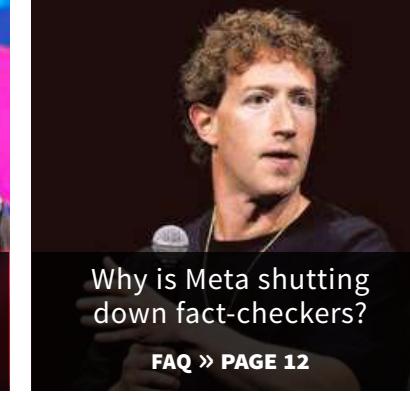
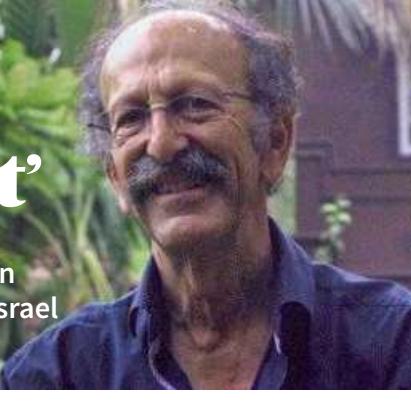


WEST BANK

'A cauldron that can explode any moment'

Israeli Indologist David Shulman predicts a third Palestinian 'uprising', suggests a confederation as path to peace with Israel

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Why is Meta shutting down fact-checkers?

FAQ » PAGE 12

Shami returns for England T20Is

SPORT » PAGE 15

Parties in Capital trade barbs over choice of CM candidate

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Delhi's three major political parties – Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), BJP, and Congress – on Saturday crossed swords over the choice of chief ministerial candidates for the Assembly election scheduled for February 5.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal fired the first volley by saying that "sources" have told him that the BJP has picked former South Delhi MP Ramesh Bidhuri, who is contesting from Kalkaji against CM Atishi, as its chief ministerial face.

In response, senior BJP leader and Union Minister Amit Shah, addressing a rally in the national capital, said, "Who is Kejriwal to announce our CM face?"

The Congress also hit out at the AAP chief, wondering whether Mr. Kejriwal, whom the Supreme Court granted bail last year in the liquor policy case subject to certain condi-



“

How can someone who was barred by the Supreme Court from signing files, who had to step down as the CM, be projected as a chief ministerial candidate?

SANDEEP DIKSHIT
Former Delhi MP, Congress leader

tions, could even qualify for the top post.

The ruling AAP has, in its poll campaign, repeatedly attacked Delhi's main Opposition party, the BJP, for not declaring a CM face. The BJP has responded by saying that the announcement will be made "in due course of time".

On Saturday, Mr. Kejriwal doubled down on his attack against the BJP, challenging it to send its chief ministerial candidate for a public debate on their vision for the national capital.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra

Shachdeva termed the former CM's claim about Mr. Bidhuri "an absolute lie" and said that "all the BJP candidates are our chief ministerial candidates".

Former Delhi MP and Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, who is up against Mr. Kejriwal from New Delhi seat, said, "How can someone who has been barred by the apex court from signing files, who had to step down as the CM, be projected as a chief ministerial candidate?"

BJP FIELDS KAPIL MISHRA
» PAGE 2

3 more bodies retrieved from flooded Assam mine

Multiple agencies keep up work to locate five other trapped miners; authorities continue to pump out water from nearby mines; the body of a worker from Nepal was recovered on Wednesday

Rahul Karmakar
UMRANGSO

Rescue workers retrieved the bodies of three workers from a flooded rat-hole coal mine in Dima Hasao district of Assam on Saturday afternoon, taking the death toll to four in the accident that took place on January 6. Five workers are still missing.

Officials at the site in Kamatia area, about 28 km from the industrial town of Umrangso, said an Army and National Disaster Response Force team recovered the bodies between 7.28 a.m. and 12.40 p.m.

The deceased have been identified as Lijen Magar (27) of Kalmati village close to the mine; Khushi Mohan Rai (57) from Fakiragaram in Kokrajhar district of western Assam; and



Long operation: A rescue team carries the body of a worker recovered from a mine in Dima Hasao, Assam on Saturday. PTI

Sarat Goyari (37) of Thailapara in Sonitpur district of north-central Assam. The body of Ganga Bahadur Shreshta (38), a resident of Udayapur district in Nepal, was recovered on Wednesday.

Efforts by multiple agencies, including the Navy, to rescue the five miners still trapped in the 90-metre pit

lakh litres per hour from the affected mine," Mr. Das told *The Hindu*.

Six more pumps are simultaneously draining out water from three abandoned mines nearby, all at a lower elevation than the ill-fated mine, while the heavy-duty pump brought by Coal India Ltd. (CIL) from Nagpur will need some more time to be set up. Once the CIL pump goes into the mine, the six small pumps will have to be taken out. Our priority is on mobilisation to wrap up the operation as soon as possible," Mr. Das said.

"Efforts to find the other miners will resume tomorrow [Sunday] morning but dewatering will continue throughout the night. The water level is down to about 15 metres with six pumps draining out 2.43

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 7

IN BRIEF



Shiv Sena (UBT)
to go solo in civic
polls: Sanjay Raut

MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Saturday announced that the party intends to go solo in the upcoming municipal corporation elections in Mumbai and Nagpur. » Page 4

Centre backs probe
against firm owned
by Kerala CM's kin

NEW DELHI

The Centre has defended before the Delhi High Court its decision to probe the affairs of Exalogic Solutions Private Limited, owned by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's daughter T. Veena, and some other entities. » Page 6

MAGAZINE » 8 PAGES
CLASSIFIEDS » PAGE 5

BJP attempting to enrol fake voters on a 'large scale' in New Delhi: AAP

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday accused the BJP of submitting fake voter registration applications on a "large scale" in a "deliberate" attempt to manipulate the Delhi Assembly election process. It said such practices raise doubts on the conduct of free and fair elections in the national capital.

The party said it had brought these fake applications to the notice of the Election Commission (EC).

At a press conference on Saturday, AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh alleged that several voter registration applications using the residential



AAP's Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh and party chief Arvind Kejriwal addressing a press conference on Saturday. R.V. MOORTHY

addresses of BJP leaders and addresses of small shops and basements across the New Delhi constituency were sent to the EC.

"An application has been filed to register 33 vo-

ters from the MP's official residence occupied by BJP candidate [New Delhi seat] Parvesh Verma, who was supposed to vacate his home after his term ended. From a two-bedroom flat at 212 VP House, applica-

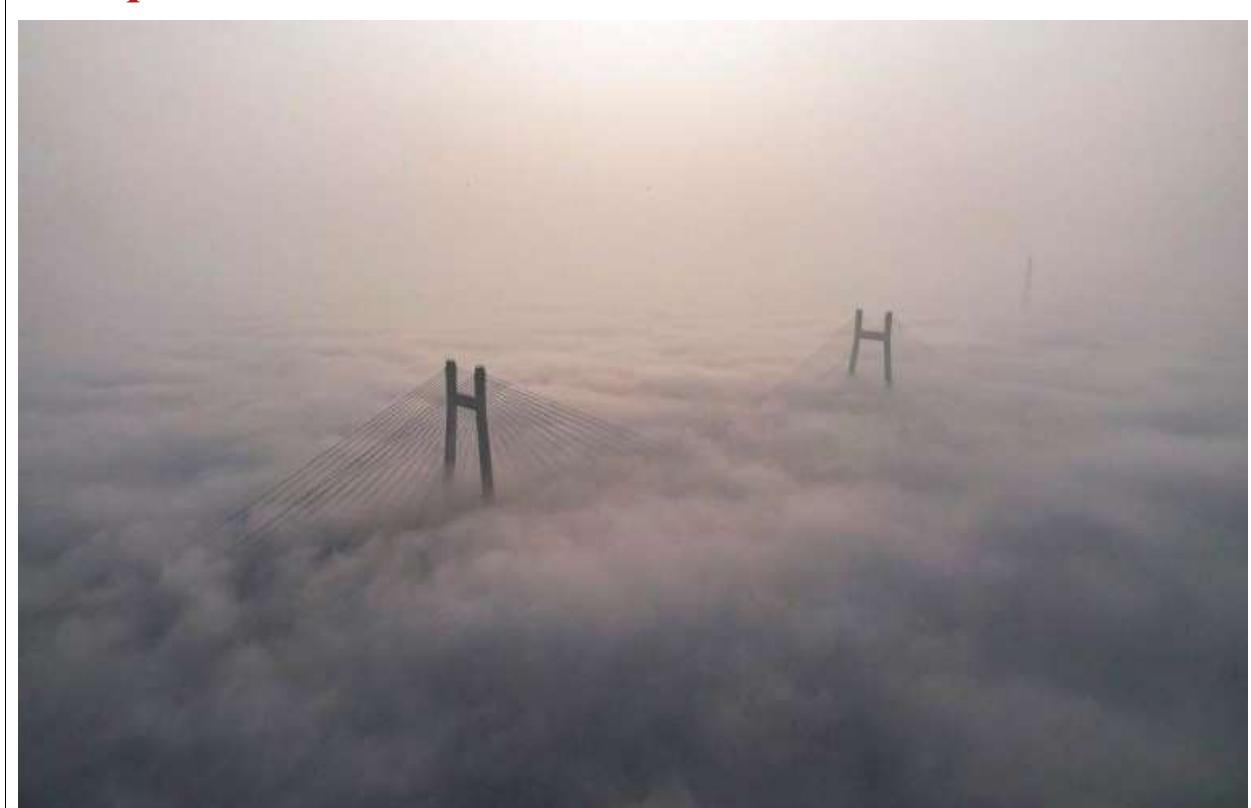
tions have been made for 24 voter registrations. It is absurd and reeks of deliberate manipulation," Mr. Singh said.

The AAP leader said filing fake applications amounted to tampering with the electoral rolls. "This calculated assault on democratic integrity shows the BJP's desperation to rig elections," he said.

He alleged that over 20 names have been sent from the address of a three-bedroom flat, 20 from a basement in Jor Bagh and 21 from a small shop in the Sangli Mess area, apart from official residences of BJP MPs.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 7

Twin peaks



Under fog: The Naini bridge over the Yamuna in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, shrouded in a blanket of dense fog on Saturday as severe cold weather continues in northern States. PTI

HAL asks civil operators to ground Dhruv helicopters

Many trapped as waiting hall collapses at Kannauj station

The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW



Rescue operation under way at the Kannauj railway station on Saturday. Seven persons suffer serious injuries. PTI

been rescued so far.

A rescue operation has been launched by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the Government Railway Police (GRP), the Railway Protection Force (PRF), and the district administration.

"Our focus is to rescue

the workers who are trapped. We are using all resources at our disposal for the rescue efforts," Kannauj District Magistrate Shubhrant Kumar Shukla said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 7

Seven special courts will be set up to hear sexual assault cases, says T.N. CM

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday announced that seven special courts would hear cases pertaining to sexual assault on women.

The courts would be set up in places including Madurai, Tirunelveli, Coimbatore, Salem, Tiruchi, and Chennai.

In his reply to the address by the Governor, R.N. Ravi, in the Assembly, Mr. Stalin said that a special committee headed by the Additional Superintendent of Police would be set up to expedite trials in sexual assault cases in all the districts.

The Tamil Nadu Prison

Rules, 1983, would be amended to ensure that persons accused in such cases were not granted bail, the Chief Minister added.

Earlier in the day, the Assembly passed the Cri-

on Friday, are aimed at enhancing the punishment for sexual offences against women and children, as well as prosecuting those harassing them on digital and electronic platforms.

The Criminal Laws Bill proposes a minimum of 14 years of rigorous imprisonment for a rape convict, up from the present 10 years.

If the rapist is a member of the police force, it seeks to double the minimum rigorous imprisonment to 20 years. If the rape victim is a girl aged below 12, the Bill calls for life term and death penalty as the minimum and maximum punishment respectively.

SEE ALSO

» PAGE 4

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. has advised civilian operators to ground the indigenous Dhruv advanced light helicopter Mark-III until the cause of a crash in Porbandar last week is identified.

The armed forces have already temporarily grounded all their 330 Dhruvs following the January 5 crash of an Indian Coast Guard helicopter during a training sortie that killed all three crew members onboard.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 9

IN BRIEF



Light rain brings minimum down to 7.7 degrees Celsius

Light rain was witnessed in parts of Delhi on Saturday evening as the city recorded a low of 7.7 degrees Celsius, according to the India Meteorological Department. Forty-five trains were delayed as a thick fog engulfed the city in the morning, reducing the visibility, officials said. The IMD said the maximum temperature settled at 17 degrees Celsius, three notches below the season's average. According to data shared by the met office, the Sadarjung weather station recorded 1.6 mm of rainfall, Palam 2.4 mm, Delhi University 2 mm, Pusa 1.5 mm, and Najafgarh 4 mm. The weather department has predicted a generally cloudy sky with light rain on Sunday, with maximum and minimum likely to settle around 17 and 11 degrees Celsius. PTI

Pink toilets will be built in prominent markets: Mayor

Delhi Mayor Mahesh Kumar Khichi said on Saturday that pink toilets would be constructed for women in prominent markets across the city. The announcement followed a meeting at the Civic Centre with 100 women entrepreneurs from Delhi, led by Priyanka Saxena, General Secretary of the Chamber of Trade and Industry (CTI) Women's Council. During the meeting, the women raised several concerns, including the lack of adequate parking in markets like Lajpat Nagar and Karol Bagh, which make it difficult for customers to access these areas. He also announced plans to develop selfie points in key historical markets, such as Chandni Chowk, Karol Bagh, Lajpat Nagar, Khari Baoli, and Kashmiri Gate, to celebrate the city's heritage. PTI

Man dies after being hit by a luxury car in south Delhi

Press Trust of India

A 28-year-old man died when his car was hit by a speeding luxury car coming from the opposite direction near Saifdargh Enclave on Saturday, police said.

The deceased was identified as Sukhjit, a resident of Hisar, Haryana. According to police, at around 6.30 a.m., the car moving to South Extension was hit by the luxury car that jumped the road divider and collided head-on. The driver of the vehicle fled, said a senior police officer.

"A case has been filed, and the driver will be held soon, the officer added."

Four arrested with pair of white rhino horns

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Four persons in illegal possession of a pair of horns of a rare white rhinoceros were arrested from Lajpat Nagar, police said on Saturday.

The accused, identified as Deepak Sharma, 57, Suresh Kumar, 57, Sant Ram, 57, Anil Kumar Sethi, 60, have been booked under various sections of the BNS and Wild Life (Protection) Act.

Following a tip-off, police officers acted as decoy customers and approached the accused to buy the horns. The deal was finalised for ₹1 crore, the officer said. As the police learnt about the accused's location, they raided

Kapil Mishra, ex-CM's son feature in second BJP list of 29 names

Candidates fielded for the February 5 election include four Purvanchali faces, five women, and several former legislators and serving councillors

Satyika Mahajan
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Saturday released its second list of 29 candidates for the Delhi Assembly election a week after issuing its first list with as many names.

Kapil Mishra, who was accused of making hate speeches in the run-up to the north-east Delhi riots in February 2020, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured, has been fielded from Karawal Nagar, where he replaces BJP MLA Mohan Singh Bisht.

Harish Khurana, the son of a former Delhi Chief Minister, Madan Lal Khurana, has been named for Moti Nagar constituency. The State unit's temple cell chief, Karnail Singh, will be up against senior Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and former Health Minister Satyendar Jain from Shakur Basti.

Former Kasturba Nagar MLA Neeraj Basoya, who recently switched over from the Congress, has been retained for the seat.

BJP MLA from Laxmi Nagar Abhay Verma, who won the 2020 poll with a slender margin of 800 votes, will seek re-election from the East Delhi seat.

Five women, including



Kapil Mishra, who has been accused of making hate speeches in the run-up to the February 2020 riots, joined the BJP in 2019. FILE PHOTO

Mahal and Neelam Pahalwan from Najafgarh, and several former legislators and sitting councillors have also made the cut.

The BJP has announced a total of 58 candidates so far for the 70-member Delhi Assembly, the election for which is scheduled on February 5. The ruling AAP has announced

Delhi
Votes

candidates on all seats and the Congress on 48.

The BJP's candidate from Karawal Nagar served as a legislator from the seat when AAP came to power in 2015. Mr. Mishra was inducted into the Cabinet as the Water Resources Minister. However, he was sacked for "anti-party activities" in 2017. After being disquali-

fied as an MLA under the anti-defection law, he joined the BJP in 2019. In August 2023, he was named as the Delhi BJP vice-president.

Mr. Mishra, the Laxmi Nagar MLA and two other candidates named in the second list belong to the Purvanchali community.

Purvanchali is a term used for residents of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and those hailing from there in the national capital. The community has been at the centre of a political tussle between AAP and BJP.

The BJP won three and eight seats in the Delhi Assembly elections of 2015 and 2020.

Delhi Police's annual data show fall in crime rate; AAP questions authenticity

Samridhi Tewari

NEW DELHI

A slight decline in crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, and molestation were recorded in 2024 as compared to the previous year, according to the annual data released by the Delhi Police.

Crime in the national capital has become a contentious issue in the run-up to the Assembly election with the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) targeting the BJP over law and order, which falls under the aegis of the Central government.

Reacting to the Delhi police data, AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday said the people of Delhi should be asked whether crime has "actually reduced".

"Gunshots are fired on the streets. The people will tell you how safe they feel in Delhi," he said at a press conference.

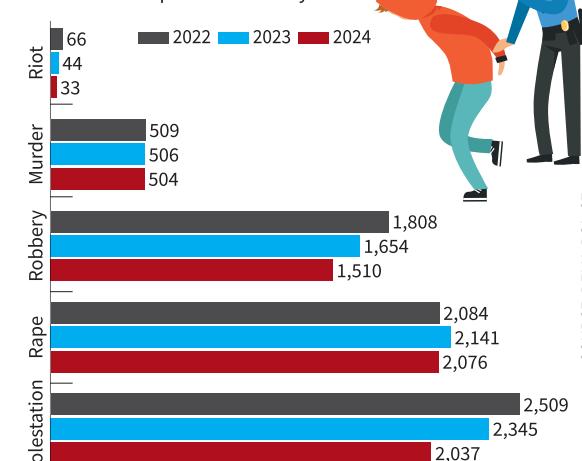
AAP Rajya Sabha member Sanjay Singh said, "It is shameful that despite gang wars taking place in the city, they [police] are claiming the numbers have still gone down."

According to police data, cases of sexual harassment decreased to 362 from 381 the previous year.

Street crime, including snatching cases, reduced in 2024 with 6,493 cases reported as compared to 7,886 in 2023. Motor vehicle theft cases declined to 39,976 from 40,045.

Law and order

Data on the number of heinous crimes in the national capital over three years



SOURCE: DELHI POLICE

Substances (NDPS) Act to 1,789 in 2024 from 1,325 the previous year.

New strategies

A senior Delhi Police officer said the several improved law enforcement strategies including targeted operations, enhanced patrolling and technology driven surveillance led to the decrease in crime rate.

Police used AI-powered surveillance cameras that worked on analysing crowd behaviour to detect untoward incidents, awareness, and a victim-centric support system like women help desks to create a safer environment for women, the officer said. Police also collaborated with municipal authorities to have well-lit roads and streets.

Rahul Gandhi to address his first Delhi election rally tomorrow

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will address a rally for the upcoming Assembly election in Delhi on Monday. Mr. Gandhi's 'Jai Bheem-Jai Samvidhan' rally in north-east Delhi's Seelampur will be his first in the national capital since the 2024 Lok Sabha poll.

Making the announcement on Saturday, the party's Delhi in-charge, Qazi Nizamuddin, said Mr. Gandhi's rally will see huge participation by city dwellers.

He added, "We will fight to throw out corrupt and the incompetent AAP, save the city from devastation, and put the Capital back on the path of develop-



Congress has been attacking AAP over 'lack of development' in the city. FILE PHOTO

ment." Mr. Gandhi was touted to participate in 'Delhi Nyay Yatra', the party's month-long foot march held last year across the 70 Assembly seats of the city, but did not attend it.

Sheila Dikshit's tenure

The party's State unit has

led a campaign by contrasting the ruling Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) "unfulfilled promises" and "lack" of development works in the Capital over the past decade with the "infrastructure boom" during Sheila Dikshit's 15-year tenure as the Chief Minister.

AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal has, in his speeches, attacked the grand old party saying it "has no role to play" in Delhi's political landscape and terming it an "alliance partner of the BJP".

The Congress and AAP are members of the Opposition INDIA bloc and contested last year's general election in the national capital together in a 4-3 seat-sharing arrangement against the BJP.

BJP attacks AAP on 'corruption' in poll song

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

North East Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari has written the song ANI

Delhi) has been written and composed by BJP Delhi MP Manoj Tiwari.

