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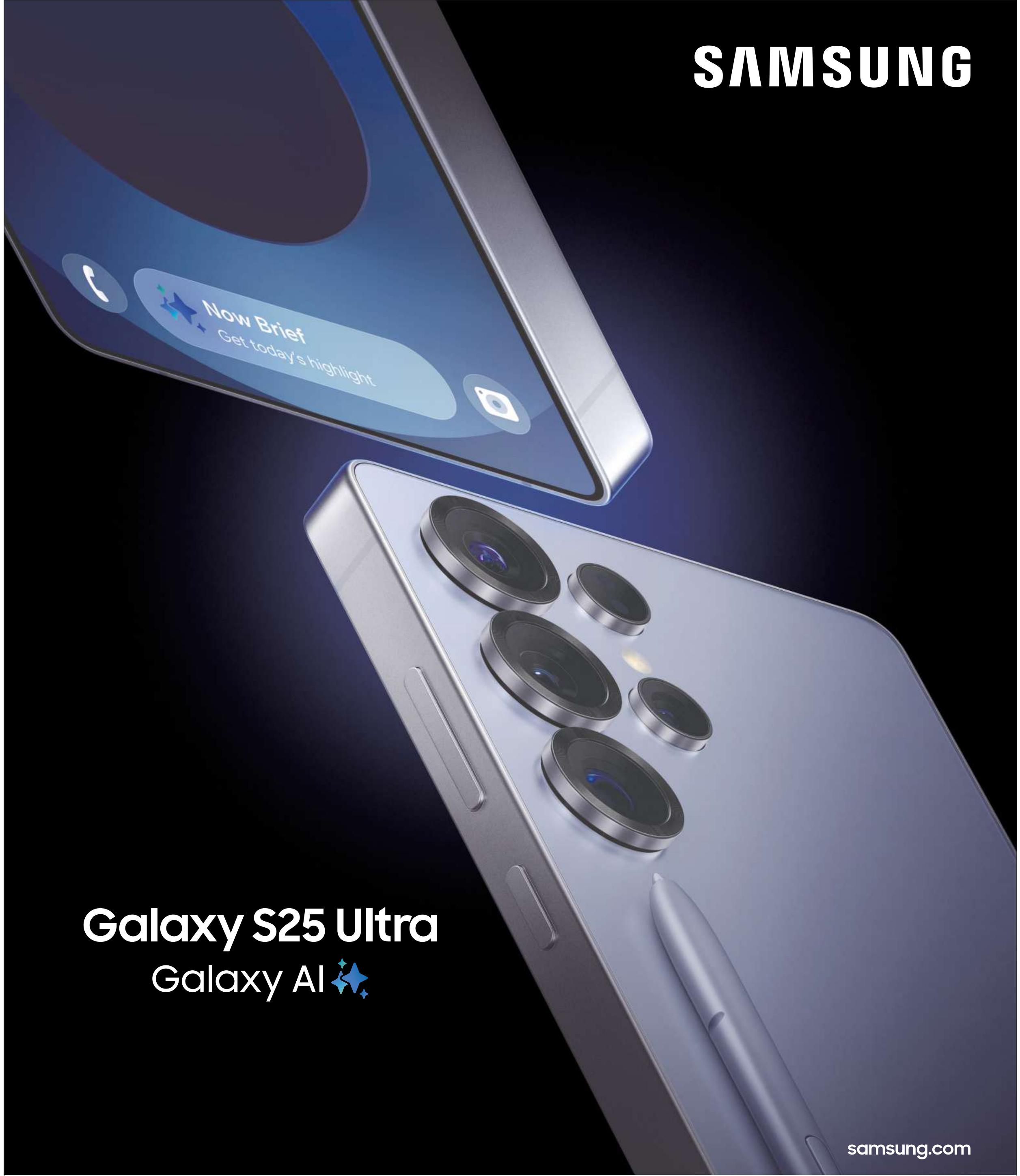
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BUSINESS » PAGE 15



PARLEY
Is poverty being
underestimated
in India?

Experts question data
sets used in survey

OPINION » PAGE 9



TRADE, TRAVEL ON AGENDA
Foreign Secretary to
visit China on Jan. 26

NEWS » PAGE 12

Tusker falls into well, rescued after high drama

Abdul Latheef Naha
MALAPPURAM

An elephant that fell into a well at Urangattiri in Malappuram district of Kerala was brought out safely on Thursday.

The local residents had initially stopped the forest staff from rescuing the tusker, citing frequent raids on their farms and crop loss. They gave in after officials promised relief measures, including a seven-km fencing. The authorities rescued the ele-

phant nearly 20 hours after its fall. The tusker was driven into the forest.

FULL REPORT
» PAGE 4

IN BRIEF



AAP: BJP workers behind attack on Kejriwal's car

NEW DELHI
AAP on Thursday said party chief Arvind Kejriwal's car was attacked by BJP workers in the presence of police in south-west Delhi. » Page 2

NHRC orders new inquiry into hiring by Foxconn

NEW DELHI
The NHRC has admonished Labour Department officials for failure to adequately probe evidence of employment discrimination at Foxconn, which makes Apple iPhones, and told them to re-examine the matter. » Page 14

Will continue to back BJP: Manipur JD(U) legislator

GUWAHATI
Muhammad Abdul Nasir, Manipur's lone Janata Dal (United) MLA, said on Thursday that he would continue to support the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government in the State. » Page 12

'Fire rumour' by tea seller triggered Jalgaon tragedy

Maharashtra Deputy CM Ajit Pawar says the accident is the result of 'sheer rumour' about fire by a tea vendor on Pushpak Express; Collector dismisses reports of any spark or smoke on train

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

The police and the Railways began a probe into Wednesday's Jalgaon train accident in which 12 persons were killed, even as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday called the accident the result of a "sheer rumour" about fire by a tea seller on Pushpak Express.

Jalgaon Collector Ayush Prasad said the police were investigating the criminal conspiracy angle, while railway officials were probing the technical aspect of the accident, wherein they were checking the speed, brakes, and where the fire came from.

Mr. Prasad dismissed reports of spark or smoke as the fire brigade's foam team was not at all used



Death trail: The police examine the tracks a day after the train accident in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra on Thursday. PTI

during the rescue work.

The railway investigation team includes the Principal Chief Safety Officer, the Principal Chief Security Commissioner, the Principal Chief Electrical Engineer, the Principal Chief Mechanical Engineer and the Principal Chief Commercial Manager from the Central Railway Zone.

Chief Public Relations Officer, Swapnil Dhanraj Nila, said the Railway Protection Force and the Government Railway Police initiated an inquiry. In the preliminary inquiry, it was found that after the Pushpak Express stopped, the driver activated the flasher light and applied the brakes as per rules. The curvature of the train was nearly two degrees, which obstructed visibility and reduced the distance for applying the brakes. Even people could not see the train coming. Pilots tried their best to avoid the incident, the CPORO said.

On Wednesday, passengers on Pushpak Express, travelling from Lucknow to Mumbai, jumped off the train after an emergency chain-pulling incident owing to rumour of fire.

The death toll remains at 12. Earlier on Wednesday, the administration gave the official figure as 13 but it was lowered on Thursday as the police found decapitated bodies and misnumbered them.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12
RUMOUR HAS IT
» PAGE 8

Iron Age kicked off in 4th millennium BCE in T.N.: Stalin

N. Sai Charan
Dennis S. Jesudasan
CHENNAI

In a finding that may alter the understanding of the antiquity of iron in the Indian subcontinent, a report released by Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Thursday said introduction of iron in modern-day Tamil Nadu went back to the first quarter of the 4th millennium BCE. Samples were lifted from the Sivagalai site in Thoothukudi district.



M.K. Stalin launches the report in Chennai. SRINATH M.

used on Tamil land in 3345 BCE, he said.

Experts suggested that the discovery proved that usage of smelted iron could go back to the middle of the third millennium BCE.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

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DELHI ELECTION

BJP ratchets up Ram rhetoric in Capital

Saffron flags pop up across localities overnight after party launches campaign song to mark first anniversary of Ram Temple consecration; while some residents say the emotive issue will influence their vote, others assert local issues take precedence; some claim flags were put up without approval

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

A fresh wave of saffron is sweeping through Delhi, with hundreds of 'Jai Shri Ram' flags popping up across localities overnight as the BJP intensifies its campaign for the upcoming Assembly election.

The BJP had launched its campaign song, 'Jo Ram ko lekar aye, unka raj hogा Dilli mein' (Those who brought Ram, will rule Delhi), on Wednesday to mark the first anniversary of the Ram Temple consecration in Ayodhya.

This saffron surge is particularly evident in Anna Nagar, a slum cluster in ITO under the Jangpura Assembly constituency, where residents woke up



A view of a gaushala near Pragati Maidan where hundreds of saffron flags were hoisted by 'unknown individuals' on the night of the one-year anniversary of the Ram Temple consecration. ASHNA BUTANI

to find hundreds of 'Jai Shri Ram' flags in the area. Almost every house, shop, and autorickshaw now sports a newly installed flag, say residents.

Raja Ram, a 50-year-old vegetable vendor, discovered a 'Jai Shri Ram' flag hoisted over his shop. He claimed it was installed by unknown individuals at

midnight. "Some might remove them, while others will let them remain."

Highlighting the area's persistent problems, Mr. Ram said, "The biggest is-

sue here is that the drains are broken and start overflowing in the monsoon."

The BJP had used its campaign slogan, "Jo Ram ko laye hain, hum unko layenge", widely during the Lok Sabha poll. Its impact is still evident, with voters like Dhruv, a 26-year-old driver, confirming that the temple consecration will influence his vote. "Some of us put flags up at night because of the one-year celebrations. The temple inauguration was important to us all," he said.

Symbol of support
A 33-year-old resident said BJP workers installed flags in her neighbourhood. "It is a symbol of support for the BJP to prevent workers from other parties from entering the area. Hindus

and Muslims live in harmony here and there were attempts to divide us on religious lines," she said.

Her top concern, however, is the unreliable wa-

ter supply. Local BJP leader Sunny Sarwan attributed the appearance of flags to residents' sentimental attachment or 'bhava'.

For Bhupinder Kumar, a 42-year-old vendor, the temple consecration isn't a top priority and he has more pressing concerns.

He points out that authorities demolished his house while sprucing up the area for the G20 summit. "For some people, God has been benevolent, but for those of us who aren't as fortunate, issues like livelihood and employment will take centre stage," he said.

Independents jump into fray to address 'ignored' local issues

Satvika Mahajan
NEW DELHI

Breaking away from the usual rhetoric of welfare schemes, identity politics, muscle power, and blame games, several Independents are contesting the poll driven by a desire to address specific concerns in their constituencies that have been "ignored" by major parties like AAP, BJP, and Congress.

While these parties have announced schemes for women, unemployed youth, Dalits, and priests, many Independents believe "this is not the model Delhi needs".

Budiya, a 49-year-old Independent candidate from Narela in west Delhi, told *The Hindu* that despite working as a 'karyakarta' of both AAP and the Congress, they "failed" her as there is "no visible development" in her area.

Prakash Srivastav, a 32-year-old lift repairman, is contesting the election from Kirari, with the aim of ensuring no child in his area remains uneducated.

Ashish Kumar, 29, is contesting from Seemapuri in north-east Delhi, to improve government schools and water supply, create jobs, and reduce crime, while Hari Kisan, 32, from Bawana of north Delhi, aims to rid Delhi of the politics of "money and



Several Independents claimed they had to run pillar to post to file nominations. FILE PHOTO

muscle power".

Filing nomination papers proved to be a daunting task for several independent candidates.

Tedious process

While a lawyer in her locality helped Ms. Budiya, Mr. Srivastav said he struggled to collect documents and fill out forms due to his limited education.

Meghnad S., a 35-year-old political content creator, decided to file his nomination from Malviya Nagar as a social experiment to understand the process of filing nominations as an Independent. He found the experience "tedious despite working in political circles". "The playing field is so skewed for Independents that they find themselves at a disadvantage at the nomination and campaigning levels," he said.

Bidhuri, Atishi file complaints against each other with EC

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Thursday filed a complaint with the Election Commission against BJP candidate from Kalkaji Ramesh Bidhuri for allegedly creating an "atmosphere of fear" to influence the election. Mr. Bidhuri, too, lodged a complaint against Ms. Atishi, accusing her of filing "false complaints" against him and exerting undue pressure on the local administration.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

P. PARTHASARATHI (86), Retired Special Correspondent, The Hindu, Chennai passed away on 23, January, 2025. Address: Plot No:23, Jain Nagar, 2nd Street, Hastinapuram, Chennai-600064. Contact No: 98680 72488.

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Director



**Office of SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, 6TH CIRCLE
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- Last date/ Time for receipt of bid through e-tendering last date/time for receipt of bids through e-tendering on dated 05.02.2024 up to 6:00PM.
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- Only online submission of bids is permitted, therefore, bids must be submitted online on website www.pmgstender.gov.in The technical qualification part of the bids will be opened online on 04-02-2025 at 11:30 AM in the office of Superintending Engineer, 6th Circle HP.PWD, Kullu by the authorized officers. If the office happens to be closed on the date of opening of the bids as specified, the bids will be opened online on the next working day at the same time.
- The bidder is not required to quote his rate for routine maintenance. The rates to be paid for routine maintenance to the contractor shall be regulated based on his performance of maintenance activities.
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- Bidders may bid for any one or more of the works mentioned in the Table above. To qualify for a package of contracts made up of this and other contracts for which bids are invited in the same NIT, the bidder must demonstrate having experience and resources sufficient to meet the aggregate of the qualifying criteria for the individual contracts.
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242523 003588: Procurement of Clay No-1 (Spray Dried) for TNPL Unit-II.

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- Deadline for submission of Bid 31/01/2025 at 11:00AM
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The Bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the department website www.hptenders.gov.in Executive Engineer, Chamba Division, HPPWD Chamba, Pin-176310 Tel.01899-222229; Email-[ee-cha-hp@nic.in</a](mailto:ee-cha-hp@nic.in)

High Court order on Delhi govt's CAG reports today

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court is scheduled to pronounce on Friday its order on a petition by several BJP MLAs seeking that the 14 CAG reports linked to policy initiatives of the AAP-led Delhi government be tabled at the State Assembly.

The Speaker's counsel and the Delhi government opposed the plea and said there was no urgency to table the reports when the Assembly poll is due in two weeks.

During a hearing held on January 13, the court said the CAG reports should have been promptly placed before the Assembly for discussion and the State government "dragging its feet" on the issue raised "doubts on its bona fides".

Timings	
DELHI	
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RISE 07:13 SET 17:54	
RISE 02:34 SET 13:00	
SATURDAY, JAN. 25	
RISE 07:13 SET 17:55	
RISE 03:33 SET 13:45	
SUNDAY, JAN. 26	
RISE 07:12 SET 17:56	
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Delhi Weather	max	min
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Palam	23	11

Delhi Palam Today
21°C Morning will be cold with mist and haze. Day will be pleasant with moderate cool winds. Night will be cold. Dry weather to prevail.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
22°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be cold. Day will be pleasant with moderate cool winds. Night also will be cold.

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BJP workers attacked Kejriwal's car amid police presence: AAP

BJP denies allegation; police allowed Opposition candidate's men to enter public meeting on Home Minister Amit Shah's orders: AAP chief

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party on Thursday alleged that former Chief Minister and party chief Arvind Kejriwal's car was attacked for a second time in a week by BJP workers in the presence of police in south-west Delhi.

"Today in Hari Nagar, the police allowed the Opposition candidate's men to enter my public meeting and attack my car. All this is happening on the orders of [Home Minister] Amit Shah. Big questions are being raised on the Election Commission," Mr. Kejriwal said in a post on X.

Earlier this month, Mr. Kejriwal had alleged that "BJP goons" hurled a stone at his car in an attempt to assassinate him while campaigning in New Delhi.

Refuting the allegation, the BJP said it would be



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal with party's candidate Surinder Setia at Hari Nagar on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"more suitable" for Mr. Kejriwal if he focused on the "internal conflicts" within his party.

AAP alleged that the attack left Mr. Kejriwal "stranded in his car" for an extended period while the police stood by as "silent spectators", offering "no protection". Mr. Kejriwal currently has Z-plus security cover.

While Delhi Police did not officially comment on the issue, a senior police officer denied any attack on the former Chief Minister. "Still we are investigating the entire matter," the officer said.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that Mr. Kejriwal had made "baseless allegations" of attack in Narela, Greater Kailash, and New Delhi earlier.

"Mr. Kejriwal has forgotten that his own party is facing internal rebellion in Hari Nagar," he alleged.

New security measures, ban on alcohol spark protests in Ashoka University

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

alcohol on campus.

The new protocols, reportedly outlined in a January 13 email by the varsity's Vice President of Operations, also include submitting students to pocket checks. Students have criticised the measures as invasive and an overreach of authorities and demanded

a roll-back. The Ashoka University Student Government (AUSG) alleged the decision was taken without any consultation with the students.

A petition opposing the protocols has reportedly garnered over 1,100 signatures, including those of faculty members'.

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Kalyan Chaubey (President, All India Football Federation and Joint-Secretary, Indian Olympic Association)
Shiva Keshavan (Head - Scholarships, Olympics Sports Strategy at Reliance Foundation & India's Deputy Chef-de-Mission at the Paris Olympics)
Commodore PK Garg (Former CEO, Target Olympic Podium Scheme)
Putul Kumari (Senior vice president, National Rifle Association of India)

Accelerating sports development in Bihar

B. Rajender (Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Sports, Government of Bihar)
Raveendran Sankaran (Director General & CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority)

Unlocking athlete potential through sports science and data

Dr. G Kishore (Principal and Regional Director, Sports Authority of India, Laxmibai College of Physical Education)
Dr. Pralay Majumdar (Sr. Advisor, Centre of Excellence in Sports Science and Analytics, IIT Madras)
Harendra Singh (Head coach, Indian women's hockey team)

Bihar championing India's e-sports revolution

Nishi Kant (Chief, Design & Product, JetSynthesys)
Akshat Rathore (Co-Founder, NODWIN Gaming)
Abhishek Issar (Founder, UNIV Sportatech; Co-Founder, Federation of Esports India)

Breaking barriers - Tackling challenges in grassroots sports

Sanjiv Kumar (Founder, Takshila Educational Society and Pro Vice-Chairman, Delhi Public School)
Rishikesh Joshi (Co-founder and CEO, Sports for All)
Jatin Paranjape (Founder and CEO, Khelo More)
Anil Kumar (Managing Director, Great SportsTech)

Empowering the Game - Unleashing women's potential in sports

Dr. Deepa Malik (Paralympic medalist & South Asia Sub Region Representative, Asian Paralympic Committee)
Mihira Khopkar (Sports Nutritionist, Rehabilitation and Sports Medicine Department, Sir HN Reliance Foundation Hospital)
Aditi Mutarkar (Program Head, Athlete and Women Initiatives, Simply Sport Foundation)
Dola Banerjee (Olympian archer, Member of IOA Executive Committee)

Chasing a Medal - The grit behind the glory

Vijender Singh (2008 Olympic bronze medalist, boxing)
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PR Sreejesh (2020 and 2024 Olympic bronze medalist, hockey)

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IN BRIEF



Centre yet to give nod to Cauvery-Vellar project: SC

The Supreme Court has found that the Union government is yet to grant 'in-principle approval' to the Cauvery-South Vellar Link project four years after Tamil Nadu sought clearance from the Jal Shakti Ministry. A Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and A.G. Masih noted the fact while disposing of an application filed by Karnataka urging the top court to restrain neighbouring Tamil Nadu from proceeding with the work on the project. The Bench disposed of the application while observing it was not necessary to consider Karnataka's interim plea for injunction as the request by Tamil Nadu for project clearance has still not received the approval of the Centre.

BSF to hold talks with BGB in Delhi from February 16 to 20

The next round of biannual Director-General level talks between the Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) will be held in Delhi from February 16 to 20, the first time after the regime change in the neighbouring country, a government official said. The talks that were previously slated to be held in October 2024 were postponed due to the ongoing political situation in Bangladesh. The talks were previously held in Dhaka. Fencing of border areas, trans-border crimes, and coordinated patrolling will be on the agenda, the official said.

BPSC announces results of exam marred by paper leak allegations, student protests

Patna HC is hearing a plea calling for the cancellation of the exam, a retest, not publishing the results

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

The Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) on Thursday announced the results of the Integrated 70th BPSC Combined (Preliminary) Competitive Examination 2024 on Thursday, which had sparked protests by students and drawn support from various political parties. The exam held on December 13, 2024 at 912 centres in the State was marred by allegations of paper leaks and irregularities.

According to the BPSC, 32,899 candidates appeared for the exam, out of which 21,581 cleared it. It expressed happiness over declaring the results within 45 days and congratulated the successful candidates, wishing them the best for the upcoming written test.

Many candidates had

boycot the December 13 exam alleging that they did not receive the question paper on time at the Bapu Exam Centre in Patna.

The BPSC subsequently cancelled the exam at the centre and conducted a re-exam on January 4 at 22 centres, which was taken by 5,943 candidates.

Despite BPSC chairman Parmar Ravi Manubhai's denial of allegations of a paper leak, many candidates have been demanding that the exams be cancelled and re-conducted at all centres, citing irregularities. Several politicians, including Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav, Independent

Tusker that fell into well rescued after high drama

Day-long tension and concern about jumbo's health end after officials clinch a deal with protesting residents in Kerala's Malappuram; authorities promise seven-km fencing to keep elephants at bay

Abdul Latheef Naha
MALAPPURAM

An elephant that fell into a well near Areekode in Malappuram district of Kerala was rescued and driven back into the nearby forest, ending the day-long protests and uncertainties on Thursday.

Though the tusker fell into the well at Urangattiri on a plantation belonging to a farmer in the morning, Forest Department staff could not initiate rescue operations immediately as local people resisted the move, pointing to the frequent elephant raids and attacks in the region.

Local political leaders too sided with them, posing a challenge to the forest and wildlife authorities.

The elephant was part of a herd that had damaged the farmlands of people living on the forest fringes. The farmers in the area have suffered heavy crop loss because of frequent elephant raids.

The area falls under the Nilambur North forest division.

The tusker exhibited



Human-wildlife conflict: Local people stopping forest staff after an elephant fell into a well at Urangattiri in Malappuram district on Thursday. SAKER HUSSAIN

signs of exhaustion after remaining immobile in the well even as the authorities held several rounds of discussions with the protesters.

