was said was that the State anthem would come first and that the National Anthem would be sung after his address thereby giving primacy to

the State and federal structures. This has been the convention too. The Governor has been making it difficult for the elected representatives to run the State. His excellency walked out of the State Assembly. It is time he walks out of the State too.

N.G.R. Prasad,

Chennai

Once again, the Tamil Nadu Governor has demeaned himself by walking out of the Assembly. The practice of the *Tamil Thai Vaazhthu* being played before the National Anthem is well known to his excellency.

Tharcius S. Fernando,
Chennai

It is usually observed that after Independence Day and the Republic Day celebrations are over, miniature plastic flags are seen strewn all over. There is an urgent need to ban plastic flags. School students, especially NCC cadets, girl guides and boy scouts and other students should be assigned the task of disposal in an appropriate manner. There is a need for schools to teach students the dignity behind our national flag.

Cajetan Peter D'souza,

Mumbai

Roads in Chennai
The need of the hour in Chennai ("Chennai

China's long game in Africa

In 2022, when China established its first political training school in Tanzania, the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School, its motivation was unambiguous. With an estimated cost of \$40 million, the school was a tool for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to shape the future political leaders of Africa following the Chinese principles of governance.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the 120 official members of the school's first cohort were from countries with long-standing historical ties to China. These countries continue to be ruled by the liberation parties that came into power through their pre-independence struggles. The countries include South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Tanzania. In fact, these six countries, along with Botswana, are also part of the Former Liberation Movements of Southern Africa, an informal coalition meant to help one another address governance challenges and stay in power.

Clearly, the move by China to establish the political school is meant to strengthen its relationship and increase its influence among the policymakers of these countries. The political school is another platform for the leaders of these ruling liberation parties to enhance their governance capabilities through shared educational resources. This is also an example of China's broader strategy to shape Africa's political landscape by promoting its governance model based on the centrality of the ruling party and its control over the state.

Game of influence

There are several ways for a country to assert its influence. One way could be mediation or fostering dialogue among the concerned parties to facilitate positive conversations. This also helps in building a strong global image for the mediator country. Historically, the U.S. has been the most influential international



Samir Bhattacharya

Associate Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation

mediator. However, China is increasingly asserting itself in this role, as seen in its involvement in resolving the Saudi Arabia-Iran and Niger-Benin disputes.

As China seeks to establish an alternative world order – often complementary to, and sometimes in contrast with, the Western-led global system – it recognises the importance of Africa's support in various multilateral forums. Africa, with 55 countries, is a significant player in international relations. And so, Beijing is intensifying its efforts to build strong ties with Africa as part of its broader strategy to shift the global balance in its favour.

However, China's engagement in Africa's politics is not a recent phenomenon. Beijing has supported African independence movements, military endeavours, and governance structures. It has also helped develop African economies through investments in infrastructure and industrial projects. This historical relationship continues to be strong, as China intensifies its focus on strengthening ties with Africa's ruling parties.

'Study tours' have remained a key part of China's public diplomacy with Africa. Every year, hundreds of African officials visit China for lectures at universities, visits to provincial governments, and cultural exchanges designed to familiarise them with Chinese traditions and governance practices.

Only now has China's game plan to influence African political elites expanded through the introduction of political schools. During the 8th Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in 2021, China acknowledged its ties to over 100 political parties across 51 African countries.

China's growing influence in Africa is evident not only in the establishment of new educational institutions but also in the deepening of its political relationships. Kenya, for example, has expressed its interest in having a leadership school that would be

China's long game in Africa is not just about economic influence or military strength. It is also about the subtle art of diplomacy and influence

financed by and modelled on the CCP's Central Party School. These efforts are accompanied by investments in infrastructure. China funded the construction of Kenya's new foreign ministry headquarters, as the two countries were celebrating 60 years of diplomatic relations.

China is not only constructing new institutions, but also refurbishing many existing ones. For instance, China funded the renovation of the Herbert Chitepo School of Ideology in Zimbabwe. Through such initiatives, it aims to establish a governance model similar to its own, based on strong, centralised party systems that offer stability and control. This highlights the effectiveness of building reciprocal relationships, particularly in countries where leadership stability and centralisation are highly valued.

Chinese diplomacy in Africa
China's approach to Africa is built on decades of patient diplomacy. While the Nyerere Leadership School represents a significant milestone, it is only one piece of China's broader strategy to embed itself deeply within Africa's political fabric. China's long-term goal is to promote a Sino-centric world order in which it plays a central role in shaping global governance structures.

However, China is also mindful of potential regime changes in Africa. It knows the importance of nurturing opposition parties to safeguard its interests in case political shifts occur. By establishing political schools and cultivating bonds with ruling and opposition parties, China is ensuring that its influence is intact regardless of political transitions.

China's long game in Africa is not just about economic influence or military strength. It is also about the subtle art of diplomacy and influence. Through its strategic investments in Africa's political future, China is ensuring that it remains a key player in shaping Africa's governance structures for years to come.

A step behind Kejriwal

By playing second fiddle to Arvind Kejriwal, Atishi has sent out a clear message

STATE OF PLAY

Nikhil M. Babu

nikhil.m@thehindu.co.in

Last September, when senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Atishi assumed charge as Delhi Chief Minister, but sat next to an empty chair used by her predecessor Arvind Kejriwal, she sent out a clear message.

Many thought that the optics would end with this sentimental gesture and the new Chief Minister would soon get down to business. However, the first woman Chief Minister of AAP has been carefully playing second fiddle to Mr. Kejriwal. This can be seen even in her minor gestures – she walks with him but always just a small step behind, and addresses him sometimes as 'sir' or 'guru'.

Sources in the party say they do not want her to overshadow the AAP supremo in any way. Others say that the fact that she is a first-time MLA and was chosen to be Chief Minister over founding members of the party and three-time MLAs may also have something to do with it. "It is not completely the party's plan. A lot of what you see is her own decision. She genuinely does not want to overshadow Mr. Kejriwal," a source said.

A day after taking oath as Chief Minister, Ms. Atishi made her first major public appearance at a party event at Jantar Mantar. Her Cabinet colleague, Gopal Rai, spoke first, followed by Dilip Pandey, Manish Sisodia, and Mr. Kejriwal. All of them then stood for the national anthem and left the stage. The Chief Minister did not speak a word.

The next day, when Ms. Atishi entered office, the party's plan became all the more evi-

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longer a part of the Cabinet.

On November 25, for instance, while addressing a press conference from the party headquarters, Mr. Kejriwal said that the Delhi Cabinet, headed by Ms. Atishi, had passed a proposal for providing pension to 80,000 more senior citizens. Speaking after him, Ms. Atishi said that 'sir' had made this possible.

The AAP's biggest announcement yet, ahead of the Assembly elections, was made on December 12. Starting the programme at the party headquarters, Ms. Atishi said, "Let us welcome our chief and beloved leader Arvind Kejriwal."

She then shouted "Arvind Kejriwal!" The crowd replied, "Zindabad!" Mr. Kejriwal then proceeded to announce another Cabinet decision. This was again a departure from how the AAP government functions – Cabinet decisions have always been announced by the Chief Minister from the Secretariat and not the party headquarters.

All this shows that while Ms. Atishi will be at the helm, she will always remain a step behind Mr. Kejriwal, thus cementing his position as the undisputed leader.

It is difficult even for AAP leaders to hide this clearly thought-out strategy. During the first day of the two-day session of the Assembly on September 26, BJP MLA and the Leader of Opposition, Vijender Gupta, began his speech pointing to Ms. Atishi and Mr. Kejriwal. He said, "Chief Minister ji, Chief Minister ji, both of them are here. You can change his seat to any place (Ms. Atishi got the seat reserved for the Chief Minister, while Mr. Kejriwal was moved to seat 41), but what difference does it make?" Many AAP leaders, including Ms. Atishi, smiled at the comment.

The Centre's share in States' revenue has surged in the last decade

The falling efficiency of States in collecting more taxes has deepened their dependency on the Centre

DATA POINT

Samreen Wani

Over the last decade, States have been relying more and more on transfers and grants from the Centre.

In the last decade (FY16 to FY25), 23-30% of the total revenue of States was collected from the Centre as transfers. However, in the 2000s and the first half of 2010, the share was 20-24%. Also, close to 65-70% of the non-tax revenue of States was collected from the Centre as grants in the last decade compared to the 2000s and the first half of the 2010s when the share was lower at 55-65%.

States have also not done enough to efficiently collect taxes to increase their own tax revenue. In addition, revenue from non-tax revenue, other than Central grants, has been diminishing.

The combination of these factors has meant that the dependency of States on Central funds has risen in recent years.

Chart 1 shows the share of States' own tax revenue, non-tax revenue, and Central transfers in their total revenue. For over a decade now, States' own tax revenue as a share of their total revenue has remained considerably below the 50% mark, while in the 2000s and in the early 2010s, it had crossed the 50% mark for many years or remained close to it. Own tax revenue of States includes money raised through stamp duty, registration fees, motor vehicle tax, and other taxes, along with the State component in Goods and Services Tax (GST), or State GST (SGST).

Moreover, the share of non-tax revenue in States' total revenue is likely to go below the 24% mark in FY25 for the first time in the past 25 years. Non-tax revenue of States includes grants from the Centre, earnings from social, fiscal, economic, and general services rendered by the States, interest receipts, and dividends/profits from

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State public sector enterprises. Earnings from services rendered, such as public health (social service) and power (economic service), did not cross the 30% mark in the last decade. It is only estimated to cross the mark in FY25. Compare this to the 2000s and first half of 2010 when it crossed the mark for many years.

While the share of interest receipts and earnings from services has come down, the share of grants from the Centre has increased (65-70% in the last decade compared to 55-60% in the 15 years before that). This is depicted in **Chart 1**.

Kausik K. Bhadra, PFM consultant, UNICEF, says, "While expenditure responsibilities have been rapidly spiralling, the nearly stagnant own tax revenue mobilisation impedes the States' counter-cyclical expansionary fiscal measures in a sustained manner to boost aggregate demand in the economy."

Mr. Bhadra adds that the share of own tax revenue in States' total revenue is largely driven by SGST. While SGST accounted for 15% of the States' total revenue in FY18, it currently makes up about 22%. This is shown in **Chart 2**. Consequently, the share of own tax revenue, without the contribution from SGST, has declined from 34% to 28%.

This means that not only is the share of States' own tax revenue consistently below the 50% mark, but also an increasing share of it is derived from SGST. It is important to note that the SGST is earned based on rates set by the GST Council and these rates have remained a bone of contention. In the past, Finance Ministers of many Opposition-ruled States including Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal have spoken out against the Council's decisions.

Chart 3 shows a detailed split of States' non-tax revenue. It depicts the share of grants from the Centre, earnings from services, interest receipts, and dividends/profits from State public sector enterprises in the States' non-tax revenue. Interest receipts have not exceeded 5% of non-tax revenues in the last decade compared to the 2000s and first half of 2010 when it formed 5-9% of non-tax revenue. Moreover, the share of dividends and profits garnered from State public sector enterprises has remained under 1%.

He adds that "the own tax revenue mobilisation efforts at the State level seems to be failing short of upholding the redistributive macroeconomic implications of tax policies."

samreen.wani@thehindu.co.in

Diminishing States' own revenues

The data for the charts were taken from the RBI's State Finances Report. It also includes The Hindu's calculations

Chart 1: The share of States' own tax revenue, non-tax revenue, and Central transfers in their total revenue (in %)

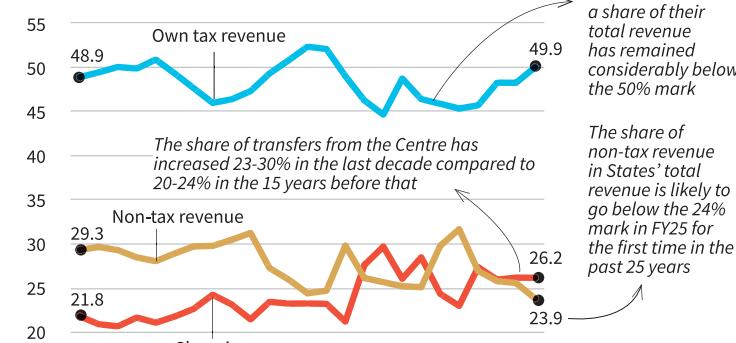


Chart 2: The share of States' SGST and own tax revenue (OTR) without SGST in their total revenue (in %)

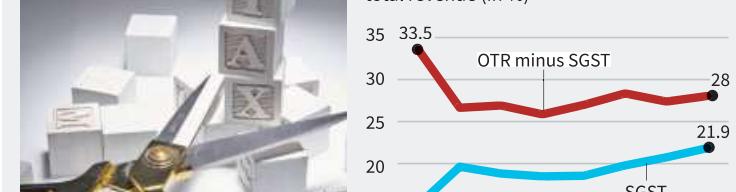


Chart 3: A detailed split of States' non-tax revenue. (Figures in %)

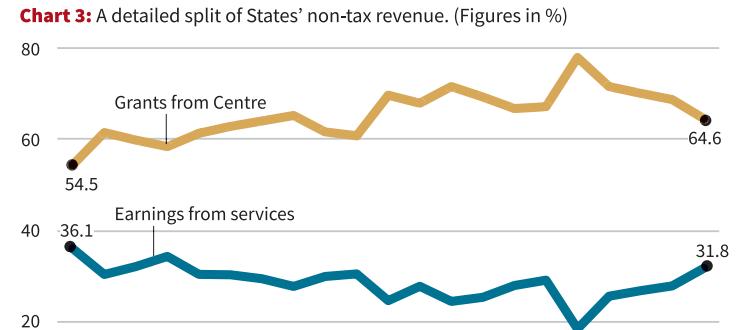


Table 4: Shows the ratio of select States' own tax revenue to their GSDP (in %). FY17, FY21 and FY24 are revised estimates. FY25 is budget estimates

State	FY13-15	FY16-18	FY19-21	FY22-24
Tamil Nadu	7.72%	6.67%	6.20%	6.17%
Karnataka	7.69%	6.94%	6.27%	6.29%
Bihar	6.04%	6.25%	5.44%	5.75%
Delhi	5.71%	5.26%	4.51%	4.75%
Kerala	7.00%	6.81%	6.28%	6.70%
Madhya Pradesh	7.74%	7.01%	6.01%	6.11%

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 9, 1975

Destruction of East India Co. records; probe urged

Madras, Jan. 5: The Tamil Nadu Commissioner of Archives and Historical Research, Mr. Badrinath, has suggested to the State Government to appoint a high level committee to probe into the destruction of valuable East India Company records.

Mr. Badrinath told newsmen today that 86,208 East India Company records had been destroyed by the Tamil Nadu Archives between 1969 and 1973 though it was not done by specific authority of the State Governments. These records did not relate to Kachchithivu, but certainly belonged to the crucial period between 1786 and 1828 and so they were of immense value for the historical study of South India, he said. They were important because they referred to the agricultural price, law and order situation, tenure system and the relationship between the East India Company and the Polygars, according to him.

Mr. Badrinath, who took charge as Commissioner of Archives in 1974, said as soon as the Tamil Nadu Government came to know of the destruction in the beginning of last year, it had immediately ordered that none of the old records should be destroyed in future until a clear policy had been formulated.

Explaining what he described as "senseless destruction" of public records all over India daily, Mr. Badrinath said this was not surprising in the country lacking a sound criterion to judge the value of a historical document. He said several valuable records relating to Indore State had been and were in the process of being destroyed in Madhya Pradesh. So it would be wrong to isolate what had happened at the Tamil Nadu Archives. The destruction was the work of bureaucrats, who were ignorant of the value of history, he maintained.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 9, 1925

News and notes.