Reacting to the song, AAP said Delhi demands law and order. "As Union Home Minister, Amit Shah must answer how many police personnel have been recruited, how many PCR vans added," a party spokesperson said.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ENGINEER: PWD: BUILDING: ASSAM, CHANDMARI: GUWAHATI-3.
No. 525638/32

PRESS NOTICE (RE-TENDER 3)

The Chief Engineer, P.W.D. Building (Health & Education), Assam, Chandmari, Guwahati- 3 on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites bids in electronic tendering system (e-tenders) through Engineering, Procurement and Construction, (EPC-I) mode of contract (Single stage two-part bidding system) from eligible contractors registered with Assam Public Works Department (Building & NH) or Contractors registered with other State/ Central Government Departments, Institutions, Undertaking and Authorities having experience in similar nature of work, for the following works (**including Routine Maintenance for four years from the completion of defect liability period:**)

Sl. No	Group No.	Name of work	District	Estimated value		Completion Period (Months)	Bid Security	Cost of Bid (In Rs.)	
				Construction (Rs. in Lakhs)	Maintenance (Rs. in Lakhs)				Total Bid Value (including GST@18%) (Rs.in Lakhs)
I	Gr-22	Infrastructure Development of 65 Secondary Schools for construction of new school Buildings under NESID-OTRI Scheme in Kamrup District i) Nagarbera H.S. School ii) Majortop H.S. School iii) Palashbari Boys High School.	Kamrup	1973.85202	39.38404	2013.23606	15	2% of Bid value for General category and 1 % of Bid Value for reserved Category	20,000

The Bid price may vary at the time of detail tendering for which no claim will be admissible.

All terms and conditions will be as per the Bidding Documents. The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Documents.

The Work will be allotted only after receiving Government approval.

Details of the bid may be seen at website i.e. <https://www.assamtenders.gov.in> from 13-01-2025, 10:00 am onwards.

Chief Engineer, P.W.D. (Building), Assam, Health & Education Chandmari, Guwahati-3

WESTERN RAILWAY
MATERIAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT
CORRIDGUM TO E-AUCTION SALE PROGRAMME
RESCHEDULE AND ADDITIONAL SALE PROGRAM DURING JAN 2025 FOR P.WAY AND OTHER VARIOUS SCRAP

E-Auction Sale Notification No. S III / Auction Programme-1 / JAN-2025 Dated-09/12/2024
The following Reschedule of auction date and additional E-auction program for disposal of P. Way Scrap Material to be held in JAN 2025 for following depots is as given below:

Depot	Reschedule		Additional E-Auction Program Of Jan 2025	Divisional Officer in charge	Contact No.
	From	To			
MAHALAXMI	27.01.2025	31.01.2025	20.01.2025	Deputy Chief Materials Manager-Mahalaxmi	022- 24929571 09004495750
PARDI	27.01.2025	31.01.2025	20.01.2025		

All other terms and conditions will remain unchanged. Please visit Western Railway Website of material Management Department i.e. www.wr.indianrailways.gov.in as well as on www.ireps.gov.in e-auction portal for further information.

(No. S III/Auction Programme-2/JAN 2025 /Dt. 09.01.2025)
Like us on: facebook.com/WesternRly | Follow us on: X.com/WesternRly 0960

BANARAS LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, VARANASI-221004
Bid No.: E/1179/W-1173R1 Date: 11.01.2025
E-TENDER NOTICE

Dy. Chief Electrical Engineer/Maintenance, BLW, Varanasi acting or and on behalf of President of India invites open E-Tenders for the following work. **Tender No.:** EL/1179/W-1173R1, **Name of work:** "Replacement of Centralized Air Conditioning Plant, AHU & Cooling Tower of Computer Building & D&D building", **Approximate cost Rs.:** ₹ 66,66,914.46, **Completion period:** 06 Months, **Earnest money:** ₹ 1,33,300/-, **Tender opening date and time:** 31.01.2025 at 15.00 hrs. For details and to participate e-tender please visit Indian railways website www.ireps.gov.in.

P.R./BLWE-14 Assistant Electrical Engineer
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WEST CENTRAL RAILWAY
TENDER NOTICE
Sr. Divisional Electric Engineer/ TRS/ Electric Loco Shed, Tughlakabad, New Delhi-44, acting for and on behalf of the President of India, invites E-Tenders against the following Tenders, with the closing date 03.02.2025. Bidders will be able to submit their original/revised bids up to closing date and time only. (1) Tender/Bid No.: TKD-24-2024, Date: 09.01.2025
Name of Work and Station: Maintenance of Three Phase Locomotives batteries Major and Minor Schedule at ELS/TKD for a period of 02 Years. **QTY:** Minor inspection=300 Loco, Major inspection=300 Loco Estimated Cost: ₹ 12,90,060/- Cost of Tender Form: Nil Earnest Money: ₹ 25,800/- Completion Period: 24 Months Last Date & Time of Submission of Tender: 03.02.2025 at 15.30 Hrs. Note: (1) E-Tender document and details of E-tender will be available on www.ireps.gov.in Portal. (2) Manual offer will not be acceptable for this E-Tender; in case manual offer received then offer will not be considered. (3) For any correction in this tender, corrigendum will be uploaded on website, which may be seen upto the date of tender opening. (4) Tenderer must have class-III, digital signature certificate and will have to register on IREPS Portal.

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Uttarakhand
BJP expels six
rebel leaders

Press Trust of India
DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand BJP on Saturday said it has expelled six rebel leaders who entered the fray for the upcoming urban local body (ULB) polls in the State as Independents against the party's official nominees.

The six rebel leaders, four in Uttarkashi and two in Rudraprayag, have been expelled for six years for anti-party activities on the recommendation of the State party president Mahendra Bhatt, said State party media in-charge Manveer Chauhan.

The orders, issued by party presidents of the two districts, were issued on Friday.

Those expelled are former municipal chairman Bhupendra Singh Chauhan in Barahat, former district president Ummeedchand Shah in Purola, former block president Yashwant Kumar in Naugaon and Shakti Kendra convener Ajay Singh Rawat in Barkot. All had filed their nominations as Independents against the BJP's official nominees in these places in Uttarkashi district, Mr. Chauhan said.

In Rudraprayag, outgoing Ukhimath Nagar Panchayat president Vijay Ranwa and former mandal mantri of Agastyamuni Sushil Goswami have also been expelled, he said.

ULB polls are scheduled to be held on January 23.

'Renaming Kolkata's Star Theatre is historic, yet futile'



A view of the Binodini Theatre, formerly called Star Theatre.
DEBASHIS BHADURI

Moyurie Som
KOLKATA

The iconic century-old Star Theatre, at the crossing of Aurobindo Sarani and Bidhan Sarani in North Kolkata, now carries a different name plaque – Binodini Theatre.

A few days after CM Mamata Banerjee's renaming announcement in December, all banners and plaques at the auditorium were promptly replaced.

While this change might seem innocuous to some, it is considered by many as historically significant – a long overdue reparation to the 19th century theatre performer Binodini Dasi.

According to author, theatre researcher and practitioner Sudhanshu Ghosh, the original Star Theatre, established in 1883 at 68, Beadon Street, and demolished and relocated by 1930, was supposed to be named after Binodini.

"Theatre veterans like Girish Ghosh, Amrital Basu, Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafa approached Binodini to court Punjabi businessman Gurmukh Rai and help fund a commercial theatre space," he said.

Supported by patrons
He added that female theatre practitioners at the time were primarily sex workers, and would be supported as thespians by their wealthy patrons. Between the 1870s and 1880s, Binodini became a celebrated and widely popular thespian. "Binodini had a paramour she wanted to

CM urges Naga leaders to play bigger role in resolving Manipur's ethnic conflict

A third party is required to resolve the current issues and for restoration of peace, says Biren Singh; clashes between Kuki and Meitei communities have left 250 people dead since May 2023

Press Trust of India

IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Saturday requested the church and other leaders of the Naga community to play a greater role in resolving the ongoing ethnic conflict in the State.

Clashes between Kuki and Meitei communities have left over 250 people dead and thousands homeless since May 2023.

The Nagas were not involved in this conflict.

Addressing a programme at Maram in Naga majority Senapati district, Mr. Singh said, "I want to appeal to the Naga communities that a third party is required to resolve the current issues and for restoration of peace. For this, church and community leaders need to take responsibilities and initiatives."

'Path of peace'

All grievances and problems can be resolved under the Constitution and the laws of the Manipur government, he said.

"Whatever happened has happened... it's time to



Refugees in own home: Tribal children playing at a relief camp in Kangpokpi, Manipur. FILE PHOTO

forget and forgive. We need to jointly walk on the path of peace and bring back the former Manipur. We need to jointly work together to resolve this crisis.

I seek the support of all those gathered today, including elected members, former elected members, and church leaders to overcome this crisis," Mr. Singh said.

The Chief Minister said he is available 24x7 and

will provide whatever help is needed from the government.

'Need help'

Mr. Singh said, "I need your help. Somebody has to come forward. During the Kuki and Naga clashes of the '90s, we tried hard to bring a solution. Similarly, I seek your support now. I have heard of such endeavours to bring peace being taken but I urge all of

you to take the initiative assertively."

The concern of the indigenous people should be addressed and all 34 recognised tribes of the State need to live together, he said.

He said his government has waged a war against drugs, and added that identifying illegal immigrants is required to protect the numerically less indigenous communities.

30 cyber 'fraudsters' held in Jaipur under 'Operation Cyber Shield'

The Hindu Bureau
JAIPUR

In a major action taken under the ongoing 'Operation Cyber Shield', the police here on Saturday arrested 30 alleged cyber fraudsters after conducting raids at 40 places falling in five police station areas of the capital city. The accused had conducted transactions worth ₹30 crore to defraud the unsuspecting people.

Besides indulging in the nefarious activities, the accused were allegedly 'training' a new batch of 'fraudsters'. Along with the accused operating through eight gangs, two minors have also been detained.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Jaipur West) Amit Kumar told *The Hindu* that three of the accused, disguised as monks and astrologers, had allegedly cheated some people and offered to conduct rituals for them.

"One of the accused, a 25-year-old resident of



Police officers seizing equipment used in cyber fraud from a building in Jaipur on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Tonk district's Kheda Kumbholav village, received training in 'cyber frauds' in Sri Lanka," he said.

Special drive

The Cyber Crime Branch of Rajasthan police launched the month-long 'operation' on January 2 as a special campaign aimed at tackling cybercrimes, apprehending offenders, and raising public awareness. The initiative seeks to dismantle the infrastructure supporting the organised economic

crimes in the State and address rising cyber threats.

Mr. Kumar said his 13-member team had unearthed evidence of frauds worth ₹30 crore and blocked 135 bank accounts, 64 unified payments interfaces and 20 automated teller machines with account transactions. The material seized from the accused included laptop computers, mobile phones, ATM cards, WiFi routers, CCTV cameras, HDMI cables, bank pass books, cheque books and passports.

Timings DELHI	
SUNDAY, JAN. 12	
● RISE 07:15	SET 17:44
RISE 16:01 SET 05:52	
MONDAY, JAN. 13	
● RISE 07:15	SET 17:45
● RISE 17:05	SET 06:50
TUESDAY, JAN. 14	
● RISE 07:15	SET 17:46
● RISE 18:10	SET 07:41

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 17 08
Safdarjung 17 08
Palam 16 08

Delhi Palam Today
16°C The weather will be mostly dry. Morning will be cold and foggy. Day will be cool with cold winds. Night will be cold and uneasy. The dry weather will prevail.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
17°C Morning will be cold and foggy. Day will be cool with cold winds. Night will be cold and uneasy. The dry weather to prevail.

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IN BRIEF



JMM president Shibu Soren turns 81, workers celebrate

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) president Shibu Soren turned 81 on Saturday, and his family members and party workers celebrated his birthday in Ranchi. A cake-cutting ceremony was organised on the occasion at his residence in the presence of his son and Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren. Mr. Hemant Soren's legislator wife Kalpana Soren, Health Minister Irfan Ansari and several other leaders were present at the programme. One of the leaders who fought for the Statehood of Jharkhand, Mr. Shibu Soren became its Chief Minister thrice but was never able to complete each five-year term. PTI

Four HMPV cases in Gujarat as 9-month-old tests positive

Gujarat has reported its fourth human metapneumovirus (HMPV) case, with a nine-month-old child contracting the infection in Ahmedabad, officials said on Saturday. All the cases have been reported in less than a week. The infant was admitted to a private hospital in the city on January 6 with cold, cough and difficulty in breathing. He has no history of foreign or other travel, the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation said. On Friday, an eight-year-old boy from Sabarkantha district was confirmed to be infected with HMPV, making him the third case in the State. PTI

Ram Temple gives hope to 'suppressed' civilisations: U.P. CM

Press Trust of India

AYODHYA

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday said the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a reminder to the "suppressed" civilisations and cultures of the world that they can assert their rights democratically and constitutionally.

Addressing a programme held on the first anniversary of the consecration ceremony of Ram Lalla's idol at the temple, Mr. Adityanath said not losing patience even after countless sacrifices and going through an *agnipari-ksha* (trial by fire) was in-

tegral to the Ram Mandir campaign.

The Chief Minister bowed in front of Ram Lalla's idol, lit a lamp, offered flowers and performed an *aarti*. He also paid tributes to the late Ashok Singhal, former working president of the Vishva Hindu Parishad and one of the key architects of the Ram Temple movement.

Three-day event

Mr. Adityanath said to mark the completion of one year of the consecration of the idol of Ram Lalla, a three-day event has been organised by Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Plea in SC seeks recall of T.N. Governor over walkout from Assembly

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

A writ petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking the recall of Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi, following his walkout on January 6 this year, over singing *Tamil Thai Vazhthu* instead of the national anthem ahead of his customary address to the Assembly.

The petition, filed by Supreme Court advocate and petitioner-in-person C.R. Jaya Sukin, called the Governor's conduct "shameful" as *Tamil Thai Vazhthu* [invocation to Mother Tamil] was being sung at the beginning of functions since 1967.

"In 1991, the State government introduced a rule that *Tamil Thai Vazhthu* would be sung at the beginning of functions and the national anthem at the end. This has not been a point of confrontation for 10 Governors since 1991," the petition said. It pointed out that *Tamil Thai Vazhthu* was the State's anthem. "State anthems are sung as per tradition in States, including Maharashtra and Odisha," Mr. Sukin said.

A statement issued by the Governor's office had said that Speaker and the Chief Minister had refused to listen to a request by the Governor to play the national anthem.

Reasons behind T.N. Governor's refusal to read customary address absurd: CM Stalin

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday said Governor R.N. Ravi's refusal to read his customary address in the Assembly on Monday was because he was "not able to stomach the progress made by the State."

In his reply to the Governor's address, Mr. Stalin said everyone knew about the "absurd reasons" behind the Governor's decision to avoid reading his address. "That is why I said his act was childish," he added.

The Chief Minister said as per established convention, the *Tamil Thai Vazhthu* [invocation to Moth-



Chief Minister M.K. Stalin in the T.N. Assembly. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

er Tamil] was played at the beginning and the national anthem at the end of the address. But the Governor refused to accept this clarification, he added.

Recalling the late DMK leader M. Karunanidhi's dialogue in the film *Paramakathi*, that "the court had

government. But he deliberately violated the rule," Mr. Stalin said.

Disrespected the House'

"The Assembly has already celebrated its centenary and is made up of the feelings of crores of people. By daring not to respect the dignity of the House and the feelings of the people and insulting the *Tamil Thai Vazhthu*, he (the Governor) has sought to denigrate the post he is holding with political motives," he said.

However, the Chief Minister said the DMK would not mind the Governor's act because the party had emerged "despite neglects, humiliations, and oppressions."

A murder on a Punjab highway has exposed the struggles of transgender sex workers

SPOTLIGHT

Alisha Dutta

Trigger warning: The following article has references to rape and murder. Please avoid reading if you feel triggered.

On a foggy November evening, Preet, 37, was flirtatiously speaking to a potential client when she was intercepted by police officer. Near a tea stall along the Ludhiana-Rupnagar route on National Highway 344A, the policeman produced a sketch and asked her a barrage of questions. "Have you seen an effeminate man (*ladkiyon wali chaal chalan*), one with a saffron dupatta covering his face? Is he one of you? Do you know him or where he is?"

Weeks later, she saw the face of the same man flash on televisions in every *dhaba* (roadside eatery) and *theka* (alcohol shop), and in every local newspaper. Some Hindi newspapers called him the "gay killer"; others went on to explain how a "gay man" had tar-

geted 11 men, looted and killed them, she recalls.

On December 23, the Punjab police arrested Ram Saroop, 47, also known as Sodhi, for allegedly killing Maninder in Kirtarpur Sahib area, Rupnagar. Later, the police learnt during interrogation that the case for which he was arrested was his 10th murder. Sodhi allegedly confessed that he had killed 11 men in Punjab's Fatehgarh, Hoshiarpur, and Rupnagar districts. All had refused to pay him for sex work. Among those killed are an ex-Army man, a mechanic, and a tea seller.

"One body was recovered with the word *dhonebaaz* (deceiver) written on his back with a pen. Most of the victims were found in a naked or semi-naked condition, with their pants below their waist," says Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Rupnagar, Gulneet Khurana. He adds that there was also a queerophobic slur scrawled on the man's back. All the victims had allegedly been strangled to death using



Motive for murder: Police personnel inspecting a spot in Bharatgarh, Rupnagar district, in Punjab, where Ram Saroop alias Sodhi allegedly killed a man. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

dupattas, scarves, and shawls.

Character sketch

On a rainy August day, Maninder, allegedly the tenth man killed, who worked in the maintenance department in Moura toll plaza along the Chandigarh-Mahindra highway, asked his colleague to get two bundles of *arabi ke patte* (cocolasia greens) for him. He was to cook the delicacy for his older brother and two sisters.

"Maninder usually returned home by 7.30 in the evening, but on August 18 (2024), when he did not come by 8.30, we started worrying," says a sobbing Manjeet, his elder brother.

Around 9 p.m. Manjeet recalls starting his bike with shaky hands, minutes after he learnt from the toll plaza that Maninder had finished his shift and left just after 7.30 p.m. "I drove straight to the *theka* nearest to his workplace, along the same highway. I was worried that he was drinking," he adds. There, he got to know that Maninder had bought a bottle of country liquor and left the *theka* with another man on pillion.

Manjeet jumped back on his bike and drove in the direction the *theka* owner had pointed him in. A few kilometres ahead, he saw his brother's bike parked next to a boulder. In the headlight, he saw a man trying to drag a body.

"I quickly tried to get off

my bike, but by then he dropped the body and fled on my brother's bike," he recounts. "I had to go back and see whose body that was," Manjeet says. On reaching the spot, he was horrified to find his brother's body in a clearing surrounded by shrubs.

The police's sketch was a result of the description Manjeet gave. The police also recovered a pair of size 11 slippers, a yellow dupatta, an alcohol bottle, and fingerprints from the bike, says a senior officer from Kiratpur Sahib police station, Rupnagar.

He further adds that Maninder's medical reports had revealed that he had sexually engaged with some one before his death.

The police activated their sources and learnt that a man frequented truck stands and often covered his head with a dupatta. "We worked out that the man could be a sex worker, maybe from the transgender community," says the officer.

Up until his arrest, the police were unaware that Sodhi had committed 10

other murders. After his arrest, the police asked routine questions around motive. Sodhi told them that Maninder, who had earlier agreed to pay him ₹300 for sexual services, refused to pay him, minutes after the act. "He told us this angered him a lot," an officer says. Maninder also used queerophobic slurs, which further angered him.

"During the interrogation, he took the notebook where we were writing down the details, and wrote about all those he had killed, and where, and started explaining why he had done so," the officer says.

The first incident was on January 24, 2024, when he was picked up in a car by a retired Army man, Harpreet Singh, 55, from Rupnagar, who had promised to pay ₹300 for his sexual services. Sodhi told the police that once the services were rendered, the man refused to pay and began abusing him. Then he allegedly stopped the car, picked up a stick and started beating Sodhi, who in turn grabbed the stick and

beat him to death.

The making of a killer

The Punjab police's investigation has revealed that Sodhi never carried a weapon and would take money from his victims' wallets, sometimes only as much as they had agreed upon. "He would also take their phones and sell them to truck drivers or alcohol shop owners in exchange for some money to sustain himself," the officer says.

A trans woman who practises sex work on Punjab's highways says that incidents of abuse are common. After a long sigh, she says that not receiving payment after sexual services is a problem that every sex worker faces. "But sometimes, they don't pay and also beat us up. But sometimes they pay and then bring their friends back, to loot and rape us," she says, adding that the list of abuse faced by sex workers, especially those from the trans community, is unending.

LINK TO FULL STORY
» <https://bit.ly/3DNh49d>

Shiv Sena (UBT) to go solo in upcoming civic polls, says Sanjay Raut

Reacting to RS MP's announcement about contesting Mumbai and Nagpur elections, Maharashtra Cong. leaders say they will discuss the matter with Uddhav Thackeray and respect his decision

Snehal Mutha

MUMBAI

Amid the brewing tensions in the Indian National Democratic, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), the opposition Mahatma Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in Maharashtra faces another setback with Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Saturday announcing that the party intends to go solo in the upcoming municipal corporation elections in Mumbai and Nagpur. Reacting to it, State Congress leaders said they would discuss the matter with Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray and respect his decision.

