



NO GOING BACK  
111 farmers embark on indefinite fast

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Govt. to use AI tools to analyse trade data

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Infrastructure in govt. schools improving

Facilities almost on a par with private schools

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GUIDING FORCE  
Padikkal sizzles as Karnataka enters final

SPORT » PAGE 17

## IN BRIEF



Remark by RSS chief amounts to treason: Rahul

NEW DELHI

Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's remark that India got "true Independence" only after the Ram Temple consecration amounts to "treason", Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Wednesday. » Page 13

Tamil Sangamam to focus on legacy of Agasthyar

NEW DELHI

The theme of the third edition of Kashi Tamil Sangamam will be the legacy and philosophy of Maharishi Agasthyar, the Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, said on Wednesday. » Page 14

OPPORTUNITIES » PAGE 5

## Gaza ceasefire agreement ready, say U.S. and Hamas

Israeli PM Netanyahu says final details of the deal are still being ironed out; agreement promises release of hostages held by Hamas and Palestinians jailed in Israel during a six-week pause in war

Associated Press  
DOHA

Israel and Hamas agreed to a ceasefire deal to pause the devastating war in the Gaza Strip, multiple officials announced on Wednesday, raising the possibility of winding down the deadliest and most destructive fighting between the bitter enemies.

The deal, coming after weeks of painstaking negotiations in the Qatari capital, promises the release of dozens of hostages held by Hamas in phases, the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in Israel, and would allow hundreds of thousands of people displaced in Gaza to return to what remains of their homes. It also would flood badly needed humanitarian



Hopes up: Supporters of Israelis kidnapped by Hamas react to the news reports on ceasefire deal in Tel Aviv on Wednesday. REUTERS

ian aid into a territory ravaged by 15 months of war.

Three officials from the U.S. and one from Hamas confirmed that a deal had

been reached, while the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said final details were still being ironed out.

All three U.S. officials and the Hamas official requested anonymity to discuss the contours of the deal before the official announcement by mediators in Doha.

Mr. Netanyahu's office said in a statement that it hoped "details will be finalised tonight." Any agreement needs to be approved by Netanyahu's Cabinet.

Once official, the deal is expected to deliver an initial six-week halt to fighting that is to be accompanied by the opening of negotiations on ending the war altogether.

Over six weeks, 33 of the nearly 100 hostages are to be reunited with their loved ones after months in captivity.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 12

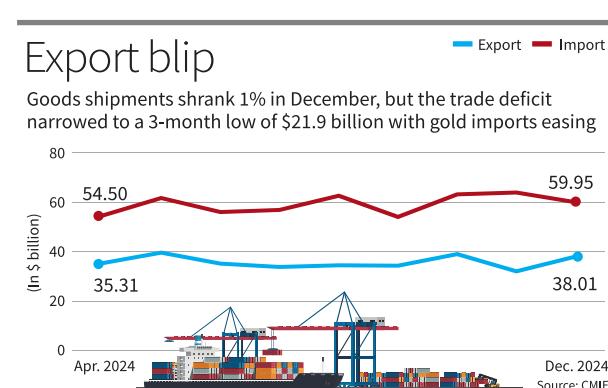
## India's goods exports dip 1% in December; trade deficit narrows to three-month low

Vikas Dhoop  
NEW DELHI

India's goods exports contracted 1% year-on-year in December to a fraction over \$38 billion, while imports grew 4.9% to almost \$60 billion, but this narrowed the merchandise trade deficit to a three-month low of \$21.9 billion, reflecting a sharp moderation from November's record gap of \$31.8 billion.

Gold imports that were feared to have spiked to a fresh high of \$14.9 billion in November, before the Centre corrected that tally by \$5 billion last week to \$9.9 billion citing an erroneous 'double count', more than halved sequentially in December to \$4.7 billion. However, this still marked a significant 55.4% increase over the December 2023 gold imports.

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal sought to

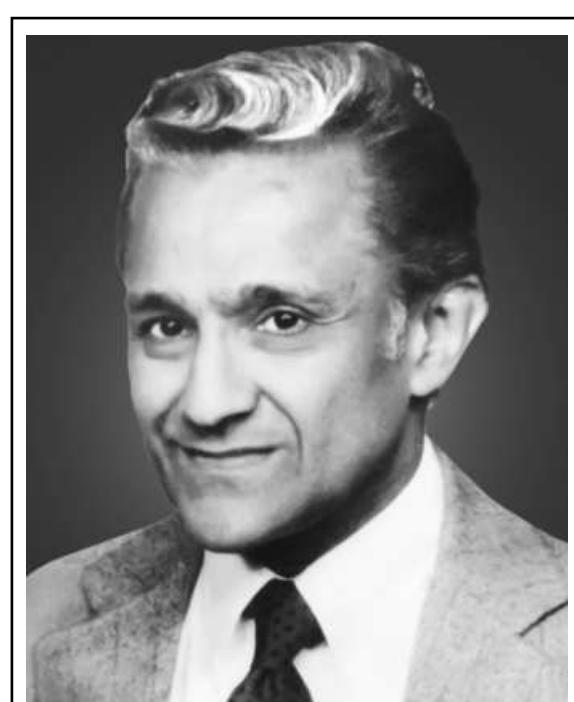


play down concerns about the export blip, saying that shipment values have grown in every quarter through the first nine months of this financial year. This shows that they have not only been resilient during a challenging year but also more consistent, he said. Officials also stressed that December's export tally marked only the third occasion in 2024-25 that outbound shipments' value has crossed

the \$38 billion mark. Overall goods exports are now estimated to be 1.6% higher through the April to December 2024 period at \$321.7 billion, while imports have risen 5.15% to \$532.5 billion. On a year-on-year basis, December's trade deficit was 17% higher, while the total deficit through the year is up 11.1% at \$210.8 billion.

CONTINUED ON  
» PAGE 12

Remembered by Family, Friends and Employees.



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Particulars	Quarter ended 31.12.2024 [Reviewed]	Quarter ended 30.09.2024 [Reviewed]	Quarter ended 31.12.2023 [Reviewed]	Nine Months ended 31.12.2024 [Reviewed]	Nine Months ended 31.12.2023 [Reviewed]	Year ended 31.03.2024 [Audited]
Total income from operations	326937	309786	285271	921325	802123	1091545
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	37465	30731	18070	89518	71019	93698
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	37465	30731	18070	89518	71019	93698
Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	28196	23959	11431	70305	45607	59542
Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))						
Paid up Equity Share Capital	677779	677779	677779	677779	677779	677779
Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve)						
Securities Premium Account	313198	313198	313198	313198	313198	313198
Net worth*	923441	892067	745351	923441	745351	783578
Paid up Debt Capital/ Outstanding Debt	606975	263716	199848	606975	199848	243385
Outstanding Redeemable Preference Shares	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Debt Equity Ratio**	0.66	0.30	0.27	0.66	0.27	0.31
Earnings Per Share (of Rs.10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) -						
1. Basic :	0.42	0.35	0.17	1.04	0.67	0.88
2. Diluted:	0.42	0.35	0.17	1.04	0.67	0.88
Capital Redemption Reserve	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Debenture Redemption Reserve	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Interest Service Coverage Ratio	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Debt Service Coverage Ratio	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* After considering the impact of valuing the Non-Interest bearing Recapitalization Bonds at Fair Value for the Quarter / Nine Months ended 31.12.2023 and Year ended 31.03.2024.

\*\* Total debts represent total borrowings of the Bank. Borrowings represent debts due for more than one year.

Notes: 1. The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly / Nine Months Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 and 52 of SEBI (Listing Obligation and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly / Nine Months Financial Results are available on Stock Exchange website (BSE: www.bseindia.com and NSE: www.nseindia.com) and website of the Bank (<https://punjabandsindbank.co.in>)

2. Information relating to Total Comprehensive Income and Other Comprehensive Income is not furnished as Ind AS is not yet applicable on banks.

For and on behalf of Board of Directors

Place : New Delhi  
Date : 15.01.2025

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Former Union Minister Smriti Irani. PTI

**Modi, Shah, Nadda, Irani in BJP's list of star campaigners**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Wednesday announced the names of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, party president J.P. Nadda, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, among others, in the list of 40 star campaigners for the Assembly election.

The list also includes senior party leaders such as Union Ministers Manohar Lal, Giriraj Singh, and Hardeep Singh Puri, as well as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma.

The BJP, which is also trying to make inroads into the Purvanchali community, will also get Bihar Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary and Gorakhpur MP Ravi Kishan to campaign for its candidates in the city.

Former Union Minister Smriti Irani, who was said to be in the reckoning for an Assembly ticket from Delhi, also features on the star campaigners' list.

The BJP last held the reins of the Capital in 1998.

# Senior leaders from AAP, BJP, Cong. hold roadshows, file nominations

**BJP, Congress yet to release their full list of candidates with two days left before the process draws to a close; AAP makes last-minute changes in Hari Nagar and Narela constituencies; total of 235 candidates have filed nominations for Feb. 5 poll**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Several big names, including Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal (New Delhi), former MP Parvesh Sahib Singh (New Delhi), and Delhi Congress chief Deven Yadav (Badli) filed their nomination papers on Wednesday for the February 5 Assembly election.

With just two days left before the process of submitting papers comes to a close, a total of 235 candidates have filed their nomination papers so far. Meanwhile, the BJP is yet to declare its candidates on 11 seats, and the Congress on two seats.

The day also saw AAP, which had declared candidates on all seats, replacing its Hari Nagar MLA, Rajku-



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal and BJP's Parvesh Sahib Singh held shows of strength before filing papers. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal and BJP's Parvesh Sahib Singh held shows of strength before filing papers. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

mari Dhillon, with Surinder Setia, and Dinesh Bhadrwaj, fielded from Narela, with Sharad Chauhan.

Ramesh Bidhuri, who is up against Chief Minister Atishi from Kalkaji, filed his papers in the presence of Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva.

Members of the three leading parties led road-

shows and rallies as they filed their papers with the respective returning officers. Mr. Kejriwal paid respects at the Maharishi Valmiki Mandir and the Pracheen Hanuman Mandir at Connaught Place before submitting his papers.

According to the nomination papers, Mr. Kejriwal has ₹1.73 crore assets in 2025 against ₹1.86 crore in

2020. His rival candidate from New Delhi disclosed assets of ₹90 crore; during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, his assets amounted to ₹8.35 crore. Mr. Yadav's assets grew from ₹39.66 crore in 2020 to ₹44.80 crore at present.

The BJP had scheduled over 30 nomination rallies and roadshows during the day in the presence of sev-

eral senior party leaders. Party sources said their candidates had not filed any nominations until now due to the time before festivals like Lohri and Makar Sankranti being considered inauspicious.

Addressing supporters before filing his papers, the Delhi Congress chief said, "I am a son of the soil. I'll do your work."

in Delhi.

BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, a popular face from the region, issued a video statement asking Mr. Poonawalla to tender an apology. "However, will the ones [AAP] who called people from Purvanchal 'fake voters' also do the same? Will you [AAP] ask (party chief) Arvind Kejriwal to apologise for calling people from Purvanchal fake voters," asked Mr. Tiwari.

AAP said it will protest across the city on Thursday against the "attack" on people with roots in Purvanchal region.

Purvanchali is a term used for residents of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and those hailing from there in the Capital.

Both AAP and the BJP have been accusing each other of disrespecting people from Purvanchal, who have a significant presence

Taking on the BJP, AAP's Rajya

Sabha member Sanjay

Singh said, "Our MLA, Rituraj Jha, was abused on a

national television channel by a BJP spokesperson.

This was not done behind closed doors but openly on

national TV, in front of the entire country and the world." He added, "AAP will hold a massive demonstration across the city to-

morning [Thursday]."

## BJP's Bidhuri in a spot again

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

[CM] Atishi has been running around in the streets like a doe roams around in the jungle

**RAMESH BIDHURI**  
BJP candidate from Kalkaji

women if he becomes Delhi's CM?" the party asked in a statement.

Targeting Ms. Atishi and her party for the alleged

water shortage and poor roads in the Kalkaji area, Mr. Bidhuri said, "People are living in hell for four years. For four months before the poll, Ms. Atishi has been running around in the streets like a doe roams around in the jungle."

Earlier this month, the former MP had made remarks about Ms. Atishi's father, drawing criticism from his own party, which stated that such comments should not be made.

## Delhi Police appoints a Joint Commissioner to check AI misuse on social media ahead of poll

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

os and misleading messages shared on social media applications and websites, said the police.

The JCP will be aided by a team of officers and the software required to track election-related content in real time, said the police.

However, speaking about the regulation of such content, a senior officer said that a lot more needs to be done to pre-

ficer said.

The role of AI in political campaigns became a major talking point last month, when the ruling Aam Aadmi Party posted an AI-generated deepfake video of B.R. Ambedkar supposedly blessing party national convener Arvind Kejriwal, prompting an AI-generated response from the Opposition Bharatiya Janata Party.

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Date of opening of Eligibility Criteria& Technical information (Cover-I)	28/01/2025 at 11:00 AM			
The tender forms and other detailed conditions can be downloaded from the portal <a href="http://htptenders.gov.in">http://htptenders.gov.in</a>	Executive Engineer, Jal Shakti Division Keylong HP/4527/24-25			

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Sl no	Item	Qty												
1	CT Machine 64 Slice	4												
2	MRI 1.5 T	4												
The details may be seen in the Request for Bid document uploaded in the Assam E-procurement portal ( <a href="https://assamtenders.gov.in">https://assamtenders.gov.in</a> ) & <a href="https://ahidms.assam.gov.in">https://ahidms.assam.gov.in</a>														
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1. The Executive Engineer, Karchham Division HP.PWD. Bhabanagar on behalf of Governor of H.P. invites the item rate bids, in electronic tendering system, from the eligible class of contractors registered with HP.PWD for the work as detailed in the table.					

GRAP III, IV  
back in Delhi**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

As the city's air deteriorated (AQI 401 at 8 p.m.) on Wednesday, the Centre reintroduced a ban on construction and demolition activities, plying of BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers, and mandatory shifting of classes to 'hybrid mode' for students, except for those in grades 10 and 12, in Delhi-NCR.

The actions are part of stage III and IV of the Graduated Response Action Plan (GRAP), a set of short-term emergency measures to reduce air pollution.

**Timings**

THURSDAY, JAN. 16
RISE 07:15 SET 17:48
RISE 20:13 SET 09:00
FRIDAY, JAN. 17
RISE 07:15 SET 17:48
RISE 21:09 SET 09:32
SATURDAY, JAN. 18
RISE 07:15 SET 17:49
RISE 22:03 SET 10:00

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Delhi City 18 06  
Safdarjung 18 06  
Palam 17 07

**Delhi Palam Today**  
17°C Morning will be cold with fog and mist. The weather will be cool. Chances of light rain and thundershower at some places.

**Delhi Palam Tomorrow**  
18°C Morning will be cold and foggy. Day will be cool. Night also will be cold and uneasy. Dry weather to prevail.

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# SP, TMC back AAP for Delhi poll

Party led by Arvind Kejriwal is stronger and better placed to defeat the BJP, say Akhilesh Yadav and Abhishek Banerjee

**The Hindu Bureau**  
LUCKNOW / KOLKATA

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and others at the Namami Ghat in Haridwar on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

**INDIA united**

"Strengthening the hands of regional parties wherever they are strong and in a position to fight the BJP is the basic principle behind the formation of the Opposition bloc. INDIA bloc is

united and our agenda is to defeat the BJP," said SP president Akhilesh Yadav in Haridwar.

He was in Haridwar to

immerse the ashes of his uncle Rajpal Yadav in the Ganga at Har ki Pauri.

"I remember, when the alliance was being formed,

[Bihar CM] Nitish Kumar had talked to leaders of all parties including ours. He had said we should strengthen the hands of a regional party wherever it is strong," he said.

On the Union Home Ministry granting sanction to the Enforcement Directorate to prosecute AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal in the erstwhile excise policy-linked money laundering case, Mr. Yadav said BJP governments work like that only.

Meanwhile, emphasising on the unity of Opposition parties, TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said the party is putting its weight behind AAP. "In the last election, AAP won 67 seats. So, we will support AAP," he said.

Mr. Banerjee was speaking at a health camp in Falta, South 24 Parganas.

**'Who can defeat BJP?'**

He asked who can defeat the BJP, whether the Congress or AAP. "If defeating the BJP is my target, then why will we weaken the party who is fighting the BJP with all its strength?"

Mr. Banerjee said, adding that all Opposition parties must unite to support AAP.

# SP's Ajeet Prasad files nomination papers for Milkipur bypoll

**The Hindu Bureau**  
LUCKNOW

Mr. Prasad is the son of Aadresh Prasad, who vacated the Milkipur seat after winning the Faizabad parliamentary seat in 2024.

Mr. Paswan, a former zila panchayat member, is believed to be close to former BJP MP from Faizabad Lallu Singh, who lost the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

"The fight is between insider and outsiders. People of the constituency are with us," he said.

The byelection is likely to be a tough battle as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has fielded Chandrabhan Paswan, a grassroots-level worker, as its candidate.

Milkipur constituency is considered an SP stronghold as it won the seat six times.

## Asaram returns to ashram after getting interim bail

**The Hindu Bureau**  
JAIPUR

During his trial and incarceration in Jodhpur after his arrest from Indore in September 2013, Asaram's multiple bail applications were rejected by different courts as many as 12 times.

While the special court sentenced Asaram to imprisonment for the "rest of his natural life", a sessions court in Gujarat also convicted him in January 2023 in a decade-old sexual assault case involving a woman disciple and awarded life sentence to him.

A huge crowd of supporters gathered outside an Ayurveda hospital in Jodhpur, where he was getting treatment while on parole.

Asaram was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by a Special SC/ST Court in Jodhpur in April 2018 in the case of a 16-year-old girl's rape and sexual assault.

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18 FEBRUARY

HYDERABAD  
9 DECEMBER

JAIPUR  
20 JANUARY

JODHPUR  
3 DECEMBER

GTB NAGAR, DELHI

6 JAN, 8 AM

LUCKNOW  
11 FEBRUARY

PUNE  
20 JANUARY

टिक्की

21 JANUARY, 11 AM | 6 JANUARY, 11 AM

जयपुर  
20 JANUARY

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## Submarine, 2 warships commissioned

**Vinaya Deshpande Pandit**

MUMBAI

In a first, three frontline platforms – INS Nilgiri, INS Vaghsheer, and INS Surat – were commissioned on the same day in the Navy on Wednesday.

Hailing the first tri-commissioning as a significant leap towards Atmanirbhar Bharat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated the naval platforms – two warships and a submarine – to the nation.

INS Nilgiri is the lead ship of Project 17A frigates, INS Vaghsheer is the sixth and the final submarine of Project 75 Kalvari class, and INS Surat is the fourth and final ship of Project 15B destroyers.

"We are becoming a major maritime power by taking inspiration from our rich naval history. INS Nilgiri is dedicated to the na-



**Major boost:** INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vaghsheer being commissioned at an event in Mumbai on Wednesday. ANI

val empire of the Cholas. INS Surat is dedicated to India's ancient connection to West Asia through Gujarat. I was there for the commissioning of the first Kalvari submarine. I am blessed to commission the sixth one – INS Vaghsheer," the Prime Minister said at the event held at the Naval dockyard on Wednesday morning.

Outlining India's vision as a global power, Mr. Mo-

di said, "India's position is not expansionist, but development-oriented. We are recognised as a reliable and responsible partner globally, especially in the Global South."

On the importance of Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan or indigenisation, he said the country's dependence on other countries at the time of any tension should be minimum. "Today, there are 5,000-plus

equipment, which our defence personnel will not buy from other countries." Of the 40 platforms commissioned in the Navy in the last few years, 39 were made in India, he said.

### Growing prowess'

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the "historic commissioning showcases India's growing prowess in the Indian Ocean region".

Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh Tripathi, Chief of Defence Staff Anil Chauhan, Maharashtra Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan, Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, and Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar were also present at the event.

**RED-LETTER DAY**

» PAGE 12

## 7-day police custody for Walmik Karad in Beed extortion case

**Snehal Mutha**

MUMBAI

A sessions court on Wednesday remanded Walmik Karad in police custody for seven days in the Beed extortion case after he was charged under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA).

The special investigation team (SIT) presented 10 points while seeking Mr. Karad's custody for 10 days. The SIT claimed that the primary reason for Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh's murder on December 9 last year was the attempt to thwart an extortion bid. According to a police official, all the accused conspired to kidnap Deshmukh, and Mr. Karad threatened him on the day of the murder.