Residents resist

The day-long tension and concerns about the tusker's health ended when the authorities clinched a deal with the protesting residents and rescued the elephant nearly 20 hours after

its fall.

The forest staff built a ramp into the well by digging the sidewall with an earthmover. The elephant climbed out of the well around 10 p.m. and was driven into the jungle.

The people were assured of relief measures, including a seven-km fencing to keep herds at bay and a compensation of ₹1.5 lakh to the well's owner.

Prior to the rescue, P.V.

Anvar, Trinamool Congress leader and former Independent MLA of Nilambur, said the elephant should be "buried alive". He said rescuing the elephant would aggravate the farmers' problems.

District Congress Committee president V.S. Joy said the forest staff would have to face the wrath of the people if the elephant returns to their farms after the rescue.

Use of loudspeakers not crucial for any religion: Bombay HC

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Use of loudspeakers is not an essential part of any religion, the Bombay High Court said on Thursday, directing the law enforcement agencies to take prompt action against loudspeakers that violate the noise pollution norms and rules.

A Division Bench of Justices A.S. Gadkari and S.C. Chandak said noise was a major health hazard and no one can claim that their rights are affected in any manner if he or she is denied permission to use loudspeakers.

The High Court asked the State government to direct religious institutions to adopt mechanisms for controlling noise levels, including calibrated sound systems with auto-decibel limits.

The court passed its judgment on a petition filed by two housing associations from suburban Kurla - Jago Nehru Nagar Residents' Welfare Association and Shivsrushti Co-operative Housing Societies Association Ltd - alleging police inaction against noise pollution caused by loudspeakers installed on masjids in the area.

The petitioners contended that the use of loudspeakers for religious purposes, including the recitation of *azan* (Islamic call to prayer) disturbed the peace and violated the Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, as well as provisions under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

The Bench in its order said Mumbai was a cosmopolitan city and obviously there are persons of different religions in every part of the city.

"It is in public interest that such permissions should not be granted. By denying such permissions, rights under Article 19 or 25 of the Constitution of India are not at all infringed. Use of loudspeakers is not an essential part of any religion," the High Court said.

Citizens helpless

The court said it was the "bounden duty" of the State government and other authorities to enforce the law by adopting all the necessary measures, as may be prescribed by the provisions of law.

It added that common citizens are "hapless and helpless victims of these obnoxious use of loudspeakers and/or amplifiers".

TMC, BJP attack Rahul over date of death in tribute for Subhas Bose on social media

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership in West Bengal on Thursday criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for a social media post on Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose which mentioned that the late freedom fighter had died on August 18, 1945.

Offering tributes to the great revolutionary on his birth anniversary, Mr. Gandhi had put up a photograph of Netaji on social media platform X and captioned it as "January 23, 1897 – August 18, 1945".

However, Trinamool and BJP leaders took exception to the post and asked Mr. Gandhi to "correct it".

"The post of Rahul Gandhi is wrong and is not acceptable. We are celebrating the birth anniver-



In Netaji's honour: A boy salutes a photo of Subhas Chandra Bose on the freedom fighter's birth anniversary in Kolkata on Thursday. ANI

sary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. We don't know whether the theory regarding the death of Netaji in air crash is true," Kunal Ghosh of Trinamool Congress told mediapersons.

West Bengal BJP president Sukanta Majumdar also targeted the Congress leader. "I strongly protest the claim that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose died on 18th August 1945, as stated

in post by @RahulGandhi! I also demand that Mr. Gandhi apologise within the next 24 hours for showing disrespect to Netaji," he said.

While a large section of the late leader's family, including his daughter Anita Bose Pfaff, is of the opinion that he died in a plane crash in Taiwan on August 18, 1945, there are people who believe otherwise.

HC notice to Rajasthan govt. over petition challenging classification of transpeople

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Rajasthan High Court has issued notice to the State on a petition filed by a transwoman challenging the State government's classification of transgender people as Other Backward Classes (OBC) for reservation in public education and employment.

A Bench of Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Srivastava and Justice Nupur Bhati has directed the State government authorities to respond to the petition in four weeks' time.

The petitioner, Ganga Kumari, the first transwoman to enter service as a Rajasthan police constable, has challenged a January 2023 circular issued by the State government's Depart-



The court has directed the State government to respond to the petition in four weeks' time. FILE PHOTO

ment of Social Justice and Empowerment, which places transgender people as a separate entry in the list of OBCs.

Ms. Kumari, through her petition, has argued that placing transpeople in the category of OBCs was not only unconstitutional but

also counterproductive. She explained that this "could lead to" their exclusion from both OBC-related and transgender-related benefits.

Unique status
Ms. Kumari, who is being represented by advocates Vivek and Udit Mathur, further argued that the Rajasthan government's circular fails to consider that there may be transpeople born in the General category communities or Scheduled Caste communities as well.

Her petition added that the circular failed to account for the "unique status" of transpeople and denied the community the special treatment called for in the 2014 NALSA judgement of the Supreme

Court. Ever since the 2014 NALSA judgement of the Supreme Court, there has been an arguable ambiguity in the direction that asked governments to provide transpeople all kinds of reservation in public education and employment by treating them as "socially and educationally backward classes of citizens".

While several activists, including Ms. Kumari in her petition, have argued that the Supreme Court's direction was clear in calling for horizontal reservation for transpeople, i.e. a percentage for transpeople within each socio-economic quota category; a section in the country has interpreted the direction as a call to include transpeople in the OBC list.

In Karnataka, many Cong. leaders speak of sacrifice to save party and government

Nagesh Prabhu

BENGALURU

Amid a game of one-upmanship between Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his deputy D.K. Shivakumar on the demand for appointment of a full-time KPCC president, leaders in the ruling Congress, including AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge, have been preaching the importance of party leaders to be ready for 'tyaga (sacrifice)' in order to keep the house in order.

Mr. Kharge, Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi, and several party leaders have been requesting their senior colleagues to put aside their personal expectations, make sacrifices, and work with unity and a sense of common purpose.



Mallikarjun Kharge tries his hands on a spinning wheel during the 'Jai Bapu-Jai Bhim-Jai Samvidhaan' rally, in Belgaum on Tuesday. ANI

It all started with Mr. Siddaramaiah and his loyalists who began the campaign of 'tyaga' for the interest of the party, citing the "one man, one post formula". They have been citing former Congress chief Sonia Gandhi's decision to turn down the post of

Prime Minister in 2004 as "sacrifice". The call for "sacrifice" gained momentum after Home Minister G. Parameshwara recently said he quit the Ministry in 2017 after taking responsibility as KPCC president ahead of the 2018 Assembly poll. Now, he has sought a simi-

lar gesture from Mr. Shiva-kumar, who is holding multiple posts.

Shivakumar's reaction
Miffed over Dr. Parameshwara's remark, Mr. Shivakumar said he has made several sacrifices for the party. When the late N. Dharam Singh was Chief Minister, he kept quiet. During Mr. Siddaramaiah's first term as Chief Minister, too, he made sacrifices by working for the party.

Mr. Kharge warned Ministers not to discuss the change of KPCC leadership, recalling sacrifices made by Mahatma Gandhi during the freedom struggle, in an attempt to give messages to factions in the party while addressing the 'Jai Bapu, Jai Samvidhaan' convention in Belgaum.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

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SPOTLIGHT



Drought, debt, and death in Maharashtra

In the State's Marathwada region, farmers struggle with many stressors. In 2024, there were over 800 suicides in just this area, leaving behind women and children who bear the brunt of poverty and stigma, finds **Abhinay Deshpande**

Trigger warning: the following article contains references to suicide; please avoid reading if you are disturbed by the subject.

Archana Chinchore's face is a picture of exhaustion. She sits quietly on a plastic chair in the centre of her modest kitchen in the family home at Bhadra village of Loha taluka, Nanded district, in Maharashtra's drought-stricken Marathwada region. Her shoulders are slumped and head dropped low as she avoids meeting anyone's gaze. Her voice is barely above a whisper, soft and fragile, as if it might break under the weight of her grief.

Once a mother who juggled household chores with caring for her four-year-old son, Archana, 30, now struggles to get through the day. Her life forever changed on August 6, 2024 – the day her husband, Hausaji, 32, a debt-ridden farmer, died by suicide. "Around 5.30 a.m., he kissed our son, who was fast asleep, and left to milk the buffaloes. It was just like any other day," Archana recounts, tears streaming down her face. "But this time, he never came back."

Their 10-acre agricultural land, barely a kilometre from the house, became the site of his final moments. In December, the cotton and sugarcane fields are lush, a stark contrast to scenes from May and June, when the summer heat cracks the black soil. The lanes in the village are cement-concrete but are narrow, and Archana's house is reachable only by a two-wheeler.

As she wipes her tears with her *pallu*, her son tugs at her sari, demanding attention. Hausaji had been burdened by loans: ₹4 lakh from private financiers and another ₹1 lakh from a bank. Heavy, unseasonal showers had destroyed his soya bean and cotton crops, leaving him unable to repay his debts. The pressure, according to his grieving family, became unbearable, driving him to take his life. Now, the debts have been carried forward to Archana.

Archana's mother, Sagarbai, has moved in from her village, about 60 km away, to help with chores and care for her grandson, and her in-laws go to work in the fields. "She doesn't eat properly or talk to anyone," says Sagarbai, her voice trembling. "She spends hours locked in a room, crying. So, I came to help her and try to get things back on track. I know, the loss is irreversible, but she now has a son to take care of."

Hausaji's story is one of many. In Nanded district alone, 146 farmers ended their lives in 2024, contributing to the 822 farmer suicides recorded in the Marathwada region between January and November, according to a report by the Divisional Commissioner's office in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad).

Beed district in the Marathwada region, which has had drought for over 10 years now, has seen 160 deaths, followed by Nanded, Dharashiv (Osmanabad) with 143, and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar with 132. Jalna, Latur, Parbhani, and Hingoli reported 76, 72, 64, and 29 farmer deaths by sui-



Coping with loss: (Clockwise from top left) Seema Jadhav in Degaon; Sadhana Kalaskar in Gidhada; Archana Chinchore in Bhadra, all from the Marathwada region in Maharashtra, have lost their husbands to suicide. ABHINAY DESHPANDE

cide, respectively. In 2023, 1,088 farmers ended their lives in eight districts of the region, say data from the Divisional Commissioner's office.

In 2022, Maharashtra recorded 38% of all suicides in the agricultural sector, the highest in India, going by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data.

Debt was the common thread tying all victims together. For the survivors, the financial burden persists – now compounded by the anguish of loss and the social stigma that comes with a loved one's suicide. Older children, especially girls, drop out of school to support mothers and younger siblings.

For Archana, who has grown up hearing about farmers taking their lives, the grim statistics mean little. Her son has just joined school and life ahead seems long. "My husband never told me about debt. Maybe he thought I was too sensitive. I have to start working. I am left to deal with everything on my own," she says, adding that she does have the support of her family.

Married in 2012, she remembers Hausaji as a quiet man who took charge of their family farm at a young age.

Cropping trouble

Senior journalist Himanshu Nitaware, who reports on crises for *Down To Earth* magazine, says currently farmers, especially small-scale cultivators, are compelled to resort to non-banking financial corporations (NBFCs) that do not allow them to come out of the vicious debt cycle. "Loans with low interest rates from government banks can prevent farmers from approaching private moneylenders," he says.

In Degaon, over 50 km from Bhadra, in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district, Seema Jadhav, 32, is mourning her husband, Dinesh, 35, who died by suicide on December 13. A mother of three – two daughters and a son – Seema struggles to make sense of why her husband chose to take his life. On that morning, Dinesh had left their home without a word. "It was unusual, but I thought he



Coping with loss: (Clockwise from top left) Seema Jadhav in Degaon; Sadhana Kalaskar in Gidhada; Archana Chinchore in Bhadra, all from the Marathwada region in Maharashtra, have lost their husbands to suicide. ABHINAY DESHPANDE

was just stressed and in a hurry, but when he didn't return for lunch, I started to worry," she recalls. By evening, her fear turned into reality.

Seema says the bank had refused to grant him a fresh loan as the previous loan was still reflected on documents. "But he had cleared this loan," she adds.

Two days after her husband's death, Seema's over-a-century-old family home is filled with relatives and neighbours trying to console her and Dinesh's parents. She sits on a plastic chair, her eyes vacant, trying to piece together her husband's final thoughts. "He had been quiet those last few days. I know it was about getting the loan to clear a few 'hand (emergency) loans' and get a motor for the borewell. But he didn't share the details. Maybe he didn't want to worry me," she says softly. Their turmeric crop across 2 acres had been damaged due to heavy rains in September, says Dinesh's uncle Sanjay Jadav.

"Apart from finances, extreme weather events such as drought and excess or unseasonal rainfall ruin standing crops, usually when they are about to be harvested," says Nitaware. In 2021 and 2022, excessive and unseasonal rainfall destroyed crops, further deepening the crisis for cultivators. Ironically, within Maharashtra, Marathwada remains the most drought-prone region.

In 2023, the then Eknath Shinde-led Mahayutti government declared 42 talukas as drought-hit, 14 of them in Marathwada. Two MLAs from the region, Abdul Sattar and Dhananjay Munde, had held the Agriculture portfolio.

According to NCRB data, 11,290 people involved in the farming sector died by suicide in 2022, including 5,207 farmers or cultivators, and 6,083 agricultural labourers. In 2021, up to 10,881 farming-related suicides were recorded, of which 5,318 were farmers.

Veteran journalist and author P. Sainath says the way farmer suicide data is being recorded, particularly for the NCRB, is problematic. "For the first 15 to 19 years (from 1995 to 2014), the errors in NCRB data were largely omissions," he ex-

plains. "They excluded many groups, especially women farmers. Whenever a farmer ended their life, officials conducting the *panchanama* (sequence of events) asked for the 7/12 document (land title deed). Tenant farmers, who didn't have a 7/12, were often left out. Dalits and Adivasis were also excluded as Dalits often operate redistributed government land, and Adivasis are viewed as encroachers. These exclusions drastically reduced the reported numbers," he says.

Sainath says since 2014, changes in methodology have impacted the data. "Now, these are sins of political omission. In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government introduced a new methodology for recording suicides and the result is that the data from 2014 to 2024 is entirely incomparable to earlier years. Farmers are now divided into categories – 'farmers', 'tenant farmers', and 'agricultural labourers'. Most tenant farmers who end their lives are recorded as agricultural labourers, skewing the data," he says.

During the Lok Sabha and Assembly election campaigns last year, farmers' distress became a central issue for both the ruling Mahayutti and the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). The Prime Minister had promised a minimum support price (MSP) of ₹6,000 per quintal for soya bean, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said his party would give ₹7,000 per quintal. Crop loan waivers, higher MSP, crop insurance, and free electricity had also topped their campaign agendas, highlighting the urgency to tackle the challenges faced by farmers in the State.

Systemic gaps

More than 200 km from Seema's village, a small trek leads to Meena Dhore's home in Pali, Beed district. Meena, who is the same age as Seema and also has three children, left her younger daughter and son with their grandmother, Ranjana, who recently underwent a cataract surgery, to work in onion fields for ₹250 per day. The money was needed to run the house and clear the debts her husband, Ashok, 35, had accumulated.

Ashok had taken a loan of around ₹3 lakh and took his own life on January 27, 2024. "Since then, we have been struggling to eat and pay the interest," says Ranjana, wearing dark glasses to shield her eyes from the light. "I'm at home now because of the surgery, but otherwise, we would have taken the children with us to work as there is no one else to care for them."

Chandigarh-based food policy expert Devinder Sharma says the root cause of the persistent distress in agriculture is that prices of farm produce are kept low to keep the industry buoyant. "Crops provide raw material for industries and supply cheap labour" as marginal, distressed farmers work as daily labourers in factories. "If farmers were paid fairly, industries would suffer losses, and profits would decline. The problem isn't that agriculture is unproductive – it's that we don't pay farmers what they deserve."

Sharma points out that many farmers are driven to suicide because they cannot recover production costs, leading to mounting debt. He cites the National Sample Survey Organisation's Situation Assessment Survey of Agricultural Households and Land and Holdings of Households in Rural India, 2019. The average income of an agricultural household is just ₹10,218 per month. "If you calculate income purely from farming, it amounts to only ₹27 per day. With such meagre earnings, how can farmers survive? When a farmer takes their own life, it's a stark indicator that we are denying them a fair income," he says.

Meanwhile, at Gidhada in Paithan taluka, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Sadhana Kalaskar, 45, lives in a house whose 'walls' are green nets usually used to shade plants. Over her head is a tin-sheet roof. Her husband, Ashok, 52, ended his life on November 24 last year, after he failed to clear a loan of around ₹6 lakh taken for their daughter's wedding and a crop that eventually failed. "Now, my son and I are toiling to clear the debts," she says, staring at Ashok's photo frame.

"While government schemes aim to address farmers' financial struggles, the gap between policy and reality continues to widen, leaving families to fend for themselves in a system that seems to have forgotten them," says Nitaware.

If you are in distress, call these 24x7 helplines: KIRAN 1800-599-0019, Aasra 9820466726. deshpande.abhinay@thehindu.co.in

Breaking stereotypes about queer love

Grief and love tenderly come together in debutant Rohan Parshuram Kanawade's *Sabar Bonda*, the first-ever Marathi film and India's only entry at Sundance this year

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Breaking away from the Western notions of queer love stories, Rohan Kanawade finds his gaze in *Sabar Bonda* (Cactus Pears), the only Indian film at the Sundance Film Festival this year being held in Utah from January 23 to February 2.

Part autobiographical, part fiction, the film traces the tender love story of two young men in a Maharashtrian village. Hailing from a modest background, Anand, a young, educated, city-bred gay man, returns to his ancestral village to mourn the loss of his father and perform certain rituals for the satisfaction of his mother.

During the mourning period, he develops a tender bond with a school friend he had left behind. If grief brings vulnerability, love provides him strength to survive the seemingly homophobic surroundings; much like cactus pears' gentle and nutritious core despite being found in harsh and arid surroundings.

"I wanted to tell a queer story

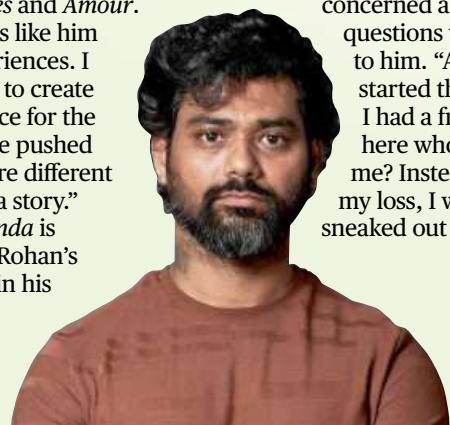
grounded in our society and culture where coming out to parents is not always a sad memory," says Rohan ahead of the film's premiere at Sundance, the confluence of the best of Independent cinema.

Though Rohan has more favourite films to recount than favourite filmmakers, he rates Satyajit Ray as an inspiration for the way the master portrayed some of his rural stories. Then there is Turkish filmmaker Nuri Bilge Ceylan who, like Rohan, used his parents and cousins to tell his stories in his initial forays.

He finds Ceylan's *Once Upon a Time in Anatolia* and *Clouds of May* close to his sensibility and gushes about Michael Haneke's *Funny Games* and *Amour*.

"Filmmakers like him create experiences. I also wanted to create an experience for the audience. He pushed me to explore different ways to tell a story."

Sabar Bonda is inspired by Rohan's experience in his ancestral village near Shirdi in 2016. Born



Part autobiographical, part fiction, the film traces the tender love story of two young men in a Maharashtrian village



Bold and brave
A still from *Sabar Bonda*; (below) director Rohan Parshuram Kanawade. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The ongoing exhibition, Blue Horizons, showcases how artists shape creative narratives with blue and bring out its ethereal to sentimental poetic imagery

The many hues of Blue

Shailaja Tripathi

The history of the colour blue reflects cultural significance across civilisations. As compared to red or yellow, blue was not common in ancient Greece and Rome mostly due to the scarcity of blue dye. In Europe, blue came into prominence sometime in the Middle Ages (500 to 1400-1500 CE).

Indigo, a plant native to the east, was sought after to obtain blue and, therefore, the region became an exporter of indigo dye. Egyptians associated blue with the sky and the River Nile and that is how blue assumed importance in their culture. Around 2500 BCE, Egyptians created Egyptian blue, which is now known as the oldest artificially produced pigment.

Blue cast a spell on Giotto, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and Vincent Van Gogh. The Blue Period in Picasso's career or Henri Matisse's experiments highlight the trajectory of the colour in art history.

With Blue Horizons as the theme for this year's Harvest 2024, an annual show by Arushi Arts Gallery, artists including KG Subramanyan, Satis Gupta, Prabhakar Kolte, Shobha Broota, and others set out to explore many layers of the colour. They bring out melancholy, hope, faith, peace, and vastness as they probe



Colour of Calm Artworks on display at the Blue Horizons exhibition. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The sleeping passengers, contorted in their makeshift sanctuaries, embody the tension between survival and respite—a testament to the human spirit adapting to the demands of modern life," says Mehta.

Ahalya Rajendran's *An Evening At Karnati Baug* using watercolour, acrylic and charcoal, on washi paper shows glimpses of daily life—an evening scene in a park against a vast blue sky with people walking, sitting and chatting. The juxtaposition of the lush green garden and vast blue sky is arresting. In another one Rajendran shows people bursting crackers on their terraces on Deepavali night and once again the dark blue sky gets highlighted in the work.

"In these times, when the news is all about the stress of modern world, the colour blue needs to fill the human mind with its coolness. Human relations, social commitments, and new world views have been skilfully woven into the works of artists, perfectly balanced with the precision of aesthetic sense," says Santhosh Sadrak, the curator of the show.

Artist Sachindra Nath Jha has made Nandi the bull, the vehicle of Lord Shiva. The colourful sculpture boasts a vibrant imagery of flowers and birds. "In all festivities colours, flowers, *kumkum*, *chandan* are used. All of these flowers have their own mesmerising glow. Nandi is the perfect image of purity and development. Flowers bring optimism and joie de vivre. My work has sharp colours representing a combination of truth and fiction," says Jha.

At Arushi Arts Gallery, W-23, GK-II, Till February 10; 11am to 6pm



Artist Diya Mehta shows the interiors of a railway compartment bathed in blue. A sleeping passenger, a bag hanging—it is melancholic and enigmatic at once. "Through a monochromatic palette dominated by shades of blue, I explore the dichotomy between chaos and calm. The blue light, symbolic of serenity yet tinged with melancholy, bathes the figures as they navigate the exhaustion of their daily grind."