"On Uddhav Thackeray's instructions, we have decided to fight solo in the upcoming municipal elections. Whatever happens, will happen. It is also good for party workers as they were not getting an opportunity to contest elections due to the [MVA] alliance," he said, adding that he has also discussed the matter



Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge with NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar. FILE PHOTO

with Pramod Manmode, the Nagpur unit chief of Shiv Sena (UBT).

MVA blame game

Mr. Raut's statement on Saturday came after a blame game among the MVA constituents - Sena (UBT), Congress and Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) - in the aftermath of the alliance's crushing defeat in the recent Assembly election.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) ended up winning 20 constituencies, Congress 16 and NCP (SP) 10 as the ruling Mahayuti alliance

tions. She agreed with Mr. Raut on party workers needing the opportunity to fight elections.

"Every party wants to grow, and nothing is wrong with that. Fewer seats were allotted to the party [Congress] in Mumbai in previous elections than expected. I will convey the feelings of the workers to the senior leadership," Ms. Gaikwad said.

She added that the matter will be discussed with Mr. Thackeray and his decision will be respected.

Mr. Raut also slammed Congress leader Vijay Wadettiwar's comment on Friday blaming him for the delay in seat sharing ahead of the Assembly election.

"In an alliance, the partners have to make adjustments. Those who are not able to do it have no right to be in the alliance," he said. Mr. Wadettiwar on Saturday said, "If they want to go solo then Congress and NCP (SP) will take this alliance ahead and fight the elections," he said.

Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya

Representatives of seven workers' unions on Saturday held protests outside the office of West Bengal Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) demanding the resumption of 100 days work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNREGS), which has been suspended for over three years.

The workers met BJP spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Samik Bhattacharya.

A few days ago, Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity (PBKMS), a union of agricultural workers had blamed the politics of the West Bengal BJP behind the suspension of the MGNREGS funds for the past three years.

The delegation of union representatives that met the BJP leader comprised Anuradha Talwar, Subha Protim Roy Chowdhury and Uttam Gayen, among others.

A press statement by the seven workers' unions stated that Mr. Bhattacharya assured them that being a Rajya Sabha MP, he shall raise the issue in the upcoming Budget session and

Workers' unions ask Bengal BJP to help resume MGNREGS

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

undertake necessary communications with the relevant Ministry.

The unions also submitted a memorandum to State BJP president Suktanta Majumdar stating that Section 27 of the MGNREGS empowers the Central government to stop funds only for a 'reasonable period'.

"The Central government bears the bounden duty to take immediate steps to address the worsening crisis faced by rural workers in West Bengal, but still out of some petty political vendetta against the State government led by the Trinamool Congress, the Central government, led by the BJP, has thwarted funds under MGNREGS, thereby depriving the rural workers," a press statement by the unions said.

Funds under MGNREGS have been suspended since December 2021 on allegations of corruption in the implementation of the scheme.

Classifieds

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

Matrimonial

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

INDEX OF MATRIMONIAL

BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

BRIDES WANTED

BRIDES & GROOMS WANTED

Classification Common for Brides, Bridegrooms, Brides & Grooms

ASSAMESE

AWADHI

BENGALI

BHOJPURI

BIHARI

CHHATTISGARHI

ENGLISH

GUJARATI

HARYANI

HINDI

KANNADA

KASHMIRI

KONKANI

MALAYALAM

MANIPURI

MARATHI

MARWARI

NEPALI

ORIYA

PARI

PUNJABI

SAURASHTRA

SINDHI

TAMIL

TELUGU

TULU

URDU

ADVOCATE

BUSINESS

DEFENCE

DOCTOR

ENGINEER

FINANCE/ BANKING

GOVERNMENT/ QUASI-GOVERNMENT

IAS / ALLIED SERVICES

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

MBA/ CA/ ICWA

NRI

COSMOPOLITAN

DIVORCEE

PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED

MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

BRIDE/ GROOMS WANTED

COSMOPOLITAN

ATTRACTIVE, CARING, 28, 168cm, active professional (US/ MS). Seeking driven, kind, compatible partner. Community no bar. Call/ WA 9345634365.

HINDU ISSUELESS Divorcee 48 MBA, ACS seeks Bride Groom CNB. Contact: 9445366062

DOCTOR

HINDU TAMIL BC Doctor 27/ 175 cm Fair, Clear Horoscope Seeks Tall Handsome PG Doctors / PG Engineers / Well settled with Good Habits from Simple family. Contact with Full view photograph, horoscope and biodata. Ph. 7200365364

PG DOCTOR/ GROOM WANTED

Good looking Doctor girl MBBS, MD OG (pg ongoing) 24 yrs / 167 cm Star - Avittam Rasi - Makaram. Doctor Parents Nattar / Kamma Naiu Own Hospital seeking clinical PG Doctor from Affluent / well educated family. Contact : 6380069015 9790288125 WHATSAPP msg: 9976532632

HINDU, ADI DRAVIDA, 25yrs/156cms, Fair, M.B.B.S settled in Chennai seeks Doctor Groom. Whatapp: 94442 18149

ENGLISH

Vadakalai, Kousigam, Pooram (4), May 1994 B.Com, A.C.A.C.S., Girl seeks Qualified Grooms only Iyer and Iyer Contact : 9940396204

KANNADA

MUSLIM VERY fair / Beautiful girl 2003 born / High Class Family of Bangalore / is looking for a suitable Match 9743700029

KANNADA DEVANGA, 26 yrs, MBA, works at Hyderabad, not particular about Horoscope. Looking for a like minded match from the same community. Contact Number: 7259528771

MALAYALAM

VISWAKARMA GIRL from elite family, 27/158 cm, Pooyam, MBA, Operations Analyst in MNC - 9447000579, 9074673232.

DELHI BAIRAVI Nair Girl 29 / 145cm, Pooram 1.5 dosham pursuing PhD in Edinburgh UK. Seek alliance from same community pref Palakkad / Trichur and nearby districts. Contact: 9818364188.

Ezhuthachan Girl 24 years Engg. Graduate 172 cms Thriketta. Pursues seek Alliance from Employed Boys/Parents. Contact 944485994

MALAYALAM VISWAKARMA Bride, 27/150, B.E, Civil, settled in Madurai, Upper Middle Class, Good proposals from Kollam or Thiruvananthapuram based family who settled in Madurai or Nearby District. Not Bureau. Ct: 7667765588

NRI Hindu Telugu. Never married 44/168 MS USA working seeking 45-47 Never married working in USA CNB 9866274192

TAMIL Tamil Muslim, 30/159, AVP in MNC at Hyderabad, well settled, 24L PA seeks suitable Groom in Hyderabad/ Bengaluru. Ct: 93080501299

NATHAMAR UDAYAR, Catholic 31 yrs, HR Professional- MNC, with null and void order looking for catholic boy below 35 yrs, premier Institute or IT professional with null and void or unmarried with clean habits. WhatsApp 9443124068

CHRISTIAN, RC, 31 Yrs, MBBS, Doctor at Kanyakumari, Income 10 Lakhs. Ct: 8138901281.

RC CHRISTIAN Vellalar, 31/176 CM, B.Tech M.A. PWC Bangalore 35PLA. Seeks God fearing, well Educated working Professional. Contact: 8870520107 / 9952719542

CHRISTIAN, CASTE no bar, 34 Yrs, MCA, Engineer, Income 50 Lakhs. Ct: 8138901097

CATHOLIC VELLALAR Girl 32 / 171 MBBS MPH student visa Texas, USA seeks professional from USA Ct: 9150153743

BORN AGAIN Christian, 44yrs/152, MBBS, MD doctor, Chennai, seeks Christian groom, CT-9500188067

GROOM REQD Christian 27yrs, MBA (UK), Well Educated Family CNB, Need Abroad Profiles 9710093399/ 9710091999

RC NADAR Tamil, 31/153, Chithirai, M.E., Spiritual, Vegetarian, wants to be a home maker sees Govt. Employed Groom. Ct: 9442247012

GOD FEARING Christian CSI Nadar rich family invites Proposal for their daughter fair, beautiful, well educated employed in foreign Company in Chennai, drawing good Salary and also having good monthly rental Income from the share of her Commercial Building in Chennai. Groom should well educated from rich family, age 32 to 36. Parents Contact: 9840129090.

CHRISTIAN, NADAR, 34 Yrs, Remarriage, MS, Doctor, Rich and affluent family. Ct: 8138900537

CHRISTIAN, RC, 30 Yrs, B.E, Manager at London, Income 1 Crore. Ct: 8138900530

Hindu SC/Fair 29 Yrs/ 152 M Law well settled/ seeks Groom/ CNB/ Chennai Contact: 6379521614.

HINDU NADAR, 28yrs, MBBS, MD, Elite business family, Seeks Suitable Groom Contact: 9380791999/ 9841329471

GROOM WANTED Mudaliar 25yrs B.Tech Own Schools & Colleges Elite family in Chennai

DOCTOR MD 37/ 165cm fair athletic divorcee seeks well settled groom from Chennai. Call: 9445180199

HINDU, VEERA saivam, 34 Yrs, B.E, Engineer at Coimbatore, Income 1 Crore. Ct: 8138900553

MUDALIAR, 24/5.3" M.Sc Neuro Lecturer Chennai seeks suitable Bride Groom Ct: 98400 37406 / 99404 20003

SC/ST MD 37/ 165cm fair athletic divorcee seeks well settled groom from Chennai. Call: 9445180199

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HINDU, VEERA saivam, 34 Yrs, B.E, Engineer at Coimbatore, Income 1 Crore. Ct: 8138900553

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Police and villagers organising an awareness rally against rooster fights and other banned games in Eluru. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

A.P. police destroy rooster fight arenas

Rajulapudi Srinivas
ELURU

With Sankranti festivities nearing, the police cracked the whip on rooster fight organisers at various places in Andhra Pradesh. They damaged the arenas with earthmoving machines and tractors and deployed additional forces in the villages.

The police erected banners and urged villagers through the public ad-

dressing system not to conduct rooster fights and other banned games.

"We will take severe action if anybody indulges in banned games," the police said.

The police served notices on the owners who leased their lands to rooster fight organisers and punters.

They warned of stern action, if anyone violates the High Court order on rooster fights.

Kerala police arrest 14 for sexually abusing minor girl

The Hindu Bureau

PATHANAMTHITTA

The Pathanamthitta district police have launched a probe into a series of incidents in which over 60 persons abused a Dalit minor girl over a period of five years.

Nine persons were arrested on Saturday in connection with the case while the police arrested five persons on Friday.

The police have so far registered five FIRs across two police stations. These cases are based on state-

ments from the survivor, aged 18 now, who was allegedly subjected to abuse multiple times since the age of 13.

It is understood that the police are now gathering evidence on all individuals involved in the abuse. Details of the new FIRs and arrests are being handed over to the Child Welfare Committee. All those arrested so far are aged between 19 and 30.

Investigations have revealed that the girl was abused by 62 individuals, starting with her neigh-

Over 60 persons have abused the Dalit girl over a period of five years

bours. The accused also include friends of her father, the coaches who had trained the survivor, a sportsperson, and her fellow athletes.

According to the girl's statement, she used her father's mobile phone to communicate with the perpetrators.

The Pathanamthitta Child Welfare Committee (CWC) has referred the vic-

duals by verifying phone records and from the information in a note in her possession. Her parents were completely unaware of the abuse.

Since the incidents occurred when she was a minor, sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCO-SO) and the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act will be invoked against the accused.

The Pathanamthitta Child Welfare Committee (CWC) has referred the vic-

tim to a psychologist for more in-depth counselling.

The issue came to light during a counselling conducted by the CWC after the girl's teachers noticed significant changes in her behaviour and informed the panel. The committee then notified the police, who initiated an investigation. The girl is currently housed in a shelter home.

Given the number of perpetrators involved, this may be the largest case of sexual abuse against a minor in the State's history, officials said.

Case against P.C. George for hate speech

The Hindu Bureau

KOTTAYAM

The Kerala Police have registered a case against BJP leader P.C. George for an alleged hate speech.

The action follows a complaint filed by the Erattupetta municipal committee of the Muslim Youth League, accusing Mr. George of making communal charged remarks about Muslims during a discussion on a news channel.

I work as per party's wishes and I do not want anybody's support, says D.K. Shivakumar

The Hindu Bureau

SHIVAMOGGA

Karnataka's Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar has said he will not expect any MLA to raise his or her voice in his support and that he will work as per the Congress party's instructions.

Speaking to presspersons at Sringeri in Chikmagalur district on Saturday, he said, "I don't want anybody's support. I work as per the party's wishes." Reciting a sloka from the Bhagavad Gita, he said he would just work and not worry about the reward.

Next CM
Asked about the demand of some party workers that

Girls asked to remove shirts as punishment in Jharkhand school

Amit Bhelari

PATNA

In a shocking incident, the principal of a private school in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district was accused of ordering more than 100 girls in the tenth grade to remove their shirts after their friends wrote messages on them.

The parents of the students have demanded strict action against the principal.

The incident occurred on Thursday, which was the students' last day of school before board exams. The tenth grade students wrote good wishes on each other's shirts.

However, the act did not go down well with the school principal, who instructed them to remove their shirts and go home in their blazers.

As per the sources, the students requested the school administration to not take such a step but it was to no avail.

Dhanbad's Deputy Commissioner has formed a committee to investigate the incident

the school had any objection to doing so, then the parents should have been informed first. However, they were sent home after removing their shirts. Do our girls have no respect? We know how shameful it was for the girls to go home like that. What if the girls had taken some wrong step?" a parent said, and added, "They have their board exams now and are already under mental pressure. This has increased their tension."

Resignation demanded
The parents have demanded for the resignation and arrest of the principal.

Baratiya Janata Party MLA Ragini Singh had also joined the parents in the DC's office in protest against the incident.

While speaking to *The Hindu*, the DC said: "The parents had come to meet me in the Collectorate today regarding this matter and we have set up a committee comprising a District Education Officer, a Social Welfare Officer, Sub-Divisional Magistrate and officers from the local police station. Today, they have scrutinised the CCTV footage but we are still awaiting the report from the committee. We will take action according to the findings of the report."

Actor Allu Arjun gets relief in bail conditions

The Hindu Bureau

HYDERABAD

Actor Allu Arjun, who is on conditional bail in the Sandhya theatre stampede case, has been permitted by the Nampally court to travel abroad and the court also exempted him from appearing at the Chikkadapally Police Station every Sunday between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m.

He was required to appear before the police, a condition set by the IX Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Court at Nampally while granting bail to him in the December 4 incident at Sandhya theatre where a 35-year old woman, Revathi, was killed in the stampede and her son grievously injured.

Extensions given to those in govt. service a setback for those next in line: Dhankhar

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU



Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar inaugurating the 25th National Conference of Chairpersons of All-State PSCs in Bengaluru. ANI

tion. People devote decades to be in a particular groove. Extension indicates that an individual is indispensable. Indispensability is a myth. Talent abounds in this country. No one is indispensable."

The Rajya Sabha Chairman said appointments could not be driven by patronage or favouritism.

"There are trends that are visible... We cannot have a PSC chairman or a member wedded to a particular ideology or an individual. That will be undoing the essence and spirit of the framework of the Constitution."

He expressed concern over question paper leaks and said: "This is a me-

nace. Your fairness of selection will have no meaning if paper leakages are there, and it has become an industry, a commerce."

Patent contribution

Talking at the Bharat Electronics Ltd. R&D award ceremony, Mr. Dhankhar said: "In the global perspective, our patent contribution leaves much to be desired... Research has to be cutting-edge. Research has to be practical... There is no use having research which goes a little beyond surface sketching."

He said, "The exemplification has to be, if it is recognised at global level, a research paper that has momentary importance of being presented and then goes in the shelf and gathers dust is something we must keep away from."

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Next CM
Asked about the demand of some party workers that



D.K. Shivakumar

he should become the next Chief Minister, he said, "I do not want anyone putting pressure on my behalf. I do not want anyone's support. I don't want any MLA to shout out his support for me. It is between the Congress party and me. I will do whatever the party wants me to do. I am just

doing my duty."

He said, "The people have blessed me and given me an opportunity. We will govern the State for five years. The Chief Minister and I will work as per the party's instructions. What others say does not matter."

Further, on his recent temple visits, Mr. Shivakumar said he is a believer and would pray to God every day.

"I pray for the welfare of the State, my well-wishers, and myself," he said, dismissing those who were ridiculing his "temple run".

Mr. Shivakumar was in Sringeri to participate in the Suvarna Bharati programme.

Kadamattom church gets a makeover



K.A. Martin

KOCHI

The mural of St. George and the dragon at the Kadamattom St. George Orthodox Church.

The murals at St. George Church provide a peek into the rich heritage of Christianity in Kerala

work. The original murals have been refurbished using natural colours. These organic colour combinations provide a view of the world when artists patiently experimented to get the right shades that went into the making of the murals. Father Varghese said the most prominent of the murals was that of St. George. He said that the church was originally believed to have been erected in the 9th century by Mar Abo, a Persian bishop.

"There is also a Persian

cross in the church, which is in prime condition even now," he said.

The most important mural is that of St. George and the dragon. There are also scenes from the Christian lures. The original Church at Kadamattom was set up in the 9th century. The church authorities said they have no record of the renovations later except in the year 1945.

Many believe that the tomb found near the church is that of Father Kadamattom. However, the popular belief has not been accepted by historians and church authorities. The restoration work started over three years ago, and the church will be rededicated on February 6 and 7.

Sabarimala gearing up for Makaravilakku

The Hindu Bureau

PATHANAMTHITTA



Taking stock: State police chief Sheikh Darvesh Sahib reviews the arrangements at Sabarimala on Saturday. LEJU KAMAL

yamala viewpoint has been prohibited. Each location will have medical support teams on standby, complemented by adequate parking facilities. As the festival concludes, 300 buses of the State transport utility will ferry devotees from Pampa to Nilakkal. To manage the anticipated influx, the area has been divided into 13 zones.

The Pathanamthitta District Medical Office has established a control room operating from Monday for

the next 72 hours. Devotees can reach the control room at 0468-2222642 and 0468-2228220. An additional fleet of 12 ambulances has been arranged, supplementing the existing 25. Seventeen emergency medical centres have been set up between Pampa and the Sanmudhanam.

To bolster security, the Travancore Devaswom Board Vigilance has installed 245 advanced surveillance cameras from Marakkootam to the Sanmudhanam.

State Police Chief Sheikh Darvesh Sahib, who visited Sabarimala on Saturday, said 5,000 police personnel would ensure safety and order during the Makaravilakku festival on Tuesday.

From Page One

3 more bodies retrieved from Assam mine



The search operation at the coal mine disaster site in Kalamati village in Dima Hasao district of Assam has been on for several days. RITU RAJ KONWAR

A few days ago, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the mine *prima facie* appeared illegal. Later, he said the mine had been abandoned 12 years ago, after being run by the State's Mines and Minerals Department.

A case connected with illegal mining was registered at the Umrao police station on Tuesday. The leaseholder of the mine, identified as Punish Nunisa, was subsequently arrested.

The second arrest was made on Friday after the police caught Hannan Laskar, a financier of the operations, from the 3 Kilo area, the nearest major habitation from the mine.

Opposition parties said the wife of Debola Gorlosa, Chief Executive Member of the autonomous tribal council that rules Dima Hasao, is a major stakeholder in the mining operations. A reaction from the couple is awaited.

SIT probe sought

Assam Congress MP and Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi on Friday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seeking a probe by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) into the Dima Hasao incident and rampant illegal rat-hole coal mining despite the National Green Tribunal's blanket ban in April 2014.

'BJP attempting to enrol fake voters in New Delhi'

"All these addresses are not in some distant part of the country but under the very nose of the EC office," Mr. Singh said.

He urged the media to check how many voters from these addresses exercised their franchise in the Lok Sabha election held recently and how many fresh applications were submitted in the past 15 days.

"I am making these claims based on official EC documents. Each of these claims can be verified. Applications have been submitted, and it is the responsibility of the election officer to resolve these issues. The work that should be done by them, catching these irregularities, is unfortunately being carried out by us," Mr. Singh said.

Many trapped in Kannauj station collapse

Besides the seven people grievously injured, at least 16 suffered minor injuries. "Three injured in the railway station accident were discharged from the hospital, while the treatment of 13 workers is going on in the district hospital," an official said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directed officials to expedite relief efforts. Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav asked the government to provide adequate compensation to the injured and speed up the relief work. "The government should provide the best possible treatment to the injured and also give them adequate compensation," Mr. Yadav said in a post on X.

Health professionals urged to communicate proactively to allay concerns on HMPV

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI



The need for public health professionals to proactively reach out to people with the right information rather than waiting for them to become concerned about information circulating on social media was emphasised during a webinar that sought to put out facts about Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV).

The webinar, "HMPV: differentiating fact from fiction", was organised by *The Hindu* and Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, as part of their 'Healthy India, Happy India' initiative on Saturday. Soumya Swaminathan, chairperson, M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, and former chief scientist at World

Health Organization (WHO), emphasised the need to create more scientific literacy and scientific

Beed murder: eight accused face charges under MCOCA

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

While the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) has been invoked against the eight accused in the Beed Sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh murder case on Saturday, political leaders have raised concerns over Walmik Karad not being charged under the Act.