While seven persons were arrested in the mur-



Walmik Karad

der case and booked under MCOCA on January 11, Mr. Karad was arrested in the ₹2-crore extortion case and booked under MCOCA on Tuesday. Mr. Karad's lawyer confirmed that the SIT mentioned conspiracy in the murder case and sought custody to further investigate the call details of all the accused. The SIT also presented the criminal records of Mr. Karad and the seven other accused.

After Mr. Karad was booked under MCOCA, his supporters staged a protest in Beed district's Pangri vil-

lage demanding withdrawal of the case. Mr. Karad's mother and wife, Manjiri, also joined the protest and sat outside the Parli police station demanding his release. Ms. Manjiri told mediapersons that he was being "made a scapegoat to further some people's political ambitions".

### Another scam: Sule

Baramati MP and NCP (SP) leader Supriya Sule said she would take up with Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis complaints from farmers that Mr. Karad took money from them to procure government funds for the purchase of harvesters. "I plan to meet the people who fell prey to Mr. Karad's scam, which involves a serious corruption charge, and later speak to the Chief Minister," Ms. Sule said.

## SC protects Puja Khedkar from arrest till February 14

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday protected former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar, accused of cheating and wrongly availing OBC and disability quota benefits in the Civil Services Examination, from coercive action by the police until February 14.

A Bench of Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Satish Chandra Sharma issued notice to the Delhi government and the Union Public Service Commission on Ms. Khedkar's plea for anticipatory bail. "Issue notice returnable on February 14, 2025. Till next date of hearing, no coercive steps to be taken against the petitioner," the Bench ordered.

## Top court asks Kerala not to publish data on church denominations

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it was time to take a "very conscious call" about the extent to which judiciary ought to intervene in religious affairs even as it asked the Kerala government to not circulate or publish data sought by the court, about the population, churches, and assets of the warring Orthodox Malankara and Jacobite denominations in the State.

"When you are asking the Supreme Court to intervene in religious affairs, we have to tread cautiously, extremely carefully...

Today you [the two denominations] have come, tomorrow some other religious group will bring their fight to us... Should we intervene? The courts would ultimately have to take a very conscious call on this question," Justice Surya Kant, heading a two-judge Bench, orally addressed the court's concern to lawyers representing the two religious sections.

On December 17, the court had directed status quo in the dispute between the Jacobite and Orthodox Malankara denominations.

The court would be hearing the case in detail on two consecutive days – January 29 and 30.

## Relief for Andhra CM as SC rejects plea to cancel bail

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday provided major relief to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu by dismissing a petition filed in 2023 by the previous YSRCP government to cancel his bail in the skill development 'scam' case.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Justice Bela Trivedi, senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi for the current dispensation said a chargesheet was filed in the case and there was no

need to cancel the bail granted by the High Court. The Bench asked Mr. Naidu to cooperate with the trial and disposed of the plea.

The petition had claimed that the alleged crime relates to a project involving the A.P. State Skill Development Corporation, Siemens Industry Software (India) Pvt. Ltd., and DesignTech India Private Ltd. for the establishment of SIEMENS Centres of Excellence, Technical Skill Development Institution and Skill Development Centres in six clusters in Andhra Pradesh.

### GENERAL



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## SC rejects KTR's plea in Formula E case

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K.T. Rama Rao's plea that a First Information Report (FIR) accusing him of corruption, criminal breach of trust, and conspiracy causing loss to public exchequer to conduct a Formula E race event at Hyderabad was a ploy to wreak vengeance against his voice of dissent.



**Declines to intervene**  
A Bench headed by Justice Bela M. Trivedi declined to intervene, following which Mr. Rao's lawyers chose to withdraw the special leave petition to quash the FIR.

"The FIR was initiated maliciously with an ul-

tior motive for wrecking vengeance on the petitioner, to damage his political reputation and to deter him from exposing the failure of the government in implementing the promises made to the public before elections," Mr. K.T. Rama Rao contended in his petition filed through advocate P. Mohith Rao.

## HC declines to stay exhumation of body of person 'buried' under his memorial

**The Hindu Bureau**

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday declined to stay the proceedings initiated to exhume the body of Gopan Swami of Neyyatinkara which had been reportedly buried under a memorial constructed for him.

The court refused to interfere with the investigation launched by the police into the alleged burial of Gopan by his sons.

Justice C.S. Dias passed

the order on a writ petition filed by Sulochana, Sanandan G. and Rajasenan, wife and sons of Gopan, challenging the Thiruvananthapuram Revenue Divisional Officer's directive to demolish the memorial and exhume the body.

The court orally observed during the hearing that the decision to exhume the body was part of the investigation. The court could not stall it.

If a cognizable offence was made out, the police had the right to register an

## 'POCSO case against ex-CM of Karnataka can't be quashed'

CID tells HC the victim has recorded her statement before a magistrate affirming allegations made in the complaint against Yediyurappa; BJP leader terms allegations false and politically motivated

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The criminal case against Karnataka former Chief Minister B.S. Yediyurappa on the allegation of sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl at his residence cannot be quashed as the victim had recorded her voluntary statement before a magistrate affirming the allegations made in the complaint lodged by her mother, it was contended before the High Court of Karnataka on Wednesday on behalf of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Pointing out that there is no other eyewitness to the



alleged sexual assault except the victim, it was contended that Mr. Yediyurappa, as the accused, has the obligation under the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, to establish that he neither had committed the offence nor

had an intention to commit such an offence.

These submissions were made before a Bench of Justice M. Nagaprasanna, who is hearing the petition filed by 81-year-old Mr. Yediyurappa questioning the criminal case by terming the allegations as false and politically motivated.

Mr. Yediyurappa had taken the girl inside a room at his house in Bengaluru on February 2, 2024, locked it from inside, and touched her inappropriately in the guise of enquiring about an incident of rape by relatives of her father, when she was about six years of age, Ravivarma Kumar, Senior Advocate

and Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) for the case, pointed from the girl's statement recorded before the magistrate under Section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

On the allegation that Mr. Yediyurappa and his associates bribed the victim and her mother, Mr. Kumar claimed that Mr. Yediyurappa admitted giving ₹9,000 to the victim but had claimed that it was as financial help for difficulties pleaded by the complainant.

The court adjourned further hearing till January 17 to enable Mr. Yediyurappa's advocate to reply to the arguments of the SPP.

## SC allows donation of CPI(M) leader's body

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday declined to intervene in a plea filed by the daughter of Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader M.M. Lawrence against the handing over of her father's body to a government medical college for "anatomic purposes".

A Bench headed by Justice Hirshikesh Roy rejected the petition filed by Asha Lawrence, who argued that though her father was a well-known Communist leader he was also a member of a Christian parish who religiously followed the rites and rituals of the faith.

"This decision was taken by the political party [CPI(M)] to keep the image that their leader M.M. Lawrence was an atheist and lived the life of an atheist," the plea stated. Ms. Lawrence further argued that it was "absolute lie" that her father had expressed a wish to hand over his body to the medical college.



A crowd of pilgrims at the Kapil Muni temple at Gangasagar Mela on Makar Sankranti. FILE PHOTO

## Bengal govt. pegs Gangasagar pilgrim count at over 1.1 cr.

**Shiv Sahay Singh**

SAGAR (WEST BENGAL)

The West Bengal government on Wednesday claimed that over 1.1 crore pilgrims have participated in the Gangasagar Mela 2025, describing the annual pilgrimage at the confluence of river Ganga and the Bay of Bengal as the "best mela in the country".

State Minister for Power and Youth Affairs Aroop Biswas lauded the arrangements at the *mela* and said that the initiatives envisaged by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had paved the way for smooth functioning of the fest.

Last year too, the State government had put a similar count on the number of devotees without attributing the source. A response to a Right to Information query, filed by Biswanath Goswami, however, pointed out that about 4.57 lakh vessel tickets were sold from January 10 to January 16, 2024, during the *mela* last year. The total fare collection of the

State government from the sale of tickets was about ₹1.83 crore.

Gangasagar Mela is held on Sagar island, which can only be accessed by vessels and boats.

When asked about the mismatch in the figure of pilgrims, Mr. Biswas said that it is not correct to ascertain the footfall from vessel tickets as the tickets are not bought by everyone. "If someone does not have money, will we not let them travel?" he said. Mr. Goswami said if a person is travelling from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan, spending thousands of rupees, he or she ought to have ₹40 for the vessel fare? "The response to the RTI query proves that the figures by the West Bengal government are fudged," he claimed.

On the investment proposals at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, Mr. Biswas said the State government does not want to "make income" from the Gangasagar Mela.

**बिहार सरकार**

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## Cabinet will discuss caste census at meeting next week, says Karnataka CM

**The Hindu Bureau**

BENGALURU

Clarifying that the Socio-Economic and Educational Survey (caste census) will not be discussed in the Cabinet meeting this Thursday but will be taken up in next week's meeting, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said there was a need for a discussion on the caste census report considering canards being spread about its content.

"The opposition to the caste census is unnecessary when the statistics in the report have not come into the public domain. There are only rumours about it. The census report would be discussed and a suitable decision taken at next week's Cabinet meeting," the Chief Minister told reporters in Delhi. AICC general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala is learnt to have supported the caste census discussion at KPCC office-bearers and Ministers' meeting.

Meanwhile, upping the ante, Home Minister G. Parameshwara told presspersons in Bengaluru that while the census details



Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah.

needed to be published, it was left to the government to implement the recommendations. "The caste census report, which is in a sealed cover, should be opened at the Cabinet meeting. Otherwise, there are chances that the information could get leaked." Stating that the government decision was final, he said, "The government has spent ₹160 crore on it. Should not the public know the details of the report?"

The caste census report is a vexed issue, as leaked data, the authenticity of which is not known, has ruffled the dominant Veerashaiva-Lingayat and Vokkila communities.

Voting for Delhi Assembly poll will be held on February 5.

## Cong. names five more candidates for Delhi poll

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday released a list of five candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly poll, taking the total number of nominees to 68.

The party has fielded Surendra Kumar from Bawana (SC), Sumesh Gupta from Rohini, Rahul Dhankar from Karol Bagh (SC), Virender Bidhuri from Tughlakabad and Arjun Bhadana from Badarpur.

With this, the Congress has declared 68 candidates for the election for the 70-member Delhi Assembly.

On Tuesday, the party had released a list of 15 candidates, fielding former Union Minister Krishna Tirath from Patel Nagar and Councillor Ariba Khan from Okhla. Earlier this month, the party released a single-name list, fielding Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba from Kalkaji.

Voting for Delhi Assembly poll will be held on February 5.

## IN BRIEF



### Businessman tenders apology for staying in prison after bail

Businessman Boby Chemmanur on Wednesday tendered an unconditional apology before the Kerala High Court for refusing to get himself released from judicial custody despite getting bail in a sexual harassment case saying that he is doing so in solidarity with the prisoners who could not come out of jail due to their inability to meet the bail conditions. "He thinks that he is above law. He has taken the order of the court lightly..." the court said.

### Woman killed in elephant attack near Nilambur in Kerala

A tribal woman from Nilambur in Kerala was killed in an elephant attack on Wednesday. Sarojini had gone to the forest along with four others to rear their cattle when the attack took place. When the elephant charged at the group, others ran to safety. But Sarojini fell and was trampled to death. This was the second death in elephant attack in two weeks. Mani from Mancheeri was killed on January 4 when he was returning after dropping his children at a school.

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**E-TENDER No. TD-500/25.**

Online e-Bids are invited for "Replacement of existing ACSR Panther Conductor of approx. 25.70 Ckt Km of 132 KV Kursi Road-Khurramnagar DC line with HTLS Conductor (Except GAP type), including Design, manufacturing, testing & supply of HTLS Conductor alongwith suitable Hardwares & Accessories, on Turn-Key basis". E-tender has been uploaded on 15.01.2025 on e-tender website <https://etender.upnic.in>. Estimated cost of the work: **Rs. 10,00,00,000.00** only. Time Period is 08-10 Months. EMD Cost: **Rs. 10.00 Lacs**. Last date of online tender submission is **18.02.2025 upto 17:00 Hrs.** Total quantity of work, tender specification and other terms and condition are as per tender document available on the e-tender website. Undersigned reserve the right to cancel the e-Bids without assigning any reason.

Corrigendum, Addendum, date Extensions, if any, shall be uploaded only on the above website. Bidders are advised to visit the website regularly for updated information.

**Superintending Engineer, ETDC, 10th floor, Shakti Bhawan Ext., Lucknow**

पत्रांक: 76 दिनांक: 15.01.2025



THE HINDU GROUP

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER  
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BALASORE

No. 136/WE, Dt: 10/01/2025 e-Procurement Notice

1. Name of the work :- "Building Works"  
2. Estimated Cost :- As per Annexure  
3. Time for completion :- As per Annexure  
4. No. of Work :- As per Annexure

Further details can be Seen from the website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
Any other changes/Corrigendums may be seen only in website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
Sd/- Er.Tapan Ku. Behera, Chief Construction Engineer,  
Rural Works Circle, Balasore  
O-1240 OIPR-25105/11/0026/2425

**BEFORE THE HON'BLE MUNISIFF'S COURT ERMALUKAM**  
O.S. 604/2020  
Plaintiff - The Federal Bank Ltd  
Registered office at Aluva  
and branch at Ernakulam North P.O  
Pin Code- 682018  
Defendant - Arshad, Aged 33  
S/o Akbar, House No. 676/1  
Gali No.7, Fakhruddin Meerat,  
Uttarpradesh Pin Code-650002  
The above case is posted to 10-02-25 for  
appearance of the defendant. If you or your  
authorized advocate is not appearing on that  
day before the Munsif's Court Ernakulam, the  
case will be decided without hearing you.  
Dated this the 20 day of November 2024  
By order  
Sd/- Peter Tharakaran,  
Advocate



## Burrow tragedy

India must learn from its mining disasters and enforce regulations

**W**ith four deaths so far, the coal mining tragedy in Assam's Dima Hasao district has revived a long-standing debate on the hazardous nature of rat-hole coal mining in India. As opposed to modern coal mining, which is mechanised, the 'rat-hole' points to the crude and antiquated technique of employing people, and even children, to burrow into the ground to scoop out the underground coal. Depending on the depths that they plumb, the odds are high that their pickaxes will often unleash a torrent of water from a hidden aquifer that can suddenly inundate the excavated tunnel – as it is suspected to have happened at Dima Hasao. Because such accidents have recurred over the decades, along with the attendant health and environmental hazards, this mode of mining was banned by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2014. The use of proper geological surveys and appropriate machinery would have made the mine economically unviable. The Assam Chief Minister has stated that the mine appeared to be "prime facie... illegal" and one abandoned by the State's Mines and Minerals Department. If that is the case, it reflects poorly on the State administration that such mines can be exploited by unscrupulous elements with such ease, despite the ban. Surely, this is only a fraction of the unregulated mining that actually goes on.

The Supreme Court of India, in 2019, had asked whether it was possible for such mining to continue without the "connivance" of officials, when it was examining the rescue of 15 miners trapped in a rat-hole mine in the East Jaintia Hills in December 2018. A report submitted by a monitoring committee set up by the NGT observed that despite the ban, the demand for coal to power cement manufacturing and thermal power plants in the northeast had sustained and supported rat-hole coal mining. On the other hand, when convenient, State authorities have sought out and even felicitated rat-hole miners, some from Assam, as in 2023, when they were called in as a last resort after advanced machinery and the expertise of professional geologists and earth scientists had failed to rescue 41 construction workers trapped in the large, over-ground Silkiyara tunnel in Uttarkashi. The Dima Hasao operation too, like others, will end and the net success or failure of saving those trapped will induce a familiar amnesia that will be broken only by the next accident. Until decisive action to puncture the economics of rat-hole mining is taken, India is only burrowing the way to another tragedy.

## Safety and piety

A sense of fairness must drive the capping of visitors to religious sites

**D**espite the hundreds of thousands who throng the Tirumala temple in Tirupati every year for the Vaikunta Ekadasi celebrations, stampedes at the world-renowned hill temple have been rare. However, the tragic incident on January 8 underscores the need to rethink crowd management strategies at religious pilgrimage sites. As an editorial in this daily on December 27, 2024, noted, India has the highest number of religious stampedes globally. According to National Crime Records Bureau data, between 1996 and 2022, over 3,000 lives were lost in stampedes at religious events nationwide. This statistic starkly highlights the need for systemic changes in the way large-scale gatherings are organised and managed. The Tirupati stampede, which resulted in six devotees passing away and injuries to over 40 others, was despite the extensive arrangements by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and the Andhra Pradesh government. Elaborate crowd control mechanisms, such as a well-dispersed token distribution strategy and the deployment of over 3,000 police personnel and other staff and volunteers were in place for the 10-day Vaikunta Dwar Darshan. Nonetheless, what appears to be miscommunication at one of the centres in the city to handle a surge in devotees at a token distribution centre, seems to have triggered chaos and panic. The probe that Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu announced would shed more light on where the lapse occurred. The tragedy unfolded just weeks after another stampede-like situation in Hyderabad. While the TTD has been making commendable efforts over the years to streamline operations – online booking systems and additional security personnel during peak periods – the scale and the spontaneity of human behaviour at such events demand innovative solutions.

One such idea could involve prioritising pilgrims who have never visited Tirupati over repeat visitors, thereby ensuring a more equitable *darshan*. VIP *darshans* too need a rethink. A robust database and a roster system could help regulate devotee flow and ensure fairness. Additionally, there is a need to consider the ecological impact on the Tirumala Hills, which are a part of the Seshachalam Biosphere Reserve. Growing anthropogenic pressures stemming from deforestation, urbanisation, and massive footfalls pose a significant threat to its biodiversity. Balancing the human need to connect with the divine with the imperative to preserve nature requires innovative and sustainable approaches. These could include capping the number of pilgrims every day, promoting virtual *darshan* experiences, and enforcing stricter conservation policies. A collaborative effort between religious and government authorities, environmental experts, and the public is essential to create a framework that prioritises safety, accessibility, and ecological preservation.

## Social justice and a lost chance by a Prime Minister

**A**t the first official state dinner of his presidency, on November 24, 2009, Barack Obama, the first non-white President of the United States, hosted Manmohan Singh, the first non-Hindu Prime Minister of India. In the oldest and the biggest democracies of the world, that era was a high noon of liberalism. A coalition of minorities appeared ascendant, in both countries. Though Manmohan Singh would not be counted as a political leader like Mr. Obama, he too represented a political process that was common to both India and the U.S. – the climax and then the crisis of liberalism, on the social, economic and international affairs fronts. Mr. Obama and Manmohan Singh understood each other better than they both would the politics of their own countries. Manmohan Singh had a keen sense of global developmental challenges – he championed the India-U.S. civil nuclear deal, economic liberalisation and also amended New Delhi's position in climate change negotiations. As a child of Partition and as a Nehruvian, Manmohan Singh understood the necessity of religious harmony. His presence, decisions and indecisions would transform Indian politics. It is essential to take note of it in order to understand the present-day politics of India.

### The 2004 vote

There were two paradoxes in Manmohan Singh's rise as Prime Minister in 2004, both of which speak to the vibrancy of Indian democracy. The anti-Sikh riots of 1984 marked a low point in Indian pluralism. Sikhs made up about 1.72% of India's population, and the fact that one of them could become the Prime Minister 20 years later, marked a high point. The majority Hindus did not find anything problematic.

The second paradox is that the vote in 2004 was one against the celebration of the market. Manmohan Singh who became Prime Minister, was a votary of the market. He would reluctantly follow a welfare agenda dictated by democratic politics.

Now, to his presence, decisions and indecisions. The United Progressive Alliance-1 was a coalition of religious and linguistic minorities and subaltern social groups. But when it was reconstituted following the 2009 elections, subaltern representatives from the Hindi belt were left out. The Left was replaced with Trinamool Congress (TMC); the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam continued. Political power in India between 2004 and 2014 was controlled, along with Manmohan Singh, by Sonia Gandhi, Ahmed Patel, Pranab Mukherjee and A.K. Antony. The coalition elected two Presidents of India, Pratibha Patil and Pranab Mukherjee, and Hamid Ansari as Vice President of India. Religious and linguistic minorities were represented for all 10 years, but subaltern castes were pointedly expelled in 2009 by Congress managers. Nobody in the above list, save perhaps Sonia Gandhi, had any capacity to get an extra vote for the Congress in the Hindi heartland. In fact, the very optics of



Varghese K.  
George

the overwhelming presence of religious minorities and upper caste Hindus at the top turned out to be one of the causes of the shift by the Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Dalits in favour of the Bharatiya Janata Party in 2014. This has parallels with what would happen in the U.S. in 2016.