A Press Communiqué says: The Government of India have arranged that from the 1st December, 1924, the opium required for consumption in Sarawak will be sold direct to the Government of Sarawak, subject to certain subsidiary conditions. The agreement will remain in force for a

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of migrant expulsions by Russia in 2024

80,000 More than eighty

thousand migrants in 2024 were expelled by Russia, nearly twice as many as in 2023, as the country toughens migration policies after last year's Crocus City Hall terror attack. AFP

Likely investment for Bihar's integrated manufacturing city

16,000 In ₹ crore. The

Bihar government has formed the Bihar Integrated Manufacturing City Gaya Ltd to spearhead the integrated manufacturing cluster project in Gaya, which is likely to attract ₹16,000 crore of investment. PTI

People who have signed up for coverage under Obamacare

24 million. A record 24 million people have signed up for insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act, former President Barack Obama's landmark health legislation, as the programme awaits an uncertain future under a Republican-controlled White House. PTI

Coverage of hybrid crop varieties in the total cultivated area

8 In per cent. India needs to accelerate the adoption of hybrid technology in pulses and oilseeds to address production deficits, while acknowledging the challenges faced by farmers in implementing these advanced farm practices, Principal Secretary to Prime Minister P. K. Mishra said. PTI

The increase in Guyana's oil exports last year

54 In per cent. Guyana's oil exports rose 54% last year to some 5,82,000 barrels per day, fuelled by European refiners' demand for easy-to-process sweet crudes to replace some West Asian grades, according to data from financial firm LSEG. REUTERS

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why is deciphering the Indus script important?

Why has Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced a \$1-million prize to anyone who deciphers the scripts of the Indus Valley Civilisation? Has any work in recent times pointed to the possible cultural contact between the Indus Valley and south India?

EXPLAINER

T. Ramakrishnan

The story so far:

In January 5, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced a \$1-million prize for experts or organisations in the event of their success in deciphering the scripts of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC). He made the announcement at the inauguration of an international conference to mark the centenary of the IVC discovery, which was disclosed through an article published in September 1924 by the then Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) John Marshall. That the Chief Minister of a southern State in the country had made such an announcement was due to the possible Dravidian connection with the IVC. Notwithstanding the political dimension of the Dravidian concept, historians, archaeologists and linguistic scholars have been debating over the Dravidian hypothesis ever since the publication of Marshall's article.

How do scholars define the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC)?

The IVC, also called the Harappan Civilisation, spanned 2,000 sites across 1.5 million sq. km. in the territories of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan during the Bronze Age (3000-1500 BCE). It had a wider geographical area than the combined areas of its contemporary civilisations – Egyptian and Mesopotamian. Talking of the IVC's importance, Pakistan's veteran archaeologist Ahmad Hasan Dani, in the December 1973 issue of *UNESCO Courier*, observed that the Valley lies across "ancient migration routes from central and western Asia to India." The IVC introduced urban life for the first time in the valley when similar civilisations had developed on the banks of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates valleys.

Why is deciphering the Indus script important?

Other scripts encountered in the contemporary Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations had been deciphered in a more satisfying manner. But, the non-decipherment of the Indus script prevents scholars from providing a complete picture of Harappan culture, which is why scholars tend to call it a "mystery script."

What is the Dravidian hypothesis?

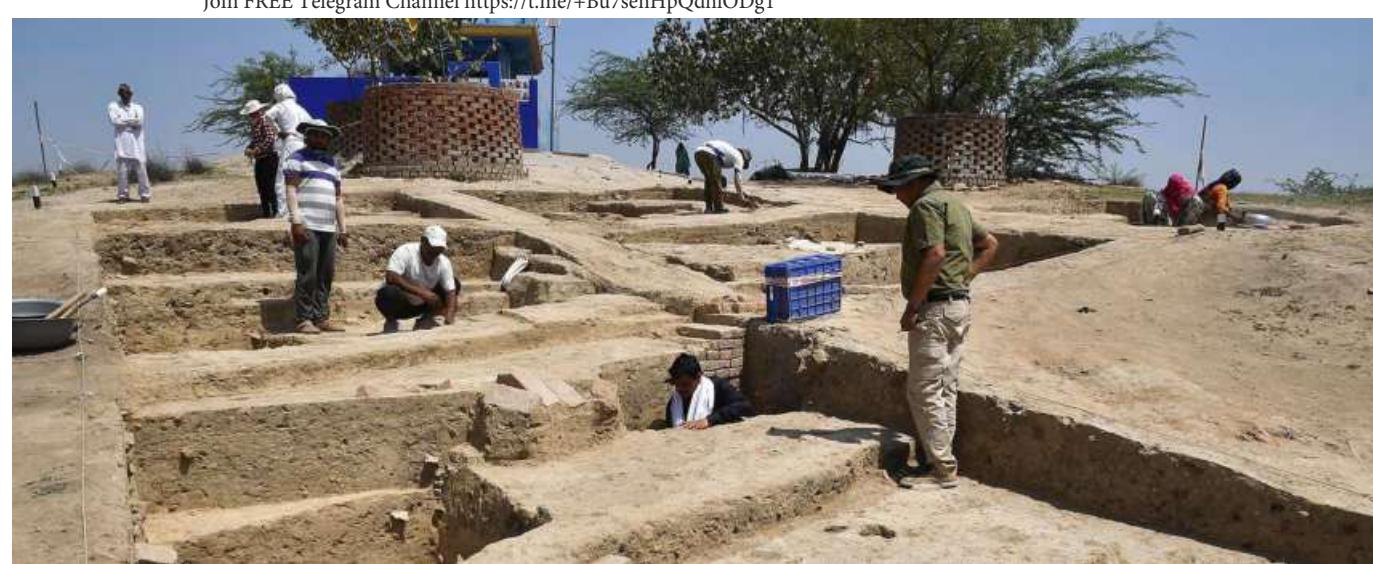
The Indus script carries proto-Dravidian references – this is the position of scholars including Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Father Heras, Yri Valentinovich Knorozov, Walter Fairervis, Iravatham Mahadevan, Kamil Zvelebil, Krishnamurti and Asko Parpola – which can be found in the latest study on Indus signs and graffiti marks of Tamil Nadu.

The IVC "is non-Aryan and pre-Aryan," argued Mahadevan in his article published in *The Hindu* on May 3, 2009. Attributing "solid archaeological and linguistic evidence," the scholar, who passed away in 2018, emphasised that "the Indus script is a writing system encoding the language of the region (most probably Dravidian)". Ruling out Aryan authorship of the civilisation, he hastened to add that this did not automatically make it Dravidian. Yet, "there is substantial linguistic evidence favouring the Dravidian theory: the survival of Brahui, a Dravidian language in the Indus region; the presence of Dravidian



Decoding language: Seals with the script of the Indus Valley Civilisation. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

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Buried secrets: Different structures are exposed in a trench at Rakigarhi, a Harappan site in Haryana, in 2022. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

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loanwords in the Rigveda; the substratum influence of Dravidian on the Prakrit dialects; and computer analysis of the Indus texts revealing that the language had only suffixes (like Dravidian), and no prefixes (as in Indo-Aryan) or infixes (as in Munda)." Mahadevan wrote. As the Dravidian models of decipherment had still little in common except certain basic features, "it is obvious that much more work remains to be done before a generally acceptable solution emerges," according to him.

What does the latest work have to offer?

Commissioned by the Tamil Nadu government's State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA), the study, which is morphological in nature, reveals that nearly 90% of the graffiti marks found during excavations at archaeological sites in the State have parallels to those found in the Indus Valley Civilisation. "...the exact shapes and their variants found both independently and in composite forms vividly indicate that they were not accidental. It is believed that the Indus script or signs would have not disappeared without any trace[s], rather they would have transformed or evolved into different forms," concludes K. Rajan, formerly professor at Pondicherry University and academic-research advisor to the TNSDA, and R. Sivanantham, joint director in the department, who carried out the study.

Defining the terms "graffiti" and "script," the duo, in a monograph, explain that all the recognisable scratches engraved on the ceramics in south India and, to some extent, on Indus ceramics

are identified as graffiti. The ones engraved on seals and other metal objects of the IVC are designated as script. Even though both were written by the same people, they were differentiated and documented as script and graffiti. "However, the extensive comparative study of graffiti marks and Indus scripts evidently suggests that both are undeciphered signs," the two scholars observe.

Which project has preceded the work?

The findings of a two-year-long project of the TNSDA, called 'Documentation and Digitisation of Graffiti and Tamil (Tamil-Brahmi) Inscribed Potsherds of Tamil Nadu', have formed the basis of the monograph.

Aimed at documenting, compiling and analysing the graffiti bearing potsherds and Tamil inscribed potsherds unearthed in archaeological excavations of the State, the project, launched during 2022-23, seeks to compare those graffiti marks with the Indus script to explore whether any cultural relationship existed between the two.

The datasets from the project suggested that 15,184 graffiti-bearing potsherds were reported from 140 sites in the State and nearly 14,165 sherds were documented. Of them, nearly 2,107 signs had been morphologically categorised within a group of 42 base signs, 544 variants and 1,521 composites. Any additional strokes added to the base signs were considered variants of the base signs while a group of signs containing more than one base sign was regarded as a composite sign. "Several signs

encountered in Tamil Nadu had exact parallels in the Indus scripts. Likewise, some signs had near parallels. These signs probably evolved from the base signs. Out of 42 base signs and their variants, nearly 60% of them found their parallels in the Indus script," the document explains.

How has the question of cultural contact between the IVC and south India been explored by the work?

The monograph talks of a "possibility of cultural exchanges." Even though the occurrences of identical graffiti marks in south India suggest a kind of cultural contact, one needs more material evidence and tangible data to support or strengthen the view.

The recent chronometric dates indicate that when the Indus Valley experienced the Copper Age, south India experienced the Iron Age. "In this sense, the Iron Age of South [sic] India and the Copper Age of Indus are contemporary." If that is so, there is a "possibility of cultural exchanges either through direct or intermediate zones," the authors of the monograph point out.

The document goes on to state that the occurrence of a large number of carnelian and agate beads and high-tin bronze objects, particularly from Iron Age graves, give a clue about the contact, as carnelian, agate, copper and tin have to come from the north or elsewhere. Besides semiprecious stones and copper, a few more cultural items are required to prove the existence of contact "convincingly," the authors state, calling for future explorations, excavations, scientific investigations and historical linguistic analysis.

THE GIST

The IVC, also called the Harappan Civilisation, spanned 2,000 sites across 1.5 million sq. km. in the territories of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan during the Bronze Age (3000-1500 BCE). It had a wider geographical area than the combined areas of its contemporary civilisations – Egyptian and Mesopotamian.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES

How the UAPA, a draconian law, is wrecking lives

The UAPA prohibits a judge from granting bail if, on a perusal of the police diary or the police report, the judge is of the opinion that there are 'reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation is ... *prima facie* true'

Gautam Bhatia

On January 7, Delhi police opposed the bail pleas of activists Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam and others, who are accused in the 2020 north-east Delhi riots case. These activists have been jailed under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967. In this article, dated August 7, 2022, Gautam Bhatia talks about how the UAPA brings in elements of a trial into a bail hearing.

In March 24, a Sessions Court in Delhi denied bail to Umar Khalid as part of a set of cases that have commonly come to be known as "the Delhi riots cases". The case of the police was that Mr. Khalid was one of the conspirators behind the February 2020 violence in Delhi, which had claimed more than 50 lives. For this, Mr. Khalid, along with many others, was charge-sheeted under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967, and jailed pending trial. Mr. Khalid has been in jail for over 500 days. The trial has not yet begun.

Much has been written about the serious problems with the manner in which the Delhi Police has conducted its investigation, and prosecution of the Delhi riots; in particular, its selective targeting of activists who were involved with the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019, which was the alleged trigger for the violence, while refraining from prosecuting individuals who are on record delivering incendiary speeches. The denial of bail to Mr. Khalid highlights an equally serious problem: the broken nature of India's criminal justice system.

Bail hearing becomes trial

First, consider these facts. Mr. Khalid's bail application was filed in July 2021. The order denying bail was passed eight months later, after multiple hours-long hearings, multiple adjournments, and three deferrals of the order itself. It is important to ask why an application for bail took so many hearings and eight months to decide: in criminal law, the purpose of bail is to ensure that an individual is not unjustly denied their liberty while the trial against them is still proceeding and their guilt has not yet been established. As such, in normal circumstances, courts are supposed to consider whether an accused is a flight risk, or is likely to tamper with evidence or intimidate witnesses. If neither of those dangers exist, there is no purpose in denying an individual their freedom before their guilt has been established in a court. This, in other words, is the real meaning of the hoary phrase 'innocent until proven guilty'.

This is where the notorious UAPA comes in. Shorn of legalese, the UAPA prohibits a judge from granting an individual bail if, on a perusal of the police diary or the police report, the judge is of the opinion that there are "reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation is ... *prima facie* true." The effect of this, as the criminal legal scholar Abhinav Sekhri has pointed out, is that the UAPA introduces elements of the criminal trial into the question of bail. There are traces of this in the Indian Penal Code as well, for bail under serious

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GETTY IMAGES

Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+Bu7senHpQdh1ODg1> non-UAPA offences. This hints at a larger problem with the criminal justice system, of which the UAPA is only the starker example. Questions of guilt or innocence are meant to be determined at the end of a trial, after evidence has been sifted, witnesses examined and cross-examined, and arguments completed. The question of guilt or innocence at the stage of bail short-circuits that essential procedure.

But that is not the only problem with turning bail hearings into mini-trials. The problem is also that this mini-trial – to borrow a colourful phrase from the U.S. Supreme Court – licenses "one side ... to

fight freestyle, while requiring the other to follow the Marquis of Queensberry Rules (i.e., the rules of professional boxing)". What the judge has before them is entirely one side of the case: the police version. In a trial, the defence would be entitled to cross-examine the prosecution's witnesses, determine inconsistencies in their testimony, examine its own witnesses, present its own evidence, and otherwise demonstrate that the case against the accused has not been made out beyond reasonable doubt. In a bail hearing, the defence can do none of that. The starting

point of the bail hearing is the presumption that everything in the police report is true. Based on that presumption, all the two sides can then argue about is whether according to these "facts", the legal ingredients of the offence are fulfilled – or, in some rare cases, about whether the facts themselves are self-contradictory or flat-out implausible, so that no reliance can be placed on them even at the stage of bail. To use an analogy, it is like holding a debate between two sides, stopping it after one side finishes, allowing the other side to pose two or three questions but not say anything more, and then deciding whether the motion passes or falls.

Such a system might possibly be defensible in a situation where criminal justice was swift, efficient, and trustworthy. If, for example, criminal trials habitually concluded within six months, it might just be possible to argue that in terrorism cases, six months of pretrial incarceration is a painful but proportionate price to pay (in my opinion, it is still unjustifiable, but there is at least a case to be made). However, that is not the case in India: a UAPA trial takes years – often more than 10 years. In such a situation, the court's decision on bail, de facto, becomes the decision on the case: the denial of bail means that a person is likely to spend a decade or more behind bars, as the trial winds on. And given the UAPA's abysmally low conviction rates, the trial will likely end in acquittal.

This, thus, explains why bail hearings take so long, and are so convoluted (although there is still little excuse for the eight-month-long process in Mr. Khalid's case). Both the defence and the prosecution know that the outcome of the bail hearing is, for all practical effects, the outcome of the case itself. The result of the denial of bail is, functionally, the same as the result of a finding of guilt: a decade-plus in jail. But, as we have seen, while the denial of bail is effectively a finding of guilt, it has none of the safeguards that the criminal law puts into place before an actual finding of guilt. The accused is first gagged from contesting the police's version and is then condemned for not being able to disprove the police's case.

Rank injustice

In a notorious judgment in *National Investigation Agency v. Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali* (2019), the Supreme Court made a bad situation even worse by forbidding the lower courts from scrutinising in depth even the police case. This leads to absurd situations like Mr. Khalid's bail order.

A reading of the bail order shows that the court reproduces many allegations against Mr. Khalid – some of them hearsay, and therefore inadmissible during the trial, and some extremely implausible; dismisses the defence's challenges to them without any engagement; and then denies bail. Lawyers and legal scholars may disagree over whether the UAPA actually requires the courts to become stenographers for the prosecution, even under existing legal doctrine. The point, however, is that for all the reasons we have discussed above, the result is rank injustice.