Mr. Karad, a close aid of Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) Minister Dhananjay Munde, has not been booked under the MCOCA as he was arrested in the extortion case, according to the police.

The MCOCA was invoked after the investigation revealed the involvement of organised crime syndicates in the murder.

The Special Investigation Team invoked the MCOCA at a time when all-party protests have been organised in various districts to demand justice for the family of Santosh Deshmukh.

On Saturday, a *Jan Akrosh Morcha* was organised in Dharashiv district of Maharashtra, where the Deshmukh family, political leader Suresh Das, and Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange Patil also joined the rally.

The protesters and political leaders demanded booking of Mr. Karad under the MCOCA and also the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita.

Himachal CM points out troubling trend of synthetic drugs

Sukhu addresses conference on drug trafficking by the NCB; Punjab CM seeks Centre's financial support to set up special court for drug menace

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu on Saturday underscored a troubling trend towards synthetic drugs, even as his Punjab counterpart, Bhagwant Mann, sought the Union government's intervention to provide financial assistance to Punjab for setting up special Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) courts to check the drug menace, pointing to the problem impacting the socio-economic balance in Punjab.

Both Chief Ministers were virtually addressing the regional conference on "Drug trafficking and national security", organised by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi. The conference focused on addressing the nexus between drug trafficking and national security, with particular attention to eight northern States and Union Territories.

Mr. Sukhu said the NDPS cases had risen by 34% over the past decade, escalating from approximately 500 cases in



Enduring fight: Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu during the virtual meeting on 'Drug trafficking and national security' on Saturday. ANI

2012 to 2,200 in 2023. Additionally, the percentage of cases involving heroin has doubled, rising from 29% in 2020 to 50% in 2024.

Pointing out a troubling trend towards synthetic drugs, which are not only more potent and addictive but also harder to control owing to their chemical composition, Mr. Sukhu emphasised the necessity of a comprehensive approach to tackle drug trafficking, particularly in inter-State border areas, which have become hotspots for illicit activities.

Mr. Mann urged the Union government to give a one-time financial assistance of ₹600 crore to the State to create special

NDPS courts and recruit public prosecutors and support staff.

He said 35,000 NDPS cases had been pending for sessions trial as on January 1, 2025, adding that at the present rate of disposal, on average a sessions court takes seven years to complete the trial of pending cases leaving aside all newly added cases.

Mr. Mann said that the drug problem in Punjab was impacting the socio-economic balance.

He added that the narco-terror drug trade business in Punjab had links with the international cartels that smuggle drugs from Pakistan, Afghanistan and other countries into the State.

Trade unions slam L&T CEO's remark on 90-hour work week

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The central trade unions on Saturday condemned a statement by the chairman and managing director of Larsen & Toubro, S.N. Subrahmanyam, favouring a 90-hour work week with employees working on Sundays too "rather than staring at" their spouses at home.

Though L&T later said that the statement reflected a larger ambition for making India a developed nation, it drew flak from various sections of society, including women's rights activists.

The Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said Mr. Subrahmanyam's statement was similar to the "satanic statement" earlier made by the Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, seeking an increase in working hours to 70 hours a week through statutory measures.

Rogue competition? "It seems that there is a rogue competition among the corporate messiahs to rinse the blood and sweat of Indian workers and they are in active connivance and collaboration with the 'satanic statement' earlier made by the Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy, seeking an increase in working hours to 70 hours a week through statutory measures."

Mr. Subrahmanyam's statement patriarchy, scandalous, and condemnable.

"Mr. Subrahmanyam dehumanises women by reducing them to mere spectacles. His statement disrespects women's autonomy and agency," the Forum's convenor Vahida Ni zam said.

Policy is against principles of human dignity'

NEW DELHI Dattopant Thengadi foundation (DTF), an affiliate for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which works in the field of social, economic, and labour policy in India, has condemned Larsen & Toubro (L&T) chairperson S.

Subrahmanyam's advocacy of a 90-hour work week. In a communiqué, the DTF says that such a policy contradicts the principles of quality of life and human dignity that are fundamental to a progressive society.

employees in the formal sector, were deployed for much longer hours of work compared with more productive countries, including China, Europe and even the U.S. "The stretching of working hours is very disastrously impacting upon the health and social life of Indian workers," Mr. Sen said.

The All India Working Women's Forum of the AI-TUC termed Mr. Subrahmanyam's statement patriarchal, scandalous, and condemnable.

"Mr. Subrahmanyam dehumanises women by reducing them to mere spectacles. His statement disrespects women's autonomy and agency," the Forum's convenor Vahida Ni zam said.

Delhi HC rejects bail to IS associate in terror case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has refused to grant bail to an alleged IS member in a terror case by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) over radicalisation of youth using cyberspace.

The court rejected the bail plea by Mohammad Heydaiullah, a qualified MBA graduate working at an IT company in Gurugram, who allegedly used Telegram groups to propagate the ideology of the terrorist group in India and recruit other persons.

The accused challenged a trial court order declining any relief on the ground that mere association or support to a terrorist organisation would not constitute an offence under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

The court rejected the contention saying Heydaiullah, a qualified MBA graduate working at an IT company in Gurugram, was not a "passive" supporter as material showed that he advocated "jihad in order to establish Khilafat" even through violent means.

"The Appellant admittedly in 2018 had taken an oath (Bayath) in the name of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is admittedly a well-known leader of ISIS and as per the chargesheet had declared formation of 'caliphate' in June 2014," said the court in its January 10 judgement.

"ISIS had been declared to be a terrorist organisation and judicial notice can be taken of the fact that the world at large knows about the activities of ISIS... Appellant was well aware of the nature of activities of ISIS," it added. Dismissing the plea, the court said the bar on grant of bail under the UAPA was clearly applicable in the case.

With retreat, Meghalaya Cabinet goes places

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI



Conrad K. Sangma, Ministers, and officials with Hally War who initiated the weaving of a living root bridge in Siej. @CMO_MEGHALAYA

bol of sustainable architecture and community-driven development — a template his National People's Party-led alliance government intends to follow in promoting tourism and other sectors.

"This root bridge shows the patience and dedication required to create something sustainable. It's a testament to the wisdom passed down through generations," he added.

During the visit, the Chief Minister announced new infrastructure projects to improve connectivity in the region, including the construction of new roads and the upgrading of school buildings.

"The government is committed to addressing the needs of rural communities," he said.

He also explained the idea behind the Cabinet retreat, touted by the government as a first of its kind.

Mr. Sangma said the root bridges remain a sym-

bol of sustainable architecture and community-driven development — a template his National People's Party-led alliance government intends to follow in promoting tourism and other sectors.

"The trek to Siej was to see the Umkar Living Root bridge and meet Hally War, the man who initiated the weaving of the living root bridge, an essential part of the local culture for more than 300 years," Mr. Sangma said.

Mr. War, the Siej village headman for the last 40 years, said he began weaving

the root bridge when he was 10 years old. "I saw people facing difficulties in crossing the river. I remembered my grandparents sharing stories about the strength of the living roots and decided to build a lasting and sustainable bridge," he said.

Mr. Sangma said the root bridges remain a symbol

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Mr

'West Bank a cauldron that can explode any moment'

The Israeli Indologist says a third Palestinian *intifada* is likely at any moment, adding that Israel has a dysfunctional political system; he emphasises the worsening settler violence in the West Bank and suggests a confederation as a potential path to peace between Israelis and Palestinians; the conversation also goes into the systemic changes in 16th century southern India in major arenas

INTERVIEW

David Shulman

Stanly Johny

David Shulman, Israeli Indologist, poet and peace activist, says the West Bank has witnessed enhanced settler violence ever since the latest war between Israel and Hamas broke out. Today's Israel looks like the South Africa at the height of Apartheid, "just a few years before the system collapsed", he says. Mr. Shulman speaks about his works on southern India, the crisis in West Asia and the prospects for peace. Edited excerpts:

You have written about 'systemic change' in 16th century South India. The 16th century was also a period where you saw, in Europe, the Reformation, the Thirty Years' War, and the rise of the Westphalian system. Do you see any parallels between the southern India of the 16th century and Europe?

I think in both cases, there was a systemic change, a civilisational change, you

could say. In Europe, that was the great watershed when the Catholic Church split into Protestants and Catholics and they went to war with one another, and that was also the time of the emerging imperial autocracies like the Habsburgs in Vienna and Spain, and also the French. That eventually produced the modern revolutions in France and in America, and later in Russia. It happened here, in India, in a very different way, in an indigenous way that had nothing to do with the influence of what was happening in Europe.

Systemic change means that in all of the major arenas, there are substantial structural changes – in the social realm, in the economic sphere, in the political domain, for example. We had a new kind of South Indian States, with a new mode of political thinking, and new kinds of political legitimisation. And in the expressive domains, that is, literature, music, graphic arts, sculpture, architecture, theatre, you can see that there is a whole new world.

A new conceptual world, a new understanding of how the mind works, a new understanding of what it means to be a human being. You begin to see these

new themes emerging and crystallising.

You have also written about 'newness'. Can you explain that?

Many people, for example Sheldon Pollock, actually have written about *navata* or newness. In early modern times, before the massive intrusion of the European powers, there was a palpable sense of novelty. Suddenly, people are talking about something being and feeling really new. This is also true of music, literature, and painting. There is an amazing sense of new discoveries. So, in music for example, in Carnatic music, which was formalised – you could say 'grammaticalised' – in 16th century Thanjavur, we begin to see an emerging corpus of Carnatic compositions, with strong introspective elements. In literature, we have what we call *prabandha* texts. This is something quite new. A *prabandha* text is a self-contained book, usually not too long, that can be recited over a period of maybe a week or two. It's meant to be read from the beginning via the middle to the end. That's a rather new thing in South India. The new *prabandha* forms demand sequential reading, that comes with



AKHILA EASWARI

an acquired newness of taste and themes.

How do you look at the developments in West Asia in light of Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack and Israel's subsequent war on Gaza?

Well, we are in a very deep crisis. And that includes the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. The Hamas atrocities of October 7 were unparalleled in Israel's history. Now the war has gone on for some 15 months and shows no sign of stopping.

On the West Bank, we have Israeli colonisation that has been going on for several decades. All of the Israeli settlements, without exception, sit upon stolen Palestinian land, and the

settler population has grown to several lakhs planted in the midst of a Palestinian population on the West Bank of some two-and-a-half million. The extremist settlers... are driving the Palestinians on the West Bank into a situation of horrible precariousness.

There is a system in place that supports this. That means the Army, the police, the military courts, the Israeli media, public and social media, and the government, which funds and supports the settlements.

The goal is to take as much Palestinian land as they possibly can with as few Palestinian people living on it as possible. That is been true for a long time. But since October 7, this sit-

uation has exacerbated enormously.

In addition to settler violence, there are military operations in Jenin and Nablus. The West Bank has become a cauldron that could explode at any moment. I think it is extremely likely that there will be a third *intifada* [uprising], worse than the first two. And it could happen at any time, because the Palestinian people are not going anywhere, and their life is no longer bearable.

States generally are violent. Still, you might see internal and external constraints on states. Do you think it doesn't work in the case of Israel?

I think it works to some extent. There are still some constraints, including on the Army operations in Gaza. But the figures of killed and wounded are shocking. In the northern part of Gaza, there are no buildings left standing, and the population has been displaced into tent cities farther south.

We have some two million people living in tents. There is not enough food, although there are attempts to bring in food. There is no clean water to drink. Obviously, no elec-

tricity. It's cold. And the shooting and the bombing continue. In the north, to make it even worse, now that they have cleared out most of the population, the Army is paving roads and putting up military camps.

It looks like the government wants to stay there permanently, to annex it, either by some act of the Knesset or just de facto.

What is the way out, for Israel and Palestine?

I can tell you the way-not-out – that is constant, eternal war. The only real way out is some kind of settlement with the Palestinians who are our neighbours. The only way to make life viable for everybody, Israelis as well as Palestinians, is to reach an agreement in which the Palestinians have some form of political framework addressing security, policies, social services and everyday needs. I'm not saying it would be easy to achieve it. But people said that about Ireland. South Africa is another example. It is not a happy place, but nonetheless, the Apartheid was overturned. I think sometimes that today, we in Israel may be experiencing something like South Africa at the height of the Apartheid system. Just a few years before the system collapsed.

perpetuates the logic where the extreme right has complete control over what is happening. It's an absurd situation. [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu has devoted his life to preventing the emergence of a Palestinian State. There are two things that he really cares about. That is one, and the second is the perpetuation of his own government. And they are linked.

I think what should emerge someday, somehow, is some system that could be like a confederation, in which the Palestinians would have control over their own lives and their own security. It would have to be a demilitarised state. Israelis would have control over their lives, and there would be some overarching framework addressing security, policies, social services and everyday needs. I'm not saying it would be easy to achieve it. But people said that about Ireland. South Africa is another example. It is not a happy place, but nonetheless, the Apartheid was overturned. I think sometimes that today, we in Israel may be experiencing something like South Africa at the height of the Apartheid system. Just a few years before the system collapsed.

BJP attacks AAP over 'undisclosed' CAG reports

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and Lok Sabha MP Anurag Thakur, citing media reports, on Saturday presented 10 findings from reports by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), criticising the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for causing a loss of ₹2,026 crore to the Delhi exchequer in the liquor scam. Mr. Thakur questioned why the AAP had not tabled the report in the Assembly and accused former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of deceiving the public in the run-up to the election.

Responding to the allegations, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh asked where the CAG reports were, why the BJP was not making them public, and whether they were "locked away in the BJP headquarters".

BJP leaders and the Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi V.K. Saxena have been attacking the AAP over 12 reports by the CAG that were released over a year ago. The L-G has repeatedly asked the AAP-led Delhi government to table the reports in the Delhi Assembly. The issue is now in the Delhi High Court.

BJP president J.P. Nadda also attacked the AAP over the reports. "The intentional lapses in the policies implementation caused ₹2,026 crore losses to exchequer money," Mr. Nadda said in a post on X.

Hitting out at the promises made by the AAP, Mr. Thakur said that instead of making Delhi the capital of education, the AAP had made Delhi "the liquor capital".

"There is not just one but multiple scams that have taken place. Since Independence, there has been no government that has committed as many sins as AAP has. That is why 'AAP-da' must go from power," he said.

Delhi welfare schemes will not be taken away if BJP comes to power, says Shah

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Addressing slum residents in his first rally in Delhi since the announcement of the February 5 Assembly election, Union Home Minister Amit Shah reiterated on Saturday that welfare schemes in the capital would not stop if the BJP came to power. He promised that the BJP would better them, though he did not specify which schemes would be improved.

Mr. Shah was speaking at the Jhuggi Basti Pradhan Sammelan held at the Jawaharlal Nehru stadium on Saturday.

The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has been attacking the BJP, warning that if it comes to power, it will stop welfare schemes, including those providing free electricity and water in Delhi.

However, Mr. Shah vowed: "No welfare schemes for the poor will be stopped if the BJP forms the government in the city." He also promised that if his party wins the election, every slum dweller will be provided a house under the PM Awas Yojana. The residents of the cap-



Union Home Minister Amit Shah addresses the Jhuggi Basti Pradhan Sammelan, at Jawaharlal Nehru stadium on Saturday. ANI

ital's slums will throw away the 'AAP-da' and become liberators of Delhi, Mr. Shah said.

The Minister said that despite its tall promises of clean water, good education, and a garbage-free city, the AAP government has forced slum dwellers to live in pathetic conditions, with dirty water, air pollution, broken roads, and garbage.

Congratulating the Delhi unit of the BJP for fighting against the AAP on behalf of the slum dwellers, Mr. Shah said, "Our leaders spent several nights in the JJ [jhuggi jhopri] clusters and made a list of all your trouble and submitted it to PM [Narendra] Modi. And keeping this in mind, we will bring our *Sankalpa Pa-*

tra [poll manifesto], which the BJP will make sure is fulfilled because, unlike the AAP, all our promises are done."

The AAP is a disaster, Mr. Shah said, alleging that while India has progressed over the past 10 years, Delhi has stayed stagnant. Delhi has become hell because of 'AAP-da', he added.

Meanwhile, Mr. Kejriwal, in a post on X said: "Today Amit Shah ji abused me and the people of Delhi a lot. The people of Delhi will answer this in the elections. Tomorrow morning I will hold a press conference from a 'jhuggi basti' which they have planned to demolish after the elections. I will expose the dirty intentions of BJP with full evidence."

Mr. Gogi joined the AAP in 2022 after quitting the Congress. He had been with the Congress for almost 22 years.

Mr. Gogi (58) is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

AAP MLA dies in 'accidental' firing from his own pistol

Press Trust of India

LUDHIANA

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Ludhiana West MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi died of a gunshot injury on Saturday, with his family members and the State party chief saying he was hit by a bullet that got fired accidentally from his pistol when he was cleaning it.

Joint Commissioner of Police Jaskaran Singh Teja said the bullet pierced Mr. Gogi's temple and he was rushed to the local Dayanand Medical College and Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The police said the case is under investigation.

Several political leaders including Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann expressed shock over Mr. Gogi's death. "Got the sad news of the demise of our party's respected MLA from Ludhiana West Gurpreet Gogi ji. Heartfelt condolences to the family in this hour of grief," Mr. Mann said in a post on X.

Mr. Gogi joined the AAP in 2022 after quitting the Congress. He had been with the Congress for almost 22 years.

Mr. Gogi (58) is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

Nadda appoints ex-Minister Ravindra Chavan working president of Maharashtra BJP

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

MUMBAI

Senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Ravindra Chavan was appointed as the Maharashtra State working president by the party's national president J.P. Nadda on Saturday night.

A four-time MLA from Dombivli, he was the PWD Minister in the last government of the Mahayati.

The process of key organisational appointments will begin from Monday under his leadership. He is also tipped to be the next State president of the BJP.

The announcement comes amid intense political speculation, as the process was pending due to the elections in the State.

The party is holding a massive convention in Shirdi on Sunday to pass a resolution to congratulate the people of Maharashtra

for bringing the BJP to power with a thumping majority. Over 15,000 office-bearers, including Maharashtra BJP Ministers, will attend the day-long convention.

"The *janata abhinandan prastav* will be kept in front of the members on Sunday," outgoing Maharashtra BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule told *The Hindu* from Shirdi on Saturday. He is now the Minister of Revenue in the State government.

"We have already enrolled 1.5 crore new primary members in Maharashtra. There are five lakh active members in all the booths. There are one lakh booths in the State. Each booth now has five active members. The booth presidents will choose the tehsil president who in turn will choose the zila presidents. The central observers will

visit thereafter to complete the process of the appointment of the State president," he said.

Sources said naming of Ravindra Chavan as the State president will be a mere formality now.

Proven performer

He is believed to be a 'performer'. During the recent State Assembly elections, he was given the responsibility of Konkan region, the coastal belt which posed a major challenge.

Recently, he was given bigger responsibilities in the State organisational structure, leading to murmurs about him being pegged to be the next State president in view of Mr. Bawankule becoming Revenue Minister. Chavan was appointed as the State in-charge for 'sangathan parv', a campaign to strengthen the organisational structure.

NOTICE INVITING TENDERS					
All 2ndCall - Two Bid system Tenders	Estimated Amount (In Rs. Lakhs)	Date & Time (Hrs.)			
Tender No. & Description of Material	Tender Fee (in Rs.)	Submission & Opening of Tender			
SP/T-0601/0125 [RFX No.7000034796] voltage ratings of 33kv & 132kv--235 MVAR at 19Nos. of EHV Substations in Phase-V [5.4] under Amravati & Nagpur zone.	1798.20	22.01.2025 17:00			
	25000.00	22.01.2025 17:15			
SP/T-0602/0125 [RFX No.7000034797] voltage ratings of 33kv --175 MVAR at 18 Nos. of EHV Substations in Phase-V [5.5] under Chatrapati Sambhajinagar zone.	1531.90	22.01.2025 17:00			
	25000.00	22.01.2025 17:15			
SP/T-0603/0125 [RFX No.7000034798] voltage ratings of 22kv & 33kv--170 MVAR at 16 Nos. of EHV Substations in Phase-V [5.6] under Karad zone.	1304.06	23.01.2025 17:00			
	25000.00	23.01.2025 17:15			
SP/T-0604/0125 [RFX No.7000034799] voltage ratings 33kv--255 MVAR at 14 Nos. of EHV Substations in Phase-V [5.7] Nashik Zone.	1318.36	23.01.2025 17:00			
	25000.00	23.01.2025 17:15			
SP/T-0605/0125 [RFX No.7000034810] voltage ratings of 33kv--110 MVAR at 06 Nos. of EHV Substations in Phase-V [5.8] under Pune Zone.	747.04	24.01.2025 17:00			
	25000.00	24.01.2025 17:15			

Contact Person: Office of

IN BRIEF



BPSC sends legal notice to JSP founder Prashant Kishor

The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) has sent a legal notice to Jan Surya Party (JSP) founder Prashant Kishor with regard to the allegations levelled by him on the commission. The commission has demanded evidence within seven days on the allegations of corruption levelled against the commission by him and his team. While speaking to *The Hindu*, BPSC secretary Satya Prakash Sharma said, "It was necessary to send him a legal notice because the kind of allegation he has levelled against the BPSC was unpardonable. The kind of atmosphere he has created was sending the wrong message among the genuine candidates."