Manmohan Singh was indecisive on many issues, but there was one question – apart from the India-U.S. nuclear deal – that he put his foot down for. This was to veto the social justice agenda pushed by cabinet colleagues Arjun Singh and Meira Kumar, Minister of Human Resource Development and Social Justice Minister, respectively, in UPA-1. There cannot be a reasonable explanation for the surprise surge of the Congress in 2009 in the heartland – it won 21 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh, for instance – without taking into account the OBC quota in higher educational institutions driven by Arjun Singh and OBC parties in UPA-1. The battle of wits between the two Singhons on the quota question is instructive of the imbalance between secularism and socialism justice that made the UPA's promise of progress short-lived. Manmohan Singh owned it.

### Singh vs Singh

Manmohan Singh resisted Arjun Singh's plans for expanding quotas. It all started with a Supreme Court judgment in 2005, which brought into dispute the power of the state to enforce the reservation policy in admissions to private educational institutions. Many States had quotas in unaided institutions, which were questionable after the Court decision. Arjun Singh championed it and Parliament amended the Constitution to insert a clause to Article 15, which specifically enabled reservations in "admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions".

A new anti-reservation movement erupted in upper India while peninsular India remained calm. The then Human Resources Development Ministry under Arjun Singh drafted a Bill that proposed OBC quotas in all government institutions of higher education which already had Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe quotas; and for all three categories in private ones. The Manmohan Singh-led Prime Minister's Office instructed Arjun Singh to bifurcate the Bill – one for aided, and a second for unaided ones. Arjun Singh got both drafts ready. Late evening on a day before they were to be taken up by the Union Cabinet, Manmohan Singh instructed that the Bill for private ones be kept aside. Though the move for caste quotas in private institutions was halted, quota in government institutions of higher education rallied OBC communities in the heartland behind the Congress party in 2009.

Manmohan Singh and the technocratic, Delhi-based Congress managers interpreted the 2009 results as an endorsement of the employment guarantee scheme, or even the U.S.

As Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh's decisions and indecisions caused a rift between subaltern Hindus and Muslims in the Hindi heartland

nuclear deal. Arjun Singh was denied a berth in the new Council. Meira Kumar was restrained as Lok Sabha Speaker. Ms. Kumar had tried to implement an item in the National Common Minimum Programme (NCMP). It had said: "The UPA government is very sensitive to the issue of affirmative action, including reservations in the private sector. It will immediately initiate a national dialogue with all political parties, industry and other organizations to see how best the private sector can fulfill the aspirations of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe youth." Ms. Kumar convened a meeting of industry leaders to open a dialogue, inviting the ire of Manmohan Singh, who instructed her to cancel it. Nobody in the National Advisory Council, whose mandate was to implement the NCMP, said anything. Meanwhile, OBC MPs were pointing out in 2006 that not a single Governor in the country was from among their communities. On this question, Manmohan Singh remained silent – indecision.

### The parallel line

This hostility towards social justice politics was happening alongside a discussion on the welfare of Muslims, Dalits, and OBC Christians. The Court's Inamdar judgment on reservations in private educational institutions and the appointment of the Sachar Committee to study the condition of Muslims happened months apart in 2005, triggering fresh debates on communal and caste questions. The Congress, partly by intention, pitched the Muslims against subaltern Hindus, thinking that this could break the OBC-Muslim social coalition that had emaciated the party in the Hindi heartland. But the consequences were unintended. OBC/Dalit segments of the heartland became the most fertile ground for Hindutva subsequently, as they came to believe that non-BJP parties were trying to provide quotas for Muslims at their cost. It is not a coincidence that the badly drafted line by Manmohan Singh about minorities having the first claim over national resources continues to haunt the Congress.

In fairness, Manmohan Singh was following a traditional Congress line of ignoring the OBCs and focusing on the rest. Arjun Singh sensed the ground had shifted and that the OBCs counted. The other politician who sensed that by 2009 was Narendra Modi, who addressed subaltern Hindus. Arjun Singh crossed swords with two Congress Prime Ministers – once on secularism and then on social justice. In 1992, he resigned from the P.V. Narasimha Rao Government for its failure to protect the Babri Masjid. In 2009 he was denied a cabinet berth by Manmohan Singh. The Congress party included in its 2024 election manifesto a promise of OBC/SC/ST reservation in private educational institutions – an idea stalled by Manmohan Singh. Rahul Gandhi today wants to rebuild the Congress on the twin plank of secularism and social justice. Manmohan Singh had an opportunity.

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## The red flag as China's expansionist strategy rolls on

**I**n recent days, India has witnessed two significant incidents of Chinese aggression along the China-India border, highlighting vulnerabilities that not only threaten India's territorial integrity but also undermine its sovereignty. The Chinese government's announcement of the construction of a dam on the Yarlung Zangbo river (which is the Brahmaputra river), and the creation of two new counties in north-eastern Ladakh, have set alarm bells ringing.

India has strongly condemned these Chinese actions, asserting that they are illegal and a direct challenge to India's sovereignty. In response to China's ambitious hydropower project, India has expressed concern, noting that it is monitoring the situation and will take necessary measures to safeguard its national interests. These developments are particularly disturbing given the recent consensus on troop disengagement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). These new moves further underscore the unpredictability of China's approach in the region.

**The transboundary water issue**  
India is not alone in facing the brunt of China's expansionist policies. Other South Asian countries such as Nepal and Bhutan have been subjected to a similar manner to Chinese territorial encroachments. Disputes over land boundaries persist between China and several of its South Asian neighbours, and China's unilateral actions with respect to transboundary rivers, particularly the Brahmaputra and Indus river systems, have the potential to jeopardise water security in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Pakistan. Despite these challenges, each country has opted to engage with China on a bilateral basis.

The proposed Chinese dam, with an annual capacity to generate 300 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity a year, is located on the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo near the China-India



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border. This massive infrastructure project presents significant challenges for downstream countries, particularly India and Bangladesh.

The construction of the dam is likely to reduce the amount of water and silt reaching downstream, which could have severe long-term consequences for agriculture, fisheries, and biodiversity in India and Bangladesh. Further, during the monsoon season or in times of geopolitical tensions, the uncontrolled release of water could result in devastating floods along the Indian border, which will be an issue of strategic vulnerability for India. In anticipation, India has accelerated plans to build its own hydropower projects and reservoirs, including an investment of \$1 billion to expedite the construction of 12 hydropower stations in Arunachal Pradesh.

**Border disputes, cartographic aggression**  
China's recent actions, including the creation of the two new counties, are a part of its ongoing strategy of cartographic aggression aimed at asserting control over disputed territories. This kind of tactic is intended to gain strategic leverage over its regional adversaries.

China's territorial disputes with India are multifaceted, with the most recent aggression occurring along the western front, specifically in Ladakh. Additionally, China continues to lay claim to Arunachal Pradesh, a State that is an inalienable part of India. Beyond India, China also asserts overlapping claims on territories in countries such as Nepal and Bhutan.

China's tactics in asserting territorial claims – such as renaming locations within Indian-controlled territories, establishing settlements in disputed areas, and incorporating contested regions into official maps – are becoming increasingly visible. For instance, in 2023, the Chinese government standardised 11 locations in Arunachal Pradesh to assert its ownership, following similar actions in 2021 and 2017.

However, international law does not recognise

India, as the dominant regional power in South Asia, should take the lead in shaping a collective response to China's aggressive actions

territorial claims based solely on cartographic assertions. In various landmark cases, which include the ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the Minquiers and Ecrehos dispute between the United Kingdom and France, maps were deemed insufficient evidence of sovereignty. The ICJ ruled that effective administrative control and sovereignty are crucial for determining ownership of contested territories. Therefore, China's use of cartographic aggression, while provocative, lacks legal validity under international law. Nevertheless, China's efforts to establish a physical presence in disputed territories, such as by building settlements, could complicate matters for India in the future.

### The South Asian response

While China has sought economic engagement with all South Asian nations, its territorial and water-related disputes with these countries continue to strain regional relations. Unlike the Southeast Asian nations, which have employed collective responsive measures through multilateral organisations such as the Mekong River Commission (MRC) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian countries, including India, have chosen to address their concerns with China on a bilateral basis. This approach has largely been shaped by the power asymmetry between China and its smaller neighbours.

India, as the dominant regional power in South Asia, should take the lead in fostering a collective response to China's actions. A unified approach, including regional forums, multilateral institutions, or enhanced diplomatic coordination would strengthen South Asia's position in addressing China's increasing influence and territorial ambitions. A comprehensive strategy involving diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation is crucial for India's sovereignty and regional security in the face of China's growing assertiveness.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Economic slowdown

According to a Goldman Sachs report, India is going through a cyclical growth slowdown. It must be remembered that a slow fall in aggregate demand or recession, which India

experiences at present, needs to be handled carefully. Put differently, the government should loosen its purse strings to enhance the disposable income of the people and boost consumption. This will

automatically spur investment demand by business enterprises. Needless to say, recession is more dangerous than inflation, and one of the best ways to tackle it is to provide considerable direct

tax relief to households and firms.

**S. Ramakrishnasayee,**  
Chennai

### Corrections & Clarifications

The judicial strength of the Supreme Court is 33 after the appointment of Justice Krishnan Vinod Chandran as a judge, and not 34 as mentioned in a report, "Patna High Court CJ Vinod Chandran appointed to SC" (January 14, 2025).

### NFOBC scholarship

The prolonged delay in disbursement under the National Fellowship for OBC is causing us financial and academic distress.

**Bhuvnesh Bawar,**  
Indore, Madhya Pradesh

# OYO's new policy may be at the cost of rights

**P**ayal Kapadia's award-winning film *All We Imagine As Light* depicts the journey of a young couple, Anu and Shiaz, struggling to find a private space. They may be fictional, but their problem certainly is not. Across the country, young people in pre-marital relationships have long found it difficult to come by privacy. This issue is likely to be exacerbated by policies such as the one recently implemented by OYO.

Last week, OYO announced that unmarried couples would be disallowed from accessing its partner hotels. The hotels have been given the discretion to implement this policy in accordance with local sensibilities. Going forward, all couples will be required to present 'valid proof of relationship' while checking in. Explaining the reason for its move, OYO stated that civil society groups and citizens had requested it to institute this rule.

Initially, the policy will apply only to hotels in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, but reports suggest that OYO may expand its application to other cities. Beyond the practicalities of providing 'valid proof of relationship,' it is clear that OYO is encouraging partner hotels to discriminate against customers based on their marital status. The burning question, however, is whether those adversely affected by this policy may find legal redress either in the Constitution or otherwise.

In various decisions, the Supreme Court has recognised individuals' right to enter pre-marital relationships. In *Shafin Jahan vs Asokan K.M.* (2020), the court held that Article 21 of the Constitution includes the right of individuals to choose their partners 'whether within or outside marriage'. Similarly, in *Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India* (2018), the court recognised the right of all individuals to physical, emotional, mental, and sexual companionship. Other decisions of the apex court have affirmed that the rights to privacy, dignity, and



**Spoorthi Cotha**  
Advocate based in Bengaluru

autonomy – emanating from Article 21 – mean that people have the freedom to engage in consensual, intimate, or sexual relationships and to cohabit with their partners if they choose. At their core, these decisions acknowledge the freedom to conduct oneself in a manner of one's choosing. For many unmarried couples, accessing hotel services is one way to exercise these rights. Individuals in pre-marital relationships apart, persons of different genders who are friends, colleagues, or cousins may also travel together and require OYO's services.

Under the constitutional scheme, fundamental rights enshrined in Part III of the Constitution are ordinarily enforceable against the State and its instrumentalities, not against non-State actors. In other words, citizens may seek constitutional remedies from courts when the State infringes upon their fundamental rights but not when a private party hinders their exercise. This is because constitutional rights are generally thought to apply "vertically" (i.e., against the State) and not "horizontally" (i.e., between private individuals or entities).

However, the Constitution contains three express provisions which depart from the traditional "vertical" model of rights: Article 15(2) stipulates that no citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them, be prevented from accessing shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment or using wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads, and places of public resort funded by the State or dedicated to public use; Article 17 forbids the practice of untouchability; and Article 23 prohibits human trafficking and forced labour. In *Kaushal Kishor vs State of Uttar Pradesh* (2023), the Supreme Court travelled beyond this schema of horizontal rights by holding that the right under Article 21 could be enforced even against private parties.

Beyond the practicalities of providing 'valid proof of relationship,' it is clear that OYO is encouraging partner hotels to discriminate against customers based on their marital status

While Article 15(2) would prevent OYO from denying its services to customers based on caste, religion, or the other grounds listed, it may not readily constitute a bar against discrimination on the ground of marital status. Separately, the effect of the decision in the Kaushal Kishor case remains to be seen – commentators have criticised it for being unclear, and in the absence of coherent and consistent jurisprudence on this subject, it is uncertain whether unmarried individuals can enforce their rights under Article 21 against OYO.

Apart from constitutional rights and remedies, statutes may provide a model for the exercise of fundamental rights in transactions between private parties. While some enactments confer certain rights on women irrespective of marital status, the time may have come for lawmakers to enact an anti-discrimination law which protects individuals (regardless of their gender) against discrimination based on marital status, in the private sphere.

The full and free exercise of our rights as citizens depends not only on State (in) action but on private actors – be it as a member of the public, a family unit, a business undertaking, or a corporation – creating the conditions for their exercise. This applies not only in the context of individuals in pre-marital relationships who may seek commercial services but also more broadly, say, to people who may wish to rent homes, who apply for employment in private establishments, or who make offers to purchase land – but are denied access on the basis of their marital status, caste, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other attributes.

The tyranny of the majority is often nowhere as evident as in the private sphere. An act may not meet with social approval but the Constitution guarantees our right to do it anyway. The law – regardless of the form it takes – must protect this right.

# Infrastructure in govt. schools catching up with private ones in 2024

The latest UDISE+ report shows that infrastructure in rural schools is on a par with urban schools, compared to a decade ago

**DATA POINT****Sambavi Parthasarathy**  
**Nitika Francis**

**G**overnment schools have notably improved in the provision of basic infrastructure facilities to students over the past 10 years, and are almost on a par with private schools, data show. More than 80% of government schools in India are equipped with functional electricity, ramps, boys' and girls' toilets, handwash, and libraries.

**Table 1** shows the shares of government and private schools that provide various infrastructural amenities as mentioned in the latest data released by the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+), maintained by the Ministry of Education.

Compared to 2013-14, the share of government schools providing functional electricity has doubled from 45% to 90% in 2023-24, while the share of those equipped with computers has tripled from 15% to 51% in the same period. The share of government schools having libraries and ramps, and conducting medical checkups, has surpassed that of private schools equipped with the same in 2024.

**Table 2** shows the share of rural and urban schools equipped with various infrastructure facilities in 2014 and 2024. Facilities such as drinking water, electricity, functional toilets, libraries, ramps, and playgrounds are available in more than 75% of rural schools across India in 2024.

The latest report shows the gap between the share of rural and urban schools in select infrastructure facilities has narrowed. The share of rural schools with ramps and regular medical checkups has surpassed the share of urban schools with the same. Drinking water, toilets, libraries, and playgrounds were provided in almost the same share of rural and urban schools. However, schools in rural

areas continue to lag in the availability of computers, rainwater harvesting systems, and internet connection.

**Table 3** compares the availability of select infrastructure facilities in 2013-14 and 2023-24. The data is provided for all major States across government and private schools. The greener the cell, the greater the percentage of schools (by management) with the facility and vice versa.

Data show that the share of schools with a functional toilet facility has increased and is at least 90% across all States in the latest year. While States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, and Delhi have sustained their values, there has been a considerable improvement in government and private schools in Bihar, Odisha, and West Bengal.

Compared to 2013-14, more schools have equipped themselves with functional electricity. A decade ago, the share of government schools with functional electricity was less than 50% in States such as Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

The share has increased close to 80% and above in all these States.

However, the availability of computers is higher among private schools compared to government schools. Except for Kerala whose figures have always been above 90%, the share of government schools having computers is above 80% only in six other States.

The share of government schools equipped with computers is still as low as 12% in Bihar, 19% in West Bengal, and 29% in Uttar Pradesh. However, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Haryana, and Odisha have shown considerable improvement compared to 2013-14.

Interestingly, the tables turn when we look at the share of schools with the availability of ramps. More government schools are equipped with ramps compared to private schools. The trend has been true in 2013-14 as well, not just in the latest year.

**Report card**

The data for the charts were sourced from Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) Reports of 2013-14 and 2023-24, released by the Ministry of Education

**Acing all tests:** Students in a public school at Laggere in Bengaluru in May 2024.



**Table 1** The table shows the shares of government and private schools that provide various infrastructural amenities (in %)

	The table shows the shares of government and private schools that provide various infrastructural amenities (in %)			
	Government	Private	14'	24'
Functional electricity	44	90	80	92
Functional toilet	86	96	91	96
Functional boys' toilets	77	90	88	96
Functional girls' toilets	81	93	90	95
Availability of ramps	65	85	35	59
Availability of computer	15	51	51	76
Rainwater harvesting	2	26	10	34
Internet	3	46	19	74
Medical checkup	66	81	57	59
Handwash	39	95	55	96
Library	78	93	72	82

**Table 3:** The greener the cell, the greater the % of schools with the facility. In contrast, cells coloured red indicate lesser % of schools with the facility

Location	Functional toilet facility				Functional electricity				Availability of computers				Availability of ramps				
	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	Govt	Private	
Andhra Pradesh*	61	95	68	100	87	95	94	100	17	80	66	96	10	48	18	90	
Bihar	65	94	79	96	4	77	58	87	2	12	36	68	60	55	33	35	
Chhattisgarh	90	96	90	99	48	90	81	98	5	67	39	73	66	83	27	50	
Delhi	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	76	100	91	100	91	100	64	100	
Gujarat	100	99	100	100	100	100	100	100	69	98	87	97	96	96	40	52	
Haryana	97	100	100	100	97	99	100	100	27	98	84	95	73	84	47	56	
Himachal	97	100	96	100	85	99	98	100	13	40	78	94	68	94	16	27	
Jharkhand	81	98	88	99	6	93	70	96	4	77	66	90	45	77	16	40	
Karnataka	100	99	99	100	97	98	93	99	19	38	66	85	79	88	29	52	
Kerala	98	100	97	100	91	100	97	100	92	100	91	99	77	95	22	51	
Madhya Pradesh	90	92	97	99	5	11	82	81	95	5	41	49	78	62	99	46	80
Maharashtra	98	94	99	99	82	81	97	99	37	73	85	97	92	97	42	86	
Odisha	70	100	70	99	23	96	57	98	9	56	31	81	66	97	13	89	
Punjab	99	99	98	99	100	100	100	100	39	100	87	97	84	89	25	56	
Rajasthan	94	89	97	89	36	89	83	94	13	38	47	80	51	76	31	56	
Tamil Nadu	97	97	99	96	37	100	99	96	49	72	86	88	77	100	22	96	
Uttar Pradesh	96	97	98	95	28	89	61	81	6	29	20	56	84	90	54	52	
Uttarakhand	93	93	92	93	61	88	79	96	22	87	62	88	59	85	14	53	
West Bengal	83	100	62	100	38	98	62	93	9	19	23	49	58	85	8	32	

\*2024 data includes numbers for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the sake of comparison

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\*\*\*\*\*2024 data includes numbers for Andhra Pradesh and Telangana for the sake of comparison

# Text & Context

THE HINDU

## NEWS IN NUMBERS

### Fatalities from a suspected outbreak of Marburg in Tanzania

**8** Like Ebola, the Marburg virus originates in fruit bats and spreads between people through close contact with the bodily fluids of infected individuals or with surfaces, such as contaminated bed sheets. Without treatment, Marburg can be fatal in 88% of people who fall ill with the disease. PTI

### The extent of the German economy's contraction in 2024

**-0.20** In per cent. The German economy, Europe's biggest, shrank for the second consecutive year in 2024, according to preliminary official figures released on Wednesday, weeks before an election in which the economy is the top issue. PTI

### Number of flights diverted from Delhi due to dense fog

**6** More than 300 flights were delayed and departures were briefly put on hold at the Delhi airport as low visibility conditions due to dense fog significantly impacted operations. Air India, in a post on X, said poor visibility due to dense fog and airport congestion may affect flight operations in Delhi. PTI

### The unexpected drop in UK's inflation in December

**2.50** In per cent. This is largely as a result of easing price pressures in the services sector, which accounts for around 80% of the U.K. economy. Though inflation has fallen, it remains above the Bank of England's target of 2%. AP

### The number of submarines that the Indian Navy owns

**16** India's navy on Wednesday simultaneously launched a submarine, a destroyer and a frigate built at a state-run shipyard, underscoring the importance of protecting the Indian Ocean region through which 95% of the country's trade moves. AP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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# Does 'blood money' have a legal standing?