Reforming the criminal justice system is the task of many years. In the immediate future, however, it is at least possible to curtail the manner in which the UAPA plays havoc with the lives of so many individuals.

Striking down or reading down its bail prohibitions and subjecting the police case to stricter scrutiny during bail hearings would be a start. It remains to be seen whether the judiciary has the will and the inclination to do so.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz to mark the 18th edition of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas being held in Bhubaneswar

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Why was January 9 chosen as Pravasi Bharatiya Divas and in which year was the inaugural event held?

QUESTION 2

The past 17 editions have been held in various Indian cities. Which city has hosted the event the most number of times and where was the last edition held?

QUESTION 3

What major change was initiated to the

PBD in 2015?

QUESTION 4

What was special about the edition held in 2021?

QUESTION 5

What is the theme for this year's Pravasi Bharatiya Divas?

QUESTION 6

The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is sponsored and organised by the Ministry of External Affairs. Which two leading organisations also collaborate with the MEA in celebrating the event?

QUESTION 7

What is the name of the award given to honour exceptional overseas Indians?



Visual question:
Identify this former President and Premier of an African nation who was the first chief guest in 2003. FILE PHOTO

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. This film is about a Mexican drug lord who changes gender. **Ans:** *Emilia Perez*

2. This TV series is set amid the emerging threat of civil war in Japan in 1600. The writer of the book was a young officer in the Royal Artillery. **Ans:** *Shogun; James Clavell*

3. The reason why naming Pia Zadora the new star of the year in 1982 was controversial. **Ans:** *The film, Butterfly, wasn't even out yet*

4. This actor refused his Golden Globe award and Academy Award in the 1970s for this cult film. **Ans:** *Marlon Brando; The Godfather*

5. Payal Kapadia lost her Best Director Award to Brady Corbet, who won it for this film. **Ans:** *The Brutalist*

6. This actor holds the highest number of nominations at the Golden Globe awards. **Ans:** *Meryl Streep*

Visual: Name the three people here. **Ans:** *Fred Astaire, Jane Fonda, and John Travolta*

Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan|

Rajmohan Velayudhan| Tito Shiladitya| Mohan Lal Patel| K.N. Viswanathan



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"Did you or didn't you see the film?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. No sooner had I reached the ticket counter when the crowd..."

"... 'than', not 'when'."

"What?"

"The expression is 'no sooner.... than', not 'no sooner,, when'. No sooner had the bell rung than the students came running out of their classrooms."

"No sooner had the star arrived than a loud cheer went up."

"Good. I'm going to make some coffee. How would you like yours?"

"I...er... Well, I.I..."

"As it comes?"

"As it comes? As what comes?"

"The coffee, of course. When somebody asks you how you would like your coffee or tea, and you reply as it comes', you mean you do not mind how strong or weak it is."

"In other words, I'm willing to drink what is given to me. I have no preFErence."

"That's right. P.r.e.f.e.r.e.n.c.e is pronounced PREference. The stress is on the first syllable."

"First syllable! Really? PREference. Rhymes with the word REference, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it most certainly does. Now, about the coffee. Will you take it as it comes?"

"Oh no! I'd like mine to be strong, please. Really strong... You've been spending a lot of your time in the kitchen lately. What's the reason?"

"I'm learning to be a househusband."

"A househusband! What's that?"

"Why don't you figure it out yourself?"

"Hm...let's see. A 'housewife' is someone who looks after the home. The husband goes out to work and she takes care of the home."

"You're on the right track."

"So a 'househusband' would be a man who looks after the house, while the wife has an outside job."

"Exactly!"

"A man looking after the house!"

"There's nothing wrong with it."

"I never said there was. But you would make a lousy househusband."

"Why do you say that?"

"This coffee! It tastes terrible. By the way, do you know that 'husband' can be used as a verb also?"

"I know."

"What does it mean?"

"To work as a husband."

"No. It means 'to use sparingly and economically.' We must husband our resources. 'It is a formal word.'

Published in *The Hindu* on August 30, 1994.

Word of the day

Gelid:

extremely cold

Synonyms: arctic, frigid, glacial, icy, polar

Usage: She could not long survive the gelid waters of the lake.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/gelid/p

International Phonetic Alphabet: /dʒelɪd.td/

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

POCSO case against Yediyurappa: victim's brother seeks justice

Shreyas H.S.
BENGALURU

Upset over the case related to the petition of former Karnataka Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa to quash the chargesheet against him under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, dragging on for eight months now, the victim's elder brother has appealed to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to take steps to ensure speedy justice.

In March 2024, the Sadasivanagar police booked Mr. Yediyurappa under POCSO Act for allegedly sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl on February

2, 2024, at his residence. The case was later transferred to the Criminal Investigation Department, which chargedsheeted Mr. Yediyurappa in June 2024.

Following this, the former CM filed a writ petition in the High Court appealing it to quash the chargesheet against him. His counsel is yet to conclude arguments in the case.

In a five-minute video titled 'Need for Justice' posted on social media, the brother said he had taken to social media as his family was undergoing difficult times. "Judiciary is the only hope we have and we appeal to the State government to take the case seriously," he said.

TMC leader's arrest in councillor's murder raises questions on factionalism

Moyurie Som
KOLKATA

The arrest of local Trinamool Congress leader Narendra Nath Tewari on Wednesday in connection with the murder of party councillor Dulal Sarkar in West Bengal's Malda district has raised questions on whether factionalism was behind the crime.

Along with Mr. Tewari, one Swapna Sharma was also arrested after questioning. The police said the two accused had hired contract killers for ₹50 lakh.

"Mr. Sharma and Mr. Te-

wari were the primary conspirators behind the murder," South Bengal Additional Director General of Police Supratim Sarkar said on Wednesday.

Mr. Tewari alleged that "a more influential figure is involved in the crime".

Chaitali Sarkar, his wife, had earlier alleged that Sarkar's murder was part of a deep political conspiracy.

Given the ISRO's busy calendar for 2025, Dr. Narayanan is aware that he has little or no time to get going. "Towards January-end, we have the GSLV Mk-II/IRNSS-1 K mission. We also have lined up the first of the uncrewed flights of the Gaganyaan programme, the G-I mission, as well as a commercial launch using the LVM3 launch vehicle," he said. "These apart, there are several experiments related to the Gag-

anyaan programme. So you see, we have our hands full."

High-profile programmes on the ISRO's to-do list include the Chandrayaan-4 moon mission, the development of the space station, Bharatiya Antariksha Station, a second mission to Mars, and the maiden Venus Orbiter Mission. While all of these may not happen during Dr. Narayanan's tenure, the space agency has kicked off preparations.

The Appointments Committee of the Union Cabinet has decided that Dr. Narayanan will take over as Secretary, Department of Space, and Chairman, Space Commission, "for a period of two years" from January 14.

Dr. Narayanan, born in



On an upward trajectory: V. Narayanan with a model of the Chandrayaan-3 moon lander. M PERIASAMY



Today, all the spacefaring nations truly understand our abilities and strengths. Strength respects strength

V. NARAYANAN
ISRO Chairman designate

to a humble farming family in Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, brings a wealth of experience to the Chairman's post, having joined the space agency in 1984 and worked in one of its core areas – rocket propulsion.

Dr. Narayanan said increasing India's presence in space tops his list of priorities. He said the space sector reforms set in motion a few years ago by

opening it up to private players will play a vital role in this area.

"If you look at societal and strategic applications, today we have about 53 satellites in orbit. We need many more for communication, navigation and earth observation purposes. The ISRO on its own cannot meet this requirement. The reforms will help in this area. We have been giving opportunities to the private sector and the start-up ecosystem," he said.

Dr. Narayanan drew attention to India's plans to expand its share in the global economy from 2% to 10%. "So far, we have not concentrated much on the space economy aspect. We need to have our due share, though. We are targeting 10%," he said.

He reiterated the importance that the ISRO places on collaboration with other space agencies. "In our development stage as a space agency, indeed there was support. Today, all the spacefaring nations truly understand our abilities and strengths. Strength respects strength," he said.

Village upbringing

Dr. Narayanan was born to C. Vanniyaperumal, a farmer, and S. Thangamal, a homemaker, at Melakattuvilai, a village in Kanniyakumari district. He has three brothers and two sisters. Young Narayanan and his siblings studied in a

Tamil-medium school near their home. It was when he was in Class 9 that their home got an electricity connection. He was a Class 10 topper in his school. Dr. Narayanan is married to Kavitharaj N.K. The couple has a daughter, Divyaa, and a son, Kalesh.

He is an alumnus of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. He obtained his M.Tech. in cryogenic engineering with a first rank in 1989 and a Ph.D. in aerospace engineering in 2001.

A Bench of Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakshy and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked the Centre to decide the petitioner's representation on the issue.

The petitioner, Akhil Bhartiya Dharma Prasari Samiti, said there was a sizeable number of migrants from Pakistan who obtained citizenship pursuant to the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019.

The migrants were in need of comprehensive resettlement measures to enable them to live with dignity in India, the plea said.

Advocate Divita Dutta, representing the petitioner, said the migrants from Pakistan are living in seven camps spread across the city. Some of them, the plea said, lived in deplorable conditions prompting an urgent need to provide them with rehabilitation measures towards shelter, access to healthcare, education, water, electricity, and sanitation.

The court noted that the rehabilitation package and the extent of its requirement were "purely a matter of policy".

HC refuses to direct Centre to rehabilitate migrants from Pakistan

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday declined to direct the Centre to provide a comprehensive rehabilitation package for migrants from Pakistan who obtained citizenship under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) saying it was a policy matter of the government.

A Bench of Acting Chief Justice Vibhu Bakshy and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela asked the Centre to decide the petitioner's representation on the issue.

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As

Dr. Narayanan has done important work on major ISRO missions and programmes, including cryogenic technology; the moon (Chandrayaan 1, 2 and 3), Mars (Mangalyaan) and Aditya-L1 (to study the sun) missions; and the upcoming Gaganyaan programme during a career spanning four decades.

As

On joining the ISRO on February 1, 1984, he initially worked on solid propulsion at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre here. In 1989, he moved to the LPSC to work on cryogenic propulsion. "His contributions made India one among six countries in the world to have the complex and high-performance cryogenic propulsion systems and made it self-reliant in this area. He has finalised the Propulsion Road Map of ISRO for the next 20 years [2017-2037]," the LPSC has noted.

India ready to support Maldives in enhancing its defence preparedness, says Rajnath Singh

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Maldivian counterpart Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon, in New Delhi. R.V MOORTHY

Tuhin Kanta Pandey
entrusted with Revenue Department

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

With a little over three weeks to go for the Union Budget on February 1, the Centre on Wednesday shifted the recently appointed Revenue Secretary Arunish Chawla to the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), and entrusted Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey with the Revenue Department.

Mr. Chawla had taken charge as Revenue Secretary on December 26, taking over from Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth who held additional charge of the department since incumbent Sanjay Malhotra was appointed Governor of the Reserve Bank of India last month.

Chawla to steer DIPAM
The Finance Secretary who was also entrusted with steering DIPAM and the Department of Public Enterprises, will now hand over charge of those two departments to Mr. Chawla, who has also been assigned additional charge of Secretary in the Culture Ministry, till a regular incumbent is appointed, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet decided.

This was conveyed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during talks with his visiting Maldivian counterpart, Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon.

"Raksha Mantri (Defence Minister) reaffirmed India's readiness to support the Maldives in capability enhancement for defence preparedness as per its national priorities.

This was conveyed by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during talks with his visiting Maldivian counterpart, Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon.

"Raksha Mantri (Defence Minister) reaffirmed India's readiness to support the Maldives in capability enhancement for defence preparedness as per its national priorities.

Mr. Maumoon appreciated India's historical role as the "first responder" for the Maldives and thanked New Delhi for assisting Male in augmenting

for All in the Region," the Ministry said in a statement.

Mr. Maumoon appreciated India's historical role as the "first responder" for the Maldives and thanked New Delhi for assisting Male in augmenting

the modern infrastructural capacities and training of defence and security personnel, the statement said.

Stating that the talks were fruitful, Mr. Singh said in a post on X, "Several issues pertaining to deepening defence cooperation were discussed which would also help in enhancing the capability of Maldives National Defence Forces. Today's discussions will add new vigour to India-Maldives relations."

During the talks, the two Ministers comprehensively reviewed various aspects of bilateral defence and security cooperation, the statement said. They also reasserted the firm commitment to work closely in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives

relations.

Earlier, the visiting Minister laid a wreath at the National War Memorial. He was also accorded a tri-service guard of honour.

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to frame a scheme by March 14, 2025, for the cashless medical treatment of road accident victims during golden hour when their near and dear ones are not around and there may not be anyone to help them with money.

Asserting that the government could no longer deny the reality of India's growth slowdown, he said that India's consumption story was the biggest pain point, as it had gone into "reverse swing" in the past 10 years.

Mr. Ramesh said the Union Budget for 2024-25 had made grand promises on increase in capex investment, with an allocation of ₹11.11 lakh crore, but until November 2024, only ₹5.13 lakh crore had been spent.

"The government's own incompetence in spending its funds is partly responsible for the wider economic gloom," he said.

Plan scheme for cashless medicare by March 14: SC

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Centre to frame a scheme by March 14, 2025, for the cashless medical treatment of road accident victims during golden hour when their near and dear ones are not around and there may not be anyone to help them with money.

It noted that it has been three years since Section 162 of the Motor Vehicles Act came into force. Yet, the Centre has not framed a scheme for its implementation on the ground.

Sambhal mosque case: HC seeks reply from govt. and ASI



A view of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Sambhal.

The Allahabad High Court on Wednesday sought a response from the Union and State governments, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and local authorities on a plea moved by the Shahi Jama Masjid committee in Sambhal challenging a trial court's order.

As

The trial court had directed an Advocate Commissioner to survey the mosque while dealing with a suit that claimed that it was built after destroying a

plaintiffs, said no reply was filed by the opposite side. "We filed an application with the court demanding their opportunity to reply should now end," he said.

The local court in Sambhal, on November 19, had ordered a survey of the Mughal-era mosque while hearing a petition that claimed that it was built in 1526 after demolishing a Harihar temple, dedicated to Kalki, the last incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The eight plaintiffs in the suit had demanded the right to access the mosque.

The Supreme Court, in November last year, had stayed the trial court proceedings in the case by the trial court in Sambhal till February 25, which is also the next date of the hearing of the matter in the High Court.

As

The lower court has now fixed March 5 as the next date of hearing.

The Supreme Court, in November last year, had stayed the trial court proceedings in the case by the trial court in Sambhal till February 25, which is also the next date of the hearing of the matter in the High Court.

"The Supreme Court directed all the courts not to entertain new suits seeking surveys of any place of worship until further orders. We filed a copy of the said order in the [trial] court, which fixed March 5 as the next date of hearing," Shakil Ahmad Wari, the advocate representing the Muslim side, told reporters.

Gopal Sharma, the lawyer representing the Hin-

Cong. suggests relief in income tax for middle class in Union Budget

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Jairam Ramesh

The downward revision of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth estimates for the current fiscal provides a gloomy backdrop to the upcoming Union Budget, and radical action is needed to dispel the cloud of growth slowdown and investment chill in the country, the Congress said on Wednesday.

Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh, in a statement, said there should be income support for India's poor, higher Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Em-

ployment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) wages, and increased minimum support prices (MSPs). Drastic simplification of the "comically complex" Goods and Services Tax regime, and income tax relief for the middle class are also the need of the hour, the

party said. "The advance estimates released by the Union government for GDP growth in FY25 project a mere 6.4% growth. This is a four-year low and a sharp deceleration compared to the 8.2% growth recorded in FY24 (2023-24). It is even lower than the recent RBI estimate of 6.6% growth which itself marked a reduction from the earlier projection of 7.2%," Mr. Ramesh said. "In a few short weeks, the bottom has fallen out of the Indian economy, with the all-important manufacturing sector simply refusing to expand as it should."