Bengal CID issues summons to Arjun Singh, son for Jan. 13

The West Bengal CID on Saturday issued fresh summons to BJP leader and former Barrackpore MP Arjun Singh and his son, asking them to appear before its investigating officers on January 13 in connection with a financial corruption case related to approval of tenders worth ₹4.5 crore by Bhatpara municipality. "Mr. Singh and his son have been asked to appear before our officers on January 13 in connection with the financial corruption case of tenders by Bhatpara municipality," a CID officer said. Although Mr. Singh had appeared before the CID on January 9 for the same case, his son Pavan Singh, had skipped the appearance on that day. PTI

Two dead in accident at construction site in Raipur

Two workers were killed while six sustained injuries when a centering frame on an under-construction building collapsed here on Saturday. The accident was reported around 3 p.m. on VIP Street, metres away from the VIP Road, a stretch that connects the city to the Raipur airport. The residential building has three multi-storey towers, each at a different stage of construction. While the project is run by a prominent construction firm from the State, those at the site said that it is subcontracted to various contractors. The work to remove the debris from the site was going on till late Saturday night.

Manufacturers of medical devices seek MRP monitoring

Medical device manufacturers have called for monitoring of maximum retail prices (MRP) of imported medical devices into India so that domestic consumers can get affordable rates. In its pre-Budget memorandum to the Union Ministry of Finance, the Association of Indian Medical Device Industry (AiMeD) has highlighted that the government's efforts to reduce import duty on devices goes in vain since consumers/patients pay "10-30 times the landed price of imported devices". AiMeD, an umbrella association of Indian manufacturers of medical devices, said that the current scenario is "against Indian manufacturers in every way".

SUDOKU



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

Civil operators told to ground Dhruv copters after January 5 crash

Armed forces have already grounded all 330 choppers in their fleet; HAL has issued the advisory to BSF, Jharkhand govt., Mauritian Police Force

Jagriti Chandra

NEW DELHI

Hindustan Aero-nautics Ltd. has advised civilian operators to ground the indigenous Dhruv advanced light helicopter Mark-III until the cause of the crash in Porbandar last week is identified.

The armed forces have already temporarily grounded all their 330 Dhruvs following the January 5 crash of the Indian Coast Guard helicopter during a training sortie that killed all three crew members, Commandant Saurabh, Deputy Commandant S.K. Yadav and Pradhan Navin Manoj.

The HAL has informed its operators that the helicopter involved in the accident did not respond to pilot control inputs in the final three or four seconds, according to a helicopter industry source.

An HAL spokesperson neither confirmed nor declined the advisory. The Border Security Force has six of these choppers on its fleet, and the Jharkhand government has at least one Dhruv helicopter. The HAL also handed one Dhruv to the Government of Mauritius in February



Precarious ride: There have been nearly 20 crashes involving the ALH over the past two decades. FILE PHOTO

2023 to be used by the Mauritian Police Force.

The Coast Guard has constituted a Board of Inquiry into the accident, which is the third crash of a Dhruv in the past two years.

In September, one crashed during a medical evacuation off the Porbandar coast, killing all three aboard. In March 2023, a Dhruv of the Coast Guard crashed shortly after take-off in Kochi. There were no fatalities.

"There have been nearly 20 crashes involving the ALH over the past 24 years. While some of these have

been due to operational reasons because of the extreme conditions the chopper flies in such high altitudes and low visibility conditions at night, there have also been concerns over control rods, which were found to be broken.

Subsequently, the rods were changed with an upgraded material. The inquiry spearheaded by the ICG will reveal whether the cause of the crash was due to operational circumstances or a manufacturing flaw," Wing Commander Unni Pillai (Retd), former chief test pilot at HAL, told *The Hindu*.

The inquiry spearheaded by the ICG will reveal whether the cause of the crash was due to operational circumstances or a manufacturing flaw," Wing Commander Unni Pillai (Retd), former chief test pilot at HAL, told *The Hindu*.

The government had constituted the National Commission for DNTs/NTs/SNTs in 2015 under the chairmanship of Bhiku

Denotified tribes' anger growing amid a stagnating scheme, classification issues

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

With the Centre's SEED scheme for denotified tribes only now taking off, caste certificates being denied to them in 29 States, and the Idate Commission's 2017 report in cold storage, anger among the denotified tribes (DNT), semi-nomadic tribes (SNT), and nomadic tribes (NT) is growing across States such as Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Gujarat. This anger is now also frustrating members of the Union government's Development and Welfare Board for DNTs, SNTs, and NTs (DWBDNC), who are making fresh attempts to push for the implementation of the Idate panel recommendations, which include a permanent commission, proper classification, and a detailed caste census.

Bharathbai Babubhai Patni, DWBDNC member, said that the government can no longer shut out voices calling for the Idate Commission's recommendations to be implemented. "A Schedule must be put out listing out all the DNTs. Alongside the issuing of SC/ST/OBC certificates, there must be directions to issue joint certificates like SC-DNT, ST-DNT, OBC-DNT."

The government had constituted the National Commission for DNTs/NTs/SNTs in 2015 under the chairmanship of Bhiku

Fresh attempts made to push for the implementation of the Idate Commission recommendations

Ramji Idate, which had put out its final report in 2017, calling for the government to expedite the final classification of these communities, count their population by including a caste census column in the 2021 census, and provide a sub-quota for them under SC/ST/OBC

workshop in New Delhi last week, said, "They are saying they have issued some 200-300 certificates and painting it as some huge achievement. It strikes at a core area, denying our identity. If the government cannot get States to issue DNT certificates, they might as well brand us criminal again, at least we will get our identity."

Welfare measures

The SEED scheme (Scheme for the Economic Empowerment of DNT/NT/SNT communities) was meant to be the Centre's flagship scheme for these communities. Launched in February 2022, the scheme offered assistance for livelihood, education, healthcare, and housing. But it took over two years for the scheme to take off.

In a meeting of top officials, chaired by Social Justice Minister Virendra Kumar last month, the government had resolved to urge States and UTs to start issuing DNT certification along with regular caste certificates.

The Minister has assured us of action but there are real concerns about the lack of implementation of the Idate Commission's recommendations. So many people are not getting community certificates because of belonging to sub-castes, or spelling it differently, or having a hyphenated caste name," Mr. Patni said.

New National Museum in Delhi to display artefacts in chronological and thematic order

Shreeparna Chakrabarty

NEW DELHI

North Block and South Block in the national capital, which are set to house the new National Museum, will have artefacts arranged chronologically and thematically, according to a draft proposal under consideration of the Union Culture Ministry.

North Block, which is likely to be the first one of the buildings where retrofitting will be completed, is expected to house the artefacts in a chronological order, while South Block is likely to have theme-based sections, sources told *The Hindu*.

India signed a memorandum of understanding with France on December



Plans made: India signed an agreement with France on December 19 last year for the development of the new museum. PTI

19 last year for the development of the new museum, along the lines of the Louvre in Paris. The museum will be developed through adaptive reuse in collaboration with France, which is renowned for its expertise in such projects – exemplified by the

Louvre, the Grand Palais, and the Hotel de la Marine. This approach mirrors France's 'Grand Projects' initiative that transformed government buildings into iconic cultural spaces.

The chronological arrangement will have about 50 sections each with 5-6

rooms and thus around 250 galleries in total. The thematic section would have displays based on different subjects such as literature, architecture, and art. There would also be galleries with augmented reality, educational centres and children's corners.

2,06,000 artefacts

North Block houses the Ministries of Finance and Home Affairs, while South Block houses the Prime Minister's Office, and the Ministries of Defence and External Affairs.

Offices in both the buildings are being moved to the Common Central Secretariat (CCS) building on Janpath as part of the Central Vista plan.

The new museum, told *The Hindu*,

Rijiju to ink pact for Haj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday embarked on a five-day visit to Saudi Arabia to sign a bilateral agreement for the Haj pilgrimage of 2025, where India is seeking an additional quota for 10,000 pilgrims.

Mr. Rijiju is scheduled to meet Saudi Arabian Minister Tawfiq bin Fawzah Al Rabiah on Monday when the two leaders are expected to sign the bilateral agreement. "I look forward to visiting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to sign the bilateral agreement on Hajj 2025 and strengthen the people-to-people ties between our two great nations," Mr. Rijiju said in a post on X.

Mr. Rijiju will also meet Saleh Al Jasser, the Saudi Minister of Transport and Logistic Services and discuss Haj flight operations and the pilgrimage-related bus and train services with him.

He will visit the Jeddah Haj Terminal, used by Indian pilgrims, where the government has dedicated an office space for facilitation.

India's Haj quota for 2025 was fixed by Saudi Arabia at 1,75,025 pilgrims, and the government is seeking an additional 10,000 quota.

Mr. Rijiju will also visit Madina.

Out of the total Haj pilgrims quota allocated to India, 70% would be handled by the Haj Committee of India (HCoI) while the remaining 30% will be allocated to private Haj group organisers, according to the government's Haj Policy for 2025.

In 2024, the HCoI was allotted 80% while the private Haj group organisers got 20% of the quota.

Kolkata second in global list of cities with slowest traffic; Bengaluru third

Serish Naniseti

HYDERABAD

Kolkata's roads were the second most congested in the world in 2024, and the most congested in Asia, the latest survey by the Netherlands-based location technology firm TomTom said. According to the report, drivers in the city spent an average of 34 minutes and 33 seconds to travel a distance of 10 km.

Kolkata was followed closely by Bengaluru, where drivers spent 34 minutes and 10 seconds to cover 10 km. Pune finished third with a travel time of 33 minutes and 22 seconds for the same distance, leaving India with three cities in the global top five.

Hyderabad (31.5 minutes) was the other Indian city in the top 20 globally.



Rush hour: Bengaluru is notorious for its traffic jams that can leave drivers waiting on roads for hours. FILE PHOTO

taking the 18th spot.

Barranquilla City (36 minutes, six seconds) in Colombia took the top spot and London (33 minutes, 17 seconds) rounded up the top five of the rankings.

While 110 hours were lost per year due to traffic

conditions in Kolkata, it was 117 hours in Bengaluru, 108 hours in Pune and 85 hours in Hyderabad.

Featuring 500 cities across 62 countries on six continents, the 14th edition of TomTom Traffic Index evaluated cities by

their average travel time and congestion level. The study used Floating Car Data (FCD) to calculate travel times.

Chennai was 31st in the list, with drivers spending 30 minutes and 20 seconds to cover 10 km while Mumbai (29 minutes, 26 seconds) was 39th.

Areas with the highest congestion in Hyderabad were Ameerpet, Khairatabad, Erragadda, Balanagar, Somajiguda, and Begumpet. Comparatively, the western and eastern parts of the city remained relatively free of congestion. On Saturday, while jokes about empty streets in Hyderabad owing to families leaving for their home towns flooded social media, the traffic map still blinked in red, showing congestion in many areas.

CM YK

SCIENCE

Millions of diabetes, heart disease cases linked to sugary drinks

The Hindu Bureau

A new study estimates that in 2020, 2.2 million new cases of type 2 diabetes and 1.2 million new cases of cardiovascular disease occur each year globally due to consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, representing 9.8% and 3.1%, respectively, of all incident cases. The study estimated sugar-sweetened beverage-attributable type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease burdens

across 184 countries in 1990 and 2020.

As per the study, in developing countries, the case count is particularly sobering. The highest sugar-sweetened beverage-attributable percentage burdens were in Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa. In Latin America and the Caribbean, they contributed to nearly 24% of new diabetes cases and more than 11% of new cases of cardiovascular disease. In Sub-

Saharan Africa, it found that sugar-sweetened beverages contributed to more than 21% of all new diabetes cases. "From 1990 to 2020, the largest proportional increases in sugar-sweetened beverage-attributable incident type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease cases in Mexico were linked to sugary drink consumption. In South Africa, 27.6% of new diabetes cases and 14.6% of cardiovascular disease cases were attributable to sugary drink consumption."

Colombia, Mexico, and South Africa are countries that have been hard

hit. While more than 48% of all new diabetes cases in Colombia were attributable to consumption of sugary drinks, nearly one-third of all new diabetes cases in Mexico were linked to sugary drink consumption. In South Africa, 27.6% of new diabetes cases and 14.6% of cardiovascular disease cases were attributable to sugary drink consumption.

Sugary beverages are rapidly digested, causing a spike in blood sugar levels

with little nutritional value. Regular consumption over time leads to weight gain, insulin resistance, and a host of metabolic issues tied to type 2 diabetes and heart disease, two of the world's leading causes of death. Men are more likely than women to suffer the consequences of sugary drink consumption, as are younger adults compared to their older counterparts, the researchers say.

They call for a multi-

pronged approach, including public health campaigns, regulation of sugary drink advertising, and taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages. Some countries have taken steps in this direction. Mexico, which has one of the highest per capita rates of sugary drink consumption in the world, introduced a tax on the beverages in 2014. Early evidence suggests that the tax has been effective, particularly among lower-income individuals.

SNAPSHOTS



Insights into coevolution of lice eggs with early bird hosts

Fossilised chewing lice eggs preserved in mid-Cretaceous Burmese amber have been discovered, marking the first direct evidence of ectoparasitic lice feeding on feathers of stem-group birds during the Mesozoic. This offers insights into the origins of lice and their early coevolution with vertebrate hosts. The discovery of the lice eggs in association with feather of enantiornithine, an extinct group, supports the hypothesis that Mesozoic bird lice were parasitic on early feathered vertebrates.



Tumor-secreted protein may be a key to treat brain tumor

Targeting a protein called endocan and its related signaling pathway could be a new approach for treating glioblastoma, an aggressive and lethal type of brain cancer. The researchers discovered that endocan, which is produced by endothelial cells lining blood vessels in the tumour, activates PDGFRα, a receptor on glioblastoma cells that drives tumour growth and makes the cancer resistant to standard therapies such as radiation. They suggest a path toward the development of therapies that specifically inhibit this interaction.



Oldest known dinosaur in northern hemisphere

It is generally thought that dinosaurs emerged on the southern portion of Pangea called Gondwana millions of years before spreading to the northern half named Laurasia. A newly described dinosaur whose fossils were uncovered in present-day Wyoming is challenging that narrative. The creature, named *Ahvaytum bahndooiveche*, is now the oldest known Laurasian dinosaur, and with fossils estimated to be around 230 million years old.

IIT Roorkee uses bacterial enzymes to degrade plasticizers

Once integrated into bacteria, the enzymes remain active for a longer time and the bacteria can be used continuously for degrading the plasticizers

R. Prasad

Besides plastics, the amount of carcinogenic plasticizers in the environment is increasing at an alarming rate. Plasticizers are chemicals added to plastics and personal care products to enhance flexibility and shine and are commonly found in items such as baby toys, shampoos, soaps, and food containers. Plasticizers can be absorbed through the skin, making them a direct threat to human health.

A team of researchers headed by Dr. Pravindra Kumar, Professor at the Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering, IIT Roorkee has successfully used an enzyme – esterase enzyme – produced by soil bacteria *Sulfovibacillus acidoophilus* to break down diethyl hexyl phthalate (DEHP) plasticizer. While a Chinese team had characterised this enzyme to degrade low molecular weight phthalate diester plasticizers, while the IIT Roorkee team uses it to degrade high molecular weight phthalate plasticizers

Cleaning up using soil bacteria enzymes

Plasticizers, which are added to plastics and personal care products, can be absorbed through the skin

■ The researchers have used esterase enzyme produced by soil bacteria *Sulfovibacillus acidoophilus* to break down diethyl hexyl phthalate (DEHP) plasticizer

■ A Chinese team characterised the esterase enzyme to degrade low molecular weight phthalate diester plasticizers, while the IIT Roorkee team uses it to degrade high molecular weight phthalate plasticizers

■ The esterase enzyme was structurally characterised using X-ray crystallography

■ In 2017, the team isolated another soil bacteria which uses three enzymes in sequence to break down phthalates into carbon-dioxide and water



Enzyme production: The esterase enzyme is produced in large scale by cloning the enzyme genes into *E. coli* bacteria. REUTERS

■ The researchers have used all five enzymes in sequence to break down DEHP plasticizer into water and carbon-dioxide

■ The team is trying to insert the genes of all five enzymes into bacteria to directly convert DEHP plasticizer into water and carbon-dioxide

■ Once integrated into bacteria, the enzymes remain active for a long time and the bacteria can be used continuously to degrade the plasticizer

The esterase enzyme was structurally characterised using X-ray crystallography. "This helped in identifying the active sites of the enzymes and in understanding the detailed mechanism by which this enzyme degrades the DEHP plasticizer," says Shalja Verma from IIT Roorkee and the first author of the paper. Other sophisticated biochemical and biophysical approaches were also used to understand the efficiency of the enzyme to degrade the plasticizer.

The esterase enzyme remains active for about a month and catalyzes the degradation of DEHP plasticizer with significant efficiency. For large-scale production of this enzyme, the researchers cloned the genes of the EstSI esterase

enzyme into *E. coli* bacteria and the enzyme was produced on a large-scale through aerobic culture.

The enzyme breaks down the DEHP plasticizer into two products – mono-(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (MEHP) and 2-ethyl hexanol. According to Prof. Kumar, this esterase enzyme, along with other enzymes identified by their group previously can convert high molecular weight phthalate plasticizers into water and carbon-dioxide. And this is where the IIT Roorkee team appears to have an edge. "The results of our research mark a significant advancement in addressing one of the most pressing environmental challenges – providing a promising path toward a plastic and plasticizer-free future," says Dr. Kumar.

Other researchers involved in the work include Shweta Choudhary, Kamble Amith Kumar, Jai Krishna Mahto, Ishani Mishra, Dr. Ashwani Kumar Sharma, Dr. Shailly Tomar, Dr. Debabrata Sircar and Dr. Jitin Singla.

In 2017, the team isolated another soil bacteria *Comamonas testosteroni* that breaks down the phthalates produced by DEHP degradation into carbon-dioxide and water. In the lab, the researchers used the enzymes in sequence to first break down DEHP to MEHP and 2-ethyl hexanol using esterase enzyme, which was then degraded to phthalate using another enzyme. The phthalate is then converted to intermediate compounds using a third enzyme (phthalate dioxygenase). The inter-

mediate compound produced after this step is converted into protocatechuate by the enzyme phthalate decarboxylase. Once protocatechuate is produced, the tricarboxylic acid cycle of the bacteria converts it to carbon-dioxide and water.

While the esterase enzyme used for breaking down DEHP into MEHP and 2-ethyl hexanol is from *Sulfovibacillus acidoophilus* bacteria, the three other enzymes used in sequence are from *Comamonas testosteroni* bacteria. "In the lab, we have tried using the enzymes in sequence to break down DEHP into water and carbon-dioxide," says Ms. Verma. "We are now trying to insert the genes of all the five enzymes into bacteria to directly convert the DEHP plasticizer into water and carbon-dioxide."

Putting all five enzymes into bacteria will speed up the degradation process not only because the enzymes will act sequentially but also because degradation of the enzymes becomes a non-issue once they are integrated into bacteria. Once integrated into bacteria, the enzymes remain active for a longer time and the bacteria can be used continuously for degrading the plasticizers. But when the enzymes are used without integrating into bacteria, a fresh batch of enzymes needs to be produced to continue the degradation process. "We are also undertaking enzyme engineering to speed up the degradation process inside the bacteria," says Ms. Verma.

Putting the gene editing tool to use

**SPEAKING OF SCIENCE**

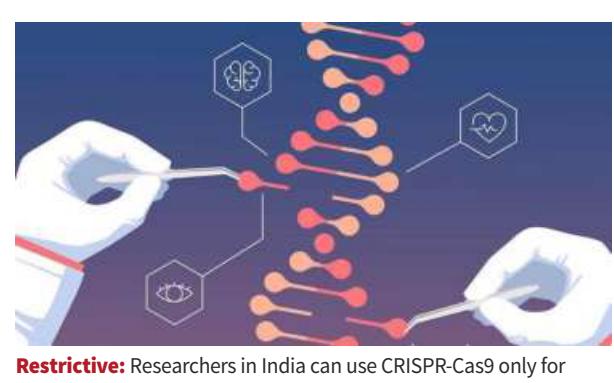
D. Balasubramanian

When you edit a letter or a document, you make specific changes in the words and phrases to make the meaning clearer. Gene editing involves changing the sequence of DNA using specific enzymes which can cut DNA at a precise location, thus permitting the removal, addition, or replacement of genetic information within a gene. The process is akin to correcting a misspelled word in a sentence, or replacing it with a more appropriate word. In organisms, this modification directly alters the genetic instructions encoded in the DNA.

In earlier days, if we wanted to modify the mes-

sage in the DNA to a desired function, it involved two enzymes – one to cut the DNA at a specific site, and another to help insert the desired genetic change. While such twin-enzyme methods worked, they were laborious.