What does 'blood money' mean? How does it figure in Islamic Sharia law? Do different Islamic nations have different rules with respect to determining the amount of money to be paid to the victim's family by the accused? What does 'plea bargaining' in India mean?

## EXPLAINER

### R. Sai Venkatesh

**The story so far:** The death sentence awarded by a Yemen court to nurse Nimisha Priya from Kerala for murdering her business partner, and the subsequent debates and efforts surrounding her acquittal and repatriation, which involves monetary compensation paid to the victim's family, have brought the focus back on 'blood money' and its implications.

**What is 'blood money'?** 'Blood money', or 'diya', finds footing in the Islamic Sharia law, and is followed in countries that incorporate these laws in their legislation. Under the rule of 'diya', a select quantity of a valuable asset, primarily monetary, has to be paid by the perpetrator of the crime to the victim, or the victim's family if the latter has died. The custom is practised predominantly in cases involving unintentional murder and culpable homicide. It is also invoked in murder cases wherein the victim's kin chooses not to retaliate through 'qisas' (a way of retribution under the Sharia). The end-goal, as the law says, is not to put a price tag on human life, but to alleviate the plight and suffering of the affected family and their potential loss of income. However, it is to be noted that even if the concerned parties reconcile through 'blood money', the community and the state will retain the right to impose a deterrent punishment, including penalties.

In its contemporary applications, 'blood money' is upheld in several Islamic countries with factors such as gender, religion and nationality of the victim coming into play. Islamic scholar-researcher Mohammad Hashim Kamali outlines several cases in his book *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law: A Fresh Interpretation*. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, the traffic regulations specifically mandate payment of 'blood money' to heirs of the victims who die in road accidents. In addition, the perpetrator shall be liable to a prison term. The statutory legislation and the Sharia work hand in hand in such cases. While the police determine the guilty parties, a Sharia court fixes the amount of 'blood money' to be paid. As for accidents in workplaces, the rates are fixed by a special committee. In 2022, talks had surfaced that Saudi Arabia was on the course to amend its 'blood money' laws, proposing equal monetary payments for men, women, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. However, efforts towards this are yet to come to fruition.

In Iran too, a country where the practice is rigorously upheld, 'blood money' varies with respect to religion and gender. A woman's compensation is fixed at half of that of a man's. In 2019, the country's Supreme Court upheld a law that sought equalisation of 'blood money'. However, the country is yet to see its full-fledged implementation. India's neighbour Pakistan, too, provides a place for 'diya' and 'qisas'. Through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 1991, these provisions were brought into mainstream law. In Yemen, the country in question, the consensus for compensation can be arrived at by the parties, and there might be a judicial oversight over the fairness of the compensation.

**What's India's stand on 'diya'?** Provisions for the grant or receiving of



**Grave accidents:** Prema Kumari, mother of Nimisha Priya who is on death row in Yemen for the alleged murder of a Yemeni national. THULASI KAKKAT

'blood money' do not find a place in India's formal legal system. However, the system does provide a way for the accused to negotiate with the prosecution through 'plea bargaining'.

Though the concept cannot be directly equated with 'blood money', the scheme lays out a procedure whereby the defendant agrees to plead guilty for a particular offence perpetrated by the accused in return for a concession from the prosecutor. The concessions can be offered on a charge or a sentence. In the former, the defendant may plead guilty for one of the several charges or a less severe charge in return for dismissal of other charges, and in the latter, for a reduced sentence than what is prescribed for the concerned offence.

Introduced into legal parlance through the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2005, which added Chapter XXI A to the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, plea bargaining comes with an array of limitations unlike 'blood money', which has a broader purview. For instance, plea bargaining can be taken up only for offences that are penalised with imprisonment of less than seven years. It cannot be invoked if the accused has been previously convicted for a similar offence. Besides, the provision is not available for crimes against women or children aged below 14; heinous crimes such as murder or rape; and offences involving socio-economic conditions, including civil rights. Moreover, the accused has to voluntarily come forward to plead guilty, and must not be coerced.

However, on the lines of 'blood money', plea bargaining may also allow

for the victim to receive compensation under clause Section 265E. Besides, much like the efforts in Islamic nations towards making 'blood money' more inclusive and egalitarian, discussions have been under way to make plea bargaining more refined.

Though its use has been minimal in India, experts have pointed out that owing to judicial delays and prolonged trials, accused persons, even if innocent, may be pushed to a situation to plead guilty under the plea bargaining clause.

**What are some historical practices which are similar to 'blood money'?** Striking similarities to 'diya' can be found in the historical records of several other cultures across the globe.

In the ancient legal system of Ireland, the Breton law (seventh century AD) provided for the system of 'Éraic' (body price) and 'Log nEnech' (honour price). The law shunned the notion of capital punishment for crimes, and allowed resolution of matters through amicable payment. In Éraic, the amount was determined by the severity of the offence, while in Log nEnech, the price varied depending upon the victim's social status. 'Galanas' was an early Welsh law wherein the compensation was determined according to the status of the victim. Under the ruling, 'blood fine' was always to be paid, especially in cases of murder, barring where the killing was justified or excused owing to circumstances, points out author Thomas Peter Ellis in the book *Welsh Tribal Law and Customs in the Middle Ages*.

'Wergeld', a concept that is said to have

been formalised in early medieval Germany, greatly resembles 'blood money'.

American legal professional Roscoe Pound's book, *The Ideal Element in Law* points out that, in fact, several medieval States had set their standards for an appropriate payment to the kin of victims in the event of homicide or grave crimes.

**Have there been other Indians who were pardoned with 'blood money'?** While Nimisha Priya's case is in the spotlight now, there have been several other instances involving Indian nationals where 'blood money' had been invoked.

As recently as in 2019, the death sentence of Arjunan Athimuthu, hailing from Thanjavur, in Kuwait was commuted to life imprisonment after his family provided ₹30 lakh in 'blood money'. Abdul Rahim, who was sentenced to death for the murder of a Saudi boy in 2006, was pardoned by the court after a 'blood money' of ₹34 crore was paid. However, he is yet to be released from prison. Ten Indians in the UAE were "forgiven" by the victim's family in 2017 after a 'blood money' of 200,000 dirhams was paid. In another case, 17 Indians who were on death row in the UAE for the murder of a Pakistani national in 2009, were pardoned after a 'blood money' of nearly ₹4 crore in value equalling dirhams was paid. The Indian consulate had even hired a law firm in the UAE to argue the case.

As for Nimisha, with Iran assuring India of taking up the case, it remains to be seen whether her death sentence would be commuted.

## THE GIST

▼ 'Blood money', or 'diya', finds footing in the Islamic Sharia law. Under the rule of 'diya', a select quantity of a valuable asset, primarily monetary, has to be paid by the perpetrator of the crime to the victim, or the victim's family if the latter has died.

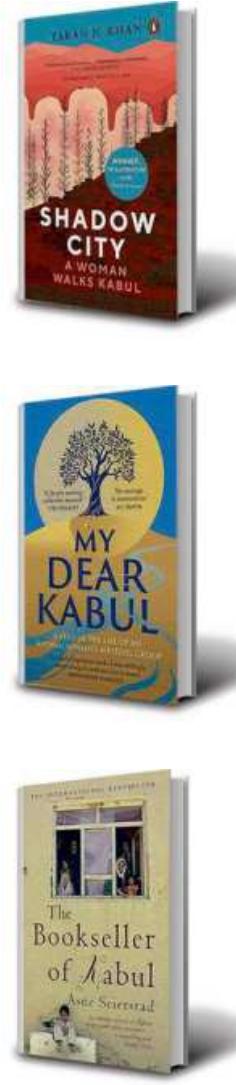
▼ Provisions for the grant or receiving of 'blood money' do not find a place in India's formal legal system. However, the system does provide a way for the accused to negotiate with the prosecution through 'plea bargaining'.

▼ As recently as in 2019, the death sentence of Arjunan Athimuthu, hailing from Thanjavur, in Kuwait was commuted to life imprisonment after his family provided ₹30 lakh in 'blood money'. Abdul Rahim, who was sentenced to death in 2006, was pardoned by the court after a 'blood money' of ₹34 crore was paid.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY



Quiet rebellion: Afghan women sew clothes at a handicraft workshop in Kabul on November 10, 2024. AFP



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

**K. Subrahmanian**  
**S. Upendran**

"How is your pain?"  
"My agony is abated."  
"What?"  
"My agony is abated. My pain is less now."

"Why didn't you say that your pain is reduced? Why use difficult words?"

"I was told that you make a good impression when you use big words."

"That is what some of our people think. Ordinarily, we should use simple words, words that can be understood by all."

"In writing too?"  
"Yes. We speak and write in order to communicate. I am not talking about literary writing. I am talking about ordinary writing and speech. There was a time when even scientists wrote verbose, flowery language in England. This was objected to by the Royal Asiatic Society as early as 1667. In its advice to scientists, it said: 'We have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this extravagance, i.e., this vicious abundance of phrase, the stricken metaphors, this volubility of tongue, which makes so great a noise in the world: and that has been a constant resolution, to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style: to return back to primitive purity, and shortness, when men delivered so many things, almost in an equal number of words. We have exacted from all the members a close, naked, natural way of speaking: positive expressions: clear senses, a native easiness: bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness, as one can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants, before that, of wits or scholars'."

"Do scientists follow this advice now?"

"Not all. Here is a bad example: 'Research suffers from pernicious superexuberance of assertive volubility accompanied by a concomitant irresponsibility of deductive rationation'."

"What does it mean?"

"It means what the writer meant it to mean."

"So what do you advise?"

"Don't say: 'Expectation is forbidden'. Say 'Don't spit'."

Published in *The Hindu* on September 27, 1994.

## Behind the veil: recounting the lives of Afghan women in books

The Taliban has banned women from doing many things, and women are struggling with these barriers, including a stricture on education beyond middle school. In this backdrop, it's imperative to document how women are living through uncertainty, and despair, as several writers are doing

**Debasree Purkayastha**

**T**he Taliban government's Morality Ministry in their November 2024 decree banned women from speaking to one another. They not only disallowed women from singing or reciting but also introduced a "vice and virtue" law that imposed sweeping behaviour codes, including the mandate that women's voices, like their bodies, should be "concealed" when outside their homes. This disturbing move even prompted Oscar-winner Meryl Streep to address the issue at a United Nations event, drawing a stark comparison by stating that "even a cat in the country has more freedom than the women." In a recent move by the Taliban, the authorities on December 30 ordered the closing down of all national and foreign non-governmental groups in Afghanistan employing women, allegedly because they didn't wear the Islamic headscarf correctly.

However, for centuries, Afghan women have displayed remarkable courage as their country endured invasions and upheaval.

**Voices of heartbreak**

*My Dear Kabul* (2024) is a vivid portrayal of a year in the life of an Afghan women's writing group, translated from Dari and Pashto by Parwana Fayyaz and Dr. Negeen Kargar. A group of 21 women writers came together in August 2021 as the Taliban closed in on Kabul. The various authors – a final-year university student, a lawyer, a teacher, and many others – joined a WhatsApp group to

share their everyday experiences of horror, uncertainty, and despair.

What unfolds is a collective narration of brutality and heartbreak yet tinged with resilience and hope. Sadaf, a teacher, writes to Maryam, a law graduate from the University of Kabul: "I don't know who sold this country again. But I saw that some named its price." Her anguish is palpable as she confronts a reality where the President has fled, paving the way for the Taliban's return. Marie, another member, in her plaintive observation writes, "The barbaric Taliban won't follow any rules," encapsulating the shared fear of what the future holds.

In *The Bookseller of Kabul* by Norwegian journalist Asne Seierstad, readers gain a profound understanding of the impact of Taliban rule on Afghan women's lives. Even after the Taliban's fall in the early 2000s and the establishment of democracy, women continued to live as second-class citizens. Seierstad, who spent months with the family of Sultan (a pseudonym for a bookseller in Kabul), poignantly recounts the stark differences in the lives of men, women, and children.

Walking through the streets of Kabul in a burka, she describes: "Burqa-women are like horses with blinkers; they can only look in one direction. Where the eye narrows, the grille stops, and thick material takes its place; another trick by the burqa-inventor: a man must know what his wife is looking at."

**Unequal society**

The book also reflects on pivotal moments in Afghanistan's history, like in 1959, when then-Prime Minister Prince

Daoud's wife appeared in a national daily without a burqa, sparking a wave of women abandoning the purdah (veil). Women stepped out in long coats and hats, and by the 1970s, they were wearing skirts and working shoulder-to-shoulder with men in various professions.

Yet, Seierstad's account of early 2000s Kabul reveals the grim inequality that persisted within households. Behind four walls, women had little autonomy, with the man of the house reigning as the ultimate authority. While some may argue that Seierstad's perspective is shaped by a Western lens, the discomfort at the systemic denial of even the simplest joys of life to women based solely on gender is undeniable. The book also depicts the challenges faced by the men, often caught between ambition and duty, and battling a lack of opportunity in a broken economy.

However, to explore the compelling history and enduring mystique of Afghanistan, one can turn to *Shadow City: A Woman Walks Kabul* by Taran N. Khan. In this deeply personal narrative, the Indian author recounts her experience of Kabul through a series of extended visits spanning eight years. Her journey captures a city in flux – taking tentative steps toward recovery from decades of conflict, only to spiral back into instability.

**Discovering Kabul on foot**

Arriving in Kabul five years after the Taliban's initial fall, the author navigates the city on foot, inviting readers to join her as she uncovers its layers. From the muddy paths leading to ancient Buddhist

monasteries to the vibrant yet chaotic markets, she paints a vivid picture of Kabul's streets and its resilient spirit. Through bullet-pocked windows, she witnesses a city shaped by both history and hardship. Khan's narrative offers a sharp and heartfelt exploration of a nation trapped in a cycle of destruction and renewal, portraying Kabul as a place of both profound beauty and enduring tragedy.

While all the books mentioned here are non-fiction, there are hidden gems like *The Taliban Cricket Club* by Timeri N. Murari, which weaves a fictional yet hard-hitting narrative about the life of a woman striving to survive atrocities by the Taliban and ultimately escape her beloved country.

In times like these, when every day brings a new challenge and another freedom is stripped away, forcing women to the margins of life, perhaps Afghanistan needs its own Svetlana Alexievich. The Nobel laureate, in her moving work *The Unwomanly Face of War*, gave voice to over 200 women whose bravery and sacrifices during World War II were long forgotten. As we begin a new chapter in the new year, it's crucial to keep reading and remembering the stories of Afghan women who continue to fight, endure, and resist in the face of unimaginable hardship. Let us hold on to the message of Afghan sprinter Kimia Yousofi, who held a placard after completing the women's 100m at the Paris 2024 Olympics: "Education, Sport, Our Right."

Their courage demands not just our attention, but our unwavering support.

## THE DAILY QUIZ

On this day nearly two millennia ago, the first Roman emperor ascended to that title. Here's a quiz about the powerful empire thus born

**Vasudevan Mukunth****QUESTION 1**

From the ascension of Augustus Caesar until the death of Marcus Aurelius, the Roman empire enjoyed a period of relative prosperity called \_\_\_\_\_, marked in particular by assurances of safe and fast travel for traders. Fill in the blanks.

**QUESTION 2**

In the five decades since 235 AD, the empire was rocked by widespread unrest. The unrest made smallholder farmers cede their land to wealthier landholders in exchange for protection. What were the smallholder farmers subsequently called?

**QUESTION 3**

In 285 AD, emperor Diocletian quelled

the unrest and abdicated the throne 20 years later, plunging the empire into another crisis that was only overcome by \_\_\_\_\_. He also became the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. Name him.

**QUESTION 4**

Name the Roman physician whose ideas dominated Western medicine for more than a millennium. He was famously associated with a disease outbreak in 165 AD after he described its symptoms and treatment in some detail.

**QUESTION 5**

Name the type of pasta popularised in Europe by the Roman legions travelling to fight on different lands. Most recipes involving this pasta today include potatoes and eggs.

**Visual question:**

Name this Roman temple in modern-day Nîmes, France. Its name in French means "square house" and it was dedicated to two grandsons of Augustus.

**Questions and Answers to the January 14 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. Name the longest rail tunnel in the world. **Ans:** Gotthard Base Tunnel

2. Name the railway system which has the world's longest undersea segment. **Ans:** Channel tunnel

3. Name the under-construction tunnel in India which is slated to be the highest in the world once completed. **Ans:** Shinkun La Tunnel

4. Name the 27 km long structure, which is technically a ring and runs under the France-Switzerland border. **Ans:** The large hadron collider

5. The significance of the tunnel passing through the Appalachian mountains of southwest Virginia in the U.S. **Ans:** It is a natural tunnel

Visual: Name this tunnel-road structure. **Ans:** Guoliang Tunnel Road, China

**Early Birds:** Nobody got all the answers correct.

## Word of the day

**Rodomontade:**

vain and empty boasting

**Synonyms:** bluster, self-praise**Usage:** The minister's rodomontade was widely parodied.**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/rodomontadepro**International Phonetic Alphabet:**

/rə.də.mən.tā.dē/

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

**From Page One****Gaza ceasefire deal is ready: U.S. and Hamas**

It remained unclear exactly when and how many displaced Palestinians would be able to return to what remains of their homes and whether the agreement would lead to a complete end to the war and the full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza – key Hamas demands for releasing the remaining captives.

Many longer-term questions about postwar Gaza remain, including who will rule the territory or oversee the daunting task of reconstruction after a brutal conflict that has destabilised the broader Middle East and sparked worldwide protests.

Hamas triggered the war with its October 7, 2023, cross-border attack, which killed some 1,200 Israelis and took 250 others hostage.

Israel responded with a fierce offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, displaced an estimated 90% of Gaza's population and sparked a humanitarian crisis. More than 100 hostages were freed from Gaza in a week-long truce in November 2023.

**Brokered talks**

The U.S., along with Egypt and Qatar, have brokered months of indirect talks between the bitter enemies that finally culminated in this latest deal. It comes after Israel and Lebanese militant group Hezbollah agreed to a ceasefire in November, after more than a year of conflict linked to the war in Gaza.

Israel responded with a brutal air and ground offensive that has killed over 46,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials. They do not distinguish between civilians and militants but say women and children make up more than half of those killed.

U.N. and international relief organizations estimate that some 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been displaced, often multiple times. They say tens of thousands of homes have been destroyed and hospitals are barely functioning.

Experts have warned that famine may be underway in northern Gaza, where Israel launched a major offensive in early October, displacing tens of thousands of residents.

**Exports dip 1% in Dec., trade gap eases**

Petroleum imports rose 2.2% to \$15.3 billion last month, but petroleum product exports tanked a sharp 28.6%, to just \$4.9 billion. Through April to December 2024, exports of petro products were 20.84% lower at a little over \$49 billion, while imports rose 6.4% to \$138.31 billion.

Mr. Barthwal noted that this is largely owing to a 20% decline in petroleum prices over this period, pointing out that non-petroleum exports have been rising consistently.

Excluding petroleum trade, India's exports were up 5.05% in December, and 7.05% higher through the April to December 2024 period, officials pointed out.

**'Urgent help needed in Budget'**

Exporters were not as sanguine, even though they attributed part of December's export dip to volatile commodity and metal prices, as well as currency fluctuations and logistical challenges affecting export flows to key markets like Europe, Africa, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Federation of Indian Exporters' Organisation (FIEO) president Ashwani Kumar called for "urgent" measures in the upcoming Union Budget to boost manufacturing and labour-intensive sectors, and resolve the trade finance issues that particularly dent micro, small and medium enterprises' competitiveness.