Asserting that the government could no longer deny the reality of India's growth slowdown, he said that India's consumption story was the biggest pain point, as it had gone into "reverse swing" in the past 10 years.

Mr. Ramesh said the Union Budget for 2024-25 had made grand promises on increase in capex investment, with an allocation of ₹11.11 lakh crore, but until November 2024, only ₹5.13 lakh crore had been spent.

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'India's digital policies, talent getting global recognition'

The IT Minister says the country is crafting balanced policies on data protection, online fact-checking, children on social media, and AI regulations while insisting that society and law have to walk in tandem; he says U.S.-based tech firms operating in India must comply with our law on data transfer restrictions; now the global IT industry is also looking at us as a potential demand centre, he adds

INTERVIEW

Ashwini Vaishnaw

Varghese K. George
Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

In the past, global IT firms saw India as a way to save costs, but they are now seeing the country as a leading source of talent and demand, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw says. He speaks on the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules and AI regulation. Excerpts:

What can we expect in the coming months with the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules in terms of further consultation and implementation?

The consultations so far have been extensive, and people are by and large okay with the provisions. I don't see too many amendments coming in the final notification beyond some

tweaks. We have also worked on the entire digital implementation framework of the DPDP Act, so that the Data Protection Board of India's portal is ready, and implementation will happen in a totally digital way.

We would like to notify it as soon as we can, and of course we'll give a good transition period to the industry to move to a new regime. I think we should see the implementation of this Act starting somewhere in the middle of this year.

In the event that government organisations are in breach of standards in the DPDP Rules, will they also be liable to the same penalties and consequences?

Of course. In this country, we have a system where the law stands the same for everybody. The law is supreme.

How do you respond to concerns on the Data Protection Board of India's autonomy?

The law has been drafted

in a way to ensure the functioning and autonomy of the Board. What will be a big challenge will be getting the right people who understand law, digital technology, the financial implications, societal implications. We are working on awareness programmes.

Why are submissions in the Rules' consultation process not public, as they are in those held by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India?

You cannot compare TRAI's consultation process with a lawmaking consultation. Lawmaking is a sovereign act enabled by the Constitution. Laws are made in a very structured manner. TRAI consultations are regulations for the industry.

The Rules hint at data transfer restrictions abroad. Does this conflict with other countries' laws, especially for U.S. firms doing business here?

The laws passed by the Parliament of India will be ap-



SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

plicable to every entity, from every geography that is providing services here.

On Tuesday, Meta announced that they are moving away from professional fact-checkers to community-led fact-checking. The IT Rules had provisions on fact-checking bodies for general news and news on the government...

This whole point proves that the stand that we had taken was the right one, that the owner or the generator of the information, or the person who is well placed to fact check in a particular sector on a particular subject is the right person to do so. [On legal

challenges to fact-checking requirements:] Let the courts decide. This is a very logical way to proceed, and there is no bias in this entire thought process.

On Monday, a subcommittee under the IndiaAI Mission put out a draft framework for AI governance. What is the government's view on tackling AI regulation?

AI has three major dimensions. First, the power that it brings for solving our very complex problems, which we must harness. Second, the potential harms it can cause. And third, the opportunities it creates for our companies, our youth and startups,

that we should not block.

That's why our Principal Scientific Adviser has taken this initiative under the honourable Prime Minister's guidance, to create a holistic plan for the country, to create a good regulatory framework which develops trust, and balances innovation and regulation. We will finalise the draft after getting inputs.

Do you think that innovation and strict rules are necessarily in conflict?

They're not. The reason I say this is because some geographies have actually put so much emphasis on the regulation part that the innovation potential there has reduced; and there are some geographies which do not want any regulation, they simply want 100% innovation.

We are actually trying to place ourselves somewhere between the two.

And I think the world is noticing; in informal meetings, people are saying that this is the right template which the world should follow. There is an impact [of big tech and social media]

on institutions which have been built over centuries, and most societies are today worried that the institutions are weakened because of the misinformation and the fake news.

So everywhere, society is looking for the right balance between absolute free speech and the right mix of regulation.

The Rules do not outright ban social media for children, like some countries are doing, but require authentication of parental consent.

Here again, we have taken a very nuanced approach and our approach is that these are things which must evolve, and the society must create a consensus around these subjects. Society and the law have to walk in tandem.

The Digital India Act has been planned to replace the Information Technology Act, 2000. Are we still moving in that direction?

We have to overhaul the

entire digital framework. We began with the two horizontal laws, the Telecommunication Act, 2023 and the DPDP Act, 2023, which cut across all the sectors and have an impact on all sectors. There will be certain verticals which are specific to sectors, and we are working on this whole comprehensive framework.

Microsoft this week announced \$3 billion in India investments, and there were deals announced with the IT Ministry and private firms. What role does the private sector have in our AI ambitions?

All players in the industry have a big role to play in our growth story. We see a very clear trend that the competitiveness of our talent is very well accepted, and so is the certainty of our policies. So now the global IT industry, which was earlier looking at India mostly from a cost and talent arbitrage perspective, is also looking at India as a potential demand centre.

(Full interview on [newsth.live/vaishnaw](#))

More voters than govt's population estimate in Maharashtra: Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Praveen Chakravarty

A day after Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar reiterated that voters' names were added to the electoral rolls in a fool-proof process, the Congress on Wednesday said the Election Commission appeared to have enrolled more voters in Maharashtra than the adult population of the State estimated by the National Democratic Alliance government for a report.

The CEC on Tuesday, while addressing a press conference to announce the dates of the Delhi Assembly election, sought to clarify doubts over the increase in the number of electors in the voters' lists for the recent elections.

In a statement on Wednesday, Praveen Chakravarty, chairperson of the Congress data analytics department, said the Con-

tors in Maharashtra seems to be more than the total adult population as estimated by the Narendra Modi government's own report," Mr. Chakravarty asked.

The party's statement quoted from page 229 of the November 2019 report of the National Commission on Population of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, saying Maharashtra's estimated adult population in 2024 could be calculated as 9.54 crore, based on the five-year projections of the report.

"As per the EC, the total enrolled electors in Maharashtra for Vidhan Sabha election were 9.7 crore. That is, the Election Commission seems to have enrolled 16 lakh more electors than the entire adult population in Maharashtra, as estimated by the Narendra Modi government," it said.

Just this one simple data

point showing the EC may have registered more electors than adult population quashes the CEC's claim that the process of voter addition and deletion was very robust and unquestionable, it said.

Aadhaar data

Mr. Chakravarty said the Aadhaar enrolment data in Maharashtra reinforced the Congress's claim that the EC's total voter enrolment in Maharashtra may be higher than the total adult population.

The Congress, in a letter to the CEC on December 10, sought for data related to the Maharashtra Assembly election, including constituency-wise voter rolls and booth-wise result sheets for the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections to be made public. A nine-member delegation of the Congress had earlier met the commission and demanded the same.

SC to take up pleas challenging CEC and EC appointment law in February

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI



The petitioners pointed to the retirement of CEC Rajiv Kumar to advance hearing. FILE PHOTO

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar's retirement in February brought back into focus before the Supreme Court on Wednesday the need to fast-track a decision on the legality of a new law dealing with the appointment of Election Commissioners which gives the Union government a dominant role.

Justice Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and K.V. Viswanathan, highlighted that the test regarding the validity of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023 would hinge on whether the court's authority to pronounce binding decisions under Article 141 of the Constitution could be circumvent-

ed or diluted by a law. "The real test here is between the court's opinion and exercise of legislative powers," he said.

The petitioners in question raised the pivotal legal question whether Parliament possessed the authority to promulgate a Gazette notification or ordinance to nullify or amend a Constitution Bench judgment.

The petitioners, including the Election Commissioners to be appointed by the Presi-

dent on the advice tendered by a Selection Committee of Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha/leader of the single largest party in Opposition and the Chief Justice of India.

The Constitution Bench had explained that a committee of diverse heads was necessary to protect the "fierce independence, neutrality and honesty" of the institution of the Election Commission and to end government monopoly and "exclusive control" over appointments to the highest poll body.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, for the petitioners, urged the court to fix an early date, saying the validity of the law has to be decided before the next crucial appointments to the EC. "Hear it next week," he suggested.

However, Justice Kant said the case could likely be heard on February 4.

Nagaland villagers detain Assam policemen

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The residents of a Nagaland village allegedly detained a dozen Assam Police personnel after they "inadvertently" crossed the inter-State border in pursuit of a car-lifter on Tuesday night.

The incident happened at Yajang village in Nagaland's Mokokchung district.

Jorhat district SP Shantanu Mishra told journalists that the police team did not realise when they crossed over.

He said one of the Assam policemen was injured in the commotion.

He said the villagers released after the identities of the police personnel were established.

Mokokchung SP Vesupra Kezo said the villagers were alarmed by the arrival of the armed and unknown men in civies.

AAP and BJP spar in Delhi over lavish spending on government residences

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A day after Assembly election was announced in Delhi, the politics over opulence continued to play out in the national capital on Wednesday, with the Aam Aadmi Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party accusing each other of extravagant spending on government residences.

While the BJP has dubbed the 6 Flagstaff Road bungalow, which was earlier occupied by AAP national convener and former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, 'Sheesh Mahal', the ruling party in Delhi has named Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence 'Raj Mahal'.

AAP leaders on Wednesday marched to the Flagstaff Road bungalow to expose the "lies" of the BJP that it had a swimming pool, a commode made of



Showdown: AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj during the march in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

gold, and so on, but they were stopped by the police from entering the house.

The leaders then tried to reach the Prime Minister's residence but were stopped near the Lok Kalyan Marg Metro Station, where they staged a protest.

The property is currently under scrutiny by Central investigative agencies for alleged irregularities in its renovation. The Congress too had targeted the AAP over the issue.

party's protest, alleged that the BJP's refusal to open the gates to the PM's residence confirmed the claims about its ₹2,700-crore price tag.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva accused the AAP of playing "petty politics".

"AAP leaders are attempting to deflect criticism over the 'Sheesh Mahal' bungalow controversy by raising questions about the Prime Minister's residence. The Prime Minister's residence is an officially designated property where construction and renovation have been transparently carried out, unlike the alleged irregularities surrounding the construction activities at 6 Flag Staff Road during Kejriwal's administration," he said.

Mr. Sachdeva and other party workers marched to 17 A.B. Mathura Road bungalow allotted to Chief Minister Atishi.



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HITES on behalf of DMER, Govt. of Maharashtra invites online bids for the "Construction of Residential Quarters (Type II, III, IV & V) & 250 Bedded Hospital at Maharashtra Institute of Mental Health Pune on EPC Basis". PAC is Rs.77,62,700/- (Excl. GST). For tender details and bid submission, please visit <https://tenders.gov.in/procure/app> and www.hitesllc.com. Tender documents will be available in e-tender portal from 16.01.2025 onwards.

VP (ID) HITES South Operations

NOTICE

BOOKING OF "Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Vadtaidham Dwishabadi Mahotsav" and "Centenary Year SBI Mumbai Main Branch Building" Commemorative Coin Sets

India Government Mint, Mumbai (Unit of Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India Ltd.) is pleased to notify booking of commemorative coin sets in Proof and Uncirculated varieties of following themes.

Theme	Proof (Rs.)	UNC (Rs.)
Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Vadtaidham Dwishabadi Mahotsav (Denomination of ₹200) - Folder Packing	6620.00	6195.00
Shree Swaminarayan Mandir, Vadtaidham Dwishabadi Mahotsav (Denomination of ₹200) - Wooden Packing	6870.00	NA
Centenary Year SBI Mumbai Main Branch Building (Denomination of ₹100) - Folder Packing	3555.00	3375.00
Centenary Year SBI Mumbai Main Branch Building (Denomination of ₹100) - Wooden Packing	3765.00	NA

The booking period will be from 09.01.2025, the coin sets can be booked online on our website [https://www.indiagovtmint.in](http://www.indiagovtmint.in). Alternatively, the coin sets can be ordered offline by submitting an order form available on our website or visit our store at Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Fort, Mumbai-400 001.

*50gms Silver Coin on Shree Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir, Ayodhya available for sale.

For other detailed terms and conditions and online booking please visit customer corner section of our web site: <https://www.indiagovtmint.in>.

Sd- Manager (Marketing) For Chief General Manager

For Chief General Manager

IN BRIEF



Filmmaker and poet Pritish Nandy passes away at 73

Poet, painter, film producer and former parliamentarian Pritish Nandy passed away at 73 on Wednesday. Actor Anupam Kher paid tribute in a post on X, calling Mr. Nandy a fearless artist and a source of strength during his struggling years. A noted magazine editor and literary voice, Mr. Nandy established his production banner, Pritish Nandy Communications, in the 1990s. Nandy was given the Padma Shri in 1977 for his contributions to Indian literature. He also hosted the DD show called *The Pritish Nandy Show*. He was awarded the Karmaveer Puraskar in 2008. Nandy is survived by his wife, Rina, and children Kushan, Ishita and Rangita.

ISRO delays satellite docking experiment again, citing drift

ISRO has once again postponed the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDEx) involving two satellites, citing excessive drift during a crucial manoeuvre. The SpaDEx was supposed to take place on Thursday. "While making a manoeuvre to reach 225 m between satellites the drift was found to be more than expected, post non-visibility period. The planned docking for tomorrow is postponed. Satellites are safe. Stay tuned for updates," ISRO said in a post on 'X' on Wednesday. This is the second time in two days that the ISRO postponed the SpaDEx. PTI

No report of any unusual outbreak pattern of HMPV in China right now: WHO

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The World Health Organization is in contact with Chinese health officials and has not received any reports of unusual outbreak patterns, its latest disease outbreak report on Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) said.

The WHO said the Chinese authorities reported that their healthcare system was not overwhelmed and that there had been no emergency declarations or responses triggered.

"WHO continues to monitor respiratory illnesses at global, regional, and country levels through collaborative surveillance systems, and provides updates as needed," it said.

Based on data published by China, covering the period up to December 29, 2024, acute respiratory infections have increased



The Ahmedabad civil hospital has opened a female ward for HMPV patients. PTI

during recent weeks and detection of seasonal influenza, rhinovirus, and HMPV, particularly in northern provinces of China, has increased.

The WHO said that though there had been an increase in respiratory pathogen detections, it had been within the range expected for this time of the year during the northern hemisphere winter.

India balancing on twin pillars of technology, tradition: Jaishankar

At the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, External Affairs Minister says the nation's quest is unique because development is based on a democratic framework; he lauded the youth, at home and abroad, for contribution to innovations in every sector

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

India is progressing within a democratic framework, balancing on the twin pillars of technology and tradition, said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

"We are today well on the way to address long-standing challenges to build a modern, inclusive and progressive society. Our quest is unique because the largest nation in the world is developing in that manner in a democratic framework. The mantra of that journey is to advance, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi says, on the two legs of technology and tradition," Mr. Jaishankar remarked.

The youth of the country can be the defining factor in the pace of that endeavour and the realisation of the goals, he added.

Mr. Modi is scheduled to inaugurate the PBD on Thursday.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, Odisha CM Mohan Majhi and Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday. ANI

Stating that the thought behind holding a Youth PBD was to recognise the special contribution that young minds make, at home and abroad, Mr. Jaishankar said, "At a time when so many key developments in the world are being shaped by this younger generation – whether we talk of AI and EV, innovation or start-ups, space or drones, sports, chess, cricket – there is all the more reason to do so."

"The very country that was predicted to go under ended up supplying vaccines and medicines to the entire world. A different but equally telling example is what we see in the realm of space, where there is a growing competition internationally. Our Chandrayaan-3 landing, the Aditya L1 observatory and the proposed Gaganyaan mission are powerful inspirations," the Union Minister said.