This was when Drs Jennifer Doudna of University of California, Berkeley, U.S., and Emmanuelle Charpentier of Humboldt University, Germany came out with a double action gene modification method, called CRISPR-Cas9. This is a mechanism that can edit the genomes of humans, pathogens, and plants. CRISPR stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats, and Cas9 (which stands for CRISPR-associated Protein 9) cuts DNA strands at a specific location, creating a gap that can be filled with new DNA. Doudna and Char-



Restrictive: Researchers in India can use CRISPR-Cas9 only for academic purposes. GETTY IMAGES

pentier shared the Nobel Prize in 2021.

However, Prof. Feng Zang who was then at a Southern California University, published a paper wherein he showed genome engineering using the CRISPR-Cas9 system. But he was not included as the third scientist by the Nobel Committee. He then went ahead, obtained a patent, and moved to Boston, where he works and this patent is owned today by

the MIT-Harvard University combine, called Broad Institute, which uses the CRISPR-Cas9 system for a variety of applications such as the mouse model for cancer, identifying genes that make cancer drugs ineffective, and modification of immune cells, plus training people in the technology.

While CRISPR-Cas9 patented technology has been used for the above-mentioned diagnostic and

genetic uses, agricultural scientists and botanical researchers have been using this method to genome engineer plants. The group of Dr. Holger Puchta of the Karlsruhe Botanical Institute, Germany has published several papers, notably on how to use Cas9, Cas 12, and Cas13, for targeting plant genomes. Most recently, CRISPR-Cas9 based 'knock-out' of two genes in tomato plants increased their sweetness with no loss in weight. Similar studies on other plants and fruits will surely follow.

However, a recent report by Dr. Anurag Chaurasia, titled "How CRISPR patent issues block Indian farmers from accessing biotech benefits", points out that the IPO has granted a local patent to ERS Genomics of Dublin, which allows Indian researchers to use CRISPR-Cas9 only for

academic purposes. Our rural farmers are thus still left 'classical'.

Visually handicapped

For people afflicted with eye disorders, scientists and clinicians at LV Prasad Eye Institute, Hyderabad, in collaboration with a group in IGIB, have used one of these high precision methods to correct inherited mutations in patient-specific stem cells (*Nature Communications*, June 2024). These mutation-corrected stem cells increased their sweetness with no loss in weight. Similar studies on other plants and fruits will surely follow.

However, a recent report by Dr. Anurag Chaurasia, titled "How CRISPR patent issues block Indian farmers from accessing biotech benefits", points out that the IPO has granted a local patent to ERS Genomics of Dublin, which allows Indian researchers to use CRISPR-Cas9 only for



Question Corner

Snake alert

How do monkeys recognise snakes so fast?

A Japanese researcher has found that a monkey's ability to rapidly detect snakes is because of the presence of snake scales as a visual cue. The findings highlight an evolutionary adaptation of primates to identify snakes based on specific visual characteristics. In an experiment the researcher demonstrated that monkeys exhibited an immediate response to images of snakes but not to images of salamanders, implying a specific fear of snakes. On the basis of this, the researcher wondered what would happen if he edited the

images of the salamanders to have snakeskin without changing anything else. When edited images of salamanders with snakeskin were shown to monkeys, they reacted to the altered images of the harmful creature equally fast, or even faster, than to the snake. The results are "consistent with the snake-detection theory that snakes were a strong selective pressure favouring modifications in the primate visual system that allow them to detect snakes more quickly or reliably".

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

FAQ

Is groundwater contamination high in India?

What are the contaminants? What happens if nitrate presence is high in groundwater?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

An assessment of India's groundwater by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) found that several States are grappling with a serious problem of nitrate contamination.

Which are the sources of contamination?

The most concerning finding was that the number of districts with excessive nitrate in their groundwater rose from 359 in 2017 to 440 in 2023. This works out to nearly 56% of India's districts having excessive nitrate in ground water, defined as having more than 45 mg/l (milligram per litre). Of the 15,239 groundwater samples collected from across the country for testing, 19.8% samples had nitrates – nitrogenous compounds – above safe limits though it must be said that this proportion has not substantially changed since 2017. In the 13,028 samples analysed in 2017 for instance, 21.6% had excessive nitrate. There are two major concerns with excess nitrate content: one is methemoglobinemia, or a reduced ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen.

A bigger problem with excessive nitrates are environmental: once the nitrates in the groundwater rise to the surface and become part of lakes and ponds, algal blooms throttle the health of aquatic ecosystems.

The most common contaminant identified in The Central Ground Water Board estimates that the country's degree of groundwater extraction is 60.4%, or roughly the same as it has been through the years since 2009

groundwater is dissolved nitrogen in the form of nitrate in sub-surface waters. Since the nitrogen content of soil is generally quite low, farmers have to look for external sources of nitrogen by using ammonium nitrate, calcium nitrate, urea, diammonium hydrogen phosphate etc. Although nitrate is the main form in which nitrogen occurs in groundwater, dissolved nitrogen also occurs in the form of ammonium (NH_4^+), ammonia (NH_3), nitrite (NO_2^-), nitrogen (N_2), nitrous oxide (N_2O) and organic nitrogen.

Which places had serious contamination?
Rajasthan, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu reported the highest proportion of tested groundwater blocks with nitrate exceeding permissible levels – 49%, 48% and 37% of the tested samples respectively reported numbers beyond the limit.

Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have a long-standing nitrate problem with relative levels fairly constant since 2017, the report says. However a growing concern are blocks in central and southern India, which are reporting an increasing trend, and therefore is a reason for worry. "Maharashtra (35.74%), Telangana (27.48%), Andhra Pradesh (23.5%) and Madhya Pradesh (22.58%) also show notable levels of nitrate contamination," the report notes.

Is nitrate the only chemical contaminant?
Other major chemical contaminants affecting groundwater quality are arsenic, iron, fluoride and uranium. Just as 19.8% samples of tested groundwater had excess nitrate, 9.04% of samples had fluoride levels above the limit.

Fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit were "a major concern" in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. Rajasthan and Punjab reported the maximum number of samples with uranium concentration exceeding 100 ppb (parts per billion). Anything over 30 ppb is considered unsafe and several of these samples were predominant in regions of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka, where groundwater was over-exploited: more water was being drawn out than replenished by rains or other means.

What was the state of groundwater in 2024?
Along with its report on groundwater quality, the organisation also produced a report on the quantity of groundwater in various blocks, enumerating the availability of groundwater across India. The CGWB estimates that on the whole, the country's degree of groundwater extraction is 60.4%, or roughly the same as it has been through the years since 2009. About 73% of the blocks are in the 'safe' zone, meaning that they are replenished enough to compensate for water drawn out.

How are groundwater levels measured?
The CGWB relies on a network of about 26,000 groundwater observation wells that require technicians to manually measure the state of groundwater in a region. Since 2023, however, around 16,000-17,000 digital water level recorders were connected to piezometers in the wells. Piezometers measure groundwater levels and transmit the information digitally to a centralised location. In the next three years, the CGWB aims to increase its network from the existing 26,000 to about 40,000. When combined with similar networks possessed by other institutions, India will have about 67,000 digitally recordable units to monitor ground water dynamics.

Why is Meta shutting down fact-checkers?

Is crowd-sourced fact-checking a better way of implementing content moderation? What role did fact-checkers play during the COVID-19 pandemic? How have fact-checking communities responded to Zuckerberg's announcement? When are policy changes likely to be implemented?

John Xavier
Sahana Venugopal

The story so far:

In January 7, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said the company will get rid of fact-checkers and simplify content policies by removing restrictions on topics as it is "out of touch with mainstream discourse." In a five-minute video, he said that the company will return to its roots as the fact-checkers have been "too politically biased" and "destroyed more trust than they created, especially in the U.S."

How did Meta get into fact-checking?

After the 2016 U.S. presidential election results were out, Meta, then known as Facebook, faced serious backlash for amplifying political posts that helped tilt the election in favour of U.S. President-elect Donald Trump. To build back its reputation, Facebook roped in content moderators globally and developed technology to filter harmful content.

Meta started its independent fact-checking programme in partnership with the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) and the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCN). Over time, Meta became one of the largest donors to IFCN.

Meta worked with fact-checkers to address misinformation on its platforms, Facebook, Instagram and Threads. While the fact-checkers worked on finding misinformation and rating them based on the seriousness of content violation, Meta followed up with action and informed users of the measures it took. Beyond fact-checking, partner organisations worked across Meta's platforms to carry out research,

Topics including 'immigration and gender identity', a subject of frequent political discourse, will be discussed

and rate content on a qualitative scale – false, altered, partly false, missing context, satire, and true. Per IFCN's 'State of Fact-Checkers in 2023' report, income from Meta's Third-Party Fact-Checking Programme and grants remain fact-checkers' predominant revenue streams. And 68% of fact-checking organisations have 10 or fewer employees, whereas only 6.6% employ 31 or more people.

Why was there a need for fact-checkers?

Fact-checkers play a vital role in finding false and misleading content promoted on social media platforms by domestic accounts, and at times by foreign regimes. They also played a crucial role during the COVID-19 pandemic by correcting misinformation on social platforms. If the rated content on Meta is false or altered, its distribution across Meta's apps will be reduced. If key information is missing or the content is satirical, Meta might provide the needed facts. Content rated poorly by a fact-checker may not be suggested to users, and repeat offenders could be hit with penalties such as restricted reach, being unable to monetise their content or turn their content into a news page.

What other steps were taken by Meta?

Apart from relying on fact-checkers, Meta set up an Oversight Board to adjudicate cases involving serious content policy violations. The board heard serious content violation cases and made binding decisions to uphold or overturn Meta's own actions. Gradually, Meta started to move away from news content in general to keep its platform free from disinformation-prone content. The company said it will not "proactively recommend content about politics on recommendation surfaces across Instagram and Threads", noting that it wants these apps to be a "great experience" for all.

Now that is starting to change under Joel Kaplan, Meta's new chief of global affairs. Mr. Kaplan said "civic content" about elections and politics would return to the apps, and that users can choose what they want to see. He expanded on Mr. Zuckerberg's video clip, noting that the platform will also get rid of a number of restrictions "on topics like immigration and gender identity that are the subject of frequent political discourse and debate". He said, "It's not right that things can be said on TV or the floor of Congress, but not on our platforms."

What is Community Notes?

Meta will be moving towards an X platform styled content moderation system called 'Community Notes'. Under this model, instead of a centralised authority taking action against

misinformation, users work together to add additional context that will appear under false or even blatantly illegal content.

The feature itself goes beyond the Elon Musk-era Twitter. It was originally conceived as Birdwatch, where users could add context to posts they see that require more information. Initially launched in 2021, the feature gained prominence in March 2022 when misinformation on the Russia-Ukraine conflict was rife on the platform.

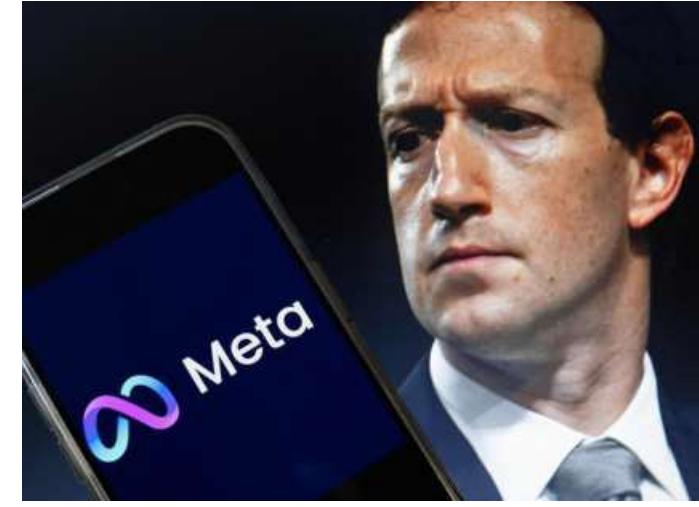
While crowd-sourced fact-checking is seen as a better way of implementing content moderation, Community Notes can also reflect biased majority viewpoints regarding controversial subjects. The feature can also be slow, meaning false or hateful content may go viral long before the specific context is added to clarify the post. Furthermore, under X's current style of content moderation, even posts glorifying slavery and Nazism are allowed to remain online, unchallenged.

In an open letter to Mr. Zuckerberg, IFCN said, "There is no reason Community Notes couldn't co-exist with the third-party fact-checking programme; they are not mutually exclusive. A Community Notes model that works in collaboration with professional fact-checking would have strong potential as a new model for promoting accurate information."

But, Meta has decided on a hands-off approach to content moderation, by stopping its demotion of fact-checked content and removing the full-screen warnings over flagged posts. The company will focus more on illegal content and high-severity violations while adjusting content filters to make it more challenging to take down flagged content – even though this means catching "less bad stuff," as per Mr. Zuckerberg.

What is the significance of the new policy?
Mr. Zuckerberg's shift in stance comes at a time when a new Trump administration takes charge. The tech CEO dined with the President-elect at his Mar-a-Lago resort in November to repair a fraught relationship. Earlier, he publicly praised Mr. Trump's conduct after the former President survived an assassination attempt. In the video clip, Mr. Zuckerberg referenced the 2024 election as a "cultural tipping point" and committed to "restoring" free expression across Meta platforms. In essence, he was aligning his values with the new conservative government by making a clean break from the old one.

While the plan to end the fact-checking programme in 2025 applies only to the U.S., there are similar programmes Meta is running in more than 100 countries. Some of these countries are highly vulnerable to misinformation that spurs political instability, election interference, mob violence and even genocide. If Meta decides to stop the programme worldwide, it is almost certain to result in real-world harm in many places, the IFCN said in its open letter.



Policy shift: Mark Zuckerberg, the CEO of Meta. AFP

Are lithium batteries on flights dangerous?

Why has the airline pilots' body called attention to fire risks? What causes lithium-ion batteries to catch fire? What are the fire-safety equipment and protocols that need to be in place? What happened when Hurricane Helene struck the U.S. in November last year?

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

In January 2, the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) issued three position papers on the fire risk due to the use of lithium-ion batteries in airport and aircraft settings. The papers are motivated by air operators' increasing use of electric vehicles (EVs) and lithium-ion batteries as well as the batteries becoming more energy-dense.

What is IFALPA?

The IFALPA is a global nonprofit representing the international community of professional pilots. After the Second World War, the UN established the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) in 1947 to coordinate air transport and its principles worldwide. A year later, ICAO organised a conference in London where pilots could interact with its leaders. The IFALPA was born at this event with 13 pilots' associations. According to a source on the ICAO website, IFALPA encompassed 104 member associations representing one lakh professional pilots worldwide around 2013. Per the same source, "The belief [is] that the unique perspective of pilots operating in scheduled

Studies have found that existing fire kits have not been able to respond adequately to fires of lithium-ion batteries

flying would be of significant benefit to the creation and adaptation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) through which ICAO regulates international civil aviation." The IFALPA also provides inputs to the International Air Transport Association, the Airports Council International, and the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Association.

Why are there fears about lithium batteries?
Almost every major industry in the world is mechanised to a significant degree, and the energy for these machines has traditionally been produced by burning fossil fuels. As climate mitigation has become more pressing, industries are under pressure to replace this thermal energy – the principal cause of global warming – with electric energy.

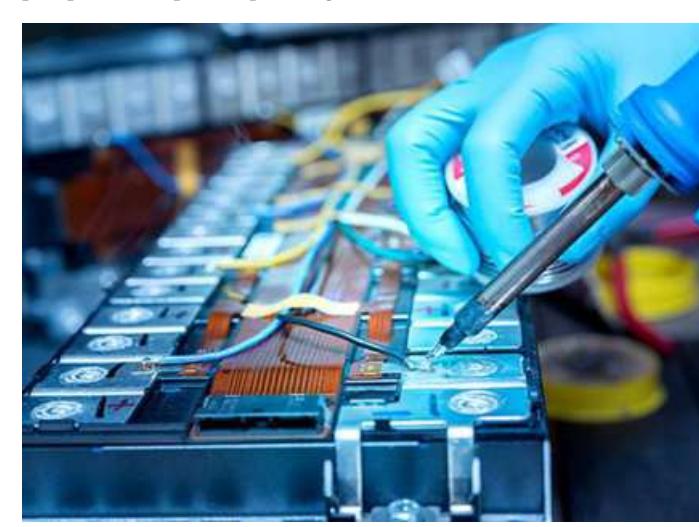
For example, EVs draw electric energy from a battery to drive an electric motor and supply kinetic energy to the wheels. In an internal combustion engine, heat energy released by burning fossil fuel moves pistons, whose motion is converted to rotary motion of the wheels.

Lithium-ion batteries have emerged as a popular solution to storing electric energy because they are energy-dense, rechargeable, and can be made in almost any shape, which is useful when there are space constraints as onboard an aircraft. But lithium-ion batteries have been known to catch fire when they are subjected to certain physical stresses.

The fire is the result of the stress creating a short-circuit inside the battery, leaving it to keep producing electric current, heat, and oxygen. The battery's internal components can become corroded while the risk of catching fire increases. The short circuit can be the result of mechanical, electric, and/or thermal abuse, which respectively deforms the internal structure, degrades its electric performance, and causes heat to accumulate.

For example, after Hurricane Helene struck the U.S. in November 2024, 48 lithium-ion batteries reportedly caught fire.

University of South Carolina mechanical engineer Xinyu Huang said they may have been the result of EV batteries rarely being rated to be waterproof when they are sitting in salt water for



New risks: A technician working on a lithium-ion battery. ISTOCKPHOTO

more than 30 minutes. Such situations are more likely to occur during flooding, which is becoming more common due to climate change and poor urban planning.

What do the IFALPA papers say?

The three position papers are numbered POS01, POS02, and POS03. POS02 and POS03 are more general whereas POS01 is more specific.

POS02 is motivated by the different kind of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries (compared to internal combustion engines). As Mr. Xinyu wrote, "When a lithium-ion battery pack bursts into flames, it releases toxic fumes, burns violently and is extremely hard to put out. Frequently, firefighters' only option is to let it burn out by itself." The position paper thus asks "airports, rescue and fire-fighting services, operators, and ground service providers" to acquire or develop purpose-built fire-safety equipment and protocols.

POS03 extends these concerns to the flight deck – the area colloquially called the "cockpit" in civilian aircraft – where the batteries may be present in components required to operate the aircraft. It also calls attention to studies by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration and the European Union Aviation Safety Agency finding that existing fire kits couldn't respond adequately to fires of lithium-ion batteries with an energy rating of 100 Wh or higher.

POS01 is concerned with the safe transport of lithium-ion batteries, especially UN regulations 3480 and 3481. Since the UN classifies these batteries as "miscellaneous dangerous goods", the regulations specify the packaging and labelling standards required to transport them by air. UN3480 applies to lithium-ion batteries transported in bulk and UN3481 to lithium-ion batteries fit inside some equipment that's being transported in bulk.

One difference between the two regulations is that UN3480 requires the batteries to be charged to less than 30%, also known as state of charge (SOC) 30%, whereas UN3481 doesn't. POS01 contends that UN3481 didn't adopt this restriction because it assumed manufacturers would install safeguards in the equipment to prevent a fire from one battery spreading to others. But as the energy density of batteries and the number of settings in which they are used is increasing and the size of the equipment that uses them is shrinking, IFALPA's position is that the SOC 30% limit should be extended to UN3481 as well.

PROFILES

Back in power with fewer friends

Nicolas Maduro

Venezuela's strongman has been sworn in for a third term at a time when the Latin American country is facing international isolation and economic woes, besides concerns about growing repression at home

Srinivasan Ramani

More than 11 years after assuming power as Venezuela's interim President following the death of popular leader Hugo Chavez, Nicolas Maduro has yet again been sworn as the President of the Latin American country. The circumstances of the retention of his post and the reactions to the ceremony from international actors provide a sense of *deja vu*.

In 2019, when Mr. Maduro was sworn in for the second time as President, nearly 40 countries including the U.S., neighbouring Colombia and Brazil and those belonging to the EU, refused to recognise his presidency. Sixteen UN-recognised countries sent representatives, including Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador.

In 2025, however, only two Presidents – Cuba's Miguel Diaz-Canel and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega – attended. International condemnation of the manner in which Mr. Maduro was declared President after the elections held on July 28, 2024 has been more severe this time around. Since 2019, there has been a new Pink Tide in Latin America with countries such as Colombia, Brazil and Chile electing leftist Presidents. All three leaders have rejected Mr. Maduro's "victory".

Meanwhile, the Opposition candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia, who exiled himself to Spain and had recently visited two countries ruled by the Right in Latin America – Argentina and Panama – withdrew plans to return to Caracas for his own "inauguration".

The results in question and the process in which Mr. Maduro was declared the winner raise severe doubts about the Venezuelan elections in 2024. The UN, which sent a panel of experts to Caracas, criticised the National Election Council of Venezuela for declaring Mr. Maduro as the winner before providing detailed table-level results.

The electoral system consisted of an

electronic voting machine which produced a paper receipt after voters registered their choice at the polling booth. At the end of polling, each machine would print a tally sheet showing the candidates' names and the votes that they received. The National Election Council traditionally put up only the vote counts at the end of the election on its website, but the site was down during the counting and after disputing the results, the Opposition demanded the release of the tally sheets which was not done.