With Blue Horizons as the theme for this year's Harvest 2024, an annual show by Arushi Arts Gallery, artists including KG Subramanyan, Satis Gupta, Prabhakar Kolte, Shobha Broota, and others set out to explore many layers of the colour. They bring out melancholy, hope, faith, peace, and vastness as they probe

STEP OUT



Visual feast
Artist Jayasri Burman combines cowries and shells in her upcoming six-week long exhibition *The Whisper of Water, The Song of Stars*, to celebrate the glory of Nature. She adds depth, texture and figurative meaning to her artworks that echo modern-day concerns from a contemporary perspective exploring the cosmic connections of stars and water bodies, harmony of colours, the expanse of mystical landscapes and the power of femininity.

At Art Alive Gallery, S-221 Gamal Abdel Nasser Marh, S Block, Panchsheel Park South; Till February 28; 11am to 7pm

Connect with Nature
The Art of the Weaver is a solo exhibition by Japanese textile artist Chiaki Maki, whose work bridges tradition and modernity, blending natural fibers such as Mulberry silk and Basho (banana fiber) with organic dyes such as indigo and pomegranate. Her intricate hand-woven textiles reflect a deep connection to Nature and sustainability.

At Gallery Art Motif, Safdarjung Enclave; Opens for preview on January 24 at 5pm; Till February 28; 10am to 6pm



Recreating memories
Curated by Adwait, Seema Kohli brings a solo project of mixed-media works titled *Khula Aasman*, in which she exhumes her family archives, material inheritance and oral accounts of her ancestral home in Pind Dadan Khan, now in Pakistan. The poignant narrative of longing, loss and belonging include the evocative *Mirroring the Past*, large paintings like *Yamuna*, and a collaborative phulkari tapestry depicting her ancestral landscapes.

At Partition Museum, Dara Shikoh Library, Ambedkar University; Till February 15 (Mondays closed); 10am to 5pm



Taste of the Far East Chicken Shanghai soup dumpling, watermelon and mint crudo, and Sichuan pulled chicken served at XO & Mi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT



Bold flavours of street food

The rooftop dining destination at Le Meridien brings street food from Southeast Asia to the table

Southeast Asia. Expect Korean pancakes, bulgogi, dimsum, sushi, and robata, among other dishes," says Shekhar Kiroula, executive sous chef.

I begin my meal with burnt corn and asparagus soup with egg drop and scallions.

This take on good old sweet corn soup is a welcome change, especially with the addition of crunchy asparagus. Alongside, I order a trio of dimsum - prawn and chives har gao, shiitake and water chestnut, and chicken Shanghai soup dumplings. With a thin covering and generous filling, each of these hit the right spot, though the chicken

Shanghai dumpling could be souvier.

Contemporary flair
The chilled tomato and burrata salad come next. Served with a side of wonton crackers, the pairing of creamy burrata cheese with ponzu

marinated tomatoes and chilli sambal is refreshing. I also try the sweet-spicy Pomelo salad with fried shallots, kaffir lime and sweet chilli dressing. Its citrusy aftertaste lingers on my palate. The menu has an extensive selection of cold and hot plates, robata grills and sushi rolls. I try a hot plate – the Okonomi prawn toast with bonito flakes, sriracha mayo and scallions, which has a

crunchy texture and juicy flavours. I jump to the mains with the Yaki udon noodles with vegetables, black pepper lamb with dried red chillies and sliced onions, and Sichuan mapo tofu. The noodles pair well with the sides. The silken

tofu soaked in black bean sauce has a pleasing sweet-salty aftertaste.

While the lamb preparation was on point, the meat was slightly chewy.

Unlike many Asian restaurants, XO & Mi@Le Belvedere has an interesting dessert section: miso caramel chocolate fondant, Vietnamese coffee tres leches and hot honey Shibuya toast. The chocolate fondant is an elevated version of the choco lava cake with bourbon soak, paired with roasted almond ice-cream, and the tres leches with the addition of coffee is a pleasant surprise. But my favourite is the Shibuya toast with whipped mascarpone, caramel sauce and torched bananas. The combination of banana and toffee may remind you of Banoffee pie but this is a crunchier version!



At Le Meridien, Windsor Place, Janpath; Price for two ₹2,000 plus tax (without alcohol); For reservations, call 9899999561



Rumour has it

Causes of the rail track deaths have more to do with deep-rooted malaises

Panic and confusion seem to have triggered the Lucknow-Mumbai Pushpak Express accident in Maharashtra that killed 12 people and injured at least 10 others. Eyewitness accounts talk about the rumour of a fire that led to an alarm chain being pulled and the train coming to a stop. Passengers often choose to get down when their train makes unscheduled stops and that is what happened near Pachora station in Jalgaon district. Those who deboarded on the side of an oncoming train on the adjacent track, the Karnataka Express, were mowed down. Reports talk about a curve that reduced the line of sight of the driver of the oncoming train who, nevertheless, promptly applied the brakes seeing the flashing lights, as in the procedure adopted to stop all other trains when one train stops mid-section. The Karnataka Express was speeding and had a braking distance of some 750 m; the Rajdhani needs more than a kilometre to stop. It could have been worse had the brakes not been applied promptly, railway officials have been quoted as saying. Passengers deboarding a train and facing danger is not uncommon either. Auto doors that can be opened and closed only by railway personnel – a feature of the Vande Bharat and Rajdhani trains – may need to be fitted in general trains as well. Such doors come with their own logistical challenges such as a requirement that the door locking system of each bogie matches with the rest, but it may well be worth the cost.

The panic shown by the passengers is a typical response in India and is seen in stampedes. In 2017, a flower vendor on a rail platform bridge at Elphinstone Road station in Mumbai, apparently complained in Marathi of 'her flowers falling', which commuters misunderstood to mean that the bridge was collapsing, leading to a stampede that killed 23 people. Probably, the series of railway accidents in recent times was fresh in the minds of the Pushpak Express passengers and added to the panic. While those accidents, at first glance, were caused by human errors or local faults, they were actually a result of a long-term and unaddressed need for enhancing railway safety. Further, initial media reports quoted railway officials talking about "hot axle" and "brake binding" that may have caused sparks and smoke, which gave rise to fears of a fire, and in turn the alarm chain being pulled. Brake binding happens when a brake is applied by the driver but after its release the brake does not disengage in one or more bogies. The wheels, instead of rolling, would only slide when speed picks up, leading to the emission of sparks and smoke. Brake binding is a case of poor maintenance. An inquiry by the Commissioner of Railway Safety concerned, an independent body of railway experts that does not come under the Railway Ministry, should uncover the true cause of Wednesday's accident.

WHO is right

The U.S. must return to WHO's fold in its own interest

President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO), based on charges of bias, is stunningly short-sighted, and deeply concerning to the global health community. Pundits are predicting that this move, if not withdrawn, or reconsidered, may well unleash the butterfly effect – a cascading set of unpredictable consequences arising from even the smallest of changes in a system. Soon after his inauguration, Mr. Trump wasted no time in announcing the beginning of the process of ending the U.S.'s membership of WHO. In language that smacked of petulance, Mr. Trump, as he signed his first batch of executive orders, declared: "The World Health [Organization] ripped us off." The U.S. will now leave the United Nations health agency in 12 months' time and stop all financial contributions to its work. He accused the organization of mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic, and of being partisan towards China, though the U.S. contributed more to its coffers. The move has not been entirely unexpected: during his previous term as U.S. President, he relentlessly criticised WHO for acting slow and being "owned and controlled by China"; in 2020 he initiated a move to halt funding to WHO, though it was scuppered as his term came to an end.

Why is the withdrawal of the U.S. significant? For starters, Mr. Trump is right – the U.S., which is a founding member of WHO, is also its biggest financial backer, contributing around 18% of its overall funding. Withdrawal of these funds will seriously impact health programmes being implemented across the world, including interventions for HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and the eradication of certain infectious diseases. WHO is also involved in ensuring equity of access to life-saving drugs for people across the world, building stronger health systems, detecting and preventing disease outbreaks. If Mr. Trump could set his petulance aside, it would be clear that global health does not operate in silos, and neither a stern countenance nor physical boundaries can keep pathogens out of one's own geography. If any lessons have been learned at all from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that no one is safe until everyone is safe, and that collaboration among nations, and open sharing of data and technology are essential to tackle pandemics. WHO has reached out to the U.S., hoping that it will reconsider its decision and engage once again with it. As fantastic as it may sound, medicine is no stranger to miracles of science, and the health community hopes one more will restore the U.S. back to WHO's fold.

Last year, tuberculosis (TB) emerged, once again, as the leading infectious disease killer globally. The goals, i.e., End TB targets of 90% reduction in TB deaths, 80% reduction in new cases, and zero TB-affected families facing catastrophic costs by 2030, seem to be a distant dream. In 2018, India extended the highest level of political commitment for the cause by pledging to achieve End TB targets on an accelerated timeline by 2025. However, the COVID-19 pandemic was a huge pushback to the efforts.

According to the World Health Organization's Global Tuberculosis Report 2024, India continues to lead in the global TB burden (26% of cases) and is also the hub for drug-resistant TB (DR-TB) and TB deaths. While ambitious policies and initiatives are rolled out from the national level, the ground reality in India needs to be better understood to translate them into effective interventions.

Focus on vulnerable groups

India's National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) clearly defines the high-risk or vulnerable groups that are at risk of contracting TB and developing adverse outcomes.

Dr. Pavitra Mohan, paediatrician and founder of Basic Healthcare Services, a non-governmental organisation working in south Rajasthan, says, "We get around 1000 persons with TB in our clinics every year and many of them have severe lung damage owing to fine dust inhalation from mining and stone carving. They are at risk for TB due to contributory factors like silicosis, undernutrition, overcrowding, and uncontrolled co-morbidities like diabetes."

Migrant workers also have an added disadvantage of poor access to health-care facilities. Dr. Mohan says, "They prefer to go back to their native place if they fall ill and hence it is not easy for the healthcare delivery system also to keep track of their treatment."

While a lot of attention is being paid to tackling undernutrition among persons with TB (pwTB), a host of other contributory factors in each geography needs to be addressed, requiring multisectoral action.

TB is a curable disease with effective and free drugs from NTEP. A significant achievement for India is the treatment initiation in more than 95% of notified cases. This was possible, over the years, by establishing an exclusive procurement and supply chain system for the NTEP.



Swathi Krishna Njarekkattuvalappil

is a public health physician and researcher based in Pune, working in tuberculosis, health policy and systems research



Parth Sharma

is a community physician and public health researcher based in Delhi and is the founder of the public health advocacy organisation, Nirvana

The chances of ending TB by 2025 appear bleak, but there is some hope

However, in 2023, there was a country-wide break in the supply chain – it still continues in many parts. Shortage of key drugs in the centres, many of which are unavailable in the open market, left the beneficiaries and their families in a struggle. Nandita Venkatesan, data journalist and two-time TB survivor, says, "It takes many a mile for pwTB to reach the finishing line of treatment combating a wide range of side effects. Shortage of such critical medicines disrupts the treatment, risking resistance to antibiotics and poor disease outcomes. Moreover, having to buy drugs from outside leads to catastrophic health expenses."

On extrapulmonary TB

Extrapulmonary TB (EP-TB) affects any organ of the body – lymph nodes, the kidneys, the brain, the spinal cord, bones, joints, and skin. However, the NTEP's main focus has been on pulmonary TB affecting the lung, as it is most common and transmissible.

The share of EP-TB is about 24% of the notified cases, but with wide geographical variations. It is often missed/delayed from being diagnosed due to symptoms which are vague and mimic other diseases. Dr. Deepak Chandra Badhani, a surgeon working in rural Chhattisgarh, says, "Doctors in Indian settings should have a high index of suspicion for TB in the cases they see. Proper history taking, thorough clinical examination and simple tests such as pus staining from a non-healing ulcer can help diagnose TB. But sadly, we wait for expensive, advanced tests just to start treatment and depend heavily on specialists to diagnose, leading to substantial delays and advanced disease." He lays emphasis on the training of general practitioners to pick up EP-TB at the earliest and of the need to sensitise frontline workers and integrating EP-TB into their screening algorithms.

A study by Daniels and colleagues in Mumbai shows that only 35% of private practitioners and 75% of government doctors could correctly diagnose a patient presenting with classical symptoms of TB. Dr. Vasundhara Rangaswamy, a microbiologist working in rural Chhattisgarh, says the reluctance to notify the disease further impacts diagnosis as private practitioners prescribe antibiotics and refer without any diagnostic tests.

TB is an area where guidelines are updated quite frequently. However, studies done by Shah and colleagues and also Hiremath and colleagues show that a shortage of adequately trained

human resources is a major challenge affecting implementation of the NTEP. Dr. Rangaswamy says, "Molecular tests are expensive and often take time to access as they are mostly available only at district level. Results take time due to the heavy workload and shortage of trained staff. In effect, patients have to travel and incur more expenses."

Dr. Mohan says, "The CBNAAT [Cartridge-based Nucleic Acid Amplification Testing] and Truenat machines are not available at many places, [as they are] mostly placed at [the] district level. And very often, when a machine is available, the lab technician will not be there and if the lab technician is there, cartridge supply for the test would not be there." The staff pattern within the NTEP does not meet the growing demands, with most now having more work.

What needs to be done

Ownership at all levels is essential to make programmes work. Idukki district in Kerala collaborated with Kudumbashree, one of the largest women's self-help networks in the world, for their TB elimination efforts. This resulted in widespread community participation and advocacy by government/leadership levels created a huge impact. "It helped us achieve our targets and sustain the activities," says Dr. Cency B., former District TB Officer of Idukki district, and current Assistant Director, Kerala Health Services.

She says, "Advocacy by political leadership helps in providing platforms for cross learning from best practices across geographies. But programme implementers will have to go beyond their routine work scope to achieve this."

While the chances of ending TB by 2025 look bleak, there is some hope. India's case notification reached the highest level and deaths due to TB declined by 24% as compared to 2015, which is way more than the global decline.

The administrative levels of the NTEP are designed to adapt to the innumerable contextual challenges. New bodies of knowledge from different parts of the world need to be considered. Vietnam, a high burden country, recently showed the effective use of active case finding for TB (advocated for high-risk groups) among the general population, so that targeted interventions could work better. Perhaps India too needs to restructure and redefine its many conventional frameworks, to combat this deadly disease.

A grey birthday for the Election Commission of India

The executive Government is instructing or managing things in such a manner that those people who do not belong to them either racially, culturally or linguistically, are being excluded from being brought on the electoral rolls. Electoral rolls are a most fundamental thing in a democracy... Independence of elections and avoidance of any interference by the executive should be regarded as a fundamental right," said Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in June 1949 in the Constituent Assembly while introducing the Constitutional provision to set up the Election Commission of India (ECI). All of India's founding leaders agreed with this unanimously. Tomorrow (January 25) is the 75th anniversary of the birth of the ECI – also celebrated as National Voters Day (January 25). Sadly, India's founding leaders will feel let-down by the ECI and not deem it to be a happy 75th birthday.

The case of Maharashtra

Dr. Ambedkar was prescient in his warnings about electoral roll manipulation by the executive. While he was more concerned about exclusion of voters through identity discrimination, government interference in electoral rolls can also be through a process of mass inclusion of voters to tilt an election – as seen in the recently held Maharashtra State elections.

The ECI enrolled 9.7 crore voters for the 2024 Maharashtra State election. The Narendra Modi government's Ministry of Health report estimated the entire adult population of Maharashtra (18-plus years), in 2024, as 9.54 crore. The ECI, by its own admission, registered 16 lakh more voters than the official estimate of the total adult population. Even if one were to accept that the government's estimate is only a projection, and can vary, it still implies that nearly 100% or more of all the adults in Maharashtra were registered as voters for the State election. This is very strange because the ECI neither enrolled nearly all adults as voters for the Maharashtra Lok Sabha election



Praveen Chakravarty

is the Chairman of Professionals' and the Data Analytics wings of the Congress party

The sanctity of electoral rolls is the foundation of India's electoral democracy; the Election Commission of India has nothing to celebrate on the anniversary of its founding day

held just six months earlier, nor ever before in any of the other large States. Then, how were more people than the entire estimated adult population of Maharashtra enrolled as voters only for the State election?

Mass enrolment in just months

This is because 48 lakh people were registered as new voters in just six months between the Lok Sabha and the State elections. For context, between 2019 to 2024, only 32 lakh new voters were enrolled. In other words, 50% more people were enrolled as voters in just six months *vis-à-vis* the previous five-year period. What led to this sudden, and intriguing, rush by Maharashtraans to register and vote in the State election alone?

Clues emerge upon careful analysis of the outcome. The BJP-led Mahayati alliance gained 72 lakh more votes in the State election compared to the Lok Sabha election. One would logically presume that this gain by the BJP alliance was largely due to voters that voted for the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance in the Lok Sabha election who then shifted allegiance to the BJP alliance for the state election. But that is not the case. Only 24 lakh such voters moved away from the Congress alliance between the two elections. So, where did the BJP alliance get its remaining 48 lakh (72 lakh - 24 lakh) votes from for the State election?

It is not even the case that the BJP alliance got its remaining votes from other parties and independents, since this group too gained more votes in the State versus Lok Sabha election. It is then rational to implore that 48 lakh people who may not have voted in the Lok Sabha election, enrolled themselves as new voters for the State election and voted for the BJP alliance.

Astonishingly, the ECI has confirmed officially that it enrolled the exact same number, i.e., 48 lakh people, as new voters for the Maharashtra election. Is this a miraculous coincidence, a case of divine intervention or executive interference, as Dr. Ambedkar had warned 75 years ago?

What explains the sudden rush of new voters in six months for the State election? Are they real

voters? Or are they ghosts? Were their documents verified when they were enrolled as voters? How is it that all the new voters enrolled seem to have voted for just one alliance?

Regardless of one's political affiliations, to a rational mind, it is amply evident that there is something amiss with the electoral rolls in the Maharashtra election. Perhaps, there are sincere answers to these questions. If so, is it not logical to expect the ECI to release all the data in the public domain and issue clarifications in a transparent manner? But the ECI is conspicuously silent and arrogantly dismissive of these questions. A counter, which includes one by the Chief Election Commissioner, is that if there was such a large-scale addition of dubious or ghost voters, why were the Opposition parties with their war-rooms, not alert enough to catch this in time? This is a duplicitous way to absolve the ECI using the line of a political party's organisational inefficiencies.

It is unfair and illegal to add vast numbers of dubious voters to influence an election and its outcome. It is the ECI's constitutional responsibility to run a fair election. This is why India's founding leaders entrusted an independent ECI with the responsibility of preserving India's electoral sanctity and not to be reliant on political parties.

Use Aadhaar

The Maharashtra incident reveals the importance of using Aadhaar to 'unghost' and de-duplicate electoral rolls and use its biometric verification for voting. Of course, not even a single eligible citizen should be denied his vote, and an appropriate backup process can be evolved for those whose biometric verifications fail. The sanctity of electoral rolls is of supreme importance and is the foundation of India's electoral democracy. Aadhaar verification of electoral rolls and voting is the birthday cake that the ECI must be given to preserve and strengthen India's electoral democracy. It is an idea that even Dr. Ambedkar and other founding leaders may approve of.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Online 'distractions'

At last, the Governor of Tamil Nadu may be right in one area (Tamil Nadu page, "Mobile phones and other screens are distractions, says Governor", January 23). Perhaps he meant it in a general sense, but it is worth talking about the recent move made by Sweden in a related area. In 2009, Sweden replaced books with computers. But in 2024-25, it has allocated €104 million to reverse this move. The country is

bringing back printed textbooks after concerns about digital learning and its impact on student focus and skills. In a world where tech is made out to be king in every sphere, this is a very significant move that needs study.

V. Subramanian,
Chennai

Rail passenger safety

The Indian Railways must focus on prioritising passenger safety by implementing robust

measures and adopting cutting-edge technologies. With vast numbers of people relying on trains for transportation across the country, it is essential to safeguard them from catastrophes (Page 1, January 23).

Sathishkumar B.,
Vellore, Tamil Nadu

Policing at a crossroads

Despite all the technological advancements, there is no improvement in safety systems. A proper alerting system connecting all

compartments is still a distant dream. Our trains are overcrowded and overloaded and tickets are issued in excess than the capacity. The Indian Railways should realise that it serves the nation and its motto should be on 'safety first' and not money.

BalaSubramaniam Pavani,
Secunderabad

In Tamil Nadu signals a troubling lack of faith in law enforcement

The recent case of assault in a university campus in the city, and its handling, underscores the perceived inability of the State police to deal with such matters effectively. The judiciary's strong comments to the government highlight the urgency of systemic reform. This erosion of trust in the State police jeopardises public confidence. The

government needs to act decisively to improve professionalism, and ensure gender sensitivity and accountability within the force. Restoring trust in law enforcement is critical to ensuring justice, public safety, and the state's credibility in maintaining law and order.

Gopalaswamy J.,
Chennai

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

Is poverty being underestimated in India?

PARLEY**P.C.
Mohanan**

Former member of the National Statistical Commission

**N.R.
Bhanumurthy**

Director of the Madras School of Economics



A beggar in Kozhikode city. K. RAGESH

Last month, the government released a factsheet on the 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES), which recorded a decline in poverty in urban and rural areas. Over the last few years, policymakers and academics have debated the issues of incomparable data sets, the unavailability of data, and the definition of an adequate consumption basket to determine a poverty line. Is poverty being underestimated in India? P.C. Mohanan and N.R. Bhanumurthy discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Samreen Wani. Edited excerpts:

How do you define poverty? Is poverty being underestimated in India?

P.C. Mohanan: We had a stable definition of poverty from the late 1970s to 2005. We started with the expenditure required for sustaining a minimum calorie diet and that used to be updated every five years using the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data. When the NSSO started the whole exercise, its estimates of private expenditure and those of the National Accounts were very similar, so there was no controversy. But over the years, their estimates diverged so much that questions came up about the accuracy of the NSS data.

Then, the government appointed the Tendulkar Committee. At the same time, the NSSO also started experimenting with different methodologies to improve the collection of consumption expenditure and that meant using different recall periods. (A recall period is when a respondent is asked to recall their consumption expenditure over a specific time period.) After 2011-12, the government neither had official poverty estimates nor conducted a survey. People started using alternative estimates of expenditure and later, the multidimensional poverty index was used. So, using certain data sets, there have been claims that poverty has drastically come down. But that is questionable because it depends on the poverty line and the data.