"In a digital era, the scale of UPI transactions speaks volumes, both of our infrastructure and of our mindsets. The new India, with 90,000 start-ups and 100-plus unicorns, has calling cards like Drone Didi, Atal Tinkering Labs, hackathons, green hydrogen mission and nano-fertilizers," Mr. Majhi said.

Guest of honour Dev Pragad, a person of Indian origin and chief executive officer of *Newsweek*, narrated

ed how diligent effort had enabled a turnaround of the American media organisation that he helms.

Odisha in focus

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi took the opportunity to showcase the State's strength in mineral resources, tourism and human resources.

"While Odisha's past is steeped in history, its present is defined by transformation and progress. Today, Odisha stands as a leader in mining and industries such as steel and aluminium, while also emerging as a hub for sports, IT and skill development," Mr. Majhi said.

At a business session on the sidelines of PBD 2025, Mr. Jaishankar focused on the 3Ts – Trade, Technology, and Tourism – as critical drivers of Odisha's growth.

He lauded the State's rich natural and cultural advantages, which position it as a hub for global trade, a fertile ground for technological innovation, and a premier tourism destination.

ICMR gets low-cost tech to detect iron deficiency

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

AnemiaPhone, a technology developed by Cornell University researchers to accurately, quickly, and cheaply assess iron deficiency, has been transferred to the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for integration into its programmes for anaemia alleviation, women's health, and maternal and child health.

A release issued by Cornell University said that AnemiaPhone would enable access to rapid screening, and diagnosis of iron deficiency at the point of need.

Iron deficiency is a leading cause of anaemia, which affects 50% to 70% of pregnant women in India.

The technology requires a small finger stick, a drop of blood on a test strip similar to a COVID-19 home test, and a few minutes for the reader to assess. The information is uploaded to a clinical database via mobile phone, wireless tablet or computer. Healthcare workers can interpret the test and provide guidance, triage and referral, or intervention on the spot.

Prioritise studies on oilseeds, rice, pulses hybrids, says official

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In China, influenza is among the most commonly detected respiratory pathogens currently affecting people with acute respiratory infections.

"HMPV is a common respiratory virus found to circulate in many countries in winter through to spring, although not all countries routinely test and publish data on trends in HMPV. While some cases can be hospitalised with bronchitis or pneumonia, most people infected with HMPV have mild upper respiratory symptoms similar to the common cold and recover after a few days," the report further said.

It added that there had been international interest in a potential increase of respiratory virus transmission in China, particularly in oilseeds, too, we should increase productivity using hybrids. This is a priority

PM's Principal Secretary says hybrid seeds have to be affordable to smallholder farmers

for the country," he said.

The senior bureaucrat said hybrids have to be affordable to smallholder farmers. "If research can make farmers save hybrid seeds from one season to another season without losing heterosis, as they do with open-pollinated crops, it would be a great scientific contribution to increasing farmers' incomes," Dr. Mishra said.

He added that there was an urgent need for adopting hybrid technologies to ensure food and nutritional security for the country's growing population.

He said the percentage of workforce dependent on agriculture still stands as high as 37%.

Maharashtra to start drone surveillance of coasts to prevent illegal fishing

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Maharashtra will be the first State to introduce drone surveillance of coasts to keep a stronger check on illegal fishing by trawlers from neighbouring States, primarily from Karnataka, Gujarat and Goa.

Nine drones will be used in seven coastal districts of the State over a period of eight years. Each drone will conduct surveillance of 120 nautical miles per day. "This move is being taken to protect sustainable fishery for traditional fisherfolks in Maharashtra, as the current means of manual surveillance lead to a difficulty in checking the irregularities," Assistant Commissioner Fisheries (Marine) Ajinkya Patil told *The Hindu*.

The project will be in-

augurated by State Fisheries Minister Nitesh Rane on Thursday. It will be useful in keeping a check on bull trawling, line trawling, fishing by purse seine and gill net, and illegal fishing with the usage of LED lights, dynamite, chemicals.

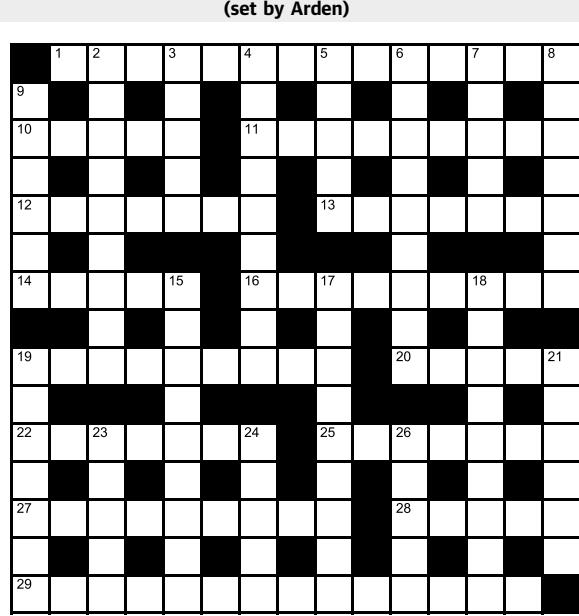
First State

"Maharashtra is the first State to implement this. At present, it is not possible for the patrol boats to check every boat in the sea. To catch the unauthorised boats, drones will help in maintaining proper control and strict enforcement of the Civil Code. Due to the high speed of the drone, more area will be covered at one time. After mapping fishing using drones, information about unauthorised fishing can be easily made available to the Department. Drone

will also be used as a coordination tool with the Maritime Police department, which will help in strengthening maritime security," said Joint Commissioner (Marine) Mahesh Deore. Officials said a large number of trawlers from Gujarat, Karnataka and Goa enter the territorial waters of Maharashtra, and indulge in fishing, thereby robbing the local fisherfolks of their livelihoods. "They come in speedboats. With the drones, we will be able to get the names and the registration numbers of these boats, so action can be initiated against them. As per the provisions of the Maharashtra Marine Fishing Regulation Act, 1981, amended in 2021, heavy fines from ₹1 lakh to ₹20 lakh are imposed for the violation of rules," Mr. Patil told *The Hindu*.

TH CROSSWORD + 14378
(set by Arden)

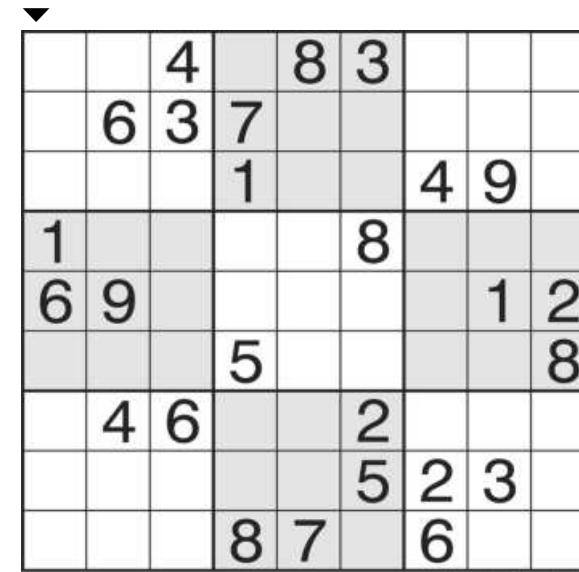
14378



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



SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

FAITH

Andal shows the way

When Vishnu manifested as Varaha and rescued Bhoo Devi from the clutches of Hiranyaksha, She continues to remain sad and informed Varaha that as long as their children (mankind) remained imprisoned by the five *rakshasas* (five indriyas), they would never attain salvation. Perumal agrees with Her and points out that, especially in Kali Yuga, devotees would need far simpler but effective methods of reaching God. He suggests She appear as a divine child in Srivilliputtur in the Tamil month of Aadi under the Poornam star in Periazhwar's garden and showed devotees that heartfelt bhakti and prayer are enough to fetch His Mercy, said Damal S Ramakrishnan in a special discourse on D.V. Vasudevan, *The Hindu's* Faith columnist, on his centenary year.

Periazhwar named her as Goda, with 'Go' referring to earth (since she came from it). 'Go' also refers to milk cows and she gave the milk of knowledge (gnana) to countless devotees.

As Goda, she was devoted to God and adorned herself with the garland made for Perumal before submitting it. When Periazhwar discovered this and put away the offering, a displeased God asked him to bring Him Andal's garland: Goda became Andal, as she had won over Perumal Himself with her devotion.

She disseminated gnana by the simple methodology of gathering together and singing His praise, chanting His name systematically, so that devotion became an organic practice and flourishing from within. Her Tiruppavai verses sung in the month of Margazhi show the way.

IN BRIEF



GMR gets ₹6,300 cr. from Abu Dhabi Investment

GMR Group received ₹6,300 crore investment from Abu Dhabi's sovereign wealth fund ADIA. The funds will help in reducing the debt of promoter group entity GMR Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. In October last year, the group said it secured ₹6,300 crore in debt funding from the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA). GMR Infra Enterprises Pvt. Ltd. (GIEPL) received the funds towards allotment of optionally convertible debentures on January 7, as per a filing. PTI

ONGC picks BP to boost Mumbai High output

Oil And Natural Gas Corporation Ltd. (ONGC) said it picked BP Exploration (Alpha) Ltd., wholly owned by BP Plc. of U.K., as the technical service provider (TSP) for its Mumbai High (MH) field. "The TSP will identify improvements in reservoir, facilities and wells to enhance production from the MH field," ONGC said in a filing. The TSP has indicated a 60% rise in oil and gas production from the baseline production level over a 10-year contract period, ONGC added.

Laxmi Dental sets IPO price band at ₹407-₹428 a share

Laxmi Dental Ltd. will tap the capital market with an initial public offering (IPO) in the price band of ₹407 to ₹428 per equity share of face value of ₹2 each. The B2C dental aligner company offers dental products like metal-free crowns, bridges and dentures. The issue will open on January 13 and close January 15. At the upper price band, the issue size is estimated at ₹698 crore. The firm proposes to use net proceeds towards servicing debt, among others.

SEBI pulls up Ola Electric for lapses on disclosures

Reuters

India's markets regulator warned Ola Electric against sharing company information on social media before disclosing it to investors, adding to a slew of problems for the electric two-wheeler maker.

The letter from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), disclosed by Ola Electric on Tuesday, said the company failed to provide "equal and timely access" to investors of information about a planned store expansion.

In December, Ola Electric founder, Bhavish Aggarwal, shared news about new store openings in a post on social media platform X and to investors about four hours later through stock exchanges.

Publicly-listed companies are required to disclose any information first to investors through exchange filings and not more than 12 hours after the event takes place.

"The above violations have been viewed very seriously. You are hereby warned," SEBI said.

Ola Electric, which went public in August 2024, opened 3,200 stores and service centres last month to expand its reach and address increasing number of complaints regarding its service standards. The letter is the latest such regulatory scrutiny of the company following a government agency's investigation into its service standards.

The issues have cast a shadow on Ola's stellar listing, which saw its shares double in value in less than a week. It has also lost market share to rivals TVS Motor and Bajaj Auto's 'Cheek' e-scooters.

Gold googly bamboozles import data

India's overall import bill for the first eight months of 2024-25, reckoned to have grown 8.35% at \$486.73 bn, has been pared by almost 3% to \$472.5 bn, as per DGCIS data; the dramatic revisions alarm economists and one calls it 'statistical harakiri'

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

In what may constitute the steepest revision in India's trade data in recent times, the Centre has revised India's import bill for November 2024 by almost six billion dollars to \$63.86 billion from the record tally of \$70 billion reported as quick estimates by the Commerce Ministry last month, led by a sharp \$5 billion downward revision in gold imports.

In fact, India's overall import bill for the first eight months of 2024-25, which was reckoned to have grown 8.35% at

Trade Math Shock

India's gold import bill for Nov. 2024 has been slashed by \$5 billion and cumulative tally from April to November pared by a quarter

Imports (in \$bn)	Original estimate	Revised estimate
Gold in Nov. 2024	14.86	9.9
Gold, April-Nov. 2024	49.1	37.39
Silver, April-Nov. 2024	3.28	2.33

Source: DGCIS, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

\$486.73 billion, has been pared by almost 3% to \$472.5 billion, as per data uploaded on the website of the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS) on



Wednesday and reviewed by *The Hindu*. The dramatic revisions triggered alarm among economists, with one terming it as outright 'statistical harakiri'. A bulk of this \$14 billion

drop in the year's cumulative goods import tally was linked to a revision in the gold import bill from \$49.1 billion for April to November 2024, which marked a 49% spike from a year ago, to just \$37.4 billion which reflects a mere 13.5% rise.

While gold imports accounted for \$1.7 billion of the \$14.2 billion revision in the year's import bill, silver imports accounted for another billion as they were recalibrated to \$2.33 billion from \$3.28 billion estimated as of December 16. The data revision implies India's trade deficit this year should be about \$14 billion lower than esti-

mated earlier. November's trade gap remains the worst on record but at around \$31.8 billion, from the earlier estimate of \$37.4 billion.

October's import bill has also been revised downward, but by a marginal \$0.16 billion to \$66.18 billion, which means it still marks India's highest import bill in a month.

Ajai Srivastava, director of the Global Trade Research Initiative, said the government must explain the rationale behind the revision to ensure India's economic data retains credibility among investors and financial markets.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	78,148	-0.06
US Dollar	85.91	-0.19
Gold	80,000	0.37
Brent oil	76.17	-0.82

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2515.25	-5.30
Adani Ports	1152.30	-21.70
Apollo Hosp.	7142.65	-294.10
Asian Paints	2334.35	-41.75
Axis Bank	1074.95	7.45
Bajaj Auto	8642.25	-168.05
Bajaj Finserv	1697.00	14.25
Bajaj Finance	7355.40	-1.45
Bharat Elec.	282.10	-4.90
Bharti Airtel	1599.20	8.35
BPCL	286.80	4.00
Britannia Ind.	4859.90	-27.65
Cipla	1494.90	-2.55
Coal India	380.35	0.55
D Dr Reddy's Lab.	1370.75	-19.20
Eicher Motors	5163.20	-14.10
Grasim Ind.	2435.75	-31.50
HCL Tech.	1932.25	-16.35
HFDC Bank	1694.30	-19.10
HDFC Life	618.00	-1.85
Hero MotoCorp	4128.10	-23.95
Hindalco	586.65	2.15
Hind Unilever	2401.00	10.20
ICICI Bank	1265.75	-15.50
IndusInd Bank	981.05	-2.55
Infosys	1933.15	2.30
ITC	449.55	8.45
JSW Steel	902.30	-9.50
Kotak Bank	1768.65	-3.40
L&T	3596.35	-46.95
M&M	3086.10	-22.75
Maruti Suzuki	11822.00	100.70
NestleIndia	2219.90	7.25
NTPC	325.40	-3.20
ONGC	271.33	7.84
Powergrid Corp	306.65	1.60
Reliance Ind.	1265.50	24.65
SBI	1463.15	-14.60
State Bank.	771.15	-7.60
Shriram Finance Ltd.	2898.75	-59.65
Sun Pharma	1837.75	-15.65
Tata Consumer Product	961.60	6.60
Tata Motors	794.95	1.70
Tata Steel	132.64	-0.74
TCS	4108.40	80.10
Tech Mahindra	1663.50	-7.40
Titan	3484.05	-21.05
Trent Ltd.	6699.10	-175.20
UltraTech Cement	11403.55	-215.00
Wipro	297.55	3.50

RBI lifts curbs on Chennai lender Asirvad Micro Finance

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday lifted the supervisory restrictions imposed on Chennai-based Asirvad Micro Finance Ltd., and Delhi-based DMI Finance Private Ltd. with immediate effect.

On October 17, 2024, the RBI had directed these entities to cease and desist from sanction and disbursement of loans, effective after October 21.

Later, the firms initiated remedial action and submitted compliances to the RBI, the central bank said.