The Opposition could, on its own, access 83% of the tally sheets from 30,026 polling stations, which "revealed" that Mr. Gonzalez polled 67% votes. The CNE's figures were different, favouring Mr. Maduro with 51.95% of the vote to Mr. Gonzalez's 43.2%.

Considering the wide differences on this issue and the fact that the Maduro regime had used intimidatory tactics throughout the election process, several international actors sought the release of the tally sheets to confirm the winner but that was not done.

Economic decline

The 11 years of rule by Mr. Maduro has coincided with a significant decline in Venezuela's economic standing, with severe increases in the poverty rate, persistently high inflation and food shortages in the country. While inflation had eased to 23.58% in October 2024, hyperinflation has characterised the economy since 2018.

As of October 2023, the UNHCR estimated that more than 7.7 million Venezuelan citizens fled the country to become refugees and 6.5 million among them (84%) are in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Critics of Mr. Maduro blame the catastrophic economic situation on the stark authoritarian turn since he came to power. Some suggest that the economic decline was inevitable as Venezuela was overly dependent upon the petroleum sector – crude constituted 95% of the country's exports in 2014 and the oil price crash in the same year sent it into a spiral.

Critics argue that the seeds of the

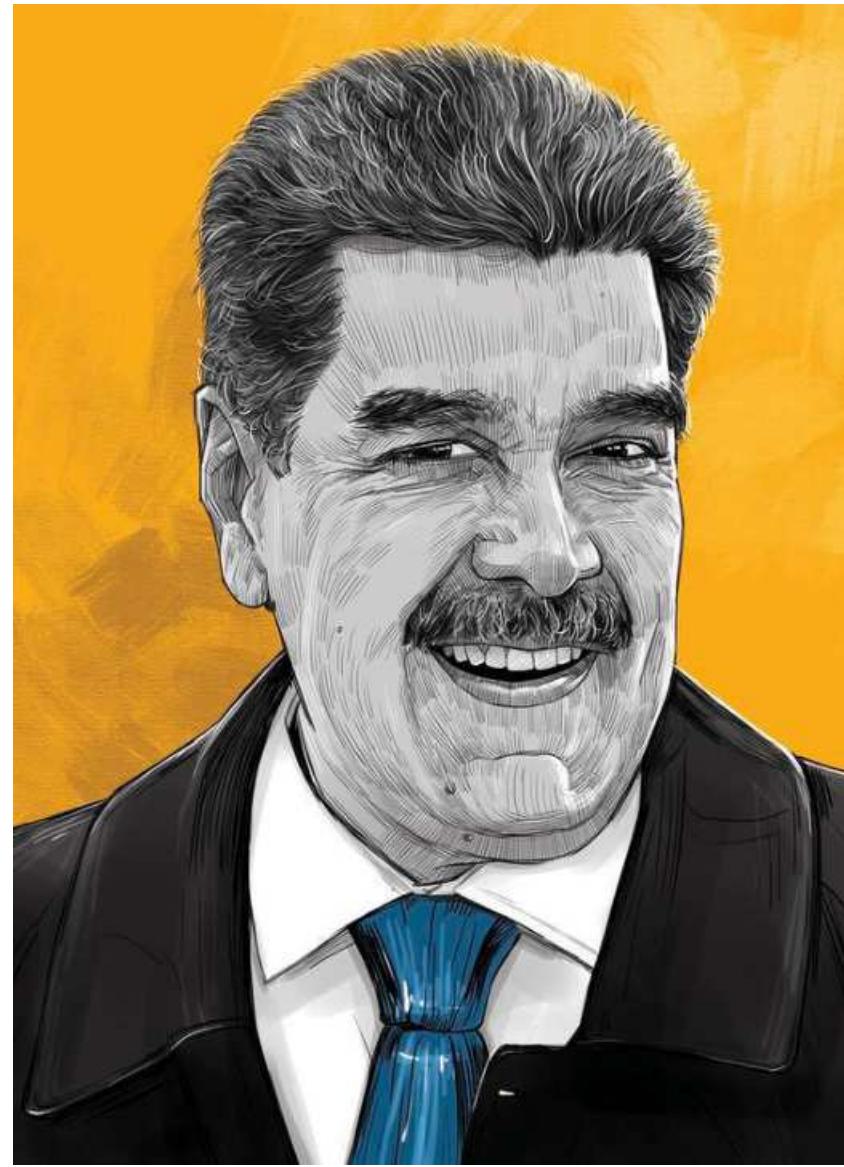


ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

participatory democracy to an authoritarian system.

The first Donald Trump administration in August 2017 imposed sanctions prohibiting the Venezuelan government from accessing U.S. financial markets, a move that affected Venezuela's state-run oil company, PDVSA. The U.S. went on, in 2019, to impose further and direct sanctions on PDVSA, preventing it from being paid for petroleum exports to the U.S., froze its U.S. assets and disallowed the supply of diluents that aided the refining of Venezuelan heavy crude, among other measures.

The U.S.-imposed economic sanctions were compounded by the EU's own embargo on arms and material to be traded with Venezuela, imposed in 2017. Restrictions still remain. The country got a respite when the U.S. eased some sanctions following an agreement signed between Mr. Maduro and representatives of Opposition parties in October 2023 in Barbados with political prisoners being released. The country's oil output saw an increase, resulting in more exports and a partial easing of the severity of the economic situation. However, in April 2024, the U.S. announced that sanctions would be reinstated on the oil sector.

International opprobrium

Just prior to the inauguration of his third term, the U.S. announced a \$65-million bounty for the arrest of Mr. Maduro even as he received support from Russia and China apart from staunch allies in Cuba and Nicaragua.

The international opprobrium and increased polarisation in Venezuela is not deterring Mr. Maduro from doubling down on authoritarianism. A proposed law – the Simon Bolivar law – now stipulates severe punishment for dissidents and repression of civil movements. With Mr. Trump returning to power in the U.S., hostilities are set to renew fresh and the biggest casualty could be the millions of Venezuelans pushed into poverty from a combination of poor economic policies, international sanctions and authoritarianism under Mr. Maduro.

THE GIST

In 2019, when Nicolas Maduro was sworn in for the second time as President, nearly 40 countries refused to recognise his presidency, but 16 countries sent representatives, including Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador

In 2025, however, only two Presidents – Cuba's Miguel Diaz-Canel and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega – attended Maduro's inauguration

The Opposition could access 83% of the tally sheets from 30,026 polling stations, which "revealed" that Maduro's opponent Gonzalez polled 67% votes. The official figures were different, favouring Maduro with 51.95% of the vote

economic decline were laid during Chavez's regime, as he tried to undo the remnants of the country's liberal democratic order to create a personalised state with concentrated powers for the executive presidency. The Chavistas instituted a series of measures, including constitutional referendums and structural changes, most of which received popular support as Chavez won several elections. The Chavistas argue that the regime enhanced grassroots participation in the polity and built

cooperatives while using the proceeds of the extractive economy to fund pro-poor programmes. And while the regime was cognisant about diversification, the lack of it during the oil price crash resulted in the economic crisis, which was exacerbated by a series of economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the EU after Mr. Maduro came to power.

Since his ascent to power, Mr. Maduro's regime has moved away from a popular regime that was dependent upon grassroots mobilisation and

Rocket scientist

V. Narayanan

The cryogenic pioneer is taking over ISRO when the agency is working on a series of high-profile missions, from the Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme to Chandrayaan-4

Tiki Rajwi

The first big news from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in the New Year seems to have an in-built element of surprise in it. On January 7, V. Narayanan, a rocket and spacecraft propulsion expert, who heads the ISRO's Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) in Thiruvananthapuram, was named successor to S. Somanath, the current chairman of the space agency.

The face of ISRO since January 2022, Mr. Somanath is highly regarded, cutting a dynamic and impressive figure, especially with the younger ISRO hands. Insider-speak is that many within the organisation were expecting his term to be extended. Comparisons with his predecessor will be par for the course when Mr. Narayanan, who joined the ISRO 40 years ago, eases into the top spot on January 14.

The change of guard is happening at a critical moment for ISRO, now guided by the Space Vision 2047. On the one hand, a series of high-profile missions are in the works; the Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme, the Chandrayaan-4 lunar mission, the development of the Bharatiya Antarksha Station – India's own space station and landing an Indian on the moon by 2040, to name a few. On the other,



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

er, the Indian space sector is in a state of flux, with the Space Policy, 2023 opening it up to private players.

Ever since the first U.S.-made Nike-Apache sounding rocket lifted off from Thumba, Thiruvananthapuram, in November 1963, the Indian space programme has largely remained a jealously-guarded government concern.

To his credit, Mr. Narayanan is someone who knows the ins and outs of the ISRO, having joined the space agency's Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram in 1984, where he worked on solid propulsion. He moved to the LPSC in 1989 to work on cryogenic propulsion, and has remained there since, initially playing his part, and in subsequent years taking the lead role, in the propulsion aspects of ISRO missions.

As LPSC Director, Mr. Narayanan was leading the development of propulsion systems for the Gaganyaan programme when he was named the next Se-

cretary, Department of Space, and Chairman, Space Commission, for a period of two years.

Success story
In many ways, his is the quintessential hard-won-success tale, the kind that parents in post-Independence India loved to inspire their children with.

Hailing from a humble background at Melakattuvilai, a village in Kanniyakumari district of Tamil Nadu, young Narayanan attended a nearby Tamil-medium school. Teachers announcing Neil Armstrong's successful 1969 moon landing is part of his childhood memories. He subsequently obtained his M.Tech. in cryogenic engineering in 1989 with a first rank from the IIT, Kharagpur. He took his Ph.D. in aerospace engineering in 1994.

At the ISRO, he has contributed to major missions and projects, including the Chandrayaan series and the successful development of the cryogenic upper stage for the Geosyn-

chronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV).

The LPSC website describes him as "one of the few cryogenic members who have worked in this area from the beginning, carrying out fundamental research, theoretical and experimental studies and contributing to the successful development and testing of cryogenic subsystems".

One of the tried-and-tested hands of the space agency, Mr. Narayanan comes across as affable and polite. Within the ISRO community, he is viewed as hard-working and tenacious, as someone who gets things done. That his long career has largely been confined to LPSC is seen as a disadvantage, given the fast-evolving, multispecialty nature of present-day space-tech.

Many of the past chairpersons have headed multiple ISRO facilities such as the LPSC and VSSC before moving on to the Bengaluru headquarters.

To his advantage, Mr. Narayanan has experience on his side. In the changing, competition-driven global space ecosystem, ISRO has the added responsibility of hand-holding Indian space-tech startups and driving industry participation. As its next Chairman, Mr. Narayanan faces the task of steering the space agency through challenging and happening times.

The island of interest

Greenland

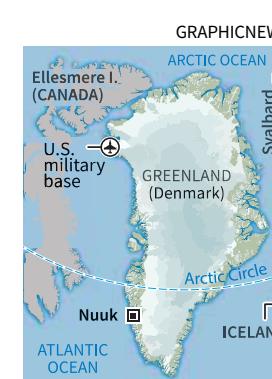
U.S. President-elect Donald Trump says he won't rule out use of military force or coercion to annex or buy the world's largest island

Joan Sony Cherian

On January 1, the King of Denmark unveiled a new coat of arms after more than 50 years. It features the polar bear and the ram (symbolising Greenland and the Faroe Islands, respectively) more prominently than before. Amid calls for independence in Greenland and U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's aggressive push to buy/annex the island, the Royal House seems to be underscoring the Danish realm's unity.

Greenland, the world's largest island with a population of 57,000, is an autonomous territory controlled by Denmark. This effectively means that while it has a Parliament which deals with domestic affairs such as business taxes, immigration, and mining, most of its foreign, monetary and military policy are dictated by Denmark. The Arctic island was colonised by the Danes in the 18th century and has been associated with Europe, though geographically it is part of the North American continent and closer to Copenhagen.

During the Second World War, the U.S. briefly occupied the region and defended it when Denmark was under siege by Nazi Germany. Noting the region's geopolitical importance, the U.S. in 1946, after the War,



Greenland, with a population of 57,000, is an autonomous territory controlled by Denmark

dom throughout the world, the United States of America feels that the ownership and control of Greenland is an absolute necessity," he said in December. Following such a declaration, Donald Trump Jr., Mr. Trump's son, visited Greenland this year as a "private individual". Both Greenland and Danish Prime Ministers have shut down such threats and plans. Mr. Egede has categorically stated that "Greenland belongs to the Greenlanders".

Mr. Trump seems unfazed. Speaking to the press last week, Mr. Trump said he won't rule out military or economic coercion to annex/buy the island.

The island is surrounded by the Atlantic on one side and the Arctic waters on the other. Due to climate change and global warming, glaciers and ice sheets in the Arctic Sea are melting, leading to potentially new shipping routes, which could greatly enhance trade. Moreover, Russia and China have already agreed to develop new trading routes in the Arctic waters as relations with the West sour and tensions in West Asia loom large.

Similarly, the Arctic waters are a global common under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The incoming U.S. President's policies are bringing to the forefront the true anarchical nature of international politics.

Strait near Alaska. With the threat of Russia-China cooperation in the region, annexing Greenland could give the U.S. significant control over the area, letting it decide who gets to run and operate in these strategic waters.

The island is also rich in minerals. As per a 2025 survey, 25 of 34 critical raw materials, which are used in EVs and batteries, were found in Greenland. The melting of almost 28,000 square km of Greenland's ice sheets makes drilling for oil, gas and other critical raw materials easier. Currently, China is the world's largest exporter and producer of critical minerals. Buying Greenland could make the U.S. compete with China for that status.

Mr. Trump has also issued calls to buy/annex the Panama Canal and Canada. While all of them have been touted as necessary for the U.S.'s economic and national security, the U.S. is breaking the first and fundamental rule of the UN Charter: recognising the sovereignty of nations. With respect to Greenland, the U.S. is going against the NATO agreement as well.

Similarly, the Arctic waters are a global common under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The incoming U.S. President's policies are bringing to the forefront the true anarchical nature of international politics.

Sport**IN THE RECORD BOOKS**

Monfils becomes oldest singles champion in ATP Tour history



Gael Monfils became the oldest singles champion in ATP Tour history when the 38-year-old Frenchman swept to victory in the final of the Auckland Classic. Monfils beat Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs 6-3, 6-4, to eclipse Roger Federer in the record books. Federer was two months younger when he won the Swiss Indoors in 2019.

SECOND TITLE

Kessler upsets Mertens to clinch the Hobart WTA crown



Rising American McCartney Kessler upset two-time champion Elise Mertens to win the Hobart International and secure her second WTA title on Saturday with a battling 6-4, 3-6, 6-0 victory. The world No. 67 needed just over two hours to topple the 34th-ranked Belgian, who won her first two crowns in Hobart in 2017 and 2018.

PERFECT PREP

Auger-Aliassime and Keys emerge triumphant in Adelaide



Felix Auger-Aliassime and Madison Keys completed the perfect preparation for the Australian Open, winning at the Adelaide International on Saturday. Keys upset top seed Jessica Pegula 6-3, 4-6, 6-1 to win the event for a second time. Auger-Aliassime fired 10 aces to beat Sebastian Korda 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 for his sixth career trophy.

SOME CHEER

Consolation win for Sri Lanka as New Zealand batters fumble



Sri Lanka razed New Zealand's top-order on Saturday to comfortably win the third ODI in Auckland by 140 runs and salvage a lone victory in the series.

The scores: Sri Lanka 290/8 in 50 overs (Nissanka 66, Henry 4/55) bt New Zealand 150 in 29.4 overs (Chapman 81).

Toofans edge past a fighting Soorma Club

Hyderabad outfit wins shootout 4-3 and claims a bonus point for its third victory; goalkeeper Dixon, dragflicker Amandeep play a key role; UP Rudras bounces back to defeat Delhi Pipers

HIL**Y.B. Sarangi**

ROURKELA

Young drag-flicker Amandeep Lakra scored the equaliser and goalkeeper Dominic Dixon made some vital saves in the penalty shootout as Hyderabad Toofans edged out JSW Soorma Club via sudden death in a cliff-hanger in the Hockey India League at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium here on Saturday.

Following a 1-1 draw in the regulation period, Toofans held their nerve to win the shootout 4-3 and claimed an important bonus point from their third win.

Missed chances

Toofans made more circle entries but could not make the most of a couple of chances in the opening quarter. Soorma's attacks looked more effective. Nicolas della Torre earned the first penalty corner and converted it too in the eighth minute.

His drag-flick got deflected off Toofans' first rusher's stick to beat goalkeeper Vikas Dahiya.

Against some gritty and clinical defence of Soorma,



On target: Amandeep played a key role for the Hyderabad Toofans. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Toofans continued to grapple with their finishing woes and wasted at least three more field goal opportunities in the second quarter.

Arshdeep Singh missed a sitter. Later, Darshan Gawkar and Talwinder Singh also wasted chances.

Toofans thwarted Soorma's second short corner before converting their first, thanks to two local lads, to level the score in the penultimate quarter.

Shilanand Lakra fed perfectly and Amandeep made no mistake in putting

it past seasoned custodian Vincent Vanasch's right.

Toofans pressed hard to create more chances but could not find success.

Soorma, who missed the services of Harmanpreet Singh after the team's captain injured his left leg with a minute and 47 seconds left, earned two more short corners in the closing seconds, but Toofans foiled those to take the contest to the tie-breaker.

The deadlock continued as both goalkeepers, Vanasch and Dixon, did well

in the first five shots of the shootouts.

Zachary Wallace found the target, while Nicolas Poncelet shot wide in sudden death to the delight of Toofans.

In the other match, UP Rudras rallied to defeat Delhi SG Pipers 3-1 and scripted its third victory.

The results: Hyderabad Toofans 1 (Amandeep 40) drew with JSW Soorma Hockey Club 1 (della Torre 8) (Toofans bt Soorma 4-3 in shootout).

UP Rudras 3 (Wortelboer 30, Russell 43, Tanguy 54) bt Delhi SG Pipers 1 (Whetton 29).

Besides Shami's return, Dhruv Jurel has been pre-

Shami returns to India squad; Axar is Suryakumar's deputy

ENG IN IND**Amol Karhadkar**

MUMBAI

Mohammed Shami will return to international cricket after a prolonged injury hiatus. The pacer was picked in India's 15-member squad for the five-match T20I series against England, starting January 22.

The national selection panel met here in person on Saturday to finalise the squad and take stock of the Indian cricket team.

The Hindu understands that Shami, who last featured for India during the 2023 World Cup final, is also set to be picked in the provisional squad for the Champions Trophy.

However, with Shami's ankle and knee injury having taken much longer than expected to heal, the selectors and the team management will keep a keen eye on the pacer's match fitness during the England white-ball series.

Update on Bumrah

It is understood that the selectors will finalise the squad for the three ODIs against England next week since they are keeping a close watch on the Vijay Hazare Trophy knockouts and are also awaiting a medical update on Jasprit Bumrah.

Besides Shami's return, Dhruv Jurel has been pre-



Shami.
FILE PHOTO: K. MURALI KUMAR

Capitals for the forthcoming edition.

Immediately after the selection meeting, the BCCI had a meeting to take stock of a disastrous season of Test cricket and plan the way forward.

The meeting was attended by Test and ODI captain Rohit Sharma, head coach Gautam Gambhir, chief selector Ajit Agarkar, secretary-in-waiting Devajit Saikia and former secretary Jay Shah.

All the personnel were huddled together at a south Mumbai hotel, before Shah's felicitation by the BCCI for having been elected as the International Cricket Council chair.

Captain Smriti Mandhana continued her fine form, laying the foundation with a forceful 41, while the efforts of Pratika Rawal and Tejal Hasabnis were crucial.

Titas Sadhu stepped up, striking in her first spell. Sayali Satghare also impressed while Saima Thakor bowled a tidy 10-over spell.

However, India's fielding was subpar in the first ODI.

The squads (from): India: Smriti Mandhana (Capt.), Deepthi Sharma (Vice-capt.), Pratika Rawal, Harleen Deol, Jemima Rodrigues, Uma Chetry (wk), Richa Ghosh (wk), Tejal Hasabnis, Raghvi Bist, Minnu Mani, Priya Mishra, Tanuja Kanwer, Titas Sadhu, Saima Thakor, and Sayali Satghare.

Ireland: Gaby Lewis (Capt.), Ava Canning, Christina Coulter Reilly, Alana Dalzell, Laura Delany, Georgina Dempsey, Sarah Forbes, Arlene Kelly, Joanna Loughran, Aimee Maguire, Leah Paul, Orla Prendergast, Una Raymond-Hoey, Freya Sargent and Rebecca Stokell. Match starts at 11 a.m.

A cautiously optimistic beginning to Women's HIL

Santdeep Dey

RANCHI

The Women's Hockey India League (HIL-W) would hope that the bumpy ride from the garage to the start line fades into a distant memory before lights-out here on Sunday.

This is the first time an exclusive league for women has found a place in the HIL framework, paving the way for a more inclusive future for Indian hockey.

With the inclusion of two more franchises deferred until next season, only 96 players could be slotted into Delhi SG Pipers, JSW Soorma Hockey Club, Shrachi Rahr Bengal Tigers, and Odisha Warriors.