N.R. Bhanumurthy: In the last two decades, the number of people below the poverty line has drastically come down, whatever line you take. But the delta between the two decades (the change in poverty estimation over a period of time) is very large for many reasons such as high GDP growth, increase in public expenditures through a number of flagship programmes introduced by the Union and State governments, and an improved public delivery system. In addition, we still have the National Food Security Act, which covers nearly 80 crore people. So, saying that people still live in

extreme poverty would be counter-intuitive, if that is happening.

Initially, while defining poverty, we were talking about calorie consumption alone. Now, the definition has been broadened. And that is the way to go. If you use the Tendulkar line or the Rangarajan line, you might get different numbers, but the change between two rounds in both the methods would be more or less the same and close to 17% or 18%. Dr. Rangarajan himself estimated that poverty was close to 10% based on the 2022-23 survey. With the recent factsheet, I wouldn't be surprised if poverty would have come down further to single digits.

What are your concerns with the HCES data?

PCM: Over the years, there has been a divergence between the NSSO per capita household consumption expenditure data and those from the National Accounts. Some of the issues were because of the recall period. The NSSO started experimenting with different recall periods. While it set a seven-day recall period for certain items, it set a 30-day period for others. But these estimates then could not be compared with previous consumption estimates, which had different recall periods. We had the uniform reference period (URP), where we had 30 days of recall for all items, and the mixed reference period (MRP) using 30 days (food) and 365 days (for other goods). Tendulkar estimated poverty based on MRP. Then we had the modified mixed reference period (MMRP) – seven days for food items along with 30 days and 365 days for other items. This gives you a higher estimate of expenditure because your recall is better. If you use the higher expenditure distribution on a lower poverty line, which is what many researchers have done, naturally your poverty goes down. Rangarajan had suggested a different methodology in his committee report, but the government did not accept that. In the last two years, the NSSO has made a further modification



Very few people have tried to create a new poverty line for the new kind of methodology that the NSSO is following. This is a major gap.

P.C. MOHANAN

by visiting households in three sittings instead of one. This way, data reporting is better because respondents get more time and can recall better. The current methodology will still give us higher expenditure. But if you use this data on the older poverty line, your estimate will come down. Very few people have tried to create a new poverty line for the NSSO's new methodology. This is a major gap.

NRB: We need to improve the methodology. We cannot go with a URP because some expenditures would not have been made in the last seven days or the last month. Right now we are looking at a slightly broader aspect of consumption. If you look at the factsheet, food articles constitute less than 50% of the total consumption basket. So, it shows that we are not spending on food items alone and are looking at other services required for the household. In that sense, there is a need for us to re-examine the old methodology. The present criticism is with the estimate that suggests a decline in poverty by over 17% between two rounds. I would say that whatever poverty line we use, the decline in the number of poor between 2011-12 and 2023-24 would be closer to 17% or more.

What do we know about poverty in rural and urban regions?

PCM: The data show that the rural-urban differential in consumption is actually coming down. Rural areas are doing better. But the idea of a rural area that we have is based on the 2011 Census, so a significant portion of the rural areas is basically urban or peri-urban in character. Earlier, food expenditure used to be the major component of rural consumption patterns. But the 2022-23 data show that a substantial number of items are the same in urban and rural areas now, which means rural consumption has actually changed in terms of diversity. We need to put a statistical base in place, including a Census, so we know what is rural and urban.

NRB: There should be clear-cut separation of what is rural and urban. If we decide to shift peri-urban to urban areas, I think urban poverty would have declined much faster than the preliminary estimates we have now. In any case, at the aggregate, we see a sharp fall in the number of poor, but in terms of consumption,

we have to look at public policy interventions.

Where do you stand on an upward revision of the poverty line in India?

PCM: A research paper by the Foundation for Agrarian Studies used the Rangarajan methodology on the 2022-23 HCES data. They estimated around 25% poverty. I'm not clear that by just updating a poverty line in that fashion, we would have a definite estimation. But we need to have some agreement on a methodology and the government needs to stand behind that. That is unlikely to happen.

NRB: With the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) laying down \$2.15/day as a poverty line, even their estimates suggest poverty was just about 12.9% in 2019. So, I don't agree with the 25% figure that Dr. Mohanan is quoting. NITI Aayog's estimates also don't really support that number. However, I agree with him that we need to have a clear-cut methodology for a poverty line estimation, but at the same time we need to stick to a single poverty line.

There have been some criticisms against Niti Aayog's multidimensional poverty index. UNDP's index has 10 indicators and India's index has 12. Is this criticism valid?

NRB: The UNDP has one methodology for all countries. It is only a framework that suggests what needs to be part of your consumption basket. But it is left to the countries to customise that methodology. Broadening that basket is the right way to do it. We have rightly added bank accounts and maternal health to the 10 indicators that the UNDP includes in its index.

PCM: I am not sure about that because multidimensional poverty tells you whether you are deprived of that particular indicator or not. Now there are many indicators which may not be applicable to a household. When you don't have a child, all those indicators related to a child are not relevant, so that household is not deprived of those things. Many of the indicators actually don't go down. Once you have access to electricity, a bank account, etc., you don't get deprived of those indicators in future. This index will never go up. Poverty estimates will continue to stay low because of the way the indicators have been selected. There is no scope for getting deprived in future. We don't measure income vulnerability and we need to do that.



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NOTEBOOK

The importance of the critical review

Well written critical reviews, more than the positive ones, add to the treasury of anecdotes and folklore that nourish a literary community

G. Sampath

The lit fest season is here, and like some migratory birds seen only in winter, books and authors are enjoying more conversational space, beyond the editorial equivalent of a wildlife sanctuary – the reviews section.

A quarter century ago, when I got my first byline as a book critic, almost every respectable newspaper and magazine had at least one weekly page, if not more, devoted to book reviews. There was this exotic species of journalist known as 'Books Editor', now sadly nearly extinct, whose sole remit was to read books, commission reviews, and attend launches. They would be courted by publishers in the morning, authors in the afternoon, and colleagues at all times of the day – begging to borrow a book from the growing pile of new titles on their desks.

The books page had no overt links to politics or business, nor was it comparable to the op-ed pages in terms of influence. Yet it was closely followed, and drew attention disproportionate to its acknowledged importance in the publication's scheme of things editorially, commercially, or budget-wise. It was seen as adding intellectual heft to the publication's brand identity.

Over the years, a number of factors have combined to erode the prominence and space that books commanded, with *The Hindu* being one of the exceptions. The first was a general sense that people are spending less time consuming books. Another was the exit of many small, independent publishing houses that encouraged unusual, local talent. Lastly, a pronounced tilt toward commercial non-fiction and market-tested genre fiction on the part of the big publishers left little scope for controversial works that could spark elaborate debates. At the same time, authors (and not just publishers) began to think of a review as a publicity prop rather than as a journalistic form with its own literary attributes.

One outcome of all this was that the negative review, especially the one where

the reviewer would, with justification, take the author to the cleaners, has become rare. The norm today is the favourable review. If the book is bad, the reviewer either gives a neutral synopsis of the book or does a balancing act by sandwiching the criticism between praise – this way the reader is forewarned, the writer gets blurb-worthy lines, and the reviewer is seen as 'objective'.

But what I have learned over years of reviewing is that being objective is not the same as being fair. Those who confused the two often became susceptible to what the legendary film critic Pauline Kael termed "saphead objectivity". A fair response to a terrible book is a proper pasting, and there is nothing objective about it. But that's more likely in a literary culture where writers, critics, and publishers are attuned to a robust tradition of dishing it out as well as taking it on the chin and readers appreciate the exchange, as happened during my stint as books editor with a now-defunct daily.

I had commissioned the review of a novel to a freelancer who, I learnt only later, had some history with the novelist. When the review came in, I was stunned by how harsh it was. I had my doubts, but there was deadline pressure, and I decided to back the reviewer's judgment. We went with it. The writer, an influential figure, did not like it. But he was quick to share it on Facebook. The terrible (for him) review garnered extensive publicity for the book.

But not all authors are sporting when it comes to negative reviews. Many take it personally. Though painful to the writer, well written critical reviews, more than the positive ones, add to the treasury of anecdotes and folklore that nourish a literary community. Not too long ago, the sort of banter between writers and critics we now witness at lit fest panels used to unfold on the books pages of newspapers. If books sections are to reclaim something of their erstwhile glory days, fair yet critical reviews would certainly help.

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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

An Aadhaar card for a tree



Workers install a plate with a QR code on a Chinar tree at the Nishat Bagh on the banks of the Dal lake in Srinagar. Under the 'Digital Tree Aadhaar' conservation initiative, Chinar trees, which are a cultural symbol of Jammu and Kashmir and are facing threats due to urbanisation, are being provided with unique identification codes. Scanning the QR code will give a person information about the tree's geographical location, health, and growing patterns. IMRAN NISSAR

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 24, 1975

All-India institute of epigraphy

Dharwar, Jan. 23: The need for the establishment of an all-India institute of epigraphy was stressed here yesterday by the Union Minister of State for Law and Company Affairs, Dr Sarojini Mahishi.

Inaugurating the first annual Congress of the Epigraphical Society of India the Minister

said the establishment of a co-ordinating body to undertake a thorough survey of all inscriptions in the country before they are damaged or lost was necessary since the reconstruction of Indian history could not be made without a scientific study of all inscriptions by competent scholars. She also recalled the contribution made by the epigraphy branch of the Archaeological Survey of India and certain State departments and universities towards the advancement of epigraphical research.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 24, 1925

Monkey gland traffic

A large number of the unfortunate monkeys destined for thyroid gland treatment are still cooped up in their wooden crates at Crawford Market awaiting shipment. They are to be taken on board a German ship in the course of a few days, their ultimate destination being Birmingham.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of voters in Bihar over 120 years old

143 Bihar has a total of 7,80,22,933 electors of which 41,000 are registered centenarian voters according to the latest Election Commission data. The data shows that the State has 16,07,527 electors who are in the age group from 80 years to 120 years and above. PTI

Number of schools closed in Bangkok due to air pollution

200 Air pollution forced schools in Bangkok to close on Thursday, authorities said, as officials urged people to work from home and restricted heavy vehicles. By Thursday morning, the Thai capital was the sixth most polluted major city in the world, according to IQAir. AFP

Funds to be raised by IREDA via qualified institutional placement

5000 in ₹ crore. State-owned IREDA said its board has approved a plan to raise funds through the qualified institutional placement route. The company said the financial resources will support the demand for green energy financing. PTI

Record number of pilgrims taking a dip at Maha Kumbh

10 in crore. The ongoing Maha Kumbh has crossed a milestone for pilgrims taking a dip at the Triveni Sangam. The government highlighted that the number of pilgrims has been consistently rising, with lakhs arriving daily to bathe and gain spiritual merit. PTI

Soldiers dead in an ambush by ex-Philippine rebels

2 Former Muslim rebels ambushed government troops assigned to escort UN staff visiting the southern Philippines wounding 12 others. The UN and the Philippine military both condemned Wednesday's attack on Basilan Island. AFP
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is France's influence in West Africa over?

Why did Chad, Ivory Coast, and Senegal ask for the withdrawal of French troops? What does the withdrawal signify for Europe'swaning influence in Africa? How has Russia benefited from this?

EXPLAINER

Anu Maria Joseph
Padmashree Anandhan

The story so far:

On January 1, Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara announced that French troops would withdraw from the country by the end of the month. On December 26, in Chad, France handed over its military base in Faya-Largeau and began the withdrawal of troops following the termination of a defence cooperation agreement in November. On December 3, Senegalese President Macky Sall called for the closure of all French military bases, commenting that their presence was "incompatible" with the country's national sovereignty. Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Chad have joined three West African countries – Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso – asking for French troop's withdrawal, marking a major blow to France'swaning influence in the region.

Why did Chad, Ivory Coast, and Senegal ask for French troops' withdrawal?

First, the narrative on incompatibility with national sovereignty. France has around 1,000 troops in Chad, 600 in Ivory Coast, and 350 in Senegal. Since independence, France had colonial pacts with these former colonies to maintain economic, political, and military influences, referred to as 'Françafrique'. In Senegal and Ivory Coast, French troops have been stationed since 2014 as part of Operation Barkhane. For Chad, the defence pact existed for decades and does not align with its security requirements. Chad's President Mahamat Idriss Déby says ending the defence agreements is like taking back national sovereignty. Ivory Coast and Senegal have followed in similar footsteps for a reciprocal relationship that respects each other's independence and sovereignty.

Second, public dissatisfaction over French presence. French troops have been fighting insurgent groups linked to



Power shift: French troops have been fighting insurgent groups linked to the Islamic state and al Qaeda across West Africa since 2014. AFP

the Islamic state and al Qaeda across West Africa since 2014. Despite their military presence, French troops failed to quell the insurgency in the region. Besides, it has spread, degenerated, and intensified across the region. This raised anti-French sentiments alongside a public demand for their withdrawal.

Third, West Africa's quest to move beyond France. Recently, many West African countries have shown interest in diversifying their relations from traditional colonial to new partners. The military governments in West Africa, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, have built military ties with Russian mercenaries to fight insurgency. For military leaders, Russian mercenaries do not come with the baggage of adhering to democratic values. Besides, Russia has successfully spread an image as a better security provider in Africa.

What does French withdrawal mean for African countries?

For Africa, French withdrawal means the end of France's decades-long influence. However, in Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, French withdrawal and Russia's arrival has not addressed or contained insurgency. Rather, these three countries rank among the top in the Global Terrorism Index 2024 by the Institute for Economics & Peace. The military regimes

have strengthened in the region with the new Alliance of Sahel states between Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. The common anti-France sentiments would likely bring Chad, Senegal, and Ivory Coast to join the Sahel alliance and an opportunity to boost regional counter-terrorism efforts.

What does the withdrawal mean for France?

The withdrawal would have four implications – first, the obituary of the 'Françafrique'. Under French President Emmanuel Macron, the withdrawal marks the end of 'Françafrique,' giving prominence to maintaining a strong economic and diplomatic foothold.

Second, the decline in political influence affects economic relations. Since 2010, President Ouattara has been in term with support from France; however former president Gbagbo's reemergence in 2020 challenged political stability. Without political influence, fulfilling France's economic interests can be problematic.

Third, a waning military presence would impact international reputation. The military has supported pro-France African leaders to maintain political and economic stability. French Armed Forces have been stationed in support of UN operations since the Ivorian Civil War. Therefore, projecting France as a global fighter against terrorism and a defender

of international values and human rights will be undermined in the new reality. Fourth, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have pushed out French troops involuntarily, which are now either replaced by Russian mercenaries or engulfed in a military coup, making French influence impossible. It is uncertain for the Ivory Coast, given its political and economic ties with France even after independence.

Is there a larger waning European influence in Africa?

In the geopolitical era of conflicts, Europe's declining presence and the competition from Russia and China in Africa were the least focused. The EU is struggling with the shifting political landscape, security issues from the war in Ukraine, and larger economic strain; therefore handling autocracies, migrants, and anti-Europe sentiments has been put on the back burner. In the last few decades, Germany, France, and the U.K. have called down their development funding, leading to increased military coups and greater involvement of external actors.

To gain a political and security presence in Africa, Russia has filled the military vacuum, while China asserts its economic influence through the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU's trade surplus has declined by 15%, from 55 billion euros to 35 billion euros between 2022 and 2023. In comparison, China maintains a surplus of more than 70 billion euros.

Militarily, Russia has benefited from the troops' withdrawals. Whether this will change the right-wing governments in Europe is worth asking. The 2024 manifestos of these parties can be useful in this regard. Their policies are more security-oriented in managing borders and migrants, rather than being economically driven. In the coming years, Europe's foreign policy approach will be more inward-looking, with few EU members looking to expand markets into Africa while facing competition from China.

The authors are Project Associates at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore

THE GIST

▼ West African countries are moving away from traditional colonial ties with France, seeking partnerships with global powers for security and economic cooperation.

▼ Chad, Ivory Coast, and Senegal requested French troop withdrawals, citing incompatibility with national sovereignty and public dissatisfaction over France's failure to curb insurgencies.

▼ France's withdrawal marks the end of 'Françafrique', diminishing its political, military, and economic presence in Africa, while Russia and China continue to expand their influence in the region.

How does Trump's 75-day order affect the TikTok ban?

What law led to the banning of TikTok in the U.S.? Can the President override a ban upheld by the court?

John Xavier

The story so far:

Donald Trump signed an order that gave TikTok a 75-day lifeline. The short-video sharing platform went offline for U.S.-based users just a day earlier following a protracted legal and political battle that ended in a federal ban. TikTok appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The court upheld the ban, making both Google and Apple remove the app from their app stores. Web-hosting platforms were also ordered to cut ties with the platform or face fines of as much as \$5,000 per user.

Based on what law was TikTok banned?

The controversial law, 'Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act,' signed by

former President Joe Biden aimed at blocking apps controlled by the U.S.'s foreign adversaries from operating in the country. It specifically targeted TikTok, owned and controlled by ByteDance, a Chinese firm. The goal is to prevent potential threats to national security from apps that may be used for espionage, data collection, and other harmful activities.

How does the law apply?

Under the law, some apps controlled by foreign adversaries can be prohibited from being distributed, maintained, or hosted in the U.S. However, it does allow an exception for apps that undergo a "qualified divestiture," meaning they can be sold or restructured in a way that reduces foreign control.

To enforce the ban, the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) has been given the authority to investigate and impose penalties on any entity that violates the law. The penalties are

determined based on how many users the app has. TikTok has over 170 million U.S.-based users. If the app is banned, users are entitled to request and receive all their account data – posts, photos, and videos – before the prohibition is enforced, ensuring they don't lose access to their content.

Any challenge to specific actions or decisions under the law must be made within 90 days of the decision. Legal disputes related to the law will be handled exclusively by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia.

What does Trump's order say?

Mr. Trump has noted that the timing of this enforcement is problematic as it doesn't give his administration enough time to assess the national security risks posed by TikTok or to negotiate a solution to address the risks without immediately shutting down the platform. And so, he has directed the Attorney General not to

enforce the Act's provisions for 75 days. During this period, the DoJ is prohibited from imposing penalties on platforms distributing or maintaining the app.

Can the President override a ban upheld by the Supreme Court?

While a section of legal experts may recognise the broad authority granted to the President under the Constitution of the U.S. in matters of national security and foreign relations, others will raise concerns that Mr. Trump's order could undermine the Congress's authority to legislate.

Another way to look at the order is through the lens of political expediency given the popularity of TikTok. Mr. Trump may be attempting to balance national security with public relations and economic interests. In this context, the order is a temporary measure to avoid an immediate shutdown and give the new administration time to negotiate a solution with TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, or implement mitigation measures.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court may play a key role in determining whether Mr. Trump's order is consistent with constitutional principles, especially if this matter is challenged in court. If the case reaches the apex court, it could result in a landmark ruling on the separation of powers and executive authority in national security matters.

THE GIST

▼ TikTok was banned in the U.S. under the 'Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act,' which targets apps from foreign adversaries, to protect national security.

▼ President Donald Trump issued a 75-day order delaying the enforcement of the ban, citing insufficient time to assess national security risks and negotiate a solution, though legal experts debate whether this could interfere with Congress's authority.

IN THE LIMELIGHT



Artistic maverick: Avant-garde director, actor, composer, and painter David Lynch passed away last week at the age of 78. AFP

What lay beneath David Lynch's unique approach to cinema?

David Lynch's evocative style, marked by surreal imagery and unconventional storytelling, reveals a deep understanding of gendered existence, exploring the complexities of women's lives through empathy; his works unravel layered narratives, offering a look at trauma and identity

Nitika Francis

Amoldy, severed ear on a patch of suburban grass, filled with crawling ants. The head of an adult human sheared off and replaced by the visage of a grotesque baby alien. An extra-dimensional room fully curtained in red, inhabited by a giant, a dwarf, a cluster of nerves, and a dead girl.

David Lynch's filmography revelled in the evocative strangeness of images like this. The avant-garde director, actor, composer, and painter passed away last week at the age of 78 due to emphysema from years of smoking.

His trademark deviation from the realm of Hollywood storytelling, via surreal imagery that disrupts the spatial and temporal universe of a film or television series, proved to be so uniquely influential that this style garnered the title of "Lynchian".

The flavour of his craft came from his belief in putting forth an uncompromised vision that he, very famously, would not explain. "People have a yearning to make an intellectual sense of (cinema). And when they can't do that, it feels frustrating, but they can come up with an explanation from within if they just allow it... What something is and what something isn't, and they might agree with their friends or argue with their friends. But how could they agree or argue if they don't already know it?" he wrote in his autobiography, *Catching the Big Fish: Meditation, Consciousness, and Creativity*.

Evoking empathy

His work demands from his audience the process of feeling, rather than understanding. His use of silence, words, sound design, and colour comes together with the intent of evoking an experience specific to each member of his audience. In worlds of incomprehension, with few rational, linear, or coherent conclusions

to be drawn, empathy is the most easily accessible component of Lynch's art.

Lynch pioneered surrealist cinema in Hollywood, an art movement that has, since its inception in the 1920s, deified the female and reduced her to a mysterious object of desire, a canvas to project ideas and thought-provoking visuals onto (see: Hans Bellmer's *The Doll*), rather than beings with inner complexities that deserve to be explored in their own right.

Lynch does not necessarily fall into this category. *Mulholland Drive*, widely regarded as his magnum opus, is at its surface a neo-noir about an amnesiac woman, Rita (played by Laura Harring), falling in love with Betty (played by Naomi Watts), another woman who is helping her solve the mystery of who she is. An hour into the runtime, and perhaps two hours into mulling over the film's ending, leads to a general conclusion that the film portrays the fractured psyche of a woman traumatised by the structural inner workings of Hollywood and the effects of sexual abuse via the casting couch.

In a scene now famous for its disturbing implications, a frazzled, more human Betty, who is in a different realm, identified as Diane Selwyn, sits on a couch and pleases herself while profusely sobbing. The scene can be interpreted as a representation of women's complicated relationship with pleasure, especially in a space such as Hollywood, where the #MeToo movement in 2017 solidified that opportunities are withheld from actresses in exchange for sexual favours.

Watts' performance invokes pain and confusion in the viewer, while the story directs attention to an unavoidable struggle of presenting oneself as feminine; how much of one's sexuality is one's own choice? The blonde-brunette pairing of Watts and Harring, who is interpreted as a part of Diane's psyche, represents an internal Madonna-who complex.