EXCHANGE RATES

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.65	85.97
Euro	88.14	88.48
British Pound	105.80	106.21
Japanese Yen (100)	54.07	54.27
Chinese Yuan	11.68	11.73
Swiss Franc	93.87	94.22
Singapore Dollar	62.51	62.76
Canadian Dollar	59.53	59.75
Malaysian Ringgit	19.01	19.10
Australian Dollar	53.07	53.27

Source: Indian Bank

Preventing Cervical Cancer: The Critical Role of Screening and Vaccination

Cervical cancer, primarily caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV), is the second most common cancer among Indian women, claiming nearly 80,000 lives annually (Globocan 2022). Despite these statistics, cervical cancer is largely preventable through regular screening and vaccination.

What Causes Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer is a growth of cells that starts in the cervix, the lower part of the uterus connecting to the vaginal canal. Most cases are caused by HPV, a common infection transmitted through sexual contact. While the immune system often clears HPV naturally, in some individuals, the virus persists, leading to precancerous changes in cervical cells that can develop into cancer over time. Regular screening and HPV vaccination significantly reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

If cervical cancer is diagnosed at an early stage (Stage I), the 5-year survival rate in India improves significantly to approximately 85%.

Dr K S Bindhu

Senior Consultant - Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Apollo Hospitals, Navi Mumbai

The Power of Prevention: Screenings and Vaccination

Cervical cancer progresses slowly, providing a window for early detection and treatment. Screening and vaccination are critical in preventing advanced disease.

1. Screening Tests:

• Pap Smear: Detects precancerous changes in the cervix, enabling early treatment. Recommended every three years for women aged 21-65.

• HPV DNA Test: Identifies high-risk HPV strains and complements pap smears, especially for women 30 and older. When combined with a pap smear, it can be done every five years.

2. Vaccination:

HPV vaccines offer proactive protection against cervical cancer's primary cause.

• Target Age Group: Vaccination is most effective between ages 9 and 14, for both boys and girls, before sexual activity begins.

• Catch-Up Vaccination: Women up to age 45 can benefit, though effectiveness may decrease after HPV exposure.

Vaccination covers high-risk HPV types linked to cervical cancer, significantly reducing the likelihood of precancerous changes.

Failing to undergo regular screening can lead to late-stage diagnosis, when treatment options are limited. Advanced cervical cancer often spreads to nearby organs like the bladder and rectum or other distant areas, resulting in severe complications and a high mortality rate – underscoring the importance of early detection.

Symptoms of Advanced Disease

Early-stage cervical cancer is usually asymptomatic, highlighting the need for regular screening. Advanced disease may cause:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding (bleeding between periods, after intercourse, or after menopause)
- Malodorous or unusual vaginal discharge
- Pelvic pain or pain during intercourse

Lifestyle Choices Matter

While screening and vaccination are the most effective measures, certain lifestyle changes further reduce risk:

• Avoiding Tobacco: Smoking damages the DNA in cervical cells, which can lead to mutations that trigger cancer. It also weakens the immune system, making it harder to fight HPV infections.

• Safe Sexual Practices: Barrier methods (like condoms) lower HPV transmission risk.

VIENNA

Austria's Foreign Minister to take over as its caretaker Chancellor



REUTERS

Austria's Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg will take over as caretaker Chancellor from Friday, as the far-right seeks to form a government with the conservatives. Wednesday's statement came after conservative Karl Nehammer said over the weekend he would step down as Chancellor and party chairman. AFP

LHASA

Rescuers search for survivors after quake in Tibet kills 126



AFP

Thousands of rescuers were searching for survivors in freezing conditions on Wednesday after a devastating earthquake in China's remote Tibet region killed at least 126 people. Officials said on Wednesday that there had been no increases in the number of people killed or injured since the last update on Tuesday night. AFP

TAMMUN

Two children among three killed in Israeli strike in the West Bank



AFP

Palestinian officials said three persons including two children were killed on Wednesday in an Israeli air strike on the occupied West Bank which the military said targeted militants. Officials said Israeli forces took the bodies of the three Palestinians "and officially informed us through coordination that they have" them. AFP

KYIV

Ukraine strikes oil depot that serves Russian nuclear bombers



AP

Ukraine launched an overnight strike deep inside Russia that set fire to an oil depot in the city of Engels that serves an air base for Russian nuclear bomber planes, the Ukrainian military said on Wednesday. The Governor of the Russian region said Engels and Saratov had been subject to a "mass drone attack". Reuters

Homes destroyed, thousands flee as wildfires tear through Los Angeles

Two killed, 70,000 face evacuation orders while 28,000 structures under threat; flames race towards neighbourhoods home to California's rich and famous; Vice-President Kamala Harris's home among those that fall under evacuation zones

Associated Press
LOS ANGELES

Multiple massive wildfires tore across the Los Angeles area with devastating force on Wednesday, destroying more than 1,000 structures and killing at least two persons as desperate residents escaped through flames, ferocious winds and towering clouds of smoke.

Three major blazes were burning in the metropolitan area, from the Pacific Coast inland to Pasadena, home of the famed Rose Parade. With thousands of firefighters already attacking the flames, the Los Angeles Fire De-



Fire fury: A home engulfed in flames during the Eaton fire in the Altadena area of Los Angeles in California on Wednesday. AFP

partment put out a plea for off-duty firefighters to help, and weather conditions were too windy for fire-fighting aircraft to fly, further hampering the fight. Fire officials hoped

to get the flights up later Wednesday.

In addition to the two deaths, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marone said many others were hurt in the fires, which threatened at least 28,000 structures.

At least 70,000 people were ordered to evacuate, officials said. The flames marched toward highly populated and affluent neighborhoods home to California's rich and famous. Hollywood stars, including Mark Hamill, Mandy Moore and James Woods, were among those forced to flee.

The home of Vice President Kamala Harris was included in an evacuation zone, although no one was there, according to a spokesperson.

California's wildfire season typically begins in June or July and runs through October, according to the

Western Fire Chiefs Association, but January wildfires are not unprecedented.

The season is beginning earlier and ending later due to rising temperatures and decreased rainfall tied to climate change, according to recent data. Rains that usually end fire season are often delayed, meaning fires can burn through the winter months, the association said.

Recent dry winds have contributed to warmer-than-average temperatures in Southern California, where there's been very little rain so far this season. Southern California hasn't seen more than 0.25 cm of rain since early May.

India's Misri meets Taliban's Foreign Minister in Dubai

Kallop Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Marking the highest outreach with Afghanistan's Taliban regime, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on Wednesday met with the Taliban's Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi, in the UAE. In a meeting that took place in Dubai, the two sides agreed to promote the use of the Iranian port of Chabahar for trade with the Indian delegation, saying that India would provide "further material support" for Afghanistan in areas such as refugee rehabilitation and health.

"In response to the request from the Afghan side, India will provide further material support in the first instance to the health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees."



Common interests: Vikram Misri meets Afghanistan Acting Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai on Wednesday. ANI

The two sides also discussed strengthening of sports (cricket) cooperation," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said after the meeting in Dubai.

Support for trade

"It was also agreed to promote the use of the Chabahar port for supporting trade and commercial ac-

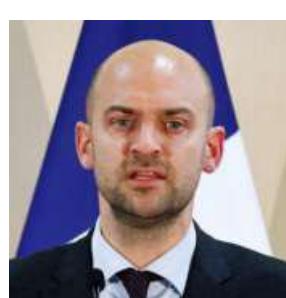
France asks Europe to brace itself against Musk's interference

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

France on Wednesday urged the European Commission to protect its member states with "the greatest firmness" against interference in political debate particularly from the billionaire owner of social media platform X, Elon Musk.

"Either the European Commission applies with the greatest firmness the laws that we have given ourselves to protect our public space, or it does not do so and then it will have to agree to give back the capacity to do so to the EU member states," Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot told France Inter radio. "We have to wake up," he said.

Asked whether X could be banned in Europe, Mr.



Jean-Noel Barrot

Barrot replied that such a mechanism to close a platform "is laid out in our laws".

Mr. Musk, who has unprecedented influence thanks to his proximity to U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, is set for a role in Mr. Trump's administration.

"When you take part in a government or aspire to take part in one, your opinions have a rather special value," Mr. Barrot said.

Yoon's lawyers slam efforts to detain impeached President

Associated Press
SEOUL

Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, expressed concern on Wednesday over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel.

As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain Mr. Yoon following last week's failed effort, the presidential security service fortified Mr. Yoon's compound with barbed wire and rows of tightly placed vehicles blocking the path to his residence.

The Corruption Investi-

Officials warn they could arrest members of the security staff who prevent arrest

gation Office for High-Ranking Officials and police say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Mr. Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff.

The office has been seeking Mr. Yoon's detention since he repeatedly ignored summons for questioning about whether his brief power grab on Dec. 3 constituted rebellion.

The opposition Democratic Party accused his lawyers of attempting to stall the process and urged the agency to swiftly execute the warrant.

Trump asks Supreme Court to block his sentencing

Agence France-Presse
NEW YORK

Donald Trump asked the Supreme Court to block his sentencing this week for covering up hush money payments to a porn star while he appeals his conviction. Mr. Trump made the eleventh-hour plea for a suspension of the criminal proceedings after a New York State appeals court dismissed his effort to have the hearing delayed. He is scheduled to be sentenced on Friday.



Lars Lokke Rasmussen

Danish territory.

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen told reporters that the Danish Realm — which includes Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands — is

"open to a dialogue with the Americans to ensure that American ambitions are fulfilled."

Mr. Lokke Rasmussen noted that the U.S. and NATO had "legitimate" interests in the region because of international events. "In conjunction with the melting of the Arctic and new shipping lanes opening up, we are unfortunately also seeing an increase in great power rivalry. We see a Russia that is arming itself. We see a China that is also starting to take an interest," he said. The top diplomat urged calm amid the new frenzy.

Denmark is 'open to dialogue' with U.S., says Foreign Minister

Agence France-Presse
COPENHAGEN

Denmark is open to talks with the United States to safeguard U.S. interests in the Arctic, after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump refused to rule out military action to take Greenland, the country's Foreign Minister said Wednesday.

Mr. Trump refused to rule out military intervention over the Panama Canal and Greenland.

Mr. Trump's comments came as his son Donald Trump Jr. made a private visit to the Arctic island that is an autonomous

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THE HINDU GROUP

RETROSPECT

Konstas regrets the Sydney stand-off with Bumrah



Sam Konstas regrets his involvement in the stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. "If that happened again, maybe I wouldn't have said anything," he said. He talked about how he handled the shoulder-barge incident with Virat Kohli. "I had a little chat after the game telling him that I idolise him".

APPRAISAL DONE

SCG gets 'satisfactory' rating while others receive 'very good' grade



Four out of five pitches used in the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series have been rated 'very good' by the ICC, which found the track for the fifth and final game in Sydney to be 'satisfactory'. In 2023, the ICC revamped its pitch rating system, reducing it from six categories to four – very good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory and unfit.

CLEAR VISION

Kohli always super motivated and he'll know what to do: du Plessis



Virat Kohli will be "super motivated" to put a struggling phase behind him, said Faf du Plessis on Wednesday. "I know someone like him is super motivated, he's gone through it all before, so he knows exactly what to do," du Plessis told PTI. He also added retirement is a "very very personal" decision for a player.

TOP STUFF

Bumrah continues to remain No. 1 in Test rankings



India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continued to reign supreme at the top of the bowlers' chart with a career-best rating of 908 in the latest ICC Test Rankings, released on Wednesday. Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja, who climbed a spot to be joint ninth, is the other Indian giving Bumrah company in the top-10.

Hockey India League increases prize money

Y.B. Sarangi
ROURKELA

The prize money has increased noticeably for the ongoing edition of the Hockey India League.

As per an announcement on Wednesday, the winner of the men's competition, featuring eight teams, will pocket ₹3 crore. The runner-up and third place finisher will earn ₹2 crore and ₹1 crore respectively.

In the previous edition in 2017, the winning team, Kalinga Lancers, had bagged ₹2.5 crore. The runner-up, Dabang Mumbai, had claimed ₹1.25 crore, while the third-placed Uttar Pradesh Wizards had got ₹75 lakh.

In the inaugural women's competition, set to kick off in Ranchi on Sunday with four teams, the winning side will secure ₹1.5 crore. The second and third placed teams will get ₹1.5 crore and ₹50 lakh respectively. There is partial pay parity for men and women as far as individual awards are concerned.

Hero MotoCorp, the league's title sponsor, has announced that the player-of-the-match in both men's and women's matches will receive ₹50,000 each. The player-of-the-tournament will receive ₹20 lakh each.

Best goalkeeper, up-and-coming player and top scorer in the men's section will receive ₹10 lakh each. In the women's section, best goalkeeper, up-and-coming player and top scorer will be awarded ₹5 lakh each.

Altogether, HIL 2024-25 will distribute ₹10 crore as prize money in comparison to about ₹6 crore in 2017.



The propeller: Janssen's heroics proved the difference in a humdinger against Gonasika. HIL

Janssen and Dragons steal the limelight

The Dutch drag-flicker stars with a hat-trick as the team pips Gonasika and climbs to second in the table; Toofans blow away Rudras

HIL

Y.B. Sarangi
ROURKELA

In a gripping goal-fest, Dutch drag-flicker Jip Janssen performed a hat-trick to guide Tamil Nadu Dragons to a 6-5 win over Team Gonasika in the Hockey India League at the Birsia Munda Hockey Stadium here on Wednesday.

Dragons' second outright win took them to the second spot.

Gonasika, relying on their short passing, made early inroads through Aranjeet Singh Hundal's double strike. Aranjeet launched a diagonal grounder from the edge of the circle and then tapped in a cross from Timothee Clement, who defied two defenders and barely maintained his balance to pass it from the goal-line. Dragons clawed back slowly. At the stroke of the first break, Janssen's

beautiful variation was deflected in by Abharan Sudev.

Early in the second quarter, Dragons earned three short corners and Janssen sounded the boards to restore parity. Man-to-man marking denied Gonasika free movement and helped Dragons share the honours at half-time.

Janssen put Dragons in the lead by converting a penalty corner early in the second half.

Gonasika bounced back well. After Tim Howard's shot off a short corner hit the crossbar, Nikkin Thimmaiah deflected in to make it 3-3. Struan Walker's short corner conversion restored Gonasika's lead.

Dragons again showed their set-piece excellence and Janssen surprised Oliver Payne with another penalty corner variation.

Dragons went ahead through Nathan

Ephraums' strike before Clement drew level. Karthi Selvam scored the winner, the fourth goal of the action-packed fourth quarter, a minute before the hooter, in the 11-goal nail-biter.

In the second match, bottom-placed Hyderabad Toofans upset UP Rudras 3-0 to record its first victory in regulation time.

First hat-trick
Kalinga Lancers' Thierry Brinkman was credited with the first hat-trick of this edition after a goal, originally awarded to Briton Nicholas Bandurak, against Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers was credited to the Dutchman a day later.

The results: Tamil Nadu Dragons 6 (Sudev 15, Janssen 19, 33, 50, Ephraums 55, Karthi 59) bt Team Gonasika 5 (Arajeet 5, 7, Nikkin 39, Walker 43, Clement 58); Hyderabad Toofans 3 (Wallace 6, Rajinder 14, Shilanand 32) bt UP Rudras 0.

BEST GOALKEEPER: Aranjeet Singh Hundal

WORST GOALKEEPER: Guntasheh Gholami

GOAL OF THE MATCH: Jip Janssen (Tamil Nadu Dragons)

MAN OF THE MATCH: Jip Janssen (Tamil Nadu Dragons)

GOALKEEPER OF THE MATCH: Aranjeet Singh Hundal (Tamil Nadu Dragons)

DEFENDER OF THE MATCH: Karthi Selvam (Tamil Nadu Dragons)

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IN BRIEF



Younis named Afghanistan's mentor for Champions Trophy

Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) on Wednesday appointed former Pakistan cricketer Younis Khan as the mentor for the Afghan national team for the upcoming Champions Trophy 2025, starting on February 19. According to a release from ACB, the former cricketer will accompany Afghanistan during its conditioning and preparation camp in Pakistan, offering his mentorship services until the conclusion of the ICC tournament.