A tariff war by the incoming U.S. administration could throw up new opportunities for India, Mr. Kumar noted, mooting the need for a focused export strategy for key markets like the U.S., the continuation of measures like the Interest Equalisation Scheme, and a resolution of GST-related export challenges to ensure sustained growth.

**SC issues notice to EC, Union govt. on poll rules****The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday sought responses from the Union government and the Election Commission (EC) on a petition filed by Congress leader Jairam Ramesh challenging an amendment made to the Conduct of Election Rules of 1961 that amounts to virtually restricting citizens' right to access election-related records.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar listed the case for hearing in the week starting March 17.

Appearing for Mr. Ramesh, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi said the amendments were "too clever by half" in reducing

public access to CCTV camera footage from polling booths, video recordings of candidates, and Form 17C, which provided an account of the votes polled in each constituency. The amendment was made to Rule 93 of the 1961 Rules, which previously allowed public permission to examine papers related to polls without exception.

The amendment, notified on December 20, 2023, by the Ministry of Law and Justice, had restricted access to only certain election records specifically mentioned in the Rules.

Officials have reportedly justified the amendment as a move to protect the poll process from false narratives by misuse or doctoring of electronic records.

**Pannun case: panel seeks action against key person**

Inquiry committee was set up on the basis of information given by U.S. Justice Department, which had charged former RAW agent Vikash Yadav with conspiring to kill pro-Khalistan activist in 2023

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

A high-powered inquiry committee – formed over a year ago based on information provided by the United States to probe the role of organised criminal groups, terrorist organisations, and drug peddlers – submitted its report to the Union government recommending expeditious legal action against an "individual", the Union Home Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The Ministry did not identify the individual, but said the person's "earlier criminal links and antecedents" came to notice during the panel's inquiry.

Though the statement did not specify the details of the case, the United States Department of Justice in October 2024 charged Vikash Yadav, an Indian citizen and former Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) official, with directing a failed plot to murder the pro-Khalistan activist and Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) chief, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, in

**Mystery person**

The committee constituted to probe organised gangs "who undermined the security interests of both India and the U.S." has recommended legal action against an unnamed individual



- MHA says "earlier criminal links and antecedents" of the individual came to notice during the enquiry
- In October 2024, the U.S. charged Indian national Vikash Yadav with directing a failed plot to murder pro-Khalistan activist Pannun (in photo)
- Yadav was arrested by the Delhi Police in an unrelated case and is currently on bail
- Indian citizen Nikhil Gupta was also extradited to the U.S. from Czech Republic in June 2024 in connection with the case

New York in 2023. Mr. Pannun is a U.S. citizen designated a terrorist.

The identity of Mr. Yadav, who was only identified as "CC-1" in U.S. court records, was disclosed in October 2024 when the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) put him on its "most wanted" list. Mr. Yadav was arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell in December 2023 in an unrelated kidnapping and extortion case. He was granted interim bail by a Delhi court in March 2024, and regular bail a month later.

The court order identified him as an "ex-government employee", indicating that he was no longer employed with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Mr. Yadav was on deputation to RAW when he was named by the U.S. authorities in the foiled assassination plot.

R.K. Handoo, Mr. Yadav's counsel, told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that his client continues to be on bail, and that the next hearing in the extortion case is expected in February.

The MHA said the inquiry panel was constituted in

November 2023 to probe the role of organised gangs "who undermined the security interests of both India and the U.S."

"The enquiry committee conducted its own investigations, and also pursued leads provided by the U.S. side. It received full cooperation from U.S. authorities and the two sides also exchanged visits. The committee further examined a number of officials from different agencies and also scrutinised relevant documents in this connection," it said.

"After a long enquiry, the committee has submitted its report to the Government and recommended legal action against an individual, whose earlier criminal links and antecedents also came to notice during the enquiry," MHA said adding that the committee has recommended that the legal action must be completed expeditiously.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had said in November 2023 that the government would look into all relevant aspects of the matter.

**111 more farmers at Khanauri boundary begin hunger strike**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI

A group of 111 farmers on Wednesday began an indefinite fast to support their demands at Punjab's Khanauri, even as farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast unto death entered its 51st day.



Farmers wearing black clothes during their protest at Khanauri border on Wednesday. PTI

Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Punjab government to place on record a comparative chart of the blood tests of Mr. Dallewal even as the State submitted that his health parameters were "stable".

A Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant ordered the Chief Secretary of Punjab to compile the results of blood evaluation done on the farmers' leader, who is in his 70s, on December 19, 24, and 30, and January 3, 9, and 14. The compiled results, the Bench said, would enable the top court to take an expert opinion from a medical Board it proposes to ask the Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, to constitute.

**Three Indian nuclear entities no more on U.S. restrictions list**

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

The United States on Wednesday removed restrictions on three Indian nuclear entities, over a week after National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan announced that Washington was finalising steps to "remove" hurdles for civil nuclear partnership between Indian and American firms.

The three entities are Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), Indira Gandhi Atomic Research Centre (IGCAR) and the Indian Rare Earths (IRE), according to the U.S. Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS).

In an address at the IIT-Delhi last week, Mr. Sullivan said the U.S. will remove regulations that have prevented cooperation between Indian nuclear entities and American companies.

**Outgoing Biden team**

The removal of the three key Indian entities is being seen as an attempt by the outgoing Biden administration to facilitate the implementation of the landmark India-U.S. civil nuclear pact that was sealed 16 years back.

The move comes five days ahead of Donald Trump's inauguration as the 47th President of the U.S. India and the U.S. signed a historic civil nuclear agreement in 2008. It was expected to pave the way for allowing the US to share civilian nuclear technology with India.

**Red-letter day for the Navy, declare Captains of 3 frontline platforms**

**Vinaya Deshpande Pandit**  
MUMBAI

"It is a red-letter day for the Navy, for the country, and for everyone. I can't express my joy. I can't tell you how proud I feel," said Captain Nitin Kapoor, Commanding Officer of INS Nilgiri, one of the three frontline platforms commissioned in the Indian Navy on Wednesday.

"The firepower of INS Nilgiri and its range of attack have increased. The deck rail system has been introduced for the first time in the country. Her heat signature has reduced considerably. The reflecting surfaces have come down. Due to the concealed deck, her stability has increased," elaborated Captain Kapoor, explaining the features of the stealth frigate.



**Security boost:** Crew members attend a briefing aboard the stealth frigate INS Nilgiri at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai. AFP

and last destroyer of Project 15B, INS Surat, Captain Sandeep Shourie said, "This is the last and the best. Both the design and the construction have matured. Even the time taken for construction has come down. From launch to commissioning, we have

received her in 31 months. The first ship had taken 54 months. So now, ships are becoming available to the Navy before the contractual time. We are combat-ready and ready to roar. She is the best in class for air, surface, underwater capabilities."

Captain Vineet Sharma, Commanding Officer of INS Vaghsheer, said, "With this, Project 75 culminates. The old Vaghsheer is the stealthiest and most advanced submarine in the world. It is a conventional diesel electric submarine. She is a greater threat to the adversary due to her long endurance. INS Vagir had covered a distance of 9,000 kilometres to reach the Australian coast. We intend to beat that record."

**Galwan incident with China should not get repeated, says Army chief**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Stressing that special attention has been given to developing modern equipment and critical infrastructure at the northern border, Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said on Wednesday that "whatever was done in Galwan should not get repeated".

At the 77th Army Day Parade held at Pune this year, the Army showcased its newly inducted robotic mules, 100 of which have been inducted and 12 were part of the parade. An all-woman Agniveer contingent of the Corps of Military Police and an all-girl contingent of the National Cadet Corps (NCC) were part of the parade along with various marching contingents of the Army. A Nepali Army band joined the Indian Army Day Parade for the first time.



**Straight talk:** Army chief Gen. Upendra Dwivedi inspects the 77th Indian Army Day Parade in Pune on Wednesday. EMMANUEL YOGINI

"We have to make sure that whatever was done in Galwan should not get repeated... It means our eyes and ears and a whole-of-nation approach should be focused towards that. Whether it's a diplomatic effort or military effort or even MHA, in terms of CAPF (Central Armed Police Forces) effort, we all should converge on this issue and make sure that we should not get any such surprises in the future," Gen. Dwivedi said speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the 77th Army Day Parade.

To a question on the situation along the country's northern border, he said that they are safe because the "Indian Army is sitting there with required deployment to hold the fort".

Addressing the rank and file after reviewing the parade, Gen. Dwivedi said

**Easy access to clean toilets essential for human dignity: SC**

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday declared that easy access to clean public toilets for all – including men, women, persons with disabilities, and transgender people – is not just a matter of convenience but a basic right and an essential part of human dignity.

"Though public toilets

are built near every toll plaza in the National Highways across the country, we seldom find them to be maintained and accessible," a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and R. Mahadevan observed in a 34-page judgment.

Justice Mahadevan, who authored the verdict, observed that State governments and Union Territory administrations have an important duty.

**APPEAL**

I am Priyadarshini aged 15 years old presently undergoing Nurses Training at Salem. I am advised to undergo Complex Open Heart Surgery at The Madras Medical Mission, Chennai. The total expenditure is Rs. 44,000/- I cannot afford this huge cost. Please help me to undergo the surgery and lead a healthy life. The donations sent through Ch.D.NEFT Transfer & GOOGLE PAY (Canara Bank, Nungambakkam Branch, A/C No. 6018010063310, IFSC No. CNRB0016016) favouring WOMEN'S WELFARE SYNDICATE is exempted under 80G IT.

All correspondence is done through WWS, Regd. Public Charitable Trust, Flat No. GF1, Cordel Apartments, O.No.29, Pycroft Garden Lane, Chennai-600006, Ph: 044-42137401 / 28235324 / 73387802731523781. E Mail ID: womenswelfaresyndicate@gmail.com. Website: www.womenswelfaresyndicate.org.

Priyadarshini

Lalu hints at Pashupati's entry into grand alliance

**Amit Bhelari**  
PATNA

Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) chief Lalu Prasad on Wednesday visited the residence of former Union Minister and Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party (RLJP) leader Pashupati Kumar Paras in Patna for a event.

Mr. Prasad was accompanied by Tej Pratap Yadav, his eldest son and a sitting MLA, as well as RJD's principal national general secretary Abdul Bari Siddiqui.

Speaking to mediapersons after the event, the RLJP leader said, "I am very happy that Lalu Prasadji accepted my invitation to come home for *dahi-chura bhoj*. I had invited Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as well but, he didn't come," Mr. Paras said.

When a reporter asked Mr. Prasad about the possibility of getting the RLJP into the Mahagathbandhan (grand alliance), his response was affirmative.

"Yes, we will take him," he said.

The Assembly poll in Bihar is due later this year.

# After summons from panel, Meta apologises for Zuckerberg's remark

House committee walks back summons after tech giant's India policy head terms election defeat comment an inadvertent error, adds India remains important for company; Trinamool MP says its 'bias towards certain parties must be questioned'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



**Apology accepted:** Meta's CEO Mark Zuckerberg had made the remarks on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast. FILE PHOTO

**M**eta Platforms Inc.'s public policy head for India Shivnath Thukral on Tuesday night apologised on behalf of the firm's founder-CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, who on the Joe Rogan Experience podcast implied that India's incumbent government was defeated in the 2024 election.

The apology came shortly after the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology's Chairman, Nishikant Dubey, said that Meta would be summoned to explain Mr. Zuckerberg's remarks. Mr. Dubey walked back the declaration after Mr. Thukral's apology.

"Dear Honourable Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, Mark's observation that many incumbent parties were not re-elected in 2024 elections holds true for several countries, but not

India," Mr. Thukral said in a post on social media platform X, addressed to the Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology.

Mr. Vaishnav had first brought up the apparent error by Mr. Zuckerberg in his podcast appearance. A Meta spokesperson did not respond with further comment.

"We would like to apolo-

gise for this inadvertent error. India remains an incredibly important country for Meta and we look forward to being at the heart of its innovative future," Mr. Thukral said.

He is the senior-most executive of the tech firm's policy efforts, a role in which he has extensively interfaced with Indian government officials on several issues, and has served

**Meta potentially impacts free and fair elections, and its impact on our democracy needs to be examined: MP**

so be questioned on their "bias towards certain political parties", the company's decision to stop fact-checking, and changes in its content guidelines on hate speech and disinformation.

"During the time of elections, it has also been noted by several independent reviewers that Meta tends to exhibit a bias towards certain political parties and does not apply the guidelines for political content uniformly," Mr. Gokhale said in the letter.

The Trinamool MP said that Meta has often been accused of not adhering to the guidelines of the Model Code of Conduct during elections, and allowed certain political parties to create proxy accounts that were used for election propaganda.

"As you rightly said, Meta potentially impacts free and fair elections and the impact of its actions on our democracy needs to be examined," Mr. Gokhale said.

The committee would continue engaging with social media firms, Mr. Dubey said.

**MP writes to panel head**  
Earlier in the day, reacting to Mr. Dubey's announcement on Wednesday summoning Meta, panel member and Trinamool Congress MP Saket Gokhale, in a letter to Mr. Dubey, had said that if Meta was called, they should al-

# Indira Bhavan, new Cong. headquarters in Delhi, opened



Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge, Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi at the new party building in New Delhi on Wednesday. PTI

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

rism, inclusive development and social justice.

"Symbolising the 140-year-old glorious history of the Indian National Congress, the walls here narrate the great saga of truth, non-violence, sacrifice, struggle and patriotism," he said.

**Tributes to Manmohan**  
The Congress president paid tributes to former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away last month, and said the library of the headquarters

would be named "Dr. Manmohan Singh Library".

"The new headquarters of Congress will give a new energy to the party, with the help of which we will fight and succeed," he said.

Mr. Venugopal thanked Murli Deora for his contribution to the construction of the building. He remembered senior leaders including Ms. Gandhi's political secretary Ahmed Patel and the party's former treasurer Motilal Vora. "From the struggle and times of the pre-Independence era to the achievement of the post-Independent period, this building is a living museum of our party's unparalleled contribution to the nation," he said.

At the inauguration, Mr. Kharge said the new headquarters had been built on the foundation of democracy, secularism,

## We are now fighting the BJP, the RSS and the Indian state itself, says Rahul Gandhi

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI



Rahul Gandhi

clean on the issue of voter lists in the Maharashtra and Haryana elections.

He said Congress workers were fighting a "battle of ideologies" under difficult circumstances amid an assault on their lives.

"Mohan Bhagwat has the audacity to inform the nation, every two or three days, what he thinks about the Independence movement, what he thinks about the Constitution. In fact, what he had said yesterday is treason, because it is stating that the Constitution is invalid, it is stating

"in the direction of breaking India and dividing the Indian society".

The sharp criticism came in response to Mr. Gandhi's remarks claiming that "the BJP and RSS have captured every single institution in this country and we are now fighting the BJP, the RSS, and the Indian state itself".

Through his X handle, BJP president J.P. Nadda said: "Hidden no more, Congress' ugly truth now

## Hidden no more, ugly truth of the Congress now stands exposed by its leader: Nadda

**Devesh K. Pandey**  
NEW DELHI



J.P. Nadda

The BJP on Wednesday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of being an "irresponsible and immature" Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, asserting that everything he did or said had been "in the direction of breaking India and dividing the Indian society".

He further said that Mr. Gandhi and his ecosystem had close links with urban Naxals and the deep state, which aimed to defame, demean, and discredit India.

Mr. Nadda added: "Congress has a history of encouraging all those forces who want a weak India. Their greed for power meant compromising the nation's integrity and betraying the trust of the people. But, the people of India are wise. They have decided that they will always reject Mr. Gandhi and his rotten ideology."

At a press conference, BJP spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said that as any MP, Mr. Gandhi had taken an Oath of the Constitution to preserve and protect India's integrity and sovereignty. "It is so unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition, who has taken this Oath of Constitution of Bharat, is saying that he is fighting the Bharat state," he said.

**Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises  
TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT CENTRE  
An Autonomous body under Ministry of MSME, Govt of India  
Fazlpur Nagar, Agra - 282006 (U.P.)  
Extension Centre - Gwalior (Orchha)**

**Data Analytics**

**Course Content:** 1) What is data, 2) How data are sourced, 3) Statistics, 4) Data Cleaning & Transformation, 5) Python & SQL for Data, 6) Excel for Data Analysis, 7) Data Visualization (Using Excel & Power BI), 8) Story telling by the given data, 9) How to make impact full presentation, 10) Live project session

**Date :** 18<sup>th</sup> Jan - 09<sup>th</sup> Feb 2025  
**Time :** 06.00 P.M - 09.00 P.M  
**Fees :** 5900/- (Inclusive of GST)  
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**RAJASTHAN STATE HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY, JAIPUR  
GOVERNMENT OF RAJASTHAN**

No. F.7(1)/RSHA/WB/RSHDP-II/Tri./2023-24/D-1633 Date: 08/01/2025

NIT No. 43/2024-25

**INVITATION OF BIDS FOR TOLL COLLECTION**

Bids for Collection for user fee through fee collecting agency on the basis of open competitive bidding in the state of Rajasthan toll plazas located at **Khood-Datarangarh- Renwal SH-08A** (km 00+00 to 51+040) (Toll Plaza at Km 12+000) section of (Package: WB/RSHDP-II/Tri./EPC-04) are invited from interested bidders upto 11:00 AM on 27.01.2025.

Other particulars of bid may be visited on the procurement portal (<http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <https://sppp.rajasthan.gov.in>) of the state. The estimated value of Annual Remittance is Rs. 6,22,43,014/-

UBN No: PWD2425SLOB13491

Email: ho.rsha@rajasthan.gov.in

Tel: +91-141-223547

DIPR/C/521/2025

Member (Tech.),  
RSHA, Jaipur

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER,  
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BOLANGIR.**

**e - Procurement NOTICE**

1. Name of Work : Construction of Road from B.M.Pur Amarapali RD road-Sardhapali Chhak in the district of Subarnapur under MMSY-Improvement to Existing RD Roads for the year 2024-25.

2. No. of Work : 1 (One) Road work.

3. Time for Completion : 9 (Nine) calendar months

4. Approximate Estimated Cost : Rs.720.20 lakhs

5. Mode of Submission of tender : Tender should be submitted online in

6. Other details are as follow

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding	Last Date & Time of seeking tender clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender	
Chief Construction Engineer, R.W. Circle, Bolangir.	BLGR-Online-10/2024-25	20,01,2025 from 11.00 A.M.	04,02,2025 upto 5.00 P.M.	03,02,2025 upto 5.00 P.M.	05,02,2025 at 11.00 A.M.
					The date will be intimated later on

• Further details can be seen from the website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)

• Any Corrigendum/Addendum will be displayed in the above e tender website only.

Sd/- S. Mahalai, Chief Construction Engineer, R.W.Circle, Bolangir

9-1212: OIPR-2518/11/0022/2425

**Jalgaon City Municipal Corporation, Jalgaon  
Sanitation Department**

**E-Tender Notice No.05/2024-25**

**Extension No.02**

Reference Number :- Outward No.JCMC/Sanitation/980/2024-2025 Date.15/01/2025

Inviting E-tender From Registered Institute or Company/Agency for Work of 1.House to House Collection of Municipal Solid Waste (Dry & Wet Separately) up to Processing Plant Via Secondary Transfer Collection Centre. 2.Supply of 500 Labors for Daily Road Sweeping, Drain Cleaning etc. for 5 years Period at Jalgaon City Municipal Corporation Jalgaon Area. All Information and Details of Tender, Like Tender Form Fee, Tender Cost, EMD, Time Schedule etc available on website [www.mahaetenders.gov.in](http://www.mahaetenders.gov.in)

**Sd/-  
Commissioner**

**Jalgaon City Municipal Corporation, Jalgaon**



## LITERARY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

- In The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe, who guides the Pevensie children into Narnia?
- Who is the author of To Kill a Mockingbird?
- In The Hobbit, what is the name of the dragon that hoards the treasure?

Scan QR code or visit [newsth.live/LFL2025QZ](http://newsth.live/LFL2025QZ) take the quiz. Top 3 winners\* every day win gift vouchers.