Lynch's empathetic lens on women allows him to deploy recognisable tropes without shoehorning a woman's personhood into them. *Blue Velvet*'s Dorothy Vallens (played by Isabella Rossellini) is, at first glance, a typical damsel in distress; a battered woman abused by her deranged husband. And yet, when she encounters Jeffrey Beaumont (played by Kyle MacLachlan), she pulls a knife on him and forces him to hit her and submit to her.

In 1986, when this film came out, this depiction of Vallens was famously bashed as misogynistic by veteran film critic, Roger Ebert. "...when you ask an actress to endure those experiences, you should keep your side of the bargain by putting her in an important film," he remarked in his review.

In hindsight, however, both the female leads in the film, the brunette Vallens and the blonde Sandy (played by Laura Dern), are postmodern parodies critiquing the two tropes into which women are categorised; the quintessential good girl, Sandy is overtly sweet and inexperienced, while Vallens is an emulation of Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, seemingly sexually empowered because she wants her subjugation.

Vallens is a reflection of the trauma endured by women who are driven towards sexual acts of self-destruction and an astute look into the complexities of sexual dynamics between genders.

Dissecting womanhood

Lynch's most extensive expansion of a woman's personhood, undoubtedly, can be found in his deeply influential collaboration with Mark Foster, *Twin Peaks*. The television series, whose first two seasons aired in 1990, was one of the first works to inject auteur directing into mainstream television. The show is driven by the mystery of who killed Laura Palmer (played by Sheryl Lee) and, as it is unraveled, the audience is further

exposed to the person underneath the poised dead body that washed ashore in this small town, the homecoming queen tragically robbed of her youth.

Laura is seen as the perfect girl-next-door by the people of *Twin Peaks*, the ideal of American girlhood. As the episodes go by, we see her self-destructive escapades and tumultuous relationships with her mother, best friend, boyfriend, secret boyfriend, and cocaine. Lynch once again breaks apart the rosy image of American suburbia, this time with a sharp focus on the nuclear family. Laura was a victim of incest perpetuated by her father Leland (played by Ray Wise), and is portrayed as such; a victim. While Lynch and Foster do foray into glamourising her destructive tendencies with strobe lights and nudity, they ultimately attribute said tendencies to her father's abuse.

Here, empathy is imparted to these characters with a delicate nuance. Leland, as it turns out, was also sexually abused by his grandfather. While this explains his perpetuation of the same abuse, it does not, by any means, justify it. Leland is still portrayed as the devil incarnate, and is revealed to be the culprit.

In the final scene of the spinoff film, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, which depicts Laura's last day on earth, Laura, now dead, is seen in the red room, a realm frequented by various characters of the show from time to time. She is visited by an angel and begins to smile widely as she weeps heavily, with a sense of relief. The detective who unravelled the mystery, Dale Cooper (played again by Kyle MacLachlan), stands beside her, hand on her shoulder, a vision of empathy, not truly understanding, but understanding.

In a turbulent world of sexual abuse, constant objectification, a flattening of personhood into archetype, death was the highest act of kindness that Lynch could bequeath upon his most polarising starlet.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz to mark the 80th birthday of noted Hindi film maker Subhash Ghai

Please send in your answers to

dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

V. V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1
Before becoming an actor, Ghai acted in some films. In which superhit flick did he play the role of Flight Lieutenant Prakash?

QUESTION 2
Name the two Shatrughan Sinha starrers, bearing the names of two popular cricketers of that era, that were the first two films of Ghai as a director.

QUESTION 3
Name the production company that he

formed in 1982 to produce his films.

QUESTION 4
Which Ghai film had the controversial song 'Choli Ke Peeche Kya Hai' pictured on Madhuri Dixit?

QUESTION 5
If Jackie Shroff debuted in 'Hero', which actress made her first appearance in 'Pardes'?

QUESTION 6
Name the film institute set up by Ghai in 2006.

QUESTION 7
Which film of his received the National Film Award for Best Film on Other Social Issues?



Visual Question:

This is a still from which Ghai film that starred the veteran actors Dilip Kumar and Raaj Kumar. HINDU PHOTO ARCHIVES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. This country grants citizenship only under exceptional circumstances. If one is a cardinal residing in the country, or due to employment within the church, the citizenship is granted. **Ans: Vatican City**

2. Citizenship of the Mercosur is granted to eligible citizens of which bloc? Which are the countries part of the bloc? **Ans: Southern Common Market, comprising Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay**

3. These citizens are the members of this international association of 56 member states. **Ans: Commonwealth of Nations**

4. This form of citizenship exists within a smaller administrative unit, like a state or province, within a nation, granting residents certain rights and participation in local governance, distinct from their national citizenship at the country level. What is this citizenship called? **Ans: Subnational citizenship**

5. Nationality law can be broadly categorised into three principles. **Ans: jus soli, jus sanguinis and jus matrimonii**

Visual: The protest is related to which country? **Ans: Australia**

Early Bird: Manasvi Dhavale



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"The second rule is..."

"Before you go to the second rule, I'd like to tell you something. I agree that what I write should be clear. I don't agree that writing should be simple. If you use simple words, your writing or speech will be colourless. It won't be impressive."

In other words, you are saying that 'expectoration is forbidden' is more impressive than 'Don't spit'. It is unfortunate that a lot of people in our country are impressed by 'words of learned length and thund'ring sound'. Some of us think that we shall make a powerful impression if we use abstract words. The second rule I was about to tell you when I was interrupted by you is: 'Prefer the concrete to the abstract'. 'Abstract' refers to the ideal and the general. 'Concrete' refers to the material and the specific. Abstract nouns are generally uncountable and concrete nouns are countable. Child is a countable noun. Childhood is not. An abstract noun is generally the name of quality, action or state. Beauty, strength, poverty, growth are abstract words. Abstract nouns are generally derived from adjectives, verbs and common nouns. 'Mildness' is from 'mild', consideration is from 'consider', 'boyhood' is from 'boy'."

"Why should we prefer the concrete to the abstract?"

"The necessity of proper perception of the deterioration of the system of examination is of paramount importance. Can you change the sentence so that it can be understood more easily?"

"Let me try. 'The necessity of proper perception' can be changed to 'The need to perceive properly'; 'deterioration of the system of examination' to 'the deteriorating examination system'; 'is of paramount importance' to 'is very important'."

"Don't you think it is clearer when concrete words are used? Let us take another sentence: The implementation of this scheme will result in expenditure of an enormous amount of money. Can you change this into a simpler sentence?"

"One will have to spend a lot of money to carry out this scheme."

"You must cut out unnecessary abstract words. Then sentences become clearer, easier to understand."

"Abstract words shouldn't be used at all?"

"I don't say that. They can be used if they don't affect clarity. Don't think that a simple style is a colourless style. Look at the last paragraph of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: 'But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth'."

Published in The Hindu on November 11, 1994

Word of the day

Knavery:

lack of honesty; acts of lying, cheating, or stealing

Synonyms:

trickery, mischief, deceit

Usage:

She was punished for her knavery when she stole money from her friend.

Pronunciation:

newsth.live/knaverypro

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/neɪvəri/

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

From Page One

'Fire rumour' by tea seller triggered tragedy



In recovery: An injured passenger being treated at a hospital in Jalgaon district on Thursday. PTI

"The family of one of the deceased could not identify the decapitated body, and on Thursday, another member of the family identified the body and the count came down to 12," said Jalgaon Medical Superintendent Vijay Gaikwad.

Among the 12 deceased, the administration has identified 11 bodies and handed over nine of them to their families. Among the 10 injured, two have spine injuries. Among the 12 deceased, seven are from Nepal and the rest from Uttar Pradesh.

Speaking to reporters in Pune, Mr. Pawar said, "A tea seller from the pantry shouted about a fire having broken out in a coach." Two passengers from Shrivastav in Uttar Pradesh heard it and conveyed the false alarm to others, leading to confusion and panic in their general coach and the adjoining one."

When the train halted, people started getting down and got run over by the Karnataka Express coming from the other side.

Iron Age began in 4th millennium BCE in T.N.'

Professor Emeritus in South Asian Archaeology in Cambridge University Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti said this discovery, for the first time in the world, proved that the usage of smelted iron could go back to the middle of the third millennium BCE. "It is not merely of Indian significance, but also in the context of the archaeology of the world," he said.

Former Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India Rakesh Tewari said: "Tamil Nadu is one of those areas which is providing evidence for an independent culture having interaction with other areas and distinctive technologies also. I hope this type of research will continue in this part of the country and other parts will also take inspiration from them."

Multiple labs

Though results were obtained a year ago, the findings went through different research methods in multiple labs and were sent eventually to archaeological experts for their validation so that the results were seen in the light of academic rigour, Commissioner of Archaeology T. Udhayachandran told *The Hindu*.

Both Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS) and Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) were adopted, he said. Samples were sent to Beta Analytic Testing Laboratory in the U.S.A., Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences in Lucknow and Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad to get the dating results.

Explaining the significance of the fresh findings of the antiquity of iron in the Indian subcontinent from sites in Tamil Nadu, Mr. Udhayachandran said: "Compared to other metals, you need to have higher temperature to smelt iron about 1,200 to 1,400 degrees Celsius. You need superior technology. It shows people in Tamil land had mastered the skill even some 5300 years ago."

Played vital role

The usage of iron played an important role in the history of humankind, as it was used to make tools for agriculture and that eventually led to more trade and eventually formation of State, he contended. "Iron technology is the most important finding in the evolution of mankind," he said.

The earlier excavations at Sivagalai, Adichanalur, Mayiladumparai, Kilnamandi and Mangadu indicated the date falls between 2500 BCE and 3000 BCE as the introduction of iron in south India, particularly in Tamil Nadu. When cultural zones located north of Vindhya experienced the Copper Age, the region south of Vindhya might have entered into the Iron Age due to the limited availability of commercially exploitable copper ore, the report said.

"Thus, the Copper Age of north India and the Iron Age of south India are probably contemporaneous," the report contended. Based on the availability of AMS-14C and OSL dates ranging between 2427 BCE and 3345 BCE for the samples recovered from the recent excavations, it said: "We may securely place the introduction of iron in India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, in the early part of 4th millennium BCE."

During the occasion, Mr. Stalin also laid the foundation stone for establishing museums at Keeladi and Gangaikondacholapuram. Ministers Duraimurugan, Thangam Thennarasu and E.V. Velu; Chief Secretary N. Muruganandam and senior officials were among the participants.

Misri to visit Beijing as India, China look to revive dialogue

Foreign Secretary will meet Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong and discuss resumption of direct flights between the two countries, visas, and the Mansarovar yatra; trade issues and concerns over hydropower project may also come up

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri will travel to Beijing on Sunday, in another indication that India and China are reviving all dialogue mechanisms after the four-year break over the military stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

The meeting follows the October 21 agreement to end the stalemate at the LAC, which was ratified by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping during a summit in Russia, followed by meetings between the Foreign Ministers and the Defence Ministers of the two countries.

Mr. Misri, who served as India's Ambassador to Beijing (2019-2021) and Deputy National Security Adviser (2021-2024), will meet Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, who was his counterpart as Chinese Ambassador to India (2019-2022).

Among issues expected to be discussed are the re-



Vikram Misri during an event in Thailand in December 2024. China's Vice-Foreign Minister Sun Weidong, right, was present. AFP

sumption of direct flights between India and China, which remain suspended since the pandemic; issuance of visas particularly for businesspersons and journalists; ironing out trade issues; and arrangements for the resumption of the Mansarovar Yatra for pilgrims.

"The resumption of this bilateral mechanism flows from the agreement at the leadership level to discuss the next steps for India-China relations, including in the political, economic,

and people-to-people domains," the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement, indicating that the talks are part of the revival of regular dialogue.

The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has not commented on the visit thus far. On Tuesday, the Ministry spokesperson had said that India and China must "deliver" on the understandings reached between Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi.

Mr. Misri will be in Beijing on January 26 and 27. He will leave after the Re-

public Day parade in New Delhi, officials said.

The Foreign Secretary's visit comes just before the Chinese New Year holidays that begin on January 28. Chinese Ambassador to India Xu Feihong is already in Beijing, understood to be in preparation for the visit.

At a reception for the New Year in Delhi this week, Chinese Charge d'Affaires Wang Lei said India and China would hold "dozens" of celebratory events to mark the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India.

He said that India-China economic exchanges had grown 2% in the past year, with trade figures reaching \$126.6 billion in the first 11 months of 2024 and 2,80,000 visas being issued by China during the year.

Considerable tensions
However, the two sides have also faced considerable tensions over economic and visa issues, with recent reports suggesting

that Chinese manufacturers were withholding technology and exports to India, including for Tunnel Boring Machines manufactured in China and Germany. Beijing has also been asking New Delhi to issue more visas and facilitate travel links.

Despite a declaration after a meeting between Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Wang in November 2024 over resumption of visas, flights, and the Mansarovar Yatra for pilgrims, there has been little movement on the ground on these issues thus far.

In addition, a Chinese hydropower project on the upper riparian area of the Brahmaputra (Yarlung Zangpo in Tibet) has caused concern about flooding downstream.

"We must convey that any reset in ties would require a lot of hard work because accumulated anxieties remain, both on border issues as well as economic issues," former Ambassador to China (2014-2016) Ashok Kantha told *The Hindu*.

CEC cautions against fake narratives that erode trust

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on Thursday sounded a note of caution against "fake narratives" that erode trust in the electoral process.

Addressing a two-day international conference of Election Management Bodies (EMB), Mr. Kumar said that such narratives are timed to strike at the vitals of the electoral process.

The conference is being held in the national capital on January 23-24, ahead of National Voters Day on January 25.

Nearly 30 representatives from the EMBS of 13 countries (Bhutan, Georgia, Namibia, Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Ireland, Mauritius, the Philippines, Russia, Tunisia, and Nepal) are participating in the conference.

The CEC also emphasised the critical role of technology and digital innovations in enhancing efficiency, transparency and voter confidence. He, however, cautioned that while technology offers significant opportunities, it also brings challenges.

Will continue to support BJP: Manipur JD(U) MLA

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Muhammad Abdul Nasir, Manipur's lone Janata Dal (United) MLA, said on Thursday that he would continue to support the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government in the State.

He affirmed his support a day after Kshetrimayum Biren Singh, the JD(U)'s former State president, wrote to Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla announcing the withdrawal of support to the government headed by Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh.

The JD(U)'s central leadership sacked the State president hours after his "withdrawal" letter went viral.

Mr. Nasir met JD(U) working president Sanjay Jha and issued a video statement, dissociating himself from the content of the former State unit president's letter.

Multiple labs

Though results were obtained a year ago, the findings went through different research methods in multiple labs and were sent eventually to archaeological experts for their validation so that the results were seen in the light of academic rigour, Commissioner of Archaeology T. Udhayachandran told *The Hindu*.

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When the train halted, people started getting down and got run over by the Karnataka Express coming from the other side.

Budget must provide relief from rising prices, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Unemployment and inflation resulting from the "wrong policies" of the Narendra Modi government had made life extremely difficult for lower and middle-class families, and the country now needed a budget that provided relief from rising prices, the Congress said on Thursday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget on February 1.

Sharing a media report on his X handle, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh claimed that the "back-breaking inflation in the last 10 years has emptied the pockets of the common people".

"The Modani [Modi-Adani] government has only taken care of its rich friends in the last ten years. Ever-increasing unemployment and inflation

due to wrong policies of the government have made life extremely difficult for lower and middle-class families," Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X.

The prices of milk, flour, pulses, petrol, diesel and vegetables were "skyrocketing," he said.

"The burden of EMIs and daily needs is increasing on every household. The country now needs a Budget that provides relief from inflation!" Mr. Ramesh added.

The Congress leader asked if the government took any concrete steps after listening to the problems of the people.

The court added that if

Court refuses to order FIR against Delhi Art Gallery over display of Husain's paintings



Jairam Ramesh

A Delhi court on Thursday refused to order the police to file an FIR against the Delhi Art Gallery (DAG) for displaying "objectionable" paintings by M.F. Husain. It said the complainant, Delhi-based advocate Amita Sachdeva, already had in her possession all the evidence required to prove her allegations.

Judicial Magistrate First Class Sahil Monga of the Patiala House Court said: "In the present case, all the facts and circumstances of the case are within the knowledge of the complainant. CCTV footage of Delhi Art Gallery, and the paintings in question have already been seized. Hence, no further investigation and collection of evidence are required on the part of the investigating agency at this stage."

The lawyer's plea had sought an FIR under Section 299 of the BNS (deliberately or maliciously acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) to be registered against DAG owners.

According to the lawyer-petitioner, when she visited the DAG last December, she photographed the "offensive" paintings. She approached the police to lodge a formal complaint despite which no FIR was filed and the paintings were removed during her subsequent visit. The gallery officials denied that they displayed the said artworks.

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M.F. Husain

the FIR would be required at the later stage, then Section 225 of the BNS could be resorted to.

According to the lawyer-petitioner, when she visited the DAG last December, she photographed the "offensive" paintings. She approached the police to lodge a formal complaint despite which no FIR was filed and the paintings were removed during her subsequent visit. The gallery officials denied that they displayed the said artworks.

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Midway through campaign, AAP wakes up to issue of joblessness

Party's poll rallies highlight people's complaints on unemployment; its 2022 'Rozgar Budget' promising 20 lakh jobs was a non-starter while its job portal has been on ice for two years; no job fairs held recently; leaders blame turf war with L-G

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nikhil M. Babu
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party's narrative on the critical issue of jobs has undergone a drastic transformation ahead of the Delhi Assembly election, with the party releasing a video message on Thursday about the serious unemployment problem in Delhi and highlighting the crisis in poll rallies all week.

This is the same party, however, that has spent the past few years claiming that "we know how to give employment" and "we have given 10 lakh jobs in Delhi", promoting its record in poll campaigns across multiple States, including in Punjab in 2022.

In the nine poll rallies he has addressed this



AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal campaigns for the party candidate from Trilokpuri, Anjana Parcha, in Delhi. ANI

week, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said the unemployment crisis would be his "topmost" priority if the party comes back to power in the capital. "This time, my biggest focus will be on jobs, employment. Our children do not have jobs. Our children are educated, but are sitting at home," Mr. Kejriwal said at an election rally in Patparganj on Wednesday night.

In 2022, the AAP government in Delhi had named its annual Budget the "Rozgar Budget", using the Hindi word for employment, and promised to create 20 lakh jobs over the next five years. Almost all the projects announced under the Rozgar Budget remain non-starters, including a job portal Rozgar Bazaar 2.0.

Rozgar portal

Previous claims that 12 lakh jobs have been provided have included 10 lakh jobs supposedly generated through the Rozgar Bazaar, where private companies or individuals could post job openings.

A Right to Information request filed by *The Hindu* in 2023, however, showed that the Employment Department did not have any data on the number of people who got jobs through the portal.

In its response to the RTI request, the government spokesperson admitted for the first time that it had arrived at the publicised figure of 10 lakh jobs on the basis of "sample surveys" from employers, and had no hard data to back up its claim. The Rozgar Bazaar portal has not been working for close to two years.

The Delhi government has not been holding any job fairs, as issues were raised about money spent on previous fairs, officials said. "They are creating unnecessary hurdles by writing baseless problems on the files for the implementation of the schemes despite funds being allocated in the Budget. They are acting like this as they know that we cannot suspend or even transfer them as the Lieutenant-General has all the powers," an AAP leader said.

Adityanath, Nadda target AAP on graft and governance



Heating up: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with other BJP leaders in New Delhi on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHAKAR

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Taking repeated jabs at the ruling Aam Aadmi Party, Bharatiya Janata Party president J.P. Nadda and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed campaign rallies in various parts of the city on Thursday.

Mr. Adityanath accused the AAP of stalling development over the past decade, while Mr. Nadda told people that Delhi would soon be rid of the corrupt "AAP-da" party.

The BJP president told people that the AAP, which was born out of an anti-corruption movement, had used all opportunities in the past 10 years to cross records of corruptions. "We all remember how former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal would talk about education, but those who talked about education went to jail after the liquor scam," he said.

Condition of Yamuna
Meanwhile, Mr. Adityanath hit out at the AAP leadership for the condition of the Yamuna flowing through Delhi. "As a Chief Minister, if I and my Ministers can take a dip in the Sangam [in Prayagraj], then I ask Kejriwal if his Cabinet can also go and take a dip in the Yamuna along with his Ministers," he said.

Mr. Adityanath said that "illegal Bangladeshi and Rohingya are being resettled in Delhi in the Okhla area of Delhi by the AAP". While Mr. Nadda spoke about alleged scams in the capital, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister asked people of Delhi to bring in the "double engine govern-

Delhi wants Sheila Dikshit's development model: Rahul

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Neither Prime Minister Narendra Modi nor AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal can do the kind of work that the Congress's former Delhi CM Sheila Dikshit has done for the city, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said on Thursday, in a video message asking people to vote for the Congress to bring "real development" back to the capital.

Highlighting the problems that plague the city, Mr. Gandhi's touched upon inflation, unemployment, pollution, bad construction, GST, and corruption, using snippets of his interactions with Delhi residents in the run-up to the State's upcoming Assembly election. "Delhi now wants the same real development model of Sheila Dikshit ji, not the false propaganda and PR model of BJP and Kejriwal," he said.

ment" for the betterment of the city.

"We can see he [Kejriwal] is panicking now, but what about the five years of scam worth ₹500 crore he did related to panic buttons in taxis in the capital. In ration cards, they did scam worth ₹5,400 crore and scams worth ₹4,500 crore were done while buying buses. Kejriwal used to say he would put CCTV cameras, but even that was a scam. And not just that, Kejriwal keeps talking about Muslim brothers, but even in Waqf Board, he did ₹100 crores scam. They have not left anyone," he alleged.

Mr. Nadda said the AAP used to talk against corruption but one by one all of the senior leaders including their Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister, and other senior Ministers went to jail.

Mr. Adityanath said Delhi will not accept this failed government any more, which is why the BJP will come to power in the capital. Once Delhi has a double engine government too, Delhi will become like Uttar Pradesh in terms of development, and like everyone is flocking to Uttar Pradesh now, they will come to Delhi too, he added.

Delhi elections are scheduled for February 5 while counting of votes will be done on February 8. The BJP is hoping to form a government in the capital after nearly 28 years.

Several bogus voters registered for SGPC poll, alleges Akali Dal

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) on Thursday alleged that "bogus voters" had been registered for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) election with several non-Sikhs given voting rights.