Kavya's knock propels Gujarat against Tamil Nadu

Kavya Patel's unbeaten half-century (57 n.o., 167b, 7x4) propelled Gujarat to 380 in its first innings against Tamil Nadu on day two of the men's under-19 Cooch Behar trophy final in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. TN ended the day at 75 for two.

The scores: Gujarat 380 in 136.3 overs (Kavya Patel 57 n.o., R. Pravin 3/79) vs Tamil Nadu 75/2 in 41 overs (S. Shrenik 37).

Hyderabad FC holds FC Goa in the ISL

Allan Paulista's last-gasp strike in injury time (90+2) helped former champion Hyderabad FC share points with FC Goa at the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Fatorda on Wednesday. The host had gone ahead through its Albanian star Armando Sadiku in the 52nd minute.

Saturday's Kolkata ISL derby shifted to Guwahati

Defending Shield winner Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Wednesday confirmed that its January 11 return-leg Indian Super League derby against East Bengal has been moved to Guwahati owing to inadequate security arrangements. "Saturday blockbuster 'Boro Match' will now be played at Guwahati. See you, Mariners," MBSG posted on X. The change in venue comes after the Bidhannagar Police, under whose jurisdiction the Salt Lake Stadium falls, cited concerns over inadequate security because of the Gangasagar Mela from January 10 to 18.

Hyderabad races for Jan. 13 advanced to Jan. 12

The Stewards of Hyderabad Race Club, have resolved to advance the Hyderabad races scheduled to be held on Monday (Jan. 13) to Sunday (Jan. 12), due to administrative reasons.



West Ham United sacks head coach Julen Lopetegui

West Ham United has sacked head coach Julen Lopetegui, the Premier League club said on Wednesday, with the London side 14th in the standings after 20 matches.

"The first half of the 2024-25 season has not aligned with the club's ambitions and the club has therefore taken action in line with its objectives," West Ham said in a statement.

Theekshana's hat-trick in vain as NZ seals ODI series

Rachin Ravindra (79) and Mark Chapman (62) made half centuries in a 112-run second-wicket partnership which helped New Zealand to a 113-run win over Sri Lanka in the rain-hit second ODI in Hamilton on Wednesday and an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. Batting first, New Zealand reached 255 for nine batting first in a match reduced by rain to 37 overs per side. Maheesh Theekshana became the seventh Sri Lanka player to take an ODI hat trick when he dismissed Mitchell Santner, Nathan Smith and Matt Henry with consecutive deliveries across two overs late in the innings.

The scores: New Zealand 255/9 in 37 overs (Rachin 79, Chapman 62, Theekshana 4/44) bt Sri Lanka 142 in 30.2 overs (Kamindu 64).

Presence of national stars adds sheen to Hazare Trophy knockout rounds

Gill, Prasidh, Padikkal set to turn out for their respective State teams; all eyes on Hardik, Shami and Arshdeep as Champions Trophy selection looms

CRICKET

S. Dipak Ragav

VADODARA

One of the issues that has cropped up in Indian cricket in recent times has been the lack of participation from the top stars in domestic cricket.

But come Thursday, when the knockout stage of the Vijay Hazare Trophy begins here, some of the top Indian stars will show up for their respective teams.

It is understood that the selectors have asked that the national team players who were in Australia must play in the 50-over competition if their teams have qualified.

Easwaran in the fray

Abhimanyu Easwaran has joined the Bengal camp ahead of his side's pre-quarterfinal match against defending champions Haryana on Thursday. In the

team players who were in Australia must play in the 50-over competition if their teams have qualified

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep, a regular in T20Is, played in five of the six ODIs India has played since the '23 World Cup and will aim to become a regular in this format. He currently leads the wickets charts after the group stages with 17 scalps

other pre-quarterfinal, Tamil Nadu will face Rajasthan.

Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt Padikkal (both Karnataka), and Shubman Gill (Punjab) are also expected to play in their team's respective quarterfinal matches on Saturday.

Globally, sandwiched between T20 and Test cricket, the one-day format is fighting for relevance. Considering the one-dayers (VHT) is also being held after the IPL auction, the event doesn't have a lot of stake for the players.

However, with the focus on the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy next month and the presence of stars, the domestic tournament should get some much-needed limelight.

Focus on Shami

Though India's one-day set-up is largely set, the selectors have a final chance to see the likes of all-rounder Hardik Pandya (Baroda), Mohammed Shami (Bengal) and Arshdeep Singh (Punjab).

Shami, who impressed at the 2023 ODI World Cup at home, is on a recovery path following his heel surgery. After playing all the games in the Syed Mushtaq Ali T20 tournament, the Bengal pacer has featured in only two outings in this competition, bowling eight overs in each.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep, a regular in T20Is, played in five of the six ODIs India has played since the '23 World Cup and will aim to become a regular in this format. He currently

leads the wickets charts after the group stages with 17 scalps.

Similarly, Hardik, who opted out from the one-day series in Sri Lanka last year, opened the bowing for his side in the three games he played in the league stages as he looks to reclaim his place in the one-day set-up.

Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Vidarbha, and Baroda sealed their berths in the quarterfinals, having topped their respective groups. Punjab, by being the best second-placed team across five groups, also got a direct berth in the last eight.

The fixtures: Pre-quarters:

Jan. 9: Haryana vs Bengal (PQF1); Rajasthan vs Tamil Nadu (PQF2); **Quarterfinals:** **Jan. 11:** Maharashtra vs Punjab (QF3); Karnataka vs Baroda (QF4); **Jan. 12:** Gujarat vs winner of PQF1 (QF1); Vidarbha vs winner of PQF2 (QF2); **Semifinals:** **Jan. 15:** Winner of QF1 vs QF4; **Jan. 16:** Winner of QF2 vs QF3.

Final: **Jan. 18:**



Home comfort: Padikkal, who was part of the Indian team in Australia, will be a key batter for Karnataka. FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

Samarth to meet Rethin in the quarterfinals

TENNIS

Sports Bureau

NEW DELHI



Samarth Sahita.
KAMESH SRINIVASAN

Aishwarya Jadhav teased fifth seed Petra Konjikusic of Serbia in a marathon before losing in the third set tie-break.

Other results (pre-quarterfinals):

Under-18 boys: Donghyun Hwang (kor) bt Daniel Tazabekov (Kaz) 6-3, 6-0; Hyeon Seok (kor) bt Roman Kharlamov 6-4, 6-2; Arturs Zagars (Lat) bt Kanata Ozaki (Jpn) 6-3, 6-3; Damir Zhalgasbay (Kaz) bt Hitesh Chauhan 6-4, 5-7, 6-3; Roshan Santhosh (USA) bt Maximus Zavier Wong (Sgp) 6-4, 6-2.

Under-18 girls: Polina Bereznina (bt Yuka Naito (Jpn) 6-3, 1-0 (retired); Polina Kuharenko (kor) bt Irem Kurt (Tur) 7-5, 6-1; Ekaterina Tupitsyna (bt Anna Perelman 0-6, 6-4, 6-4; Allegra Davies (GBR) bt Oai Watanabe (Jpn) 6-3, 6-1; Eleejah Inrana (fra) bt Priyanka Rana (USA) 6-0, 6-0.

Maaya Rajeshwaran raced past qualifier Manon Favier of France 6-0, 6-3.

Maaya will play Rada Zolotareva in the quarterfinals, who defeated Rishitha Basireddy 6-1, 6-4.

Bhambri-Olivetti pair makes quarterfinals in Auckland

Sports Bureau

Sriram Bhambri in partnership with Albano Olivetti of France beat Sander Arends and Luke Johnson 6-4, 6-4 in the doubles pre-quarterfinals of the \$766,290 ATP tennis tournament in Auckland, New Zealand, on Wednesday.

In the other ATP event in Adelaide, Australia, Sri Ram Balaji and Miguel Reyes-Valela of Mexico went down 11-13 in the super tie-break to the fourth seeds Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten in the doubles second round.

The results:
\$766,290 ATP, Adelaide, Australia: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Harri Heliovaara (Fin) & Henry Patten (GBR) bt Sriram Balaji & Miguel Reyes-Valela (Mex) 3-6, 6-3, [13-11].

\$766,290 ATP, Auckland, New Zealand: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Yuki Bhambri & Albano Olivetti (Fra) bt Sander Arends (Ned) & Luke Johnson (GBR) 6-4, 6-4.

\$100,000 Challenger, Nonthaburi, Thailand: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Francis Alcnatara (Phi) & Evan

Sriram Balaji and Miguel Reyes-Valela go down 11-13 in the super tie-break to the fourth seeds Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten.

King (USA) bt Niki Poonacha & Saketh Myneni 6-4, 4-6, [10-8]; Blake Baydon (Aus) & Jakub Paul (Sui) bt Anirudh Chandrasekar & Karol Drzwienski (Pol) 7-6(4), 6-3.

\$60,000 ITF women, Nonthaburi, Thailand: Doubles (pre-quarterfinals): Alicia Barnett (GBR) & Prarthana Thombare bt Ines Ibbou (Alg) & Naima Karamoko (Sui) 6-3, 6-3; Rutuja Bhosale & Eudice Chong (Hkg) bt Maria Mateas & Alana Smith (USA) 6-4, 1-6, [10-1].

\$30,000 ITF women, Nairobi, Kenya: Singles (first round): Ksenia Laskutovo (Sui) bt Komal Nagare 6-1, 6-2.

Lexue Xiao (Chn) bt Ashmita Eswaramurthy 6-2, 6-2; Joanna Garland (Tpe) bt Vanshita Pathania 6-1, 6-4.

LIVE TELECAST

Badminton: Malaysia Open, Sports 18-1 & Hotstar, 6.30 a.m.

ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioCinema, 7.30 p.m.

HIL: DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 2, 3 & LIV, 8.15 p.m.

Sidharth knocks out second seed Crawford

Sports Bureau

Qualifier Sidharth Rawat fought his way past second seed Oliver Crawford of Britain 6-4, 6-7(6), 6-0 in the first round of the \$30,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Arera Club in Bhopal on Tuesday.

In the pre-quarterfinals, Sidharth will play fellow qualifier Rohan Mehra.

S.D. Prajwal Dev eased past Aryan Shah for the loss of four games. Vishnu Vardhan went down in three sets to sixth seed Eric Vanshelboim of Ukraine.

The results (first round):

Mathys Erhard (Fra) bt Constantine Koumzine (Fra) 7-6(5), 6-4; Luca Castelnovo (Sui) bt Dzhakshinov Suresh 7-5 (retired); Eric Vanshelboim (Ukr) bt Vishnu Vardhan 6-7(5), 6-1, 6-2; Alastair Gray (GBR) bt Chirag Duan 6-1, 6-4; Kosuke Ogura (Jpn) bt Sai Kartick Reddy 5-7, 6-4, 7-5; Maxim Zhukov bt Yuval Nandal 6-4, 7-5; Vladyslav Orlov (Ukr) bt Ulisang Park (kor) 6-4, 7-5; Sergey Fomin (Uzb) bt Dzogchan Bobrov 6-1, 6-1; Yurii Dzhakanian (Ukr) bt Yunseok Jang (kor) 6-3, 6-4; S.D. Prajwal Dev bt Aryan Shah 6-4, 6-0; Rohan Mehra bt Parth Aggarwal 6-3, 6-4; Sidharth Rawat bt Oliver Crawford (GBR) 6-4, 6-7(6), 6-0.

Sahaj stars in Railways' win over Punjab

BASKETBALL

Sports Bureau

Sahaj Pratap Sekhon (22) sank a three-pointer with three seconds left for the hooter to help Railways to a thrilling 73-72 victory over Punjab in a men's group-B league match of the 74th National basketball championship at the Sids Sports Complex in Bhavnagar on Wednesday.

With another day of league matches to go, Railways, Tamil Nadu, Services, Punjab and Karnataka secured their entry into the quarterfinals in the men's section.

In the women's section, Punjab, Delhi, Kerala, Railways and Tamil Nadu confirmed their entry into the next stage.

The results (league): Men:

Group-A: Kerala 63 (Sejin

Mathew 18, Joshua Oommen 17, Grigo Varghese 14) bt Services 52 (Sahil 19, Gaurav Chandal 13).

Tamil Nadu 83 (Prashanth Rawat 21, Aravind Kumar 16, Baldhanevar 13, Muin Bek 12) bt Rajasthan 60 (Sharad Dhadhich 18).

Group-B: Railways 73 (Sahaj Pratap Sekhon 22, Palpreet Singh 18) bt Punjab 72 (Kanwar Gurba Singh Sandhu 20, Nawaz Singh Panahi 13, Amjot Gill 10).

Women: **Group-A:** Railways 83 (Vaishnavi Yadav 13, Sathya Senthilkumar 12, Dharshini 11, K. Sathy 10) bt Karnataka 33 (C.N. Supritha 12, Ruth Blessen 11).

Delhi 70 (Preeti Kumar 20, Prakriti Ranjan 19, Namrata 15) bt Punjab 57 (Kanishka Dhir 18, Manmeet Kaur 13, Komalpreet Kaur 10).

Group-B: Tamil Nadu 72 (Kritika Sureshbabu 14, Anumaria 13, Nikita Amuthan 12) bt Chhattisgarh 63 (Divyani Gangwal 17, Divya Sam 12, Shanti Xaxa 12, Nisha Kashyap 11, Neha Karwa 11).

Kerala 71 (sreekala Ranji 20, V.J. Jayalakshmi 16, Susan Florentina 15) bt Tamil Nadu 52 (Kritika Sureshbabu 14, J Ishwary 11).

Sports Minister urges all stakeholders to pool their resources to take India forward

Sports Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya called for all stakeholders to contribute their might to take the country forward in sports, as he convened the Mission Olympic Cell meeting at the Dhyan Chand National Stadium here.

"India's sports infrastructure and funding is at par with the countries performing well at the global stage. Winning medals in the Olympics is not a one-year or six months job. It requires preparation well in advance," said the Minister.

"India's sports infrastructure and funding is at par with the countries performing well at the global stage. Winning medals in the Olympics is not a one-year or six months job. It requires preparation well in advance," said the Minister.

"India's sports infrastructure and funding is at par with the countries performing well at the global stage.

The Indians will definitely benefit from playing with overseas stars

I am eagerly looking forward to the next men's junior World Cup, the junior Indian team is going to be one of the title favourites: Dragons coach Eijk



INTERVIEW

REIN VAN EJK

K. Keerthivasan

Tamil Nadu Dragons head coach Rein van Eijk is really happy with the way the Hockey India League (HIL) is shaping up in Rourkela.

Though the Dragons are still finding their feet in the league, they jumped to the second spot with a 6-5 win over Team Gonasika in a thriller on Wednesday. However, the 37-year-old, who guided Germany to the 2023 Junior Men's World Cup title, has backed the HIL and his team to succeed.

In an interview with *The Hindu*, the Dutchman spoke at length about the HIL, his coaching philosophy, the future of India hockey, and more. Excerpts:

What has impressed you the most about the HIL so far?

It's the magnitude of the spectacle, the way we're trying to sell the sport and Hockey India is doing a great job in media coverage and in setting the stage for an absolutely unique event. The other thing that is remarkable is the number of absolute world-class players in one league and the way that everyone is interacting with each other and how that's influencing the level of play. You can see huge jumps being made from game to game by all players and the way people treat each other is something very special. You can truly see that it is one big hockey family.

Your thoughts on the HIL?

So far, it's been quite okay. We haven't gotten to a point in the league where all teams play at a consistent level. You see all teams are having some sort of difficulty in controlling the game, which might be due to the fact that there are so many different nationalities and levels of players in one team. Nonetheless, you see the level of play improving game by game. The matches have been entertaining and I think that's one of the most important things. I'm happy about that.

You have been an experienced coach, but this is your first trip to India as a coach. How has it been so far?