Answers for 14<sup>th</sup> January quiz:

1. Mr. Darcy | 2. The White Tiger | 3. 1984

Winners of 14<sup>th</sup> January:

1. Akshat Jain, Faridabad | 2. Angadi Spandana, Vijayawada  
3. Juhiwanki Pala, Shillong



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**Request for Proposal (RFP) for**  
**'Selection of agency to undertake Operations & Maintenance and Other Services of IRIS Scanners installed at Fair Price Shops (FPS) & Paddy Purchase Centres (PPC) across the State of Odisha'**

**RFP Advt. No. 550 /OSCSC, Date : 10/01/2025**

Odisha State Civil Supplies Corporation Limited invites proposals from interested bidders being registered in India as per Government of India Company Registration Act 1956/2013 for 'Selection of agency to undertake Operations & Maintenance and Other Services of IRIS Scanners installed at Fair Price Shops (FPS) & Paddy Purchase Centres (PPC) across the State of Odisha'. The tender document with all information relating to the tender process, including cost of tender document, EMD, eligibility criteria, scope of work, terms & conditions, evaluation criteria and formats of submission of bid proposals, may be downloaded from the website [www.foododisha.in](http://www.foododisha.in) & [www.oscsc.in](http://www.oscsc.in)

SI No	Event Description	Date
1	Publication of RFP in website	16 / 01 / 2025
2	Pre-Bid Meeting	27/01/2025 at 1600 Hours Office of OSCSC Ltd., C/2, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar-751012
3	Last Date and time for submission of proposal	10/0

## IN BRIEF



## SIT to look into 13 mysterious deaths in Jammu's Rajouri

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the J&K Police and experts were constituted on Wednesday in Jammu's Rajouri district to investigate the deaths of 13 persons, including 11 children, in the past 40 days, as multiple medical expert bodies ruled out any spread of disease in the area. J&K Health Minister Sainoo Ito said, "Tests have come negative locally and outside as well. No virus was found. Eleven children were among 13 dead so far. These are within three families. One family is 1.5 km away from the other. They all are related to each other. In case of disease, it could have spread to other areas in 40 days. It's a matter of investigation now."

## 6 held for inciting sectarian unrest in Srinagar: J&amp;K Police

The J&K Police on Wednesday said six local people had been arrested in Srinagar for inciting sectarian unrest with "derogatory remarks". The move came in the wake of growing sectarian tensions in the Kashmir Valley over a video purportedly "containing derogatory remarks" against Islamic caliphs. "Six miscreants have been charged under Sections 126 and 170 of the BNSS [Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhitai] and have been detained at the Central Jail, Srinagar, for inciting sectarian unrest through derogatory remarks," a police spokesperson said. The police warned against engaging in unlawful activities, including posting or sharing sectarian content.

## CJI declines to take over all CLAT cases from High Courts

The Supreme Court on Wednesday orally said the courts will not interfere "unless the answers are clearly wrong", even as it proposed transferring petitions filed in various State High Courts challenging the results of the Common Law Admission Test (CLAT) 2025 to one High Court for expeditious disposal. The court was hearing a petition filed by the Consortium of National Law Universities to transfer the various petitions in the High Courts to the Supreme Court for an authoritative pronouncement as uncertainty over the results was delaying the admission process. Chief Justice Khanna, however, refused to shift the case to the apex court.

## Misleading ads: SC warns States, UTs against laxity

The Supreme Court on Wednesday warned States and Union Territories of contempt action for hesitating to initiate proceedings against offending individuals and companies which give misleading medical advertisements. The court's threat of contempt action came after *amicus curiae*, senior advocate Shadan Farasat, submitted a status report on the implementation of statutes against misleading advertisements, including the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectable Advertisements) Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and the Consumer Protection Act. "Contempt action will be initiated against those who have not complied," Justice Oka warned.

# Centre, Ladakh leaders discuss new land policy

Plan to regularise government land in the names of residents discussed at Home Ministry's talks with civil society leaders; they seek higher cut-off for domicile status for those seeking govt. jobs

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Union Home Ministry is considering a proposal to regularise vast areas of government land in the Union Territory of Ladakh in the names of residents who have been using, or tending to, these barren acres over the years.

The proposal was discussed at a high-powered committee meeting between Ladakhi civil society leaders and Ministry officials on Wednesday.

The practice of cultivating wasteland, known as *nautor*, has its origin in a rule framed by Hari Singh, the erstwhile king of Jammu and Kashmir, in 1932.

Himachal Pradesh has also had a *nautor* land policy since 1968, though its implementation has now been halted in the Congress-governed State due to queries posed by Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla.

Ladakh, comprising Kargil and Leh divisions, has erupted in protest on several occasions since 2019 after the special status of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under Article 370 of the Constitution was re-



**Civil resistance:** Ladakh has erupted in protest many times after the special status of J&K under Article 370 was revoked in 2019. ANI

voked. Ladakh, which had been part of the erstwhile State of J&K, was turned into a Union Territory without a Legislative Assembly.

**'Revolutionary step'**

"If *nautor* land is regularised in the name of the locals of Ladakh, it will be a revolutionary step. The fear of outsiders taking over resources in the fragile region is among the biggest concerns that we have," says Sajjad Kargili of the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), one of the civil society leaders holding talks with the Ministry in the high-powered committee.

According to publicly available information, Leh district has over 14,400 acres of *nautor* land. The information for Kargil division is not available.

Ladakh MP Mohammad Haneefa told *The Hindu* that a consensus had been reached on the domicile policy, following up on an earlier government assurance that 95% of government jobs would be reserved for permanent residents or natives of Ladakh.

"The definition of domicile needed more clarity. The [Ladakhi leaders in the] committee have

agreed that domiciles [or outsiders residing in Ladakh] can also apply for government jobs in Ladakh. We are requesting the government to increase the cut-off period for domiciles from 15 years to 20 years of continuous stay. Domicile status will be applicable only for 5% government jobs, not to purchase land or property," Mr. Haneefa said.

Since it became a Union Territory five years ago, there has not been any recruitment for gazetted government posts in Ladakh.

The Ladakh MP said that discussions were on with the Law Department to formulate the procedure to grant domicile certificates.

He said two other demands were discussed: to include Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule (tribal status) of the Constitution; and for Statehood with a Legislative Assembly.

"The two issues are very much alive," Mr. Haneefa said.

Another decision taken during the meetings was to consider languages other than Urdu and Bhoti, such as Puri, as among the languages of Ladakh.

# Agasthyar's legacy to be the focus of Kashi Tamil Sangamam 3.0

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

**The event, to be held at the Namo Ghat in Varanasi, will be held from Feb. 15 to 24**

ary 1. The participants will be selected after a Tamil quiz on February 2. The portal, [kashitamil.iitm.ac.in](http://kashitamil.iitm.ac.in), is hosted by the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras.

Responding to questions, Mr. Pradhan said the Centre had not used the Sangamam for any political purposes and the intention was cultural integration and upholding of the inseparable and timeless bonds between Tamil Nadu and Kashi.

The participants will be from five categories – students, teachers, and writers; farmers and artisans; professionals and small entrepreneurs; women from various sectors; and those involved in start-ups, innovation, edutech and research.

"This year, an additional group of around 200 students of Tamil origin studying in various Central universities will be a part of this event to enliven the bond between Kashi and Tamil Nadu. Participation of youth in all categories will be encouraged this year," Mr. Pradhan said.

# In an attempt to address 'lack of diversity', INSA selects non-scientists too as its Fellows

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI



The INSA introduced two new categories of fellows this year: 'Science in Translation' and 'Science in Society'. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The annual list of Fellows announced by the 90-year-old Indian National Science Academy, among the country's most prestigious assembly of scientists, sticks out this year for its deviation from the academy's traditional practice. The list features a phalanx of famous Indians who are not professional scientists.

They include Sudha Murthy, Rajya Sabha member and former Chair of the Infosys Foundation; her spouse, N.R. Narayana Murthy; two of his Infosys co-founders, Nandan Nilekani and Krish Gopalakrishnan; and Rajendra Singh, water conservationist and founder of the Tarun Bharat Sangh.

"While the majority of our fellows are those asso-

ciated with the creation of science, we must have at least 20% of them associated with the consumption and the use of science to create opportunities," Ashutosh Sharma, President, INSA, told *The Hindu*.

The move to introduce new categories of Fellows was part of a larger thrust to address a "lack of diversity".

This included not only improving representation

of women and youth but also the various stakeholders who contributed to science in India, beyond traditional academic scientists, he added.

The presence of Ms. Murthy, Mr. Sharma explained, was in her capacity as a former chairperson of the Infosys Foundation, which funded scientific research.

He cited the inclusion of Mr. Gopalakrishnan, who

has invested in multiple streams of basic research.

"The people who show commitment towards funding basic science research must be recognised. If we want more private funding for R&D, we must bring these people in the fold as they are stakeholders of science," he said.

While several notable industrialists were now included, this would set the template of recognising future contributors in the areas of deep-tech and space entrepreneurs, Mr. Sharma added.

The demarcation between "scientist" and "non-scientist" in the past was so strict that Satish Dhawan, Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) from 1972 and 1984, was only elected as a "Honorary Fellow" in a special category along with Indira Gandhi, Jawaharlal

Nehru, and J.R.D. Tata.

To accommodate the non-scientist entrants, the INSA introduced two new categories of fellows this year: "Science in Translation" and "Science in Society".

For being eligible in the "Translation" category, the candidate should have demonstrated scientific leadership in "science-based innovation; industrial research and development; technology missions of national importance; and in the management of scientific institutions".

For the "Society" category, the candidate should have applied science to address energy, water and health issues, or should have done work to popularise science or used science to deliver on societal impact, says an explanatory note on the INSA website.

Frontier Nagaland Territory may get autonomy

**The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

The Centre has agreed in principle to executive, legislative, and financial autonomy for the Frontier Nagaland Territory (FNT), an administrative area proposed to be carved out of six eastern districts of Nagaland.

The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO), an apex organisation representing seven Naga tribes, has been spearheading the demand for the creation of the FNT.

Ahead of a meeting with a three-member team from the Union Home Ministry at the Police Complex in Chumukedima on Wednesday, the ENPO said that it would not accept anything short of executive, legislative, and financial autonomy for the territory.

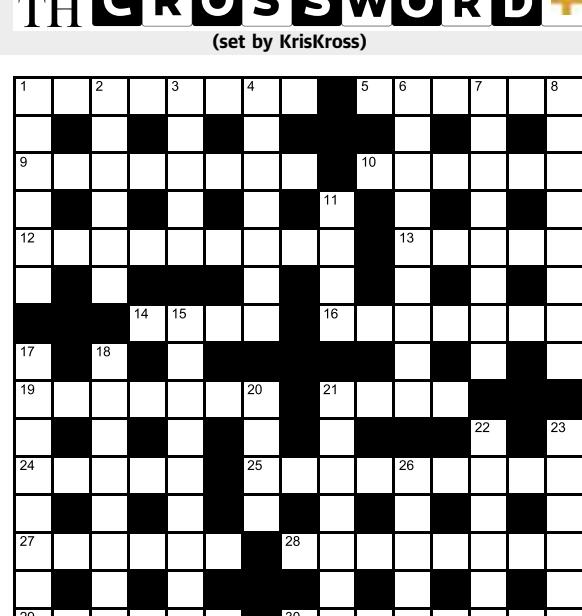
## FAITH

### Concerned parent

In Sri Vaikuntha, Lord Narayana is surrounded by Nityasuris like Garuda. They are never bound by karma. Then there are the muktas. They were once bound by their karmas, and had several births. But when they found an Acharya and resorted to surrender, they were liberated from all bonds of karma, and therefore from repeated births. The Nityasuris and muktas are in Sri Vaikuntha, serving Him. That being the case, why did the Lord take avatars and come to the earth? He is like a parent in this respect, said Velukkudi Krishnan in a discourse.

A man may be surrounded by most of his children, but his heart aches for the one who lives far away. In the same way, the Lord is concerned about those on the earth, who have not realised that the only way for them to escape the suffering that repeated births entail, is to seek the path of surrender, and reach Him. So, like an anxious parent, who pines for the company of the child who lives miles away from him, He too thinks about us. That is why He took many avatars. A sloka in *Vishnu Sahasranama* describes Him as *bheshajam* (medicine) and *bhishak* (physician). So, the Lord is both medicine and physician for the disease of *samsara*. It is because of His sympathy for our plight that He takes avatars, and is also enshrined in temples in image form. He is pleased with simple worship, expecting nothing elaborate from us. And yet, we do not surrender at His feet. We do not realise that if we surrender to Him, we can once and for all be rid of *samsara*. Since He cares for us, why does He not stop us from doing wrong? A mother sometimes lets a child learn through experience, for this will leave a lasting impression on the child's mind.

## TH CROSSWORD + 14383



- To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ <https://qrgo.page.link/ijpTn>
- SCAN TO PLAY**
- 13** Corruption in weightlifting round (5)  
**14** Birds belonging to the musician (4)  
**16** "Sengol" - Cholas' excellent present to rule empire, primarily (7)  
**19** Indian state in revolt will not welcome organization's head yet (2,2,3)  
**21** Vessels in bar counter (4)  
**24** Slow mover after cycling gets handy tips? (5)  
**25** Liberal media unfortunately prefers to include editorials lacking in content (4,5)  
**27** County's old tree chopped (6)  
**28** After brief greeting, wager to win new set (4-4)  
**29** Indian soldiers spy enemies at first - so cunning (6)  
**30** Island basically not traceable by one going through book of maps (8)
- Down**
- Starting to pour...leader heading off to get raincoat (6)
  - Fake money to procure power diesel, say (6)
  - He takes minutes perhaps to tailor one gown ultimately (5)
  - #1 seed upset, facing second downfall (7)
  - Bend knee, leg etc. - fun moves! (9)
  - Roll in empty utensil consumed by a French girlfriend (8)
  - Techies working to save earth becoming a cold mass (3,5)
  - Cheat tame animals (4)
  - Where you find brothers playing, breaking rule (9)
  - Stout British actor (8)
  - Start playing uke in band (6,2)
  - Carry whiskey to rear of ship (4)
  - Gift dispatched beforehand (7)
  - Novel about change in America (6)
  - A model is rejected already (2,2,2)
  - A king cut off retro dance form (5)

Across

- Expecting President's ruling (8)
- Rodent in Goa - it angrily bites you (6)
- Nobody accepts US university? On the contrary, twelve! (8)
- United Germany, say, turning tense (2,4)
- Sleep, overwhelmed by injection filled with drug - its effects are magical (3,6)

## SUDOKU

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

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle

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

## IN BRIEF



## Aditya Birla Fashion to raise \$500 million via equity

The board of Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd. approved raising \$500 million via a combination of preferential issuance and qualified institutional placement (QIP) of equity shares. The preferential issuance of \$275 million will be led by the promoter group investing \$150 million and Fidelity Investments investing \$125 million, the firm said. The board also approved an equity issuance through QIP for up to \$225 million, taking the total fund raise to \$500 million.

## Japan's Takeda to hire 750 in India to boost deep tech

Takeda, a Japanese biopharmaceutical firm, on Wednesday said it would hire 750 deep-tech professionals in calendar 2025 to be deployed at its newly set-up Innovation Capability Centre in Bengaluru. The company had already hired 270 software developers, scrum masters, AI specialists and data analysts, a spokesperson said. Takeda mainly focuses on oncology, gastroenterology, rare diseases, neuroscience, plasma-derived therapies and vaccines.

## HDFC Life Q3 net rises 14% to ₹415 cr, total income slips 37%

HDFC Life reported an almost 14% year-on-year rise in net profit to ₹414.94 crore for the third quarter ended December. Total income declined almost 37% at ₹16,914.07 crore on the back of a slump in income from investments to ₹192.09 crore from ₹11,369.81 crore a year earlier. Income from investments is net of amortisation and losses, including capital gains. Net premium income, a key performance metrics for insurers, rose more than 10% to ₹16,771.26 crore.

## TRAI eyes cost cut for public Wi-Fi hotspots

Aroon Deep  
NEW DELHI

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) plans to pare the high costs telecom operators and internet service providers charge operators providing public Wi-Fi hotspots in a bid to boost such hotspots.

The draft Telecommunication Tariff (Seventy First Amendment) Order, 2025 proposes that the "broadband tariff (fiber to the home [FTTH]) for Public Data Office (PDO) under the PM-WANI scheme shall not exceed twice the tariff applicable for retail broadband FTTH services for the corresponding capacity offered by the respective service provider."



The proposal comes after India missed a key goal on public Wi-Fi hotspots. The "Digital India 2030 mobile and broadband policy objectives [and] the Bharat 6G Vision6 [had set] the goal of 10 million public Wi-Fi hotspots by 2022," TRAI said in a note. As of last July, only a fifth of these hotspots have been rolled out.

## Singapore President honours Tarun Das

Kalol Bhattacharjee  
NEW DELHI

President of Singapore Tharman Shanmugaratnam bestowed the highest honour of the city-state on Tarun Das, former director general of Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

Mr. Das was bestowed the Honorary Citizen Award by the President who will start official leg of his India tour on Thursday.

The award is given for "outstanding contribution by a non-Singaporean to the country's growth and development," a press note released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Singapore declared. Mr. Das is the second Indian to receive the honour with the late Ratan Tata be-



ing the only other Indian recipient earlier.

The Foreign Minister termed Mr. Das as "one of Singapore's strongest advocates in India" and recollect he led a delegation of Indian industrialists to Singapore in 1993 as part of India's "Look East" policy.

Mr. Shanmugaratnam is accompanied by a large business delegation.

## After steep import bill rejig, more robust trade data likely

Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal asserts that data revisions to quick trade estimates are in line with global norms and a dynamic data revision policy; promises AI tools to analyse trade numbers

Vikas Dhoot  
NEW DELHI

A week after the Centre effected a dramatic \$14.2 billion correction in India's import bill for April to November 2024, top government officials asserted on Wednesday that revisions to trade data are made in line with international standards, and a standard operating procedure (SoP) has now been put in place for more robust data.

Last Thursday, the Commerce Ministry had issued a statement that the erro-



neous trade figures, largely driven by a flawed assessment of gold and silver imports, were thrown up due to double counting of imports into Special Economic Zones (SEZs). An inter-departmental panel was

formed to spruce up the data's consistency.

"Let me assure you that now, we have created a very good SoP, and a committee is already there, looking into an SoP that will ensure there is a better coordination between the DGCIS [The Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics] and the DG (Systems) [in the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs]," Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said.

"That committee is working. So now, you will always have this very ro-

bust data," he added, stressing that by their nomenclature itself, quick estimates of monthly foreign trade released by the 15th of every subsequent month in line with global standards, are quick assessments that are amenable to revisions.

"We are also now working on creating a better data analytics system with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the project that can get launched at any point of time will give you much better insights into the trade data," Mr. Barthwal averred.

## Rupee extends gains, settles 13 paise higher at 86.40/\$

Press Trust of India  
MUMBAI

The rupee extended its recovery for the second straight session and settled with a gain of 13 paise at 86.40 against the U.S. dollar on Wednesday, tracking favourable cues from domestic equity markets and softening crude oil prices.

Anuj Choudhary, research analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee gained on weak U.S. dollar and soft U.S. 10-year treasury yields.

## India, China growth to soften in 2025

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

India and China will see softer growth in 2025, relative to their economies' 2024 performance, with the U.S. trade policy posing material risks even though India could see some gains from strains in U.S.-China economic ties, Moody's Ratings said.

India's fiscal conditions will continue to constrain its credit strength this year, the rating major reckoned, as fiscal consolidation is likely to be gradual with the government commit-

ted funding to job creation and enhancing social welfare programmes.

"We expect only gradual fiscal consolidation, and debt to stay significantly higher than the Baa-rated peer median of around 57%. Despite gains in revenue in recent years, we expect debt affordability to stay much weaker than rated peers," Moody's said about India.

Geopolitical risk will also add to fiscal pressures, as India's defense spending will grow rapidly amid tensions with China and Pakistan," it averred.

## India is new Boeing CEO's first stop outside U.S.

Jagriti Chandra  
NEW DELHI

Boeing's new president and CEO Kelly Orteberg, in India this week on what is his first international visit after taking charge last August, met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday.

Mr. Orteberg is also expected to hold business meetings with customers and partners in the country, including Tata Trusts chairman Noel Tata, as per industry sources.