Demanding extension of the process for registration of voters to March 31, besides weeding out all bogus voters, a delegation of the SAD met gurdwara elections chief commissioner Justice S.S. Saron (retd) here.

The SGPC is a statutory body established under

the Sikh Gurdwara Act of 1925, which controls and manages Sikh gurdwaras in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Chandigarh. The SGPC polls are supposed to be held every five years by the Gurdwara Election Commission. The previous election was held in 2011.

"We informed Justice Saron that the State government had directed booth-level officers to register voters *en masse* from voter lists due to which thousands of non-Sikhs had been given the voting right for the SGPC elections," former SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal, who was part of the delegation, said.

President of Indonesia arrives for Republic Day fete, to meet PM tomorrow

Kallop Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto arrived here on Thursday to attend the 76th Republic Day event on Sunday as the chief guest.

This is the first state visit to India by Mr. Subianto. He is the fourth Indonesian President to be the chief guest at the Republic Day function.

As a special gesture, a 352-member marching and band contingent from Indonesia will take part in the parade.

Mr. Subianto will be hosted at Hyderabad House on Saturday, where he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead the respective delegations at an official-level dialogue.

During the meeting, the two sides will sign a number of memorandums of understanding, sources said. Mr. Subianto will attend the "At Home" reception by President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar will call on the visiting dignitary.

Official engagements for Mr. Subianto will begin on Friday, when External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is scheduled to call on him.

Old allies

India was the first major country to recognise Indonesia, and New Delhi led an international campaign for recognition of Indonesia's Independence at the



Dry run: The Indonesian contingent during the full dress rehearsal for the Republic Day parade in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

international level in the late 1940s.

The relation received an early boost when President Sukarno was invited to be the chief guest at the first Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 1950, following the adoption of the Constitution of India.

Over the past decades, Indonesia has emerged as an important pillar of India's Act East Policy and regular interactions have been held between officials and military personnel of the two sides. Indonesia is one of the largest trading partners of India in the ASEAN region, with bilateral trade touching \$29.4 billion in 2023-24.

Mr. Modi visited Indonesia in 2018, when the relation was elevated to the level of a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and the two sides adopted the Shared Vision of India-Indonesia Maritime Coopera-

tion in the Indo-Pacific region. The same year, India and Indonesia signed the Defence Cooperation Agreement, which has boosted defence ties and led to staff-level talks between the Air Forces, the Navies, and the Armies of both sides.

Review collaboration

Indonesia is home to one of the oldest Indian diaspora communities in the ASEAN region, and the two sides are ancient cultural partners. The visit by Mr. Subianto, according to sources, will give an opportunity to review collaboration in areas such as defence, security, trade and investment, healthcare, digital technologies, energy, culture connectivity, tourism, and people-to-people relations.

The third India-Indonesia CEO Forum will be held on the sidelines of the visit.

HC seeks NIA stand on J&K MP's bail plea in terror funding case

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Thursday asked the NIA to spell out its stand on Jammu and Kashmir MP Engi-

neer Rashid's plea for bail in a terror funding case.

Senior advocate N. Hariharan, representing Mr. Rashid, urged the High Court to either direct its expeditious disposal or de-

cide the matter itself.

"Issue notice. Let reply/status report be filed before the next date of hearing," the Court said while posting the case for hearing on January 30.

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA STATE PUBLIC HEALTH & MUNICIPAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT NIT No.07/SEPHWGL/RWBP/AMRUT-2/0 Sp1. Tranche/2024-25/1246 Dt:23-01-2025 Name of the work: MA & UD - PHMED- Rejuvenation of 50 Water Body Projects in 45 ULBs under AMRUT 2.0 (Special Tranche) under the jurisdiction of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Khammam and Warangal PH Divisions in Package-1, Total Estimated Cost: Rs. 132.45 Crores; Bid Submission Start Date: 29.01.2025 @11.00 AM; Bid Submission Closing Date: 13.02.2025 @ 04.30 PM For details visit https://tender.telangana.gov.in . Contact No: 9704601864, 9392920307. DIPR R.O.No.9537-PP/CL/ADVT/1/2024-25 Dt. 23.01.2025	Sd/- Superintending Engineer, P.H. Circle Warangal
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भारत सरकार - अंतरिक्ष विभाग / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA - DEPARTMENT OF SPACE

शिरामण एवं अनुसरण समूह, एसटीएसपी शार / CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC-SHAR

श्रीहरिकोटा / नेल्लूर (जिला), आ.प्र. / SRIRAKHOTA - 524124

संक्षिप्त ई-निविदा सूचना / Brief E-TENDER NOTICE

ई-निविदा सूचना सं/ e-Tender Notice No: CMGIC/CON/248732 तिथि/ Date: 21.01.2025

भारत के एटीपीयॉर की ओर से, "संलग्न प्रत्येक के लिए इनिविदा नाम (पीसीएन) इसरो / अं.वि. हायासिंग कॉलेजी में 60 और प्रकार के बन्टर तथा 20 और प्रकार के बन्टरों के लिए इनिविदा के माध्यम से मद दर निविदाएँ आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। निविदा दस्तावेज 13/02/2025 को 14:30 बज तक जारीनाम दिए जाएंगे। विस्तृत सूचना देखें। इनिविदा सूचना सं/ e-Tender Notice No: CMGIC/CON/248732 तिथि/ Date: 21.01.2025

On behalf of President of India, online EPC tenders are invited through e-tendering for "Construction of D Type (60 Nos) & E type (20Nos) Quarters at Pulicat Nagar (PCN) ISRO/ DOS Housing Colony, KRP, Sulurpetra - Phase-I (Civil, PH, Electrical & Mechanical (Lift) works in EPC Mode-III)" (₹ 7686.00 Lakhs); Tender documents can be downloaded up to 13/02/2025, 14:30 hrs. Interested tenderers may visit www.isro.gov.in or www.tenderwizard.com/ISRO for details.

इसके लिए इनिविदा सूचना सं/ e-Tender Notice No: CMGIC/CON/248732 तिथि/ Date: 21.01.2025

भारत सरकार - अंतरिक्ष विभाग / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA - DEPARTMENT OF SPACE

शिरामण एवं अनुसरण समूह, एसटीएसपी शार / CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTENANCE GROUP, SDSC-SHAR

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भारत सरकार - अंतरिक्ष विभाग / GOVERNMENT OF INDIA - DEPARTMENT OF SPACE

शिरामण एवं अनुसरण समूह,

IN BRIEF



CCPA issues notices to Uber, Ola, and Apple Inc.

Union Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said the Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has sought an explanation from Apple Inc, Uber and Ola on complaints received against them with the National Consumer Helpline. The complaint against Apple's iPhones was on performance issues following the iOS 18+ software update, and for Uber and Ola, it was on their differential pricing strategy based on different phone models (iPhones or Android).

HPCL Q3 net profit rises threefold to ₹2,544 crore

Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL) reported a more than threefold increase in consolidated net profit to ₹2,544 crore for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024, compared with ₹713 crore in the year-earlier period. Consolidated sales revenue grew marginally to ₹18,513 crore from ₹18,027 crore in the same period last year. Standalone profit after tax (PAT) grew sharply to ₹3,023 crore from ₹529 crore in the year-ago period.

Zee Entertainment Q3 profit jumps threefold to ₹164 crore

Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd. (ZEEL) on Thursday reported a nearly three-fold jump in consolidated net profit at ₹164 crore for December quarter FY25, helped by lower expenses, specially operational costs. The company had posted a profit of ₹58.5 crore for the year-ago period, ZEEL said in a regulatory filing. Revenue from operations in the quarter under review was at ₹940.6 crore as compared with ₹1,027.4 crore in the year ago, it added. PTI

Notes from Davos

Chandrajit Banerjee



The sun took a day off in Davos on the last two days, leaving the town wrapped in a grey shroud of cold and the ski resort shining with fresh snow. But within the World Economic Forum (WEF) Congress Centre and along the Promenade, the atmosphere was vibrant with energy and ideas, with leaders from over 130 countries, including heads of state, officials, and CEOs gathering to chart pathways for a collaborative future.

Geopolitical tensions were a recurring theme, with discussions focusing on building resilient supply chains amid global uncertainties. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim shared his vision for driving inclusive growth, while Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez spoke passionately about climate innovation and partnerships. Bringing the Indian perspective, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw outlined India's economic strategy based on the four crucial pillars of public investment in infrastructure; focus on innovation and manufacturing, inclusive growth, as well as simplification.

The week culminated with the CII India Reception, a must-attend for most visitors, with its signature blend of business networking and cultural celebration. This embodies India's presence here - global yet rooted, serious yet spirited.

As I walked back on the snowy streets, I reflected on the synergy between CII's initiatives and WEF's agenda. From climate action to gender inclusivity and innovation, it is clear India's narrative aligns seamlessly with the priorities of the Intelligent Age.

(The writer is Director General of CII)

Meta secures NCLAT relief from CCI's Whatsapp diktat

Tribunal holds that the Competition Commission's order against data sharing between Whatsapp and its owner for advertising purposes "may lead to a collapse" of the former's business model

Reuters
NEW DELHI

An Indian tribunal temporarily suspended a five-year data sharing ban between WhatsApp and owner Meta Platforms, a major relief for the U.S. giant which had warned its advertising business will be affected.

Meta had challenged the Competition Commission of India's (CCI) directive issued in November that imposed a ban on data sharing between WhatsApp and other Meta entities for advertising purposes,



warning it may have to roll back some features. Meta also criticised the CCI for not having the "technical expertise" to understand the ramifications of its order. On Thursday, India's National Company Law

Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) ordered a suspension of the data sharing ban while it continues to hear Meta's challenge to the antitrust ruling.

The ban "may lead to a collapse" of WhatsApp's business model, the tribunal noted. India is the biggest market for Meta where it has more than 350 million Facebook users and over 500 million people using WhatsApp.

Meta earlier told the appeals tribunal that it may have to "roll back or pause" some features such as those that would allow

an Indian fashion business, for example, to personalise ads on Facebook or Instagram based on interaction with a WhatsApp user.

Facebook's registered entity engaged in selling advertising in India – Facebook India Online Services – reported revenue of \$351 million in 2023-24, the highest in at least five years. A Meta spokesperson said it welcomed the ruling and "will evaluate next steps." CCI, which did not respond to a request for comment, can challenge the order in the Supreme Court if it wants to.

Tea industry breaks a sweat over massive import spurt from Kenya

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

India, the world's largest tea producer after China, has become the largest importers of the beverage from Kenya.

According to the Tea Board of Kenya, exports to India shot up from 3.53 million kg from January to October 2023 to 13.71 million kg during the same period in 2024. The 288% jump makes India the country's largest importer of its teas, it said.

India's tea exports also increased from 184.46 million kg from January to October in 2023 to 209.14 million kg during the same period in 2024, the Tea Board of India's report on tea exports during 2024 said. The increase was a tad more than 13%.

The leap in tea imports from Kenya has been a cause of concern for tea producers and traders in India, who have been grappling with oversupply for some time although production in the country dropped by more than 50 million kg in 2024 with Assam recording a crop loss of about 20 million kg.

"The imports from Kenya in recent months have been alarming as oversupply in India has kept prices of local teas in check. Some Indian brands use the cheap and lower-quality African teas as well as substandard teas from Iran and Vietnam for blending and re-exporting as Indian teas," a tea producer said.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	THURSDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	76,520	0.15
US Dollar	86.44	-0.10
Gold	82,900	0.20
Brent oil	79.32	-0.05

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2385.00	8.45
Adani Ports	1104.00	1.75
Apollo Hosp	6920.85	27.95
Asian Paints	2276.35	14.25
Axis Bank	951.05	-8.25
Bajaj Auto	8399.95	-60.90
Bajaj FinServ	1746.15	2.85
Bajaj Finance	7443.25	46.10
Bharat Elec	273.95	3.60
Bharti Airtel	1636.00	4.25
BPCL	271.25	-6.35
Britannia Ind	5012.60	55.90
Cipla	1451.15	11.75
Coal India	385.80	6.60
Dr Reddys Lab	1289.40	-6.85
Eicher Motors	5116.20	106.50
Grasim Ind	2461.15	73.00
HCL Tech	1807.00	-20.70
HFDC Bank	1664.90	-1.15
HFDC Life	621.00	2.80
Hero MotoCorp	4100.35	44.65
Hindalco	608.25	-5.20
Hindustan Unilever	2321.70	-21.25
ICICI Bank	1201.75	1.30
IndusInd Bank	970.95	0.00
Infosys	1865.45	9.00
ITC	440.20	3.20
JSW Steel	929.90	10.50
Kotak Bank	1894.85	-22.65
L&T	3503.25	-14.95
M&M	2886.45	60.00
Maurti Suzuki	12045.75	25.40
NestleIndia	2198.95	-8.85
NTPC	323.65	1.25
ONGC	263.05	-1.00
PowerGrid Corp	294.35	-3.20
Reliance Ind	1263.65	-13.45
SBI Life	1449.85	-10.20
State Bank	745.90	-7.55
Shriram Finance Ltd.	529.80	11.15
Sun Pharma	1833.60	34.65
Tata ConsumerProduct	983.90	16.50
Tata Motors	752.50	9.75
Tata Steel	130.37	1.45
TCS	4145.45	-11.45
Tech Mahindra	1713.40	29.45
Titan	3398.55	-42.10
Trent Ltd.	5733.60	107.25
UltraTech Cement	11420.90	727.15
Wipro	317.70	8.60

AESL Q3 PAT up 73% to ₹562 cr.

Adani Energy Solutions Ltd. (AESL) reported consolidated net profit for the third quarter ended December 31, 2024, up 73% year-on-year to ₹562 crore. Revenue for the quarter grew 28% to ₹5,830 crore.

UltraTech Cement Q3 net slips 17% to ₹1,474 cr., revenue up 3%

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

UltraTech Cement Ltd. reported a 17% year-on-year dip in consolidated net profit for the third quarter ended December 31, to ₹1,474 crore even as revenue from operations grew by 2.7% to ₹17,193 crore.

Additionally, UltraTech has made an open offer to the public shareholders of The India Cements to buy up to 26% stake at an offer price of ₹390 per share.

During the quarter, UltraTech achieved a capacity utilisation of 73% and domestic sales volume

grew 10%. Energy costs were lower by 13% on account of a decrease in fuel cost, the company said.

As part of its capacity expansion programme, UltraTech commissioned an additional 1.8 mtpa [million tonne per annum] capacity during the quarter. With the acquisition of The



grew 10%. Energy costs were lower by 13% on account of a decrease in fuel cost, the company said.

UltraTech has acquired a 31.72% stake in The India Cements Ltd. Along with its existing shareholding of 22.77% in the firm, UltraTech's total holding has risen to 55.49%, making it a subsidiary of UltraTech.

VOTE FOR YOUR SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR



D Gukesh
Chess



Jasprit Bumrah
Cricket



Neeraj Chopra
Athletics



PR Sreejesh
Hockey



Sumit Antil
Para Athletics

Amul

Presents

SPORTSTAR

ACES

2025

INDIA TRIUMPHS

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MOTORCYCLES



PNB



CHRIST



CASAGARD

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Realty Partner

DHAKA

Bangladesh frees 178 paramilitary troops over deadly 2009 mutiny



Bangladesh released 178 former paramilitary troops on Thursday, nearly 16 years after their detention for a violent mutiny in 2009 that resulted in 74 deaths, including of Army officers, destabilising the government of then-premier Sheikh Hasina. The troops had been acquitted of murder but faced charges related to explosives. AFP

JENIN

Hundreds leave West Bank camp during Israeli raid, says official



Hundreds of residents in the Jenin refugee camp have begun evacuating their homes on Thursday amid a large-scale Israeli military operation. Israeli forces reportedly ordered evacuations using loudspeakers, though the Army claimed it was unaware of any such orders. The operation has resulted in many casualties. AFP

SEATTLE

Judge temporarily blocks Trump's order ending birthright citizenship



A federal judge temporarily blocked U.S. President Trump's executive order ending birthright citizenship for children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents. Citing the 14th Amendment, Judge John C. Coughenour ruled against the order, which was set to take effect on February 19, amidst lawsuits from 22 States. PTI

WASHINGTON

U.S. calls Venezuela's Gonzalez Urrutia 'the rightful President'



The U.S. recognised Venezuelan Opposition leader Edmundo Gonzalez Urrutia as the "rightful President," rejecting Nicolas Maduro's third term. In a call with Marco Rubio, Mr. Gonzalez emphasised restoring democracy and releasing political prisoners. The U.S. and allies have dismissed Mr. Maduro's election claims. AFP

Putin is 'increasingly concerned' about status of Russia's economy

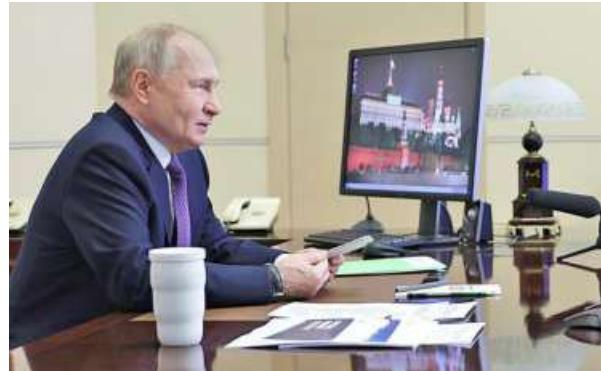
Domestic economic activity has become strained in recent months by labour shortages and high interest rates introduced to tackle inflation; Putin is 'ready' to discuss ceasefire options but wants Russia's territorial gains in Ukraine to be accepted

Reuters
MOSCOW

President Vladimir Putin has grown increasingly concerned about distortions in Russia's wartime economy, just as Donald Trump pushes for an end to the Ukraine conflict, five sources with knowledge of the situation have said.

Russia's economy, driven by exports of oil, gas and minerals, grew robustly over the past two years despite multiple rounds of Western sanctions imposed after its invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

But domestic activity has become strained in recent months by labour shortages and high interest



Steady talks: Vladimir Putin holds a meeting of supervisory board of the Agency for Strategic Initiatives in Moscow on Thursday. AP

rates introduced to tackle inflation, which has accelerated under record military spending.

That has contributed to the view within a section of the Russian elite that a negotiated settlement to the

war is desirable, according to two of the sources familiar with thinking in the Kremlin.

Mr. Trump, who returned to office on Monday, has vowed to swiftly resolve the Ukraine con-

flict, Europe's biggest since the Second World War.

This week, he has said more sanctions, as well as tariffs, on Russia are likely unless Mr. Putin negotiates, adding that Russia was heading for "big trouble" in the economy. A senior Kremlin aide said on Tuesday Russia had so far received no specific proposals for talks.

"Russia, of course, is economically interested in negotiating a diplomatic end to the conflict," Oleg Vyugin, former deputy chairman of the Central Bank of Russia said in an interview, citing the risk of growing economic distortions as Russia turbo-charges military and defence spending.

Mr. Vyugin was not one of the five sources, who all spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the situation in Russia.

Reuters has previously reported that Mr. Putin is ready to discuss ceasefire options with Mr. Trump but that Russia's territorial gains in Ukraine must be accepted and that Ukraine must drop its bid to join the U.S.-led NATO military alliance.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov acknowledged "problematic factors" in the economy, but said it was developing at a high rate and was able to meet "all military requirements" as well as all welfare and social needs.

Trump tells Davos elite to invest in U.S. or face tariffs

Associated Press
WASHINGTON



Donald Trump

said on Thursday that the kingdom wants to invest \$600 billion in the U.S. but that he would ask Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to increase it to \$1 trillion.

Mr. Trump, who promised to end the Russia-Ukraine war before taking office, said it remained a top priority, but he offered few clues for how he would do so.

"One thing very important: I really would like to be able to meet with President Putin soon and get that war ended," Mr. Trump told the Davos audience. "We really have to stop that war. That war is horrible."

Earlier in his address, Mr. Trump laid blame on the OPEC+ alliance of oil exporting countries for keeping the price of oil too high for much of the nearly three-year war.

S. Korea investigators recommend Yoon be charged with revolt

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

South Korean investigators on Thursday recommended charging impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol with insurrection and abuse of power following a 51-day probe into his December 3 martial law declaration.

The Corruption Investigation Office (CIO) accused Mr. Yoon of conspiring with military commanders to disrupt the constitution-

al order and incite riots. Mr. Yoon, currently suspended from duties, declared martial law briefly before lawmakers voted it down.

He was arrested last week, becoming the first sitting South Korean President detained in a criminal investigation. His legal team has urged prosecutors to ensure a legitimate investigation. The case will now be handed to prosecutors, who have 11 days to decide on charges.

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Anuja, a short film set in New Delhi, has on Thursday received a nomination for the Live Action Short Film category at the 97th Academy Awards. Directed by Adam J. Graves and Sushmita Mattai, it competes against films like *A Lien* and *The Last Ranger*.

The nominations for the 2025 Oscars, which were twice postponed earlier this month due to wildfires in Los Angeles, were announced by Bowen Yang



Decisive turn: The film tells the story of a gifted nine-year-old girl, Anuja, who must choose between education and factory work.

and Rachel Sennott.

The film tells the story of a gifted nine-year-old girl, Anuja, who must choose between education and factory work alongside

her sister, impacting their futures. Produced by Guneet Monga and Mindy Kaling, it collaborates with the Salaam Baalak Trust to address child labour issues.

All We Imagine As Light is nominated for the Best Film Not in English Language at the 2025 BAFTA Film Awards.

The Oscars will take place on March 2 at the Dolby Theatre in Los Angeles.

Pakistan passes Bill tightening control over social media

Associated Press
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's Lower House of Parliament has passed a controversial Bill granting the government extensive controls over social media, including the ability to imprison users for spreading disinformation.

The Bill was expedited after Opposition lawmakers, protesting the law, staged a walkout. Critics argue it threatens freedom of speech, with human rights

activists claiming it expands executive power over both content and social media platforms.

The new law mandates that platforms register with a regulatory authority and criminalises disinformation, punishable by up to three years in prison and fines.

Despite widespread opposition, the ruling government defends the legislation as necessary to combat misinformation and hate speech.

Glushko tries to find happiness on court in face of constant conflict

Ashwin Achal
BENGALURU

Israel tennis player Lina Glushko found it hard to focus on the sport when the Israel-Hamas war raged on. While on tour, Glushko worried for the safety of her friends and family back home, and faced a personal loss early in the conflict.