The franchises will play each other twice in the pool stage, with the first match set to be played between the Warriors and Pipers. The top two teams will clash in the finale on January 26. In its efforts to popularise the event, HII has decided to forego revenue from ticket sales by making entry free for all.

Big guns target glory as action begins at Melbourne Park

AUSTRALIAN OPEN**Agencies**

MELBOURNE



Gearing up: Sabalenka has been in red-hot form in the lead up to the tournament. REUTERS

Top Picks

Men: 2-Zverev vs Pouille; 6-Ruud vs Munar; 20-Fils vs Virtanen; 26-Machac vs Nagal

Women: 1-Sabalenka vs Stephens; 5-Zheng vs Todoni; 11-Badosa vs Wang; 14-Andreeva vs Bouzkova

Grand Slam success has so far eluded Zverev but after a 2024 season in which he won the Masters 1000 titles in Rome and Paris and reached the French Open final, the German is once again among the favourites in the men's draw.

He will be hoping to im-

prove on last year's semi-final run at Melbourne Park during which he defeated

Novak Djokovic is targeting an 11th Australian Open title and record 25th Grand Slam crown but faces an uphill battle against Jannik Sinner and Alcaraz.

Djokovic may be 37 but the Serb can never be written off on Melbourne Park, where he has enjoyed enormous success.

Italian Sinner won his maiden Grand Slam title in Australia last year, beating Daniil Medvedev in the final, and went on to establish himself as the undisputed world No. 1.

But the 23-year-old's season was rocked by doping accusations that he denies.

Punjab men set up title clash with holder TN

Sports Bureau

Punjab beat Railways 69-63 to set up the title clash against defending champion Tamil Nadu in the men's section of the 74th National basketball championship in Bhavnagar on Saturday. The women's final will be between Railways and Kerala.

The results: Men: Semifinals: Punjab 69 (Wang Singh Panaiach 16, Kanwar Gurba Singh Sandhu 15, Amritpal Singh 15) bt

Railways 63 (Sahaj Pratap Singh Sekhon 16, Palpreet Singh 14, Tushal Singh 14).

Tamil Nadu 78 (Anantharaj 17, Aravind Kumar Muthukrishnan 16, Muin Bek Hafez 12) bt

Karnataka 51 (Samanth Sathyarthi 13, Abhishek Gowda 11). Quarterfinals:

Railways 79 (Sahaj Pratap Singh Sekhon 11, Sahil Kalyan 11, Princepal Singh 11) bt Rajasthan 53 (Sharad Dadich 14).

Women: Semifinals: Kerala 69 (R. Sreekala 18, Susan Florentina 12, Swapna Merin Jiju 12) bt Delhi 62 (Namrata 17, Garima Goswami 15); Railways 18 (K. Sathy 18, Dharsini Thiruvakkarakku 14, P. Priyanka 14) bt Tamil Nadu 62 (Ashmita 16, C.S. Anumaria 13).

Quarterfinals: Kerala 68 (R. Sreekala 16, Irin John 11, Susan Florentina 10) bt Maharashtra 27.

Mohammedan pulls off a stunning win over Bengaluru

ISL**N. Sudarshan**

BENGALURU



Mohammedan SC pulled off a stunning heist as it snatched a 1-0 win over Bengaluru FC in the ISL at the Sree Kanteerava stadium here on Saturday.

Mirjalol Kasimov's superb free-kick from just outside the penalty area in the 88th minute beat Gurpreet Singh Sandhu at the near post to hand BFC its first home defeat of the season.

The victory – only the visitors' second of the campaign, both away – came on the back of two goalless draws, and lifted Andrei Chernyshov's wards from the bottom of the table into 12th position (10 points) above Hyderabad FC.

BFC remained second (27 points) but its fourth loss in the last nine fixtures will hamper its chances of a top-two finish, with FC Goa and Jamshedpur FC breathing down its neck.

The host will rue the chances attackers Alberto Noguera and substitute Shivaldo Singh missed from point-blank range in

the first and second periods respectively. But it shouldn't mask what was a largely subdued performance from BFC.

Mohammedan didn't quite impress. Defender Florent Ogier nearly turned one into his own net in the first half while midfielder Alexis Gomez lost the ball routinely from promising positions.

Killer blow

But the Kolkata side stayed tight when it mattered and landed the killer blow to ensure that this new year has so far been without blemish.

PTI reports from Guwahati

Riding on Jamie Maclaren's record second-minute goal, Mohun Bagan extended its dominance in the Kolkata derby with a 1-0 win over East Bengal FC. Maclaren scored the fastest goal of the Kolkata derby in ISL and it was enough for the reigning champion to edge its arch-rival, while going eight points clear (35) at the top.

The results:
At Bengaluru: Bengaluru 0 lost to Mohammedan 1 (Kasimov 88).
At Guwahati: MBSG 1 (Maclaren 2) bt East Bengal 0.

IN BRIEF



Sidharth Rawat goes down to Maxim Zhukov in semifinals

Qualifier Sidharth Rawat's fine run was broken by Maxim Zhukov in the semifinals of the \$30,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Arera Club in Bhopal on Saturday. Zhukov won 6-4, 6-1 to set up a title clash against the champion of the last tournament in Indore, Alastair Gray of Britain, who beat Eric Vanshelboim 6-3, 6-4. India's Chirag Duan and Dev Javia defeated Korea's Yeongseok Jeong and Uisung Park 4-6, 6-1, [10-2] in the doubles final. While it was the maiden title in the professional circuit for the 21-year-old Chirag, it was the third doubles crown for the 22-year-old Javia.

Satwik & Chirag lose in Malaysia Open semifinals

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's impressive run at the Malaysia Super 1000 badminton tournament came to an end following a 10-21, 15-21 loss to Korea's Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae in the semifinals, in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday.

Rutuja-Chong pair goes down in the final

Rutuja Bhosale in partnership with Eudice Chong of Hong Kong was beaten 4-6, 6-0, [10-6] by Sujeong Jang and Wushuang Zheng in the doubles final of the \$60,000 ITF women's tennis tournament in Nonthaburi, Thailand, on Saturday.

Triple crown for Ankur, double for Abhinandh

Bengal's Ankur Bhattacharjee completed a treble, winning the u-19 boys' singles and doubles titles to go with the team title West Bengal clinched the other day, in the 86th UTT junior and youth National table tennis championships here on Saturday. Tamil Nadu's P. B. Abhinandh won a double, bagging the u-17 singles and doubles crowns.

The results (finals): Boys: U-19: Ankur Bhattacharjee bt P.B. Abhinandh 11-4, 8-11, 13-11, 11-7, 11-7; **Doubles:** Ankur & Shankardas bt Punit Biswas & Oishik Ghosh 12-10, 8-11, 11-4, 11-2; **U-17:** P.B. Abhinandh bt Punit Biswas 11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-6, 11-9; **Doubles:** Abhinandh & S. Sriram bt Atherva Gupta & Sarthak Arya 5-11, 11-8, 11-6, 10-12, 11-7.

LIVE TELECAST

Vijay Hazare Trophy: JioCinema, 9 a.m.
Badminton: Malaysia Open, Sports 18-3 & Hotstar, 10.30 a.m.
India Women vs Ireland Women: 2nd ODI, Sports 18-1 & Hotstar, 11 a.m.
I-League: Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LIV, 1 & 3.30 p.m.
Australian Open: Evening session, Sony Sports Ten 2, 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 1.30 p.m.
Serie A: gxr.world, 5, 7.30, 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Monday)
LaLiga: gxr.world, 6.30 & 8.45 p.m.
Bundesliga: Sony Sports Ten 2 (SD & HD) & LIV, 8 & 10 p.m.
Hockey: HIL, DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 3 (SD & HD) & LIV, 8.15 p.m.
Australian Open: Sony Sports Ten 2, 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 5.30 a.m. (Monday)

Pacific Heights may score an encore in feature event

HYDERABAD: The three-year-old filly Pacific Heights, who won well in her last start, may score an encore in the Deccan Bookmakers Welfare Association Darley Arabian Million (Gr. 3), the feature event of Sunday's (Jan. 12) races.

1 RED SATIN PLATE (Div. I) (1,200m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. II) – 12. 25 p.m.: 1. Inderdhanus (10) Deepak 62, 2. Fashion Icon (1) Gaurav 59, 3. Genie (2) Nakash 56, 4. The Pictures (6) Akshay K 55, 5. Dhanadeepa (3) Mukesh 54, 5, 6. Elegant Girl (9) Raifque Sk. 53, 7. Wandering Warrior (5) Abhay Singh 53, 8. Club Queen (4) Md. Ekram 52, 9. Desert Sultan (8) B.R. Kumar 52.5 and 10. Splendour On Grass (7) Ajay K 52.5.

1. THE PIUS, 2. CLUB QUEEN, 3. DHANADEEPA

2 COMMON LAND PLATE (Div. II) (1,200m), 5-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. II) – 12. 55: 1. Dvanoosh (2) Shiwansh 60, 2. Malibu (6) Saqlain 60, 3. Golden Gazelle (1) H.M. Akshay 57, 5. Blissful (4) R.S. Jodha 57, 5. Rival (7) P. Sai K 55.5, 6. Shadow Fax (9) Kuldeep Sr. 55, 7. Mr. Perfect (3) Mohit 54, 8. Deccan Sprint (8) B. Mohit 53.5, 9. Happy Soul (10) Kuldeep Jr. 52.5 and 10. Hurricane Wave (5) Afroz K 50.5.

1. DECCAN SPIRIT, 2. SHADOW FAX, 3. RIVAL

5 B. VIJAY MADDEN (Div. III) (1,600m) 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III) – 2. 30: 1. See My Attitude (8) Afroz K 61, 2. Bellingham (1) B.R. Kumar 58, 3. Always Special (12) Mukesh 55, 4. Golden Unicorn (9) Kuldeep Sr. 54, 5. Hoping High (2) Mohit 54, 6.

Padikkal slams hundred as Karnataka edges Baroda

Opener Rawat's maiden List A ton goes in vain for the home side; speedster Koushik and leg-spinner Shreyas strike timely blows to take their team into the semifinals

HAZARE TROPHY

S. Dipak Ragav
VADODARA

Devdutt Padikkal kicked off the new year in style by slamming a breezy 102 (99b, 15x4, 2x6) and headlined Karnataka's five-run win over Baroda in a closely fought quarterfinal match of the Vijay Hazare Trophy here at the Motibaug Cricket ground on Saturday.

Asked to bat first, Karnataka managed 281 for eight after Padikkal and K.V. Aneesh (52) laid the foundation through their 133-run second-wicket partnership.

In reply, Baroda opener Shashwat Rawat (104, 126b, 9x4, 1x6) shepherded the chase expertly, scoring his maiden List A hundred. He found able allies in Atit Sheth (56) and Krunal Pandya (30), whose contributions kept the home side in the hunt for most of the chase.

However, pacer V. Koushik (two for 39) and leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal (two for 38) gave timely breakthroughs during the middle-overs to get the southern giant back into the contest.

Shreyas removed Sheth while Koushik had Krunal caught behind by keeper K.L. Shrijith, who took a superb one-handed catch diving to his left. Their dis-



Free-flowing knock: Padikkal was in his element as he brought up his ninth List A century. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ciplined bowling prevented Baroda from scoring a boundary for more than 10 overs and pushed the asking rate to nearly 10.

Despite Rawat's heroics and some useful cameos from Bhanu Pania (22) and

much to the disappointment of hundreds of fans cheering for the host.

Earlier, Padikkal was at his free-flowing best, clearing the in-field with lofted drives and square cuts. He quickly brought up his half-century off just 51 balls. From there, the 24-year-old stepped up a gear and smashed the spinners to all corners of the park.

He used his feet well against Mahesh Pithiya to target the leg-side, collecting a handful of boundaries and a maximum over long-on. He also swept well and moved to the 90s by lofting Raj Limbani over long-off for his second six and reached his ninth List-A ton in just 96 balls.

Limbani and Sheth then helped Baroda dry up the runs, taking three wickets each. However, Abhinav Manohar, Shreyas and Prasidh Krishna hit a flurry of boundaries in the climactic stage of the innings to help their team get 69 runs in the last 10 overs. Those runs proved decisive in a game of fine margins.

The scores: Karnataka 281/8 in 50 overs (Devdutt Padikkal 102, K.V. Aneesh 52, Raj Limbani 3/47, Atit Sheth 3/41) bt Baroda 276 in 49.5 overs (Shashwat Rawat 104, Atit Sheth 56).

Maharashtra 275/6 in 50 overs (Arshin Kulkarni 107, Ankeet Bawane 60, Nikhil Naik 52 n.o., Arshdeep Singh 3/56) bt Punjab 205 in 44.4 overs (Anmolpreet Singh 48, Arshdeep Singh 49, Mukesh Choudhary 3/44).

Provisional results: INAC1 Class B: 1. Kiran Reddy (02:39.825).

INAC1 Class C: 1. Ashad Pasha (02:28.615); 2. Amandeep Singh (02:57.160); 3. Ashish Gupta (03:08.219).

INAC2 Class B: 1. Ashad (02:35.871); 2. Kartik Konchady (02:41.524).

4WD Open: 1. Raunak Jana (02:44.311); 2. Kuttoor (02:50.769).

INAC2 Class C: 1. Ashad (02:29.400); 2. Areeb Rahman (02:41.547); 3. Saneesh Sharma (03:45.346).

Jincy's century helps Team-B get the better of Team-D

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Jincy George (104, 119b, 13x4) and Arushi Goel (55 n.o., 81b, 4x4) helped Team-B cruise to a five-wicket victory over Team-D in the BCCI Senior Women One Day Challenger Trophy on Saturday.

The scores:
At MAC: Team-E 147 in 47.4 overs (Sourya Tiwari 57) lost to Team-C 148/5 in 31.3 overs (Tripti Singh 32, Yastika Bhatia 52).

At SSN: Team-D 235 in 48.5 overs (Vrushali Bhagat 75, M. Dakshini 30, Isha Pathare 3/41) lost to



Jincy George (Team-B, 104). Team-B 237/6 in 47 overs (Jincy George 104, Arushi Goel 55 n.o.).

Grand treble for Ashad Pasha

MOTORSPORTS

Sports Bureau
CHENNAI

Ashad Pasha clocked the fastest time, besides winning a triple crown in the South Zone qualifier of the FMSCI-National autocross championship at the Madras International Circuit here on Saturday.

Provisional results: INAC1 Class B: 1. Kiran Reddy (02:39.825).

INAC1 Class C: 1. Ashad Pasha (02:28.615); 2. Amandeep Singh (02:57.160); 3. Ashish Gupta (02:55.132).

Ladies Open: 1. Pallavi Yadav (03:30.081); 2. Reshma Inchalakar (03:44.312).

4WD Open: 1. Raunak Jana (02:44.311); 2. Kuttoor (02:50.769).

INAC2 Class C: 1. Ashad (02:29.400); 2. Areeb Rahman (02:41.547); 3. Saneesh Sharma (03:45.346).



Gritty Maaya rallies to beat Tupitsyna

TENNIS

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI



Champions Donghyun Hwang and Maaya Rajeshwaran. KAMESH SRINIVASAN

hyun Hwang of Korea proved a hard nut to crack for Roshan Santhosh as he dropped only two games.

The seasoned coaches, Balram Singh and Nar Singh, presented the trophies.

The results: Finals: U-18: Boys: Donghyun Hwang (Kor) bt Roshan Santhosh (USA) 6-1, 6-1; **Girls:** Maaya Rajeshwaran bt Ekaterina Tupitsyna 3-6, 7-5, 6-2.

In the boys final, Dong-

hyun

peppi (4) Ashad Asbar 54, 7, N.R.I Star (6) Santosh Raj 53.5, 8. Oskars Officer (5) H.M. Akshay 54.5, 8. Nijinsky Star 54.5, 9. Pride Aside (3) Gaurav 54.5, 10. Screenshot (5) Md. Ismail 54.5 and 11. Whistledown (1) Akshay K 54.5.

1. N.R.I BLAZE, 2. NIJNSKY STAR, 3. WHISTLEDOWN

6 COMMON LAND PLATE (Div. III) (1,200m), 5-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III) – 3.05: 1. Amrya (9) Shivansh 60, 2. Calista Girl (4) Gaurav 59, 3. Kefan (3) Saqlain 59, 4. Darling's Boy (1) Akshay K 57.5, 5. Sangreal (10) P. Sai K 56.5, 6. Sopranos (6) P. Ajeeth K 55.5, 7. Mix The Magic (1) Mukesh 54.5, 8. Miss My Day (7) Nakash 53.5, 9. Park Lane (5) Md. Ismail 53.5, 10. Sucker Punch (8) G. Naresh 54 and 11. Top In Class (2) Kuldip Sr. 52.

1. SOPRANOS, 2. PARK LANE, 3. CHEERIE CHEVALIER

7 IEIME CENTRE ROLLING TROPHY (1,400m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. III) – 4.50: 1. Shoolin (6) B. Nikhil 60.5, 2. That's My Mission (1) Saqlain 59.5, 3. Dali's Champion (10) P. Ajeeth K 56.5, 4. Golden Inzio (9) P. Sai K 55, 5. Self Image (4) B.R. Kumar 54.5, 6. Country's Maximus (5) H.M. Akshay 53.5, 7. Exponent (2) Md. Ekram 53, 8. Petra Act (7) Mukesh 53, 9. Niloufer The Great (8) G. Naresh 52.5 and 10. Talking Stick (3) Ajay K 50.

1. GOLDEN INZIO, 2. DALI'S CHAMPION, 3. THAT'S MY MISSION

8 COMMON LAND PLATE (Div. I) (1,200m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III) – 4.50: 1. Inderdhanus (10) Deepak 62, 2. Fashion Icon (1) Gaurav 59, 3. Genie (2) Nakash 56, 4. The Pictures (3) Akshay K 55, 5. Dhanadeepa (3) Mukesh 54.5, 6. El-

ectant Girl (9) Raifque Sk. 53, 7. Wandering Warrior (5) Abhay Singh 53, 8. Club Queen (4) Md. Ekram 52.5, 9. Desert Sultan (8) B.R. Kumar 52.5 and 10. Splendour On Grass (7) Ajay K 52.5.

1. THE PIUS, 2. CLUB QUEEN, 3. DHANADEEPA

9 RED SATIN PLATE (Div. II) (1,200m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III) – 4.50: 1. Inderdhanus (10) Deepak 62, 2. Fashion Icon (1) Gaurav 59, 3. Genie (2) Nakash 56, 4. The Pictures (3) Akshay K 55, 5. Dhanadeepa (3) Mukesh 54.5, 6. El-

ectant Girl (9) Raifque Sk. 53, 7. Wandering Warrior (5) Abhay Singh 53, 8. Club Queen (4) Md. Ekram 52.5, 9. Desert Sultan (8) B.R. Kumar 52.5 and 10. Splendour On Grass (7) Ajay K 52.5.



Leaving a mark: A Navy aircraft fires flares as it performs a fly-past.



Close call: Two naval skydivers collide mid-air before safely landing in the sea during a rehearsal of the operational demonstration.



In sync: Indian Navy personnel perform a continuity drill during the Eastern Naval Command's operational demonstration in Visakhapatnam.

Might over the sea

At a display in Visakhapatnam, the Indian Navy's Eastern Command demonstrates its operational excellence, resilience, and technological prowess



K. R. Deepak
deepak.kr@thehindu.co.in

The Eastern Naval Command of the Indian Navy held an operational demonstration in Visakhapatnam on January 4, showcasing a breathtaking display of maritime prowess and precision.

The grandeur unfolded with a submarine sail past, followed by a gripping demonstration from the Marina Commando Force that featured the stealth and combat skills of the naval special forces. An oil rig demolition drill emphasised the Navy's readiness to tackle maritime emergencies, while a helicopter rescue operation illustrated their ability to execute daring lifesaving missions.

The skydiving team's performance stood out, especially after an incident during the final rehearsal two days ago, when two skydivers became entangled mid-air and had a choppy

landing in the sea. They were promptly rescued and brought back to the shore. Undeterred by the mishap, the team executed a flawless landing during the main event, earning cheers from the audience. A composite fly-past by Chetak helicopters, Hawk jets, and Dornier planes highlighted the synchronised operations of the naval air fleet.

The evening concluded with a mesmerising beating retreat ceremony. Drone formations lit up the night sky, narrating tales of naval valour and technology. Fireworks and a laser show from the deck of a ship captivated the audience, culminating in firing of flares and illumination of naval vessels, casting a glow over the coast.

The demonstration was a testament to the Indian Navy's operational excellence, resilience, and technological prowess.



Visual treat: Naval officers with their families watch as fireworks go off during the demonstration.



Red skies: Illuminated naval vessels fire flares to the sky making for a brilliant spectacle at night.



Combat ready: Marine commandos simulate a beach assault.



No glitches: Skydivers perform flawlessly during the main event, after getting over a mistake during rehearsal.



Across elements: A Navy helicopter hovers above a submarine performing a sail-past.



In control: Navy personnel simulate a blast as part of a demonstration of beach assault by marine commandos.