## MARKETS

## MARKET WATCH

	WEDNESDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	76,724	0.29
US Dollar	86.40	0.15
Gold	80,800	0.27
Brent oil	80.81	0.00

## NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2388.15	7.60
Adani Ports	1128.90	-11.80
Apollo Hosp	6691.85	-15.00
Asian Paints	2229.70	-10.25
Axis Bank	1026.80	-24.85
Bajaj Auto	8578.00	-33.20
Bajaj FinServ	1671.65	-41.85
Bharti Airtel	1607.45	7.35
BPCL	267.00	-3.20
Britannia Ind	4877.00	-14.60
Cipla	1447.20	-0.55
Coal India	374.60	5.35
D Dr Reddys Lab	1337.20	-0.35
Eicher Motors	5081.90	52.35
Grafin	2317.55	6.95
HCL Tech	1825.70	12.15
HDFC Bank	1643.05	-3.55
HDFC Life	594.20	-6.25
Hero MotoCorp	4111.90	9.25
Hindalco	591.55	0.65
Hindustan Unilever	2373.00	5.05
ICICI Bank	1238.25	-2.05
IndusInd Bank	962.45	0.35
Infosys	1949.65	9.60
ITC	437.35	0.75
JSW Steel	904.05	-2.00
Kotak Bank	1789.60	39.00
L&T	3501.40	38.80
M&M	2960.25	-89.25
Maruti Suzuki	11947.40	206.25
NestleIndia	2199.65	-19.40
NTPC	321.35	10.95
ONGC	258.18	-2.19
PowerGrid Corp	298.65	8.40
Reliance Ind	1252.20	13.45
SBI	1472.75	-26.50
State Bank	753.70	5.55
Shriram Finance	553.20	-10.90
Tata Consumer Product	955.55	-7.60
Tata Motors	763.60	-6.90
Tata Steel	126.53	-0.40
TCS	4249.60	16.55
Tech Mahindra	1675.95	28.45
Titan	3323.50	1.00
Trent Ltd.	6390.25	229.25
UltraTech Cement	10521.65	37.90
Wipro	292.65	-0.20

## EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on January 15

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	86.16	86.48
Euro	88.83	89.17
British Pound	105.32	105.72
Japanese Yen (100)	54.93	55.14
Chinese Yuan	11.75	11.80
Swiss Franc	94.50	94.87
Singapore Dollar	63.03	63.28
Canadian Dollar	60.07	60.30
Malaysian Ringgit	19.15	19.23
Australian Dollar	53.46	53.67

Source: Indian Bank

## Five Ways Strength Training Can Be a Health Game-Changer

Strength training, often overlooked in favour of running or cycling, is more than just a way to "build muscle". It plays a vital role in improving metabolic health – the body's ability to process food into energy while keeping blood sugar levels stable. With rising cases of metabolic disorders such as diabetes (1 in 4 is diabetic)\*, obesity (3 in 4 are obese)\*\*, and high cholesterol (3 in 10 have dyslipidemia)\*\* in India, understanding the benefits of strength training is crucial.

## What is Strength Training?

Strength training, or resistance training, involves exercises that challenge your muscles using weights, resistance bands, or even your own body weight. The goal is to build muscle strength and endurance, which significantly impacts metabolic health.

Contrary to popular belief, strength training isn't just for bodybuilders or athletes. It's for everyone – regardless of age (with proper supervision for children), gender, or fitness level. Many, especially women, avoid strength training out of fear of "bulking up", but this is a myth. Women have lower testosterone levels than men, making bulky muscles highly unlikely.

**Even moderate strength training can cut the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by an impressive 32%**

**Dr Shreevidya (MD Internal Medicine)**  
Medical Director, Apollo ProHealth, Chennai

## Five Benefits of Strength Training

The impact of strength training extends far beyond the gym. While it does improve balance, posture, and strength, its benefits reach further – transforming your metabolic health, protecting against chronic diseases, and enhancing overall well-being.

## 1. Enhanced Insulin Sensitivity

Strength training helps muscles absorb glucose more efficiently, reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.

## 2. A Faster Metabolism

Did you know muscle burns more calories at rest than fat? Strength training boosts your resting metabolic rate, aiding weight management and countering the slowing metabolism caused by muscle loss over time.

Trump moots an External Revenue Service to rake in foreign dues

## Reuters

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump said on Tuesday he will create a new department called the External Revenue Service 'to collect tariffs, duties, and all revenue' from foreign sources.

Mr. Trump said in a social media post he would create the department on January 20, the day he will be inaugurated as president for a second term.

"Through soft and pathetically weak trade agreements, the American economy has delivered growth and prosperity to the world, while taxing ourselves. It is time for that to change," the Republican said in a Truth Social post.

"We will begin charging those that make money off of us with Trade, and they will start paying, FINALLY, their fair share."

Mr. Trump has pledged to impose big tariffs on the United States' three largest trading partners – Canada, Mexico and China – including a 25% tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico until they clamped down on drugs and migrants crossing the border.

## LONDON

**All We Imagine As Light** scores a nomination at 2025 BAFTA Awards



Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine As Light* bagged a nomination for the Best Film Not in English Language at the 2025 BAFTA Film Awards. The Malayalam-Hindi movie is pitted against *Kneecap* (Ireland), *The Seed of the Sacred Fig* (Germany), *Emilia Perez* (France) and *I'm Still Here* (Brazil) in the category. AP

## LONDON

**Sheikh Hasina's niece Tulip Siddiq resigns as U.K. Treasury Minister**



The niece of Bangladesh's former leader Sheikh Hasina, Labour Party MP Tulip Siddiq, resigned as Treasury Minister to prevent her family connections becoming a "distraction" for the work of the British government. She was hit by allegations of corruption and a lack of transparency regarding her use of properties in London. PTI

## LONDON

**English author Neil Gaiman denies rape and assault accusations**



English writer Neil Gaiman denied accusations of rape and sexual assault, insisting he never had non-consensual sex with anyone. The science fantasy author of works such as *American Gods* and *Good Omens* hit back after the New York Magazine published an investigation into allegations which emerged six months ago. AP

## BEIJING

**China and Sri Lanka agree to more investment, economic cooperation**



China and Sri Lanka agreed on more investment and economic ties as China's President Xi Jinping met Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Beijing. The countries signed 15 documents, including agreements on aligning China's 'Belt and Road Initiative' with Sri Lanka's 2030 digital economy blueprint. REUTERS

## Bangladesh SC acquits Khaleda Zia, clearing her way to contest election

The court clears the last corruption case against the Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader, while also acquitting her son Tarique Rahman, the heir apparent to her party; chief adviser Yunus decries graft that happened under Hasina's watch

**Associated Press**  
DHAKA

**B**angladesh's Supreme Court on Wednesday acquitted former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the last corruption case against her, paving the way for her to run in elections that an interim government says will be held either in December or in the first half of 2026.

## Ailing leader

Ms. Zia travelled to London earlier this month for medical treatment after being cleared in another corruption case brought under former Prime Minister



**Reason to rejoice:** Supporters of Khaleda Zia shout slogans before she left for London for medical treatment last week. AP

Sheikh Hasina, who was ousted last August in a mass uprising that ended her 15-year rule.

Ms. Zia and Ms. Hasina

are arch-rivals who have dominated Bangladesh's politics for decades, and Ms. Hasina's ouster has created an opportunity for

Ms. Zia to make a comeback.

On Wednesday, a five-member Appellate Division of the Supreme Court overturned a 10-year jail sentence handed down by the High Court in 2018 on charges of embezzling some \$2,50,000 in donations meant for an orphanage trust established when Ms. Zia became Prime Minister in 1991.

The High Court had also sentenced Ms. Zia's son, Tarique Rahman, and four others to 10 years in prison for involvement in the case. Mr. Rahman is the heir apparent in Ms. Zia's party under Bangladesh's

dynastic political system.

Wednesday's verdict by the Supreme Court also cleared Mr. Rahman and the others.

## Yunus's demand

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus on Wednesday demanded the return of stolen assets, decrying the scale of corruption under the ousted government of Ms. Hasina.

Mr. Yunus said added that the stolen funds have "not only robbed the people of Bangladesh, but also disrupted the country's progress toward economic stability".

## Iran acknowledges Israel's tampering of centrifuge platforms using explosives

**Associated Press**  
DUBAI

Israel supplied Iran with centrifuge platforms containing explosives for its nuclear enrichment programme, a top Iranian official has acknowledged for the first time, underscoring the sophistication of sabotage programmes targeting the Islamic Republic.

The comments by Mohammad Javad Zarif, a former Foreign Minister who serves as Vice-President for strategic affairs for reformist President Ma-soud Pezeshkian, appear aimed at explaining to the country's disaffected public the challenges Iran's government faces under crushing Western sanctions over the programme. The comments also acknowledged details previously reported in Israel about a 2021 attack on Iran's underground Natanz nuclear enrichment facility.

The revelation, released this week, shows the danger still facing Iran after Israel struck the country twice during the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip – and threatens to directly target its nuclear sites as President-elect Donald Trump prepares to re-enter the White House next week.

Mr. Zarif made the remarks in an interview with a programme affiliated with the Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, a publicly funded organisation in Iran. Politicians from Iran's reformist camp, which seeks to change Iran's Shia theocracy

cy from within, often seek different media outlets to reach the public as Iranian state television is controlled by hard-liners.

Mr. Zarif, who helped Iran reach its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, discussed a sabotage attack launched by Israel's Mossad intelligence agency targeting pagers and radios used by the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah in September. The two waves of attacks killed 42 people and wounded thousands more, setting the stage for Israel's invasion of Lebanon in October.

**Cost of sanctions**

"This is part of the damage of sanctions, that you are forced to receive (purchases) through multiple dealers instead of buying from a factory directly," Mr. Zarif said. "If the Zionist regime can infiltrate one of the dealers, then it can do anything and install anything."

He added: "For instance, our friends at the Atomic Energy Organization (of Iran) had purchased a platform for centrifuges in which (the

Israelis) had installed explosive material."

Mr. Zarif did not elaborate, and the interviewer did not press him on the issue.

However, it marked the first clear acknowledgment of the degree Mossad had infiltrated Iran's programme.

**Mysterious blast**

In July 2020, a mysterious explosion tore apart Natanz's advanced centrifuge assembly, which Iran blamed on Israel. AP

Russian strike forces Ukraine to shut down power grid

**Associated Press**  
KYIV

Russia on Wednesday launched a major ballistic and cruise missile attack on regions across Ukraine, targeting energy production and compelling authorities to shut down the power grid in some areas despite winter weather.

The Russian Defence Ministry said that it launched a strike on "facilities of gas and energy infrastructure that ensure the functioning of Ukraine's military-industrial complex." It didn't give the target locations or other details.

## U.S. securities regulator sues Tesla founder Elon Musk over purchase of Twitter shares

**Agence France-Presse**  
WASHINGTON



**Tough times:** Elon Musk failed to timely file a beneficial ownership report about his acquisition of Twitter shares. REUTERS

According to the SEC, the omission enabled Mr. Musk, the world's richest man and a close ally of Donald Trump, to continue

purchasing shares at "artificially low prices, allowing him to underpay by at least \$150 million for shares he purchased after his benefi-

cial ownership report was due."

Alex Spiro, an attorney for Mr. Musk, called the filing a "sham" that culminated a "multi-year campaign of harassment" against the billionaire.

"Today's action is an admission by the SEC that...they cannot bring an actual case," he said.

## Many controversies

Mr. Musk's role at the social network has been marked by numerous controversies and led to various legal actions on the part of investors, former employees and companies that had contracts with Twitter, now called X.

## Sport

### Pratika, Smriti set up India's biggest ODI win

## IRELAND IN INDIA

**Press Trust of India**

Records tumbled like nine pins as the Indian women's cricket team, powered by skipper Smriti Mandhana's 70-ball century, demolished Ireland by a whopping 304 runs to claim its biggest-ever ODI win and complete a 3-0 clean sweep here on Wednesday.

The result of the match was a mere formality once India set Ireland a massive target of 436, and Ireland could only garner 131 before getting bundled out in 31.4 overs.

India put the first step forward towards a crushing victory through record-breaking Smriti (135, 80b, 12x4, 7x6) and her opening



partner Pratika Rawal (154, 129b, 20x4, 1x6), reaching 435 for five, highest total by an Indian team – men's or women's – in ODIs. India men's highest ODI total is 418 for five made

against the West Indies in Indore in 2011.

Smriti and Pratika added a whopping 233 runs in just 26.4 overs, and there was no looking back. Then, spinners Tanuja

Kanwar (two for 31) and Deepti Sharma (three for 27) took over, sharing five wickets among them to decimate the Irish line-up, which was well short on experience.

### Mohammedan snatches draw with two late goals

## ISL

**Amitabha Das Sharma**  
KOLKATA

Mohammedan SC pulled off a dramatic draw with two goals in added time to hold Chennaiyin FC 2-2 in an ISL encounter at the Kishore Bharati Stadium here on Wednesday.

Chennaiyin enjoyed a healthy two-goal lead till the end of the regulation time with strikes from P.C. Lalidinpuia (10) and Lukas Brambilla (49).

Mohammedan made a spectacular turnaround in injury-time when substitute Manvir Singh Saini reduced the margin in the 90+5th minute.

Then, Lalremsanga Fanai converted a penalty which came up after Manvir Singh was tripped inside the box by Lalidinpuia, who was given the marching order after the incident.

## Status quo

CFC remained in the 10th spot after tallying 17 points from 16 matches while Mohammedan also did not see any improvement in its status and continued in the 12th position with 11 points from 16 outings.

The visitor took control of the game early and converted its dominance with a goal in the 10th minute when Lalidinpuia nodded home from close after Con-

nor Shields found him with a nice cross on top of the six-yard box off a corner.

The host had a chance to equalise in the 27th when it earned the first penalty but Mirjalol Kasimov's attempt from the spot was saved by Chennaiyin goalkeeper Mohammad Nawaz.

Chennaiyin doubled the lead early in the second half through Brambilla but it was not enough to secure the win.

**The results:**  
Mohammedan SC 2 (Manvir Saini 90+, Lalremsanga Fanai 90+12) drew with Chennaiyin FC 2 (Pachau Lalidinpuia 10, Lukas Brambilla 49).

**Tuesday:**  
At Guwahati: NEUFC 1 (Jithin 76) drew with FCG 1 (Yasir 65).

**HIGH PRAISE**

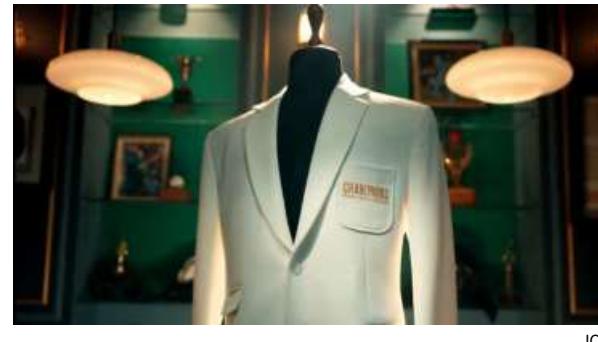
Alcaraz tips 'incredible' Fonseca to be among world's best 'soon'



Four-time Grand Slam winner Carlos Alcaraz hailed giant-killing teenager Joao Fonseca as "incredible" on Wednesday and tipped him to become one of the best players in the world "really soon". The fearless 18-year-old Brazilian qualifier stunned ninth seed Andrey Rublev in straight sets on his Grand Slam debut on Tuesday.

**THE LOOK**

Akram unveils iconic 'white jackets' for ICC Champions Trophy



Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram on Tuesday unveiled the iconic 'white jackets' — a badge of honour adorned by champions — for the ICC Champions Trophy. Akram said the jackets embody the relentless pursuit for tactical brilliance and winning the jacket signifies the journey of putting it all on the line for victory.

**DOMINANT DISPLAY**

India men and women ease into Kho Kho WC knockouts



The Indian men's and women's teams entered the knockouts of the Kho Kho World Cup. While the men made it three in three by beating Peru 70-38 in a Group-A match in New Delhi on Wednesday, the women sealed their spot after defeating South Korea 175-18 (Tuesday) and Iran 100-16 (Wednesday).

**READY FOR BATTLE**

World Rapid champion Humpy to compete in Norway Chess Women



Reigning World Rapid chess champion Koneru Humpy, currently ranked World No. 6, will return to compete in the Norway Chess Women in May. "Humpy's achievements speak volumes, and we are delighted to welcome her back to Norway Chess Women 2025," said Kjell Madland, Founder and Tournament Director of Norway Chess.

# Tigers bounce back in style

Jugraj, along with Boccard, Sukhjeet and Abhishek, help the side prevail over Rudras in a tense finish; Hardik, Ward's efforts in vain

**HIL**

**Y.B. Sarangi**  
ROURKELA

Jugraj Singh struck a fine brace to help Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers return to winning ways with a convincing 5-3 victory over UP Rudras in the Hockey India League at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium here on Wednesday.

Tigers' fourth win, and the first after two successive defeats, elevated them to the second spot.

Rudras outplayed Rudras in possession as well as circle entries and pumped in three goals in the first quarter.

Gauthier Boccard provided the breakthrough in the eighth minute as he dribbled through the centre and beat three defenders before pushing it in.

Tigers doubled their lead as Jugraj drag-flicked high and the ball got deflected to beat goalkeeper James Mazarello on the right.

Tigers got their third goal and the league's 100th when Sukhjeet Singh shot home a rebound following Sebastien Dockier's reverse hit.

However, it was not without controversy. Rudras claimed a stick check but video umpire Anand Dangi rejected it. Floris Wortelboer objected and



**Double delight:** Jugraj's exploits were pivotal in a crucial win that could spark a turnaround. R.V. MOORTHY

ended up being green-carded.

Tigers firmed up their defence, launched counters and collected two penalty corners. They nearly registered another goal but Sukhjeet's effort was disallowed due to a back stick foul in the second quarter.

Rudras showed some intent to gather two short corners but could not breach the Tigers' wall.

Tigers piled further misery as Jugraj nicely executed another drag-flick, off substitute custodian Prashant Chauhan's pads, to make it 4-0 minutes into the second half.

Midway through the penultimate quarter Rudras threw some serious challenges, including two consecutive penalty corners, but Jamie Carr and his

mates in the backline stood resolutely.

Without Jugraj's presence, Tigers could not make the most of two more short corners in the 45th minute, but had enough cushion going into the final quarter.

Following a counter-attack, Abhishek scored Tigers' fifth from Sukhjeet's pass before Rudras redeemed some pride.

Hardik Singh converted a penalty stroke, a result of a challenge that tripped Sam Ward inside the 'D', and Ward scored twice off penalty corners to reduce the margin.

**The result:**

Shrachi Rarh Bengal Tigers 5 (Boccard 8, Jugraj 10, 33, Sukhjeet 14, Abhishek 46) bt UP Rudras 3 (Hardik 47, Ward 51, 59).

# Indian hopes suffer a blow as the favourites stumble

**Uthra Ganesan**  
NEW DELHI

Indian hopes of a home champion suffered a massive blow with all the top favourites exiting in the first round of the India Open Super 750 here on Wednesday even as Anupama Upadhyaya took the honours in the all-Indian battle, defeating Rakshittha Sree Santhosh Ramraj — fellow trainee at the Pullela Gopichand Academy — 21-17, 21-18 in 43 minutes.

While Priyanshu Rajawat, H.S. Prannoy and Malvika Bansod went down fighting in three games each, Lakshya Sen failed to even put up a semblance of a fight, going down tamely to Chinese Taipei's Chun-Yi Lin 21-15, 21-10.

Malvika came the closest to causing an upset against World No. 4 Han Yue of China, winning the first game and pushing Han hard in the second before succumbing 20-22, 21-



**In cruise mode:** Lin eased past Lakshya. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

16, 21-11 in 66 minutes.

On the positive side, Ashwini Ponnappa and Tanisha Crasto beat Kavya Gupta and Radhika Sharma 21-11, 21-12 while the Panda sisters, Rutaparna and Swetaparna, got the better of Phattarin Aiamvarasirikul and Sarisa Janpeng 7-21, 21-19, 21-14.

**Top results (round 1, Indians unless mentioned):**

**Men:** Loh Kean Yew (Sin) bt Chia Hoo Lee (Tpe) 21-15, 22-20; Kodai Naraoka (Jpn) bt Priyanshu Rajawat 21-16, 20-22, 21-13.

**Mixed doubles:** Ashith Surya & Amrutha Pramuthesh bt K. Tarun & Sri Priya Krishna 21-14, 21-15.

# Warriors fail for the first time this season



**Wall:** Soorma's custodian Savita stood tall. K.R. DEEPAK

**Santadeep Dey**  
RANCHI

Odisha Warriors was condemned to its first loss of the season by JSW Soorma Hockey Club by a 1-2 margin on Wednesday in the Women's Hockey India League at the Marang Gomke Jaipal Singh Munda Stadium here.