"All my friends went to army service as soon as the war started. I lost friends in the war. I had a friend who died the day the war started. It has been very tough," Glushko said, after winning her doubles quarterfinal in the \$1,00,000 KPB Trust Women's Open here alongside Russian partner Anastasia Tikhonova.

Glushko had served a mandatory two years with



the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Glushko hopes that the recent ceasefire will eventually lead to long-term peace.

"In my country, it never stops because we have conflict all the time. My friends and family are there, so I'm obviously under stress about them all the time. It's really sad to say that I'm kind of used to it (conflict),"

because this is not the first war we have had.

"We have it constantly. I just hope that things settle down soon and get better all over the world, not just in our country. I want peace everywhere," the 25-year-old said.

At times, Glushko has had to conceal her nationality to stay safe. "When I play a tournament, I have my Israel flag next to my name, so I cannot hide it. However, when I go to countries that are against Israel, if I'm alone in the street, I try to hide my identity," she said.

On the court, there is added motivation to perform well. "When I'm on the court I try to bring a bit of happiness and good news to my country and to my family," Glushko said.

Gukesh climbs to fourth in live world rankings

Press Trust of India
WIJK AAN ZEE

D. Gukesh beat Vincent Keymer of Germany in the fifth round of the Tata Steel Chess tournament here. With this win, he climbed to fourth spot in world rankings in five ratings, overtaking Arjun Erigaisi.

Important results (round 5):
Masters: Mendoza (1) drew with Erigaisi (1); Warmerdam (2) drew with Praggnanandhaa (4); Wei (2.5) drew with Harikrishna (3); Gukesh (3.5) lost to Keymer (2.5); Van Foreest (1.5) lost to Abdusattorov (4); Fedoseev (3.5) bt Caruana (2.5).

Challengers: Vasihali (3) drew with Svane (2.5); MLami (4) bt Divya (1.5).

Host of speakers set to discuss key issues at Sportstar's Focus Bihar Conclave in Patna

The Sportstar Conclave caravan's third edition will move to Patna for the Focus Bihar Conclave, set to take place here on Friday.

The Honourable Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, will deliver the closing remarks, while the Deputy Chief Minister of the State, Samrat Choudhary, will inaugurate the event.

Bihar Sports Minister Surendra Mehta will also be in attendance.

A host of speakers will discuss key issues pertaining to the sports ecosystem in the region.

Olympic bronze medal-winning boxer Vijender Singh, double Olympic bronze medal-winning hockey player P.R. Sreejesh, double-Paralympic

medal-winning athlete Sharad Kumar, former Paralympic Committee of India chief Deepa Malik, and Indian women's hockey team head coach Harendra Singh will headline the event.

Veteran Winter Olympian Shiva Keshavan, World Athletics Vice President Adille Sumariwalla and shuttler Aditi Mutatkar are some of the other

speakers at the event.

B. Rajender, Additional Chief Secretary, Department of Sports, Government of Bihar, and Ravendaran Sankaran, Director General and CEO, Bihar State Sports Authority, will be in conversation with Sportstar Editor Ayon Sen Gupta during a discussion titled "Accelerating Sports Development in Bihar".

The conclave will also include a panel discussion on Bihar's role in championing India's e-sports revolution.

The session will feature Nishi Kant (Chief, Design & Product at JetSynthesis) and Akshat Rathee (Co-Founder, NODWIN Gaming) in conversation with Abhishek Issar (Founder, UNIV Sportatech & Co-

Founder, Federation of Esports India).

Two awards – Unsung Champion (Lifetime Achievement Award for a sporting veteran) and Young Achiever (to a promising athlete under 18 years of age) – will be presented.

The conclave can be followed live on Sportstar's YouTube channel.

The Sportstar Focus Bihar Conclave is presented by the Bihar State Sports Authority and the Department of Sports, Government of Bihar.

The associate sponsors are Indian Oil Corporation Limited and State Bank of India. Great SportsTech is the technology partner, and KPMG is the knowledge partner.



CM YK

DIFFERENT LEAGUE

I felt like Sabalenka was playing a PlayStation, admits Badosa



As Paula Badosa watched winners from Aryna Sabalenka, in pic, scream past her in all directions, it was game over for the Spaniard in the Australian Open semifinals. "Sometimes you're like, I don't know, I'm just walking around the court because I feel like she's playing a PlayStation. Today she was like that," said Badosa.

ROLLER-COASTER RIDE

I blacked out at some point in the third set, reveals Keys



Madison Keys confessed she couldn't recall much detail about the final set where she saved a match point against Iga Swiatek in the semifinal of the Australian Open. "In the third set, it was just so up and down. I feel like I blacked out at some point," a smiling Keys said after setting up a final with Aryna Sabalenka.

NEXT STOP

India and England teams land in Chennai for second T20I



The India and England teams arrived in Chennai on Thursday for the second T20I to be held at the MAC Stadium on January 25. Suryakumar's men lead the five-match series 1-0 following a seven-wicket win in Kolkata on Wednesday. Chennai last hosted an international T20 fixture in 2018 when India faced the West Indies.

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Rocky Flintoff betters father Andrew's England Lions' record



The 16-year-old Rocky Flintoff made an attacking 108 against Cricket Australia XI to become the youngest England Lions cricketer to score a hundred, obliterating the record of his father Andrew in Brisbane on Thursday. The senior Flintoff, coaching the Lions here, had made a hundred when he was 20 for England's junior team.

Solid Harte takes Dragons to the top

The goalkeeper denies Toofans with a series of saves, including three successive ones in a frenzied third quarter and four in the shootout

HIL

Aashin Prasad
ROURKELA

David Harte had a sensational game in goal as Tamil Nadu Dragons registered a thrilling 4-3 penalty shootout win over Hyderabad Toofans in a Pool B encounter in the Hockey India League (HIL) at the Birsa Munda Hockey Stadium here on Thursday.

The Irishman pulled off four saves in the shootout to add to his series of stops in the regulation time to frustrate Toofans and take his side to the top of the standings. Maico Casella's goal of a penalty corner – Toofans' 13th PC of the night – with less than 120 seconds left on the clock made it 2-2 before Harte once again got in their way in the shootout.

It was a quick start as both teams were flat-footed in defence. Two goals were scored in as many minutes in the opening exchanges.

Toofans went ahead when Tim Brand slid the ball home off a Rajinder Singh pass. Dragons responded immediately through Blake Govers, who picked up a pass at the edge of the circle before crisply striking the ball low to sound the boards.

It was an end-to-end affair with Dragons' forwards



Standing tall: Harte frustrated Toofans with a lion-hearted show.
SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

in the thick of things but denied by Toofans' goalkeepers Vikas Dahiya and Bikranjit Singh. In the second quarter, the Hyderabad outfit came back stronger and had multiple PCs; however, the team couldn't find a way past Dragons' defence.

The Tamil Nadu side's Jip Janssen then made the most of an opportunity that came his way, angling the ball to the right corner past Dahiya and taking his tally to six goals.

The result:
Tamil Nadu Dragons 2 (Govers 4, Janssen 37) drew with Hyderabad Toofans 2 (Brand 3, Casella 59). Dragons won 4-3 in shootout.

Harte rescued the Dragons time and time again with some stunning stops, including three successive ones in a few seconds in

the third quarter. Though Toofans tried penalty corner variations through Amandeep Lakra from the second battery and Rajinder from a decoy, their efforts were thwarted.

In the final minutes, Gonzalo Peillat, Arthur de Sloover and Brand all tried their luck before Casella managed to finally get past Harte through a lucky deflection. However, it was Harte and Dragons who had the final say.

The result:
Tamil Nadu Dragons 2 (Govers 4, Janssen 37) drew with Hyderabad Toofans 2 (Brand 3, Casella 59). Dragons won 4-3 in shootout.

It was an end-to-end affair with Dragons' forwards

Pipers shoot out Warriors to end dismal campaign

Santadeep Dev
RANCHI

Delhi SG Pipers capped off an otherwise disappointing campaign in the Women's Hockey India League 2025 with a 3-2 victory in a shootout against Odisha Warriors at the Mangal Gomke Jaipal Singh Stadium here on Thursday.

Ishika, Navneet Kaur and Sunelita Topo managed to sneak the ball past Jocelyn Bartram at goal. For the Warriors, Kaitlin Nobbs and Baljeet Kaur were the scorers.

Despite the defeat, the Warriors have officially cemented their place in the final on Sunday.

The 4-0 thrashing by the Warriors in the lung opener of the league was clearly a thing of the past as nothing could separate the sides, stuck at 1-1, in regulation time on Thursday.

In the opening minutes, both sides exercised extreme caution as the game largely stayed locked in the midfield.

Bichu Devi Kharibam



Going out on a high: Pipers celebrate their win against the Warriors. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

caught on to the first sign of impending danger in the ninth minute when Sakshi Rana found Michelle Fillet skulking inside the circle.

The Warriors got the equaliser through Yibbi Jansen, who sounded the boards for the fifth time this season with a blazing drag flick from yet another penalty corner (PC).

With 30 seconds remaining, the Pipers won a PC to have the Warriors quaking in their boots. But Bartram threw her body on the line to force a shootout.

The result: Odisha Warriors 1 (Jansen 35) drew with Delhi SG Pipers 1 (Navneet 28). Pipers won 3-2 in shootout.

The Pipers eventually smelted blood as skipper Navneet Kaur converted from a penalty stroke,

awarded for an offence on Preeti Dubey inside the circle.

The Warriors got the equaliser through Yibbi Jansen, who sounded the boards for the fifth time this season with a blazing drag flick from yet another penalty corner (PC).

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The Pipers eventually smelted blood as skipper Navneet Kaur converted from a penalty stroke,

The coach and captain always want me to just express myself, says Abhishek

Sports Bureau
KOLKATA

In 2024, Abhishek Sharma had a breakthrough campaign in the IPL for Sunrisers Hyderabad, providing his team with blazing starts. The left-handed opener amassed 484 runs at a breathtaking strike rate of 204.22 and was a vital cog in his side's run to the final. His efforts helped him break into the national T20 team, and he announced himself on the big stage, scoring a century only in his second outing against Zimbabwe.

While his aggressive approach and ability to tee off from the get-go look exciting, it can also misfire. In such situations, the backing a player receives from the think-tank becomes crucial. After that century, the Punjab batter hit a lean patch in the subsequent games. But the team management persisted with the youngster.



Back in the groove: Abhishek revealed that the thinktank's support gave him the confidence to play his natural game. R.V. MOORTHY

On Wednesday, Abhishek repaid that faith by making quick work of a modest target of 133 as he slammed 79 off just 34 balls against England in the first T20 at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata. The 24-year-old later revealed that his coach and

captain's support gave him the confidence to play his natural game.

"If you don't score runs in four or five innings, it can play in your mind as a batter," said Abhishek. "But even when I have not done well, they (the coach

and captain) say, 'We know you are going to win the game for us, (so) just go and express yourself'. When they say that, you get confidence and back yourself."

He also added that, be it his IPL franchise or the national team, the messaging about his role and approach has been clear, which has made things easy for him.

"When I came to the IPL, the plan was simple: just go and express. And if it's in your arc, even if it is the first ball, just go for it. Even in the Indian team, the plan was simple. We never had a conversation like 'we have to play according to the situation' or something like that," he added.

"They always wanted me just to go and express myself, and I think today was one of those examples that I thought it was my day, and I just wanted to win the game".

Trisha, pacers power India to the Super Six stage

Press Trust of India
KUALA LUMPUR

Opener G. Trisha's composed 49 and pacers' excellent new ball spell fashioned India's lopsided 60-run win over Sri Lanka and their entry into the Super Six of the ICC U19 T20 Women's World Cup as Group-A topper here on Thursday.

On a spiteful pitch, Trisha's 44-ball knock (5x4, 1x6) was worth its weight in gold as it guided India to 118 for nine.

Pacers V.J. Jositha and Shabnam then tore through the Lankan top-order and the latter was restricted to 58 for nine in 20 overs as India finished the group engagements with an all-win record in three matches.

The scores:
India 118/9 in 20 overs (Trisha 49)
bt Sri Lanka 58/9 in 20 overs.

Keys rallies to stun Swiatek; Sabalenka blows away Badosa

1 Keys' win against Swiatek was the first time an Australian Open semifinal was decided in the third set tiebreak

3 Sabalenka is the first woman to reach three consecutive finals at Melbourne Park since Serena (2015-17), and the youngest (26) since Hingis (21 in 2002)

11 Keys has gone level with Wozniacki for most appearances needed to qualify for the final Down Under

18 Swiatek dropped more games against Keys (18) than she did en route to the semifinals (14)

20 Sabalenka has pulled level with Goolagong for the fifth-longest winning run (Seles 33, Hingis 27, Graf 25 and Court 21) in Melbourne

7y 138d Keys now has the second-longest gap (after Venus Williams - 7y 208d) between two singles Slam finals



Day 12 in numbers

5 Sabalenka is only the fifth woman after Navratilova, Graf, Seles and Hingis to make five straight singles hard court Major summit clashes

All stats are from the Open Era

FRIDAY'S SCHEDULE
MEN'S SEMIFINALS
1-Sinner vs 21-Shelton
2-Zverev vs 7-Djokovic

COMPILED BY ANIRUDH VELAMURI

Agence France-Presse
MELBOURNE

Madison Keys fought back from a set down on Thursday to shock Iga Swiatek in a nail-biter and set up an Australian Open final against the American.

The Warriors got the equaliser through Yibbi Jansen, who sounded the boards for the fifth time this season with a blazing drag flick from yet another penalty corner (PC).

With 30 seconds remaining, the Pipers won a PC to have the Warriors quaking in their boots. But Bartram threw her body on the line to force a shootout.

The result: Odisha Warriors 1 (Jansen 35) drew with Delhi SG Pipers 1 (Navneet 28). Pipers won 3-2 in shootout.

a seesaw encounter that lasted two hours and 35 minutes. It will be the American's first final in Melbourne.

Earlier, Sabalenka put her close friendship with Badosa aside to stay on track for a third straight title. The Belarusian World No. 1 romped home 6-4, 6-2 on the Rod Laver Arena.

Things were very different in the second semifinals as Keys flew out of the blocks and broke Swiatek in the opening game.

It signalled the start of a roller-coaster first set in which both players struggled for control.

Three breaks each were exchanged before Swiatek

finally clinched it on her second set point after 49 minutes.

Swiatek was, however, far from convincing as the second set witnessed a dramatic turnaround.

Keys surged back, breaking the Pole four times and unleashing three huge aces in one game to take the contest to a decider.

In the final set, the American saved a match point before finally getting over the line.

THE RESULTS

Women (semifinals): 1-Sabalenka (Blr) bt 11-Badosa (Esp) 6-4, 6-2; 19-Keys (USA) bt 2-Swiatek (Pol) 5-7, 6-1, 7-6[10-8].

PSG pushes Man City to the brink; Madrid stays in contention

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) pushed Manchester City to the brink of Champions League elimination after coming from two goals down to win 4-2 on Wednesday while Arsenal all but secured its place in the last 16.

Holder Real Madrid remains in contention for a top-eight spot after sweeping aside Red Bull Salzburg 5-1, but Bayern Munich's hopes of automatic qualification took a hit with a 3-0 defeat by Feyenoord.

Pep Guardiola's City was left stunned as it blew a two-goal lead after Jack Grealish and Erling Haaland struck early in the second half in pouring rain at the Parc des Princes.

Substitute Ousmane Dembele soon halved the deficit for PSG and Bradley Barcola equalised on the hour after Desire Doué's effort came back off the crossbar.

Joao Neves' diving header put PSG on top before Goncalo Ramos added a

late fourth as the French champion climbed from 26th in the table to 22nd and bumped City out of the knockout phase.

City is down in 25th and must beat Club Brugge at home next week to salvage its campaign.

Real Madrid is on the verge of the last 16 as goals from Declan Rice, Kai Havertz and Martin Odegaard sealed a 3-0 home win over Dinamo Zagreb.

The results:
RB Leipzig 2 (Sesko 19, Poulsen 78) bt Sporting Lisbon 1 (Gyokeres 75); Shakhtar Donetsk 2 (Kevin 18, Sudakov 37pen) bt Brest 0; Real Madrid 5 (Rodrygo 23, 34, Mbappe 48, Vinicius 55, 77) bt RB Salzburg 1 (Bistrup 85); Paris Saint-Germain 4 (Dembele 56, Barcola 60, Neves 78, Ramos 90+6) bt Manchester City 2 (Grealish 50, Haaland 53); Sparta Prague 0 lost to Inter Milan 1 (Martinez 12); Arsenal 3 (Rice 2, Havertz 66, Odegaard 90+2) bt Dinamo Zagreb 0; Celtic 1 (Benito 86-og) bt Young Boys 0; Feyenoord 3 (Gimenez 21, 45+9pen, Ueda 89) bt Bayern Munich 0; AC Milan 1 (Leao 37) bt Girona 0.



IN BRIEF



One-match suspension for Bawne for showing dissent

Maharashtra batter Ankeet Bawne has been handed a one-match suspension by the BCCI for showing dissent against an on-field umpire's call in a Ranji Trophy match last year because of which he is missing the tie against Baroda, currently underway in Nashik. The BCCI conveyed the decision to the Maharashtra team in Nashik, where it is playing its Group-A Ranji match. The incident had occurred at the MCA ground in November where Bawne had stood his ground after being caught in the slip by Services' Shubham Rohilla off Amit Shukla.

Dhamne advances past fellow qualifier Trochu

Qualifier Manas Dhamne beat fellow qualifier Pablo Trochu of France 6-1, 2-6, 7-6(7) in the first round of the \$15,000 ITF men's tennis tournament in Manacor, Spain.

Indian challenge over at the Indonesia Masters

India's campaign came to an early end at the Indonesia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament after Lakshya Sen and doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty crashed out on Thursday.

The result (second round): Men: Kent Nishimoto (Jpn) bt Lakshya Sen 16-21, 21-12, 21-23.

Doubles: Kittinupong Kedren & Dechapol Puavaranukroh (Tha) bt Satwiksairaj Rankireddy & Chirag Shetty 22-20, 23-21.

Women: Doubles: Pei Kee Go & Mei Xing Teoh (Mas) bt Tanshia Crasto & Ashwini Ponnappa 13-21, 22-21, 21-18.

Mixed doubles: Pang Ron Hoo & Su Yin Cheng (Mas) bt Dhruv Kapila & Tanshia 18-21, 21-15, 21-19.

HPSL to sponsor Bangalore Derby to be run on Jan. 26

R. Manjunath Ramesh, chairman & senior steward of the Bangalore Turf Club, said during a media briefing on Thursday that HPSL will sponsor the Derby jointly with Bangalore Turf Club Limited and the race, to be run on January 26, will be titled 'HPSL Bangalore Derby'. The blue ribbon event of the season, which has a field of nine runners, has total stakes of ₹1,26,07,500 with the winner taking home ₹61,78,305 and a trophy valued at ₹1.25 lakh.

Hyderabad FC edges Jamshedpur FC in ISL

Hyderabad FC edged out Jamshedpur FC 3-2 in the Indian Super League (ISL) at the GMC Balayogi Stadium in Hyderabad on Thursday.

The result: Hyderabad FC 3 (Muhammed Rafi 12, Joseph Sunny 69, Andre Alba 74) bt Jamshedpur FC 2 (Javi Hernandez 24-pen, 28pen).

Pioneer Joshi shines with the ball for Rehman Club

Pioneer Joshi's seven for 27 helped Rehman Club beat Malviya Club by 74 runs in the DDCA League at Ramjas Sports Complex. Dipesh Balyan and Yatharth Singh, meanwhile, excelled in L.B. Shastri Club's victory over Young Association.

The scores: Rehman Club 251 in 37 overs (Parikshit Singh 66, Tanay Kaushik 60) bt Malviya Club 177 in 37 overs (Jasveer Gandhi 46, Pioneer Joshi 7/27).

L.B. Shastri Club 315/8 in 40 overs (Dipesh Balyan 84, Vikas Dixit 55, Ankut Dabas 3/51) bt Young Association 230 in 35 overs (Mayank Pal 102, Ravi Gupta 46, Yatharth Singh 3/38). Tedco Club 281/4 in 40 overs (Sambhav Sharma 126, Jitendra Kumar 76) bt DTC 135 in 32 overs (Hemant Kumar 33, Mohit 3/15).

Delhi Gymkhana Club 251/6 in 40 overs (Manpreet Singh 100, Akash 39) bt Punjab National Bank 195 in 36 overs (Preyash 73, Jatin 3/29).

Century Cricket Club 230 in 37 overs (Himanshu Kumar Pandey 48, Ayush Bhardwaj 44, Rohan 37) bt Rani Bagh 203 in 33 overs (Himanshu 92, Jayant 3/54).

United Club 204 in 39 overs (Deepak Khatri 116) lost to Young Delhi Sports 208/7 in 33 overs (Mohd Zeshan 58, Anish Chaturvedi 64).

LIVE TELECAST

U-19 T20 Women's World Cup: Hotstar, 8 a.m. & 12 p.m.

Ranji Trophy: JioCinema, 9.30 a.m.

Australian Open: Sony Sports Ten 2, 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 9 a.m. & 2 p.m.

I-League: Sony Sports Ten 1 (SD & HD) & LIV, 3.30 & 7 p.m.

Hockey: HIL (Women), DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 2, 3 (SD & HD) & LIV, 6 & 8.15 p.m.

ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioCinema, 7.30 p.m.

Serie A: gxr.world, 1.15 a.m. (Saturday)

LaLiga: gxr.world, 1.30 a.m. (Saturday)

Jadeja thrives on home turf, puts Saurashtra ahead against Delhi

The India star snaps up a five-wicket haul and complements it with a quickfire 38; Pant's turn with bat for the visitors turns out to be a damp squib

RANJI TROPHY

Vivek Krishnan
RAJKOT

Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja basked in the glow of another five-wicket haul on a spin-friendly surface on day one of an engrossing Ranji Trophy contest against Delhi at Ground C of the Niranjan Shah Stadium here on Thursday.

As Saurashtra chases outright wins in its last two matches in Group D, the 36-year-old claimed five for 66 after skittling out Delhi for 188 in the afternoon session. Rishabh Pant's impact, on the other hand, was limited for the visitors – he was out for one.