Yes, it's my first time coaching in India. The challenge of working with people from so many different cultures. But I think we have a very special mix of Indian players as well since we have a big

part of the team from Tamil Nadu. It's going to be a very exciting experience bringing it all together.

I've been in India several times for hockey, for coaching courses. However, the city of Chennai and then leading such an international team is going to be a first for me. I think that my experiences so far have prepared me very well for this challenge.

How did you get involved with Tamil Nadu Dragons?

I was first approached by Vikrampal Singh, the competition manager of the Hockey India League.

There was a franchise that had decided that they really wanted to have a coach from the German system because of the conviction of several people around the franchise. At the time I didn't know it was a Chennai franchise. Then I got in touch with Sekar (Manoharan), president of the Hockey Unit of Tamil Nadu and treasurer of Hockey India, Charles Dixon, assistant coach of TN Dragons.

Those conversations were very positive for me. Both the franchise and Sekar were saying all the right things and you can see that they have a very long-term plan in mind. That is something that really reeled me in. The project was very easy to say yes to them after those conversations.

HIL has quite a bit of history. It started in 2005 and went on till 2008. It was restarted in 2013 before folding up in 2017. Now, it has returned after a seven-year break. What do you think of HIL?

I think that Hockey India has driven Indian hockey and world hockey in the previous editions. I think, especially the 2013 to 2017 block, has really ignited hockey not just in India but all over the world. I think now the league is trying to be bigger and bolder while taking a little less risky approach from a financial standpoint.

You have coached several Dutch clubs and also the Germany junior men's World Cup team to victory in 2023. What has been your coaching philosophy?

I think it's my job to maximise the qualities of each and every player and I think that's where my qualities definitely lie because my leadership style is very much supporting. It's not authoritarian. I think what strengthens me is that I very much let players get involved in having good interactions, creating a good culture, and getting a message across. It's a leadership style that I've had to adopt from a very early age on-



ward because I started coaching the teams I was playing in at a very young age.

Being younger than most of the players at that time made me comfortable with giving responsibility to the players and I think that's going to be very important in a situation with so many different cultures together. If you look at the overseas players, also the Indian players, we have team-first players and I think that fits the kind of character and the kind of coach that I am and it will fit the challenge.

How do the Dragons see the growth of its two goalkeepers Senthamil Arasu and Prince Deep Singh?

Looking back at previous editions of the Hockey India League, there has never been a team in the current setup reaching the finals with an Indian goalie. Therefore, we were adamant on getting Irish goalkeeper David Harte.

We also knew that it was very important for us to get Tamil Nadu's Senthamil Arasu.

The local guy is someone who has connections to the region. With the other Indian goalkeeper Prince Deep Singh, we obviously have a very talented young goalie, the number one goalie of the junior India team.

They could be easy and good successors for when David quits. We don't just have a very good setup in place for success but also for learning. David (36 years of age) is experienced in playing in the Hockey India League (he played in 2014, '15, '16 and '17). He also knows that we are going to pull him as one of our strategic means to win games. It al-

so means that Prince Deep and Arasu will get playing opportunities. This is probably better than most of the other franchises.

How much will the HIL help Indian players?

Hockey is very much embedded in the Indian culture. Hockey being a very technical sport, skills are way more important than they are in football. The overseas players tend to be from a body size standpoint. That is a disadvantage for the Indian players in other sports.

But for a sport like hockey being so technical, I think the Indian players have a huge advantage. I think the skill level of the Indian players is immensely high. However, what you can see in the international game of hockey is that structure and physicality have become way more important. That also means that the way I go about practice, the way I go about tactics, and the way I go about decision-making on and off the pitch is something that is not always embedded widely in the Indian system.

It is more embedded in the overseas system. I feel that there is an area where our Indian players will definitely benefit from playing with the overseas players.

They will need to find solutions playing with and against such large bodies. They will also see and experience a different level of structured hockey and structured approach in defence and a disciplined approach in how we want to go about things.

On the other hand, I think it is going to be a great learning experience for overseas players because I think the free-flowing game of Indian hockey is tremendous to watch, but it is also very hard to play with and play against because it is simply so fast and so open. I think it is going to be beneficial for both Indian players and overseas players.

According to you, which Indian youngster will shine in the league this time?

We [Dragons] have several very good youngsters. I am looking forward to working with Y. Anand, Chandan [Yadav]. I think Prince Deep might have a big role in our team and that's going to be interesting.

I very much hope that this league will be a stepping stone for many juniors and the local boy Selvam Karthi and Mohammad Raheel. I hope they solidify their spots in the national team as well. I think it will be beneficial for many players.

There is a strong possibility that the next men's junior World Cup might be held in Tamil Nadu. Are you looking forward to that?

Yes. I'm very much looking forward to that. I think that makes the adventure even more special. Being able to coach a team from the Tamil Nadu region that might host the next (2025) Junior World Cup is obviously very exciting. And I think the stadium is amazing. And it's going to be great to also play hockey in this part of India with such a big group of future stars in hockey. The junior Indian team is going to be one of the title favourites.

The crowning glory in your career has been coaching Germany to the FIH junior men's World Cup in 2023 when the team beat India in the semifinals on way to the title...

The Indian team was technically sound. And they had interesting solutions for different problems that faced them. I think we were fortunate that the Indian players were probably mentally not as stable as we were, and that we had a big physical advantage. We were able to change a couple of things and the Indian players had difficulties reacting to that.

The strengths of that team were that they played as a unit, their skill levels were good, and were good in scoring and passing. And I think the Indians thought of them as the weaker team, even though they were way better. They were not too convinced. They need to be little bit more mentally self-aware. Obviously, it (winning the 2023 junior World Cup) was an amazing feeling to finish such a journey that we've all put so much energy and time. And it's something that I'm still very proud of. It also creates a hunger for more.

Germany has won the junior men's World Cup a record seven times. What is the secret of Germany's success?

I think what the German system does very well is that we look differently at building athletically robust players. We start a little bit early in developing a winning culture. The fact that Germany doesn't have a centralised system is, in a lot of ways, also a big advantage because it makes players more flexible. And, also makes them a little bit fresh when we get to tournaments. Excitement might be a little bit higher.

Who is your pick from the HIL?

Soorma HC will definitely be the favourites. They obviously have a good core of Indian players. They have many drag-flickers as well. The fact that they had the Indian national players in their ranks made it a lot easier for them to hit the ground running.

SCIENCE

Female birds 'can't reproduce without male sex hormones'

Male and female chickens lacking the androgen receptor showed differences in various aspects. These aspects were hormone-dependent. Surprisingly, certain male traits, for example the length of tail feathers and of spurs, remained unaffected by the genetic modification

Madhurima Pattanayak

The androgen sex hormones are responsible for male sexual development while oestrogen and progesterone essay the same roles in females. But new research by a team at the Max Planck Institute of Biological Intelligence and Technical University, Munich, could force scientists to redraw these boundaries. The team has reported that androgen receptors are as important for sexual development and fertility in females as in males.

Specifically, the researchers found that both male and female chickens devoid of androgen receptors turned out to be infertile. But the males still developed testicles and the females ovaries, and produced gonadal hormones. The testicles and ovaries were smaller than in chickens that retained their androgen receptors.

Additionally, female chickens that lacked the receptors failed to develop and lay eggs. And while a few sex-specific peculiarities like tail feathers, spurs, and differences in body size and weight persisted in both sexes, their sexual behaviours failed to develop. Their eye rings remained unpigmented as well.

"For years, one of the key players in avian sexual development has been reported to be testosterone, a steroid hormone belonging to the class of hormones called androgens, commonly thought of as only a male hormone," Mekhla Rudra, a scientist at the Max Planck Institute of Biological Intelligence and a coauthor of the study, said. "One of the key insights this study provides is that testosterone action via androgen signalling is critical in both male and female birds."

The study illustrates that androgen receptors directly influenced diverse tissues leading to sex-specific phenotypes. In females, too, the effects of androgens are to promote the development of head ornaments and normal ovarian follicle," Peter O'Shaughnessy, a scientist at the University of Glasgow who wasn't involved in the study, said.

Androgen hormones are known to decrease body weight in chickens. Male chickens in commercial settings are thus castrated to prevent androgen secretion and thus increase their bodyweight.

In birds, androgen and oestrogen receptors help regulate sexual development by mediating the actions of these hormones. Unlike mammals, avian somatic cells (cells other than sperm and ova) also manifest sexual traits independent of hormonal influences. "These characteristics are independent of hormonal influence," Rudra said.

The shrinkage that wasn't

The bursa of Fabricius, a.k.a. the cloacal thymus, is a chestnut-shaped lymphoid organ in birds that develops antibodies and B lymphocytes. This organ is also known to be involved in sexual growth and maturation. When a chicken reaches pubescence – around 15-20 weeks after birth – the bursa of Fabricius shrinks in size.

This bursal involution is an androgen-sensitive characteristic that shows sexual development has begun. In the new study, chickens of both sexes lacking androgen receptors had delayed bursal involution. In some cases, the

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In the study, female chickens that lacked androgen receptors failed to develop and lay eggs. Representative image. STEPHEN MIERENDORF
Join FREE WhatsApp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>

of androgens in both sexes appear to be prominent in the sexually dimorphic regions of the head and gonads".

In birds unlike in mammals

A 2021 study examined male chickens whose testicles had been replaced with ovaries through genetic modification. These chickens developed their complete sexual ornaments – which shouldn't have been possible if sexual phenotypic characters were entirely under the influence of the testicular hormones. The study thus challenged the canon that these sexual characteristics in birds are regulated only by testicular hormones.

In a 2023 study, scientists showed that when androgen signalling is disrupted in (male or female) humans, the internal and external sex organs, sexual characteristics, and behaviours, couldn't develop properly.

Androgen and oestrogen hormones play their respective roles once they bind to their corresponding receptors. The dearth or impairment of these receptors eventually disrupts the function of the hormone binding to them.

To understand the function of androgen receptors in avian sexual development, the researchers blocked receptor functions – and thus androgen signalling – by knocking off the genes required to develop the receptors using CRISPR/Cas9.

"The methods used in this study are appropriate and the data are reliable," O'Shaughnessy said.

Necessary but insufficient

In sum, male chickens devoid of androgen receptors didn't display an overall female phenotype – and nor did female chickens lacking in androgen receptors develop an all-male phenotype.

A 2018 study in the *Journal of Physiology A* reported that while oestrogen receptors could contribute to sexual development in birds of both

Androgen signalling plays a crucial role in the development, fertility, physiology and appearance of both sexes as well as sex-specific crowing behaviour in males

sexes, oestrogen signalling alone was insufficient for complete sexual maturation.

"The mechanism of testosterone action in the brain is complex," Rudra said. "Testosterone binds to androgen receptors ... However, in the brain, testosterone is also converted to oestrogen and exerts its role by binding to estrogen receptors, making the understanding of testosterone-mediated effects quite complicated."

According to her, the study shows androgen signalling plays a crucial role in the development, fertility, physiology and appearance of both sexes as well as sex-specific crowing behaviour in males.

"The findings in the current study are valid," O'Shaughnessy said.

Male and female chickens lacking the androgen receptor showed clear differences in various aspects compared to their normal counterparts. These aspects were hormone-dependent. Surprisingly, certain male traits, e.g. the length of tail feathers and of spurs, remained unaffected by the genetic modification.

"These traits are thus controlled by either another hormone system or something entirely different. Thus it appears that the sexual development of birds involves a complex interaction of both hormone-dependent and hormone-independent mechanisms," Rudra said.

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THE SCIENCE QUIZ

209 years ago, Humphry Davy first tested a peculiar lamp...

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

The Davy lamp was a type of _____ that Humphry Davy designed for use in coal mines. The design prevented the coal dust that hung in the air from catching fire from the lamp's flame. Given this purpose, fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 2

Before Humphry Davy, an English engineer named X had devised a lamp that also didn't ignore the air in coal mines, by feeding oxygen to the flame through small holes but through which the flame couldn't pass. Name X. Davy's lamp achieves the same function using a mesh.

QUESTION 3

Name the lamp X (from Q2) invented. Humphry Davy and X developed a bitter rivalry over this invention, with Davy refusing to accept X's work and X developing a distrust of experts of theoretical science.

QUESTION 4

Aside from allowing miners to work without fear of combusting coal dust, the Davy lamp also alerted them to the presence of poisonous gases, which most often caused the lamp's flame to burn in what way?

QUESTION 5

The build-up of combustible gases in a coal mine is called a _____, from the German word for 'vapour'. Fill in the blanks. While Davy's lamp

often alerted miners to their presence, it also led to more mining accidents because miners explored new seams of coal that they wouldn't have without the lamp.

Answers to January 7 quiz:

- Species named for the oily substance in their heads – **Ans: Sperm whales**
- Term denoting reproductive capacity of a species – **Ans: Fecundity**
- Organ that the colossal squid possesses in a larger size – **Ans: Eyes**
- Squid species growing to be larger than colossal squids – **Ans: Giant squid**
- Phenomenon whereby deep-sea species grow to great sizes – **Ans: Abyssal gigantism**

First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Sheney Muraly | Chandan Kumar Singha | Vijayram Ganapala | Joe V.R.



Visual: Name this town, where Davy tested his lamp for the first time in a colliery. The town also gave its name to a mediocre BBC sitcom of the 2010s. ANDREW TRYON (CC BY-SA 2.0)



Fluoride, which also occurs naturally in varying levels, helps restore minerals lost to acid breakdown in teeth. AP

Review asserts link between fluoride levels and IQ loss

Agence France Presse

A divisive new study out on January 6 in a US medical journal could reignite debate over fluoride's safety in water, linking higher exposure levels to lower IQ in children.

Published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Pediatrics it has sparked pushback from some scientists who criticise the study's methods, defend the mineral's proven dental benefits, and warn the findings may not directly apply to typical water fluoridation levels.

Its release comes as US President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office. His health secretary nominee, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., is a vocal critic of fluoridated water, which currently serves nearly two-thirds of the US population.

Researchers from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences reviewed 74 studies on fluoride exposure and children's IQ conducted in 10 countries, including India.

The same scientists helped formulate an official government recommendation in August that there is "moderate confidence" that higher levels of fluoride are linked to lower IQ scores.

Now, the team led by Kyla Taylor said the analysis found a "statistically significant association" between fluoride exposure and reduced IQ scores.

The review estimated that for every 1 mg/L increase in urinary fluoride, children's IQ drops by 1.63 points.

Fluoride's neurotoxicity at high doses is well known, but the controversy lies in the study's suggestion that exposure below 1.5 mg/L – currently the World Health Organisation's safety limit – may also affect children's IQ.

However, the paper doesn't clarify how much lower than 1.5 mg/L could be dangerous.

Steven Levy, a member of the national fluoride committee for the American

The review estimated that for every 1 mg/L increase in urinary fluoride, children's IQ drops by 1.63 points

Dental Association, raised significant concerns about the study's methodology.

He pointed out that 52 of the 74 studies reviewed were rated "low quality" by the authors themselves but were still included in the analysis.

"Almost all of the studies have been done in other settings where there are other contaminants, other things we call confounding factors," he told AFP, citing coal pollution in China as an example.

Levy also questioned the study's use of single-point urine samples instead of 24-hour collections, which provide greater accuracy, as well as the challenges in reliably assessing young children's IQ.

With so many uncertainties, Levy argued in an editorial accompanying the study that current policies "should not be affected by the study findings."

That said, the journal also published an editorial commending the study for its methodological rigour.

The benefits of water fluoridation are well documented. Introduced in the US in 1945, it quickly reduced cavities in children and tooth loss in adults, earning recognition from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as one of the greatest public health achievements of the 20th century.

Fluoride, which also occurs naturally in varying levels, helps restore minerals lost to acid breakdown in teeth and reduces acid production by cavity-causing bacteria.

However, with fluoride toothpastes widely available since the 1960s, some research suggests diminishing returns.

For feedback and suggestions
for 'Science', please write to
science@thehindu.co.in with the
subject 'Daily page'