They say well begun is only half done. Having made a confident start, Warriors learned it the hard way when Baljeet Kaur couldn't convert a relatively easy opportunity two minutes from pushback. Soorma's Sophie Hamilton broke free from a barricade of players, crossed over to the left wing, and found Ajmina Kujur. The midfielder passed to Hina Bano, and the faintest of touches from the latter was enough

to see the ball roll home.

Even luck didn't seem to favour Warriors, who didn't have Yibbi Jansen to take either of their five penalty corners in the opening 30 minutes. Claire Colwill had a shy at the board twice from either battery, but Savita Punia proved difficult to beat.

Later, Olivia Shannon put herself in a good position on the right and reached out to Sonam, who dinked the ball past Jocelyn Bartram.

In a classic case of too little too late, Warriors' Freeke Moes — reacting to a defensive lapse — slapped an angled shot past an outstretched Savita with three minutes remaining on the clock.

**The result:** JSW Soorma Hockey Club 2 (Bano 6, Sonam 47) bt Odisha Warriors 1 (Moes 57).

# Padikkal, Smaran power Karnataka into the final

**HAZARE TROPHY**

**Dhruva Prasad**  
VADODARA

A couple of kids were screaming their lungs out for Devdutt Padikkal (86, 113b, 8x4, 1x6), their voices echoing across the empty Kotambi Stadium, and the left-hander repaid the faith by helping Karnataka beat defending champion Haryana by five wickets in the semifinal of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here on Wednesday.

Building on his ton in the quarterfinal, Padikkal anchored a tricky 238-run chase to ensure Karnataka didn't suffer a fourth semi-final defeat in five seasons.

After captain Mayank Agarwal's early dismissal, Padikkal was just the cool head Karnataka needed. The 24-year-old was impetuous through the off-side en route to his 72-ball half-century — his seventh consecutive fifty-plus score in 50-over List-A cricket.

He rode out a challenging phase with fellow southpaw R. Smaran (76, 94b, 3x4, 3x6) during their 128-run partnership. After a 48-ball boundary drought that saw the required rate close in on six runs per over, Smaran



**Sheet-anchor:** Padikkal paced his knock to perfection in a big game against Haryana. FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

smote Anshul Kamboj for a six, opening the floodgates as 62 runs came off the next 50 balls.

Haryana hit back with three quick wickets to add suspense, but it wasn't enough.

Earlier, after inserting Haryana on a pitch where the ball kept low, senior pacers V. Koushik and Prasidh Krishna were wayward in their lines.

Rookie Abhilash Shetty was then called upon and the left-arm seamer delivered in his first over, inducing Arsh Ranga's outside edge.

But one didn't bring two as Himanshu Rana and skipper Ankit Kumar forged a 70-run partnership with their textbook

elegance on display. The duo perished to Shreyas Gopal and Hardik Raj's guile, before Abhilash, helped by Padikkal and Mayank's sharp catching inside the 30-yard circle, set off a collapse that saw Haryana lose five wickets for 57 runs.

Anuj Thakral and Amit Rana added 39 runs for the last wicket in quick time, but Haryana was always falling short.

Vidarbha and Maharashtra will lock horns in the other semifinal here on Thursday.

**The scores:** Haryana 237/9 in 50 overs (Himanshu Rana 44, Ankit Kumar 48; Abhilash Shetty 4/34) lost to Karnataka 238/5 in 47.2 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 86, R. Smaran 76).

# Djokovic surpasses Federer; Ruud crashes out; Olympic champion Zheng falls by the wayside

**AUSTRALIAN OPEN**

**Agence France-Presse**

MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic celebrated a slice of Grand Slam history on his way into the Australian Open third round on Wednesday, but last year's women's finalist Zheng Qinwen was knocked out in the biggest shock so far.

Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka, in-form Coco Gauff, former Melbourne winner Naomi Osaka and a rampant Carlos Alcaraz were all victors on a rainy day four.

Alexander Zverev also progressed, but Norway's Casper Ruud went down in four sets to Czech teenager Jakub Mensik to become the highest men's seed to fall at six.

Playing under the roof on Rod Laver Arena, Djokovic needed four sets for the second match in a row before defeating Portuguese qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1, 6-7(4), 6-3, 6-2.

It was Djokovic's 430th match at a Major to surpass Federer's record (429), has the most titles (24), finals (37), semifinals (49), quarterfinals (60) and wins (379) at Grand Slams

Day Four in numbers



**6**  
The fewest games conceded by Zverev in a men's singles match in Melbourne

**26**  
The number of hard court wins (in Grand Slams) for Alcaraz before turning 22, surpassing Nadal and Roddick (25). Only four players have won more before turning 22: Djokovic (29), Sampras, Hewitt (28 each) and Safin (27)

**150**  
The 37-year-old Djokovic is the second player (after Serena) in the Open era to secure 150 singles Grand Slam wins after turning 30

**150**  
Sabalenka became the second player (after Swiatek - 157) to register 150 WTA match wins on the hard court since 2020

**1**  
Djokovic, who played his 430th match at a Major to surpass Federer's record (429), has the most titles (24), finals (37), semifinals (49), quarterfinals (60) and wins (379) at Grand Slams

**2**  
Mensik (19) and Fonscak (18) became the first teenage pair to defeat top-10 opponents at a Major since Djokovic and Murray at the 2006 Wimbledon Championships

**3**  
Ruud is the third top-10 player in the men's section, after Rublev and Dimitrov, to exit this year's Australian Open

THURSDAY'S PICKS: SECOND ROUND

**Men:** 1-Sinner vs Schoolkate | 4-Fritz vs Garin | 5-Medvedev vs Tien | 13-Rune vs Berrettini

**Women:** 2-Swiatek vs Sramkova | 4-Paolini vs Zarazua | 6-Rybakina vs Jovic | Raducanu vs Anisimova

COMPILED BY ANIRUDH VELAMURI

just five games in an ominous display to sprint into the third round.

The third seed showed no mercy to Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka in a 6-0, 6-1, 6-4 rout in 81 minutes.

Second seed Zverev swept through with a straight-sets victory over Spain's Pedro Martinez.

Olympic champion Zheng was sent packing 7-6

(3), 6-3 by World No. 97 Laura Siegemund, the second-oldest player in the women's draw at age 36.

"I knew I just had to play more than my best tennis. I had nothing to lose so I just told myself to swing free," said the German.

Sabalenka dropped her serve three times and faced 11 break points before overcoming Spain's Jessica Bouza.

Former World No. 1 Osaka, the 2019 and 2021 champion in Australia but now unseeded, stormed back to defeat 20th seed Karolina Muchova 1-6, 6-1, 6-3. Osaka called it a "little revenge" for defeat at the US Open in August to the Czech.

## IN BRIEF



**Kaushalya, Prema and Vrinda take Team-C to the title**

Off-spinner Kaushalya Choudhary (four for 38), leg-spinner Prema Rawat (four for 54), and opener D. Vrinda (71, 65b, 10x4) helped Team-C defeat Team-A by two wickets in the final of the BCCI senior women's one-day Challenger Trophy in Chennai on Wednesday.

**The scores:** Final: Team-A 239 in 50 overs (Dhara Gujjar 34, Mukta Magre 75 n.o., Kaushalya Choudhary 4/38, Prema Rawat 4/54) lost to Team-C 240/8 in 49.5 overs (D. Vrinda 71, Riya Chaudhari 32, Henrietta Pereira 40, Sonia Mendhiya 4/42). **Player-of-the-Series:** Shafali Verma (Team-A).

### Services boxers strike it rich in the Nationals

Services men retained the National team title for third consecutive time with five gold, three silver, and one bronze medal in Bareilly.

**The winners:** **Bantamweight:** Manish Rathore; **lightweight:** Sachin Siwach; **Welterweight:** Abhinash Jamwal; **Light heavyweight:** Lakshya Chahar; **Middleweight:** Nikhil Dubey; **Cruiserweight:** Sumit; **Super heavyweight:** Narendra; **Flyweight:** Jaduman Singh; **Light-middleweight:** Hitesh; **Heavyweight:** Vishal.

### Lakshay Sheoran tops trap qualification with 121

Lakshay Sheoran topped trap qualification with 121 along with Prithviraj Tondaiman and Zoravar Singh Sandhu, in the 67th National shotgun championship at the Dr. Karni Singh Range here on Wednesday. Jaswinder Singh (118), Zuhair Khan (117) and Shardul Vihan (116) were the other three to make the final. Shardul had to beat four others in a long shoot-off to clinch the last berth. In women's trap, Rajeshwari Kumari topped the field with 114, one point ahead of Neeru. Kirti Gupta (111), Sabeera Haris (111), Bhavya Trpathi (110) and Shreshtha Sisodiya (109) were the others to make the final.

# Pant set to play for Delhi in Ranji Trophy game against Saurashtra

The wicketkeeper-batter will join the team directly in Rajkot, says DDCA president Rohan Jaitley; No communication from Kohli yet regarding his availability

### CRICKET

**Vivek Krishnan**

NEW DELHI

Rishabh Pant has confirmed his availability for Delhi's next Ranji Trophy game against Saurashtra in Rajkot from January 23 to 26. Pant, 27, hasn't played for Delhi in India's premier domestic First Class competition since leading the side in the 2017-18 final against Vidarbha in Indore that the latter won.

"Pant is available for Delhi's next Ranji game. He will join the team directly in Rajkot," Delhi & District Cricket Association (DDCA) president Rohan Jaitley told *The Hindu* on Tuesday.

The news comes after the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) advised top cricketers to participate in the Ranji Trophy following India's 3-1 loss to Australia in the five-Test series Down Under.

Virat Kohli is also among Delhi's probables for the upcoming fixture, but it is understood that there has been no communication from him yet regarding his availability.

The Ranji Trophy is resuming after a two-month gap in which the white-ball tournaments were held.



**Much awaited return:** Pant has not played for Delhi in the Ranji Trophy since leading the side in the 2017-18 final against Vidarbha in Indore. FILE PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

Rohit trained with the Mumbai team on Tuesday ahead of its clash against J&K. While it is uncertain if Rohit will play, Jaiswal has made himself available.

Gill is available for Punjab, which faces Karnataka in Bengaluru

has made himself available. Shubman Gill is also available for Punjab, which faces Karnataka at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru.

Pant played all five Tests in Australia, scoring 255 runs at 28.33. Having been excluded from India's five-match T20I series against England, scheduled from January 22 to February 2, the wicketkeeper-batter will look to make an impact for Delhi.

After India's loss in the final Test in Australia, coach Gautam Gambhir urged players to be available for domestic cricket.

"I would always like everyone to play domestic cricket," Gambhir had said.

"That is how much importance domestic cricket needs to be given.

Not only one game. If

they're available and they

have the commitment to

play red-ball cricket, eve-

ryone should play domes-

tic cricket. As simple as it

can get. If you don't give

importance to domestic

cricket, you will never get

the desired players what

you want in Test cricket."

Pascual's previous tryst with India and World Cups

**Vivek Krishnan**  
NEW DELHI

The Kho Kho World Cup is in its inaugural edition in India, but Argentina's Mariano Pascual has been at a World Cup in India before. That was in 2016, when Pascual was part of Argentina's kabaddi team for the third edition of the World Cup in Ahmedabad. It wasn't a particularly memorable campaign as the South American country lost all five matches to finish bottom of Pool-A, but it was the beginning of Pascual's tryst with tag-games that have their roots in India.

Pascual was 22 years old and very new to the sport of kabaddi then. Now 31, he has gone on to become captain of Argentina's kabaddi team. At this opening edition of the Kho Kho World Cup, too, he has been entrusted with the responsibility of leading his countrymen.

Another common link between the two teams is coach Ricardo Acuna, who was instrumental in drawing Pascual to kabaddi a few months before the 2016 World Cup.

"I have been playing kabaddi for Argentina since 2016. And I have been playing kho kho professionally over the past year," Pascual, who works as a physical education teacher at a high school back home, told *The Hindu*. "Kabaddi and kho kho are similar in terms of pursuit, escape, agility and leg speed. But kho kho requires more endurance than kabaddi."



Pascual.

As the conversation veered towards football, a sport that is ubiquitous in Argentina, Pascual flashed a broad smile. Like most Argentinians, Pascual played football as a child. He was a right-back for Argentinos Juniors, the club that his idol Diego Maradona made his professional debut for, at the age-group levels. But belonging to O'Brien, a small town 300 kilometres from Buenos Aires, he wasn't able to reach the highest level.

"I was a footballer at amateur level. Everyone plays football in Argentina. I tried to enter professional football, but it was very hard in terms of money to keep trying. I was also living in a small town, far away from the city where there are more chances to make the cut. So I couldn't keep on trying. When I discovered kabaddi, I fell in love with it," he said.

Can kho kho also gain popularity in his homeland? "We know that many countries had a lot more preparation time for this World Cup, but Argentinians can be good at a lot of sports. We just need time. I know that we can evolve in kho kho," he said.

**MARUTI SUZUKI**

**NEXA**

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# I am good enough and I really think I can make a comeback

The 33-year-old batter — who holds the record for most List-A runs without being dismissed (542) — says he is not thinking about the past but looking forward to making each and every game count; feels he is playing his best cricket now and believes that age is not a deterrent



Going big: Karun was the second Indian after Sehwag to score a triple century in Tests. FILE PHOTO: V. GANESAN

## INTERVIEW

### KARUN NAIR

**S. Dipak Ragav**  
VADODARA

**K**arun Nair's career has been a roller-coaster ride. When he scored a triple century in only his third Test, Karun was destined for big things. However, he played only three more international games and fell off the radar.

Two years ago, even his home State Karnataka dropped him, forcing him to miss an entire season. But since moving to Vidarbha in the 2023-24 season, the 33-year-old is back amongst the runs.

In the ongoing Vijay Hazare Trophy, he has led from the front, scoring five centuries in six games.

In a chat with *The Hindu*, Karun opened up about the tough times and still believes he can make an India comeback. Excerpts:

#### What's the secret to the incredible run recently?

It's no secret, really. It's just years of hard work, following the process day in and day out, training and practising. It's not something that's just come off suddenly. I think it's the work of a few years. I'm happy with the way it's coming out, and I hope it continues.

#### Do you feel you are playing some of your best cricket now?

Yeah, I think I've been playing really well for the last 16-17 months. I have played many county matches as well and getting runs there in difficult conditions has boosted my confidence.

I have been just trying to enjoy my batting, and it's been coming out well in all formats in the recent past. I am looking forward to continue in the same way, and every game matters. Every game is another opportunity for me to score runs.

#### How helpful have the county stints been?

It was my first experience, and it was pretty unexpected. I was playing the Maharaja Trophy, and suddenly, I got a call to play three matches for Northamptonshire towards the end of

the season. It is actually the better part of the season to play county cricket. So I was really happy with the opportunity, and I played two out of three matches at Test venues against top opposition (2023). I got runs in Edgbaston and scored a 150 at The Oval (against Surrey) which was amazing and gave me a lot of confidence.

The ball swings there all day. The innings at The Oval, I think we played with the lights on all day; it was that gloomy, cold and windy. The ball swung throughout, and it was against the best pace attack in the county — champion Surrey.

So, to get runs against them was a learning experience for me. Honestly, I was happy to be out there and I did not have any target in my mind. I was just enjoying my batting, telling myself I didn't care if I didn't get runs. I only wanted to learn how to play there. I was really happy. It's probably one of the best innings in my career.

There were phases during that innings where I didn't get runs for like 20-30 balls. I had to do something and told myself 'it's just a learning. I want to stay here and learn how to play in these conditions'.

#### Whenever your name has come up in recent times, it is more to do with 'Karun Nair the triple centurion who then went away'. Does it feel good to be in the limelight for your runs and records again?

Quite honestly, it's not on my mind that much because, for me, every match is important. In my head, I keep saying every game is essential no matter where I play. I want to get runs for my team wherever I play. That's the only thought process at the moment and nothing else matters to me.

#### You missed out most of the 2022-23 season. Has the change of jersey helped your career?

I'm very grateful to the Vidarbha Cricket Association for giving me the opportunity. I missed one year for reasons even I don't know. Honestly, I didn't understand or still haven't got any answers to that and I don't think I'm the right person to even say anything because I don't think I was wrong.

To not be playing a full season was really heartbreaking and

disappointing. It probably helped me become a stronger person, looking outward at myself and learning every single day. When you're not given the opportunity that's when you realise what you miss.

#### How did you keep yourself motivated during the tough times?

It was heartbreaking at the start. Especially, since you don't know, you are not given any indication and there was no time. So, basically it was just me missing out on an entire season during which anything could have happened. That was the only thought in my head: what if I had played that season? That was the first full season after Covid.

Obviously, family and close friends helped a lot in keeping the spirits high. They tried their best but honestly you as a person know what you're going through but all you can do is just go for practice and do your work.

#### How hard was it to get up every day because the future was uncertain at that point? At any stage did you feel like leaving the game?

I didn't want to leave. I never thought of leaving the game. I knew that I could do a lot more and I knew I hadn't done anything wrong so why should I give up? There were certain things that got stuck in my head, certain lines that I've heard which I used to spur me on. At first it kind of broke me but then I used those to help me get up and go and practice harder.

#### You have had a very brief Test career. You made a triple hundred but got only a handful of chances after that. In 2018, you were part of the squad in England but you were overlooked even when there was an opening. How tough was that period?

I think it's been a few years... actually many years now from that. So I have really gotten past that. But when I scored runs at The Oval, that was the place where I didn't play in the fifth Test match.

After scoring the 150, I stood by myself on the balcony and just soaked that feeling where I was thinking how I felt about four-five years ago and how I'm feeling now.

That feeling cannot be described. It was like life coming back a full circle at the same ground where I thought I was

couldn't get any worse.

#### In hindsight, do you feel you could have done things differently to get those chances?

I'm not sure what I would have done differently, and I don't want to look so far back. I just want to focus on what I'm doing now.

#### How tough was it when you were maybe one game away from getting back into the team, and then you saw things slipping away from you?

I've been through many things. I think this past experience (missing 2022-23) is far greater than that. Obviously, that's also a different experience than what I went through a couple of years ago. I think all these experiences made me the person that I am today.

#### Where do you draw your mental strength from?

These kinds of instances make you work that much harder or make you more determined. I'm not sure I want to prove anyone wrong but I just want to prove to myself that I am good enough to play at that level.

#### Do you still feel you can make a comeback?

Sure, if I didn't feel like that, I wouldn't go and play county cricket. Why would I do that if I didn't have any intentions or if I didn't have the belief in myself to play Test cricket again?

So, the intentions are very clear from my side, at least that I really think that I can and I think that I'm good enough. Age is just a number. Even in this past series, I think Scott Boland was 35 and picking wickets for fun. I don't think that should be the criteria, from my point of view at least.

#### In the last couple of years you have been in and out of IPL sides. Can that also affect the perception of a player that you are not in the limelight any more?

To a certain extent it's true: the out of sight, out of mind kind of thing. From 2014 to 2018, I played every single game. After that, I haven't played at all and I don't understand why. I have played just four or five games. It's probably very hard once you get out of people's minds to get back in.

#### Where do you feel you have grown as a cricketer in the last few years?

You just learn a lot of things about your batting like what you can do, what you can't do, believing in yourself a lot more because you just kind of start to understand your game a lot more.

You understand what you're good at and what you're not good at. What the bowlers are trying to do and how you can counter that. You just keep learning every day, and there comes a point when you understand your game much better, and you're able to implement that in your game in any situation. So, I think I'm at that point now where I am settled in my game and I trust my game and the way I'm playing.

#### If you were to zoom in on a specific aspect in which you have gotten better...

Just consistency and belief in my batting and what I can do in the way that I know. I'm not trying to be anyone else and just taking every match as important as the last one.

#### If you were to make a comeback, do you think you're in a much stronger situation?

As you grow older, you learn more about yourself and the game. You have been following a certain process for many years and if something's working, then you stick to it. You know your game is suited to any condition or opponent.

#### If you don't get to play Test cricket again, will there be any regrets?

Obviously, there will be regrets but more disappointment that probably I could have done much more in whatever opportunities I had. I can only say that I should have, in the succeeding innings [after the triple century], made sure that the 25s or 30s I scored grew into something bigger. And not let anyone take that chance away from me.

#### Does that affect you sometimes?

No, it's been many years now. I would be lying if I say it didn't affect me at the start. I don't think about it any more, and I just use it as motivation to do better every single time.