At the close, the host reached 163 for five, with Jadeja scoring a quick-fire 38 off 36 deliveries. Opener Harvik Desai, too, made



Standout performers: While Jadeja made good use of the conditions with the ball, Harvik backed it with a stellar knock. VIJAY SONEJI

a stellar contribution of 93 in 120 balls, though he was left lamenting his dismissal by part-timer Arpit Rana off what was the final ball of the day's play.

He was fortunate, however, as the dice had rolled to his liking early in his innings. In the 11th over, he had been cleaned up by Sumit Mathur on 26 and

only to be called back because the left-arm spinner had overstepped.

Desai capitalised on the reprieve, stitching together a counterattacking 76-run partnership with Jadeja off only 71 balls. When Jadeja went after Mathur and Harsh Tyagi with sixes towards long-on and deep midwicket, the mind



harked back to what Pant could have done had he stayed longer than 10 balls.

Having strode in when Delhi was 85 for three, Pant's off-balance sweep off Dharmendrasinh Jadeja was snuffed by Prerak Mankad at deep square leg.

For Delhi, skipper Ayush Badoni and Yash Dhull looked most at ease in the

Pant c Mankad b Dharmendrasinh 1, Jonty Sidhu c Jackson b Dodia 16, Sumit Mathur lbw b Dharmendrasinh 1, Mayank Gusain (not out) 38, Shivam Sharma st Desai b Dharmendrasinh 3, Harsh Tyagi lbw b Jadeja 3, Navdeep Saini c Vasavada b Jadeja 0; Extras (b-5, lb-5); 10; Total (in 49.4 overs): 188.

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-34, 3-85, 4-92, 5-124, 6-125, 7-164, 8-175, 9-188.

Saurashtra bowling: Unadkat 5-2-16-1, Jani 3-2-3-0, Jadeja 17-4-66-5, Dharmendrasinh 19-3-63-3, Dodiya 4-1-28-1, Gajjar 1-0-2-0.

Saurashtra — 1st innings: Harvik Desai c Pant b Rana 93, Chirag Jani c Dhull b Tyagi 11, Cheteshwar Pujara c Tyagi b Badoni 6, Sheldon Jackson b Shivam 7, Ravindra Jadeja c Sidhu b Shivam 38, Arpit Vasavada (batting) 3; Extras (nb-3, lb-2); 5; Total (for five wkts. in 38.5 overs): 163.

Fall of wickets: 1-32, 2-58, 3-79, 4-155, 5-163.

Delhi bowling: Saini 5-0-19-0, Tyagi 13-0-61-1, Mathur 7-0-32-0, Shivam 10-0-36-2, Badoni 3-0-13-1, Rana 0.5-0-0.

Jadeja's advice was to take calculated risks, says Harvik

Vivek Krishnan
RAJKOT



Crucial: The fourth-wicket stand between Desai and Jadeja, worth 76 in 11.5 overs, could prove to be the difference. VIJAY SONEJI

In Harvik Desai's previous Ranji Trophy outing in November, he was out for 99 in Saurashtra's first-innings total of 531 for nine against Chandigarh. Against Delhi here on Thursday, the opening batter succumbed to the nervous 90s again, dismissed seven runs short of a century in tough conditions. Until he got out to part-time spinner Arpit Rana, he had done exceedingly well to thwart the Delhi spinners on a pitch aiding turn.

"The pitch was difficult to bat on. It was turning quite a lot, which was expected because we need a result in our favour," Desai said on Thursday. "It is quite disappointing to get out in the 90s again. But it is all part of the game. I put the team in a good situation."

The fourth-wicket stand between Desai and Ravindra Jadeja could prove to be the difference between victory and defeat if wickets continue to tumble on the second day. The 25-year-old was appreciative of Jadeja's inputs during the partnership.

"Jadeja told me to take calculated risks. He said that playing sweeps and reverse sweeps would involve fewer risks than going down the ground with the ball spinning, and that

the rewards will be the same. So, that helped me a lot in making the runs that I did," he remarked.

Having had his stumps disturbed off a no-ball by Sumit Mathur when he was on 26, Desai made the visiting team pay.

"My mindset was similar after the reprieve too. I wanted to play positively because to keep defending and get out on such a surface is of no use. Adding as many runs as possible was crucial," he said.

Lahiri excited about Indian fare in International Series

GOLF

Kamesh Srinivasan
NEW DELHI

tour," said Lahiri, in a chat with media on Thursday.

"It is perhaps the best field to play in India. For youngsters, children and amateurs, it is in such events that dreams are born.

"When you see the top stars from close, the whole competitive environment motivates you and channels your dream," said Lahiri as he stressed the point that Indian golfing community would get a taste of the highest level of the game.

Hinting at the efforts in

bringing the event to India, Lahiri said, "Bryson (DeChambeau) is bullish about taking his brand of golf all over the world.

Wired differently
"He is wired differently and an amazing student of the game.

"Despite the concerns of Delhi belly, pollution, everyone was very keen to come to India."

Grateful to everyone who has chosen to visit India, Lahiri revealed that plans are on to help the players "experience In-

dia", apart from having some fun events, like teeing off one of the buildings.

Despite the presence of many stars, Lahiri did not discount the chances of an Indian, including himself, being in focus on Sunday afternoon and emerging as champion, on February 2.

"Golf is a game. You have to be on top of your game at any given point of time."

"The No.1 may play his 'B' game, and the No.5 may play his 'C' game. Am sure, some of us will spring a few surprises," he said.



Lahiri, SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Mairaj and Raiza lead in skeet

Sports Bureau

Mairaj Ahmad Khan led men's skeet with 99 following rounds of 25, 24, 25 and 25 in the third Digvijay Singh shotgun championship in Bhopal on Thursday. Gurjot Singh Khangura followed one point behind Mairaj. Harmehar Singh Lally (97), Mohd. Sheeraz Sheikh and Anantjeet Singh Naruke with 96 out of 100 after four rounds, were the others in the leading bunch.

Zorawar Singh Bedi, Rituraj Singh Bundela and Abhay Singh Sekhon (95), along with Arjun Thakur, Parampal Singh Gurao and Angad Vir Singh Bawja (94), were the others in the race for making the final after one more round to be shot on Friday.

In the women's section, Raiza Dhillon led with 95, one point ahead of Ganemat Sekhon. Karttiki Singh Shaktawat (92), Mansi Raghuvanshi, Darshna Rathore (90), Parinaaz Dhalal (89), Yashasvi Rathore (88), Kajal Singh Baghel (87), Maheshwari Chauhan (86) were some of the others in the race for the final.

Rajasthan stakes claim for National Games participation

TABLE TENNIS

Amol Karhadkar
SURAT

It may not have won a medal, but the sensational run of TTFI-1 men's outfit – comprising one of the disputed factions of the Rajasthan Table Tennis Association (RTTA) – has created a stir at the 86th senior National table tennis championship.

The TTFI-1 men – including Shubham Ojha, Harsh Srivastava, Priyansh Bhati, Anukrat Jain and Lakshya Toshniwal – first stunned Bengal to top its group and then marched into the quarterfinals to seal a direct entry for the next year's National Games, scheduled to be hosted by Chhattisgarh.

RTTA secretary Sanjay Gehlot hoped that the internal dispute can be resolved with the other fac-

tions and the National Games aspirations will be fulfilled.

"The boys have worked extremely hard to first qualify."

"Finishing joint fifth is indeed incredible. We wish that the TTFI can help us resolve all the issues and even the other team players can be considered for the National Games selection," Gehlot told *The Hindu* on Thursday.

"Qualifying for the Na-

sional Games in a huge achievement and honour for Rajasthan table tennis fraternity. Hopefully, all the issues are put on the backburner at the earliest and players' welfare is prioritised."

However, a TTFI official, requesting anonymity, was not sure whether the National Games officials will accept the TTFI-1 team as the official Rajasthan outfit.

"TTFI has always en-

Arshdeep – the resilient left-arm's journey from zero to hero

The pacer from Guna in Madhya Pradesh is the classic example of refusing to rest on his laurels, of the willingness to get out of his comfort zone, of not believing in the theory of not fixing something that ain't broke



GETTY IMAGES

R. Kaushik

Arshdeep Singh is unlikely to forget September 4, 2022, in a hurry. He might want to, and yet he might not want to. It was an evening when he was labelled national villain No. 1. It was also the evening he used as a springboard to greater things.

Only 23 at the time, the left-arm pacer was playing his ninth Twenty20 International, a high-pressure outing against Pakistan in Dubai in the Asia Cup. It was the precursor to the T20 World Cup, due to start in Australia the following month.

The young man had made a decent enough start to his career, 12 wickets in eight games in England, the West Indies, the United States and the Emirates, but he was singularly unprepared for the backlash a dropped catch would attract.

Pakistan needed 32 to win off 20 deliveries, six wickets in hand, when Asif Ali tried to slog-sweep leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi. All he managed was a top-edge that lobbed - there is no other word, really - to short third-man. Arshdeep had it well under control, perhaps too well at that. Somehow, he contrived to shell the dolly, throwing the hard-hitting right-hander, then on zero, a generous lifeline.

Asif smacked 16 off eight balls, two fours and a six, before Arshdeep trapped him leg before in the final over of Pakistan's chase. It was too little, way too late. Especially with an extra fielder inside the ring because of a tardy over-rate, there was no way Arshdeep could defend seven runs. Pakistan won with a ball to spare, and the trolls got cracking.

The cowards, sitting anonymously in front of clacking keyboards, unleashed a stream of abuse and vitriol, questioning his patriotism, among other things. The attacks were vile, stupid, unacceptable.

It could have broken anyone, let alone a young lad in the early stages of his international career. Rohit Sharma and the rest of the outfit rallied around him, Arshdeep received support and succour and comfort and backing from several quarters. Even so, it couldn't have been easy to be at the receiving end of a collective lashing for a mistake on the field, however silly and expensive it might have been.

To his credit, Arshdeep stayed strong. He is a character, this lad born in Guna, Madhya Pradesh. He finds humour in the most unexpected places and he himself is a terrific wit, dead-panned and poker-faced as he delivers one-liners with stunning regularity.

Blessed with a positive, sunny outlook, Arshdeep dug deep within himself and fed off the empathy of his colleagues to come out of his 'darkest hour' with his head held high, his confidence shaken but not stirred, his belief intact, his faith in his

abilities immense. A little over two and a quarter years later, Arshdeep has stormed to the top of the list of wicket-takers for India in T20 cricket.

On Wednesday against England at Eden Gardens in Kolkata, he finished with two for 17 from his four overs, dismissing Phil Salt in the first over of the contest to draw abreast of Yuzvendra Chahal on 96 wickets, then having Ben Duckett caught by a back-pedalling Rinku Singh to take sole possession of the lead with 97 sticks.

It had taken Arshdeep only 61 innings to get there; Chahal had wheeled away for 80 matches and 79 innings to reach 96. Of the 10 Indians to boast 50 or more T20I scalps, only left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav (12.46) has a better strike-rate than Arshdeep's 13.03 balls per wicket. This lad, he sure can bowl.

Hitherto considered pretty much a T20 specialist at the international level, Arshdeep's wings are spreading as wide as his hands do when he picks up a wicket. Last week, he retained his place in the side for the 50-over Champions Trophy next month, edging out senior pacer Mohammed Siraj to the third specialist pacers' slot in the 15-strong party. Since his ODI debut in November 2022, Arshdeep has played only eight ODIs but already has one five-wicket haul and another four-for. His versatility and adaptability won him the nod ahead of Siraj, whose diminishing effectiveness with an ageing ball was cited as the primary reason for him missing out.

Vote of confidence

Arshdeep must realise that being selected for the Champions Trophy is a huge vote of confidence, the clearest sign that the men entrusted with making the important decisions in Indian cricket envision a greater role for him going forward. He is a rarity in Indian cricket, a left-arm quick with the skills, the nous and the belief to hold his own at various stages of a limited-overs innings, a novelty for a primarily right-heavy fast-bowling unit since the retirement in early 2014 after a glorious run of Zaheer Khan, the maestro.

In the decade and more since Zaheer hung up his boots, India have struggled to find a left-arm quick for reasons beyond the fact that one is a left-arm quick. For very brief whiles, Jaydev Unadkat (who made a comeback after debuting in Tests in late 2010 in Centurion), Khalen Ahmed, T. Natarajan and Chetan Sakariya, among others, were tried out with limited to middling success. The hunt for a reliable left-arm quick who would last the distance seemed headed nowhere until India unearthed a gem in the shape of Arshdeep.

On the face of it, there is nothing menacing about this wispy young man who might not attract a second glance if one passes by him on the streets. He isn't all rippling muscles, he isn't towering and

massively built. But give him the cricket ball, mainly but exclusively white, and he grows several feet in stature, offering an angle different from the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Shami, and Siraj and Hardik Pandya.

Age-old nemesis

There is no overstating the value of possessing a left-arm pacer who can bring the ball into the right-hander from over the stumps. It's a delivery that has accounted for even the most accomplished batters. For a long time, India have had problems with bowlers who can do that, be it Shaheen Shah Afridi or Trent Boult or Mitchell Starc, even Sam Curran and the likes of Reece Topley and Obed McCoy, the West Indian left-arm who wrecked them with six for 17 in Basseterre in August 2022.

It's an angle that creates tremendous problems. Just the knowledge that the bowler has the ability to swing the ball back in can trigger indecision and sow doubts in the minds of the batters, who often end up playing at balls they perhaps don't have to because they aren't sure which one is going on with the angle and which one against it.



Arshdeep is a master at bending the ball back into the right-hander. Like he did to Babar Azam, the Pakistan captain, at the T20 World Cup game in Melbourne, just seven weeks after the Asif Ali misadventure in the desert.

It was his first ball ever in a World Cup, the seventh of the match, the first Babar would face. The field was set for a potential bouncer, with a third-man and a deep backward square in place. Arshdeep steamed in, pretended to drop his right shoulder but produced a beautiful full ball, tailing in late, that worked its way around the bat and thudded into his shin. Dead duck, golden duck. Arshdeep might not have felt so - or maybe he did too - but the ghosts of Dubai had been exorcised. Emphatically.

In his next over, the short ball that the field had promised arrived. Superbly directed, at a good height, excellent line, not inconsiderable pace. Mohammad Rizwan, Babar's opening partner-in-crime and one half of the prolific opening pair that had consigned India to a 10-wicket hammering in the corresponding clash in the 2021 World Cup in Dubai, was sucked into top-edging to fine-leg. In 12 deliveries, Arshdeep had cleaned up India's two chief tormentors, who made only four runs between them. In the space of 50 days, Arshdeep had traversed the spectrum from zero to hero. Oh, the fickleness of the Indian cricket fan.

Arshdeep is the classic example of refusing to rest on his laurels, of the willingness to get out of his comfort zone, of not believing in the theory of not fixing something that ain't broke. He is aware that staying in the same place is not an indication of stagnancy, it's actually a step backwards in a world and a format where predictability comes with the ultimate price. Therefore, he has embarked on a constant and rigorous journey of self-improvement, using himself as his best judge and his worst critic, and using the expertise of the coaches around him to become a better, more feared version of his affable off-field self.

Today, apart from the screaming inswinger and the well disguised bouncer which he uses sparingly but at opportune moments, he has a variety of slower deliveries that make him lethal at the death. It is this skillet that relegated Siraj to the sidelines and earned Arshdeep his Champions Trophy berth. With questions still abounding over Bumrah's availability, the load on Arshdeep's slender yet strong shoulders will be huge, but knowing him, he will view it as a responsibility, not a burden.

Arshdeep is a throwback to the era when Test cricket was considered the foremost, if not the only worthwhile, format. He will seek to continue his red-ball education and keep knocking on the doors of Test selection. Who's to say that he won't break those down, too?

THE GIST

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SCIENCE

The hidden dangers of Rhodamine B: a global and local perspective

Rhodamine B is a synthetic dye utilised in industries such as textiles, paper, and leather. Its application extends to scientific research due to its fluorescent properties. However, its use in consumable products is fraught with health risks. Studies indicate it can cause DNA damage, leading to mutations and potentially triggering cancerous growths.

Monisha Madhumita

Imagine indulging in an appetizing looking, sweet treat, only to discover it contains a dye primarily used in textiles and linked to cancer. This alarming reality has prompted significant health interventions worldwide, including recent decisive actions in India.

Rhodamine B is a synthetic dye known for its bright pink hue, commonly utilised in industries such as textiles, paper, and leather. Its application extends to scientific research due to its fluorescent properties. However, its use in consumable products is fraught with health risks. Studies indicate that Rhodamine B can cause DNA damage, leading to mutations and potentially triggering cancerous growths.

Animal research has demonstrated tumour development in organs like the liver and bladder following prolonged exposure to the dye.

Recognising its potential dangers, many countries have put in place strict regulations on use of Rhodamine B. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has long prohibited its use in food products, classifying it as unsafe for human consumption. A recent ban issued by the FDA in January 2025 further reinforces these restrictions, prohibiting the use of Rhodamine B in any food-related applications due to increasing evidence of its carcinogenic properties.

The FDA cited growing concerns over children's exposure to high levels of the dye in candies, baked goods, and other processed foods, prompting an urgent call for manufacturers to reformulate their products. This ban stems from studies indicating its potential carcinogenicity and other health risks. Similarly, the European Union classifies Rhodamine B as a substance of very high concern, restricting its use in cosmetics and other consumer goods.

Indian perspective

In India, the rampant use of Rhodamine B in food items has raised significant health concerns. The dye has been illegally employed to enhance the visual appeal of various consumables, posing serious health risks to consumers. Over the last few years, action has been taken by various Indian states and these highlight the growing awareness of these dangers. In February 2024, Tamil Nadu banned the production and sale of cotton candy after the Government Food Analysis Laboratory in Chennai detected Rhodamine B in samples collected from



Animal research has demonstrated tumour development in organs such as the liver and bladder following prolonged exposure to the dye. FILE PHOTO.

vendors. Health Minister Ma Subramanian emphasised that the use of Rhodamine B in food violates the Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006, categorising such products as unsafe. The ban aims to raise public awareness about the hazards associated with coloured candies and ensure that only safe, colour-free cotton candy is available.

Following Tamil Nadu's lead, other Indian states and territories have taken similar measures. Karnataka, in March 2024, prohibited the use of Rhodamine B in popular street foods like "Gobi Manchurian" and cotton candy. Minister for Health and Family Welfare in the Government of Karnataka, Dinesh Gundu Rao, announced stringent penalties for violators, including imprisonment of up to seven years and fines reaching ₹10 lakh. Laboratory tests revealed the presence of harmful chemicals in numerous samples collected across the state.

Puducherry also followed suit by banning the sale of cotton candy containing Rhodamine B. Food safety officers have been directed to conduct inspections and take strict action against violators to safeguard public health. In May 2024, Himachal Pradesh instituted a one-year ban on the production, sale, and storage of cotton candy after detecting Rhodamine B in samples. This preventive measure aims to protect consumers from the potential carcinogenic effects of the dye.

Mohammed Mithi, Consultant Surgical Oncologist at Saifee Hospital in Mumbai, explains, "Synthetic dyes, including Rhodamine B, may pose carcinogenic risks due to certain chemical components. Some dyes, like azo dyes,

Synthetic dyes, when used in concentrations approved by regulatory bodies, are generally safe. However, in sensitive individuals, they can lead to allergic reactions such as itching, redness, and skin thickening

can break down into aromatic amines, which are known carcinogens. Laboratory studies have shown that specific synthetic dyes can induce DNA damage, oxidative stress, and promote tumour growth in animal models. While concrete evidence in humans is limited, long-term exposure to unregulated products remains a concern." He further adds that certain groups, such as children, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals, are more susceptible to these harmful effects due to their body's reduced ability to metabolise and detoxify harmful substances.

Abyramy Balasundaram, consultant dermatologist at Cosmediq Hair Transplant and Skin Clinic, Chennai, states, "Synthetic dyes, when used in concentrations approved by regulatory bodies, are generally safe. However, in sensitive individuals, they can lead to allergic reactions such as itching, redness, and skin thickening. Long-term exposure to synthetic dyes like Rhodamine B can result in chronic allergic reactions and permanent skin pigmentation changes. Although there is no definitive link to cancer in humans through topical application, it is always advisable to opt for products from reputable brands with

proper labeling."

She further notes, "The European Union was among the first to ban Rhodamine B in cosmetics in the early 1990s due to concerns about its potential carcinogenic effects and skin sensitisation risks. This move has paved the way for stricter global regulations on synthetic dyes in personal care products."

India's food safety ecosystem

Priyadarshini Chidambaran, Community Health Specialist and Researcher, Bengaluru, says, "The ecosystem in India for research into food dyes safety is weak.

There is a need for proactive funding and commissioning of independent research by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to study the impact of additives, especially synthetic dyes, on public health based on Indian diet practices through collaborations with academic and research institutions. We must build a robust system of rapid scientific reviews and proactive policy implementation to be on par with international recommendations on food safety instead of reacting to a public health crisis or just joining the bandwagon of international ban trends."

She adds, "There needs to be active testing for harmful food dyes and enforcement of strict action against both errant big brands and smaller establishments and vendors. The fact that a state-level ban was necessary to bring attention to harmful dyes like Rhodamine B is a wake-up call. It underscores the need for FSSAI to play a more visible role in educating the public about unsafe food practices. There is a definite knowledge gap among the public on food standards. We must harness the growing digital and social media influence to disseminate information on safe food additives and food label warnings. Community education and engagement are needed to tackle the menace of harmful additives."

The case of Rhodamine B serves as an important reminder of the hidden dangers that lurk in seemingly innocuous products. It underscores the collective responsibility of governments, industries, and consumers to prioritise health over aesthetics.

(Dr. Monisha Madhumita is a consultant dermatologist at Saveetha Medical College, Chennai and member of the International Alliance for Global Health Dermatology, London, UK. mail.monisha.m@gmail.com)

THE GIST

In the U.S., the FDA has long prohibited Rhodamine B in food due to evidence of its carcinogenic properties. The FDA cited growing concerns over children's exposure to high levels of the dye in candies, baked goods, and other processed foods

In February 2024, Tamil Nadu banned production and sale of cotton candy after it detected Rhodamine B. Such products are graded as unsafe and substandard. The ban aims to raise public awareness and ensure only safe, colour-free cotton candy is available

According to doctors: 'Specific synthetic dyes can induce DNA damage, oxidative stress, and promote tumour growth in animal models. While concrete evidence in humans is limited, long-term exposure to unregulated products remains a concern'

Rhodamine B serves as an important reminder of the hidden dangers that lurk in seemingly innocuous products. It underscores the collective responsibility of governments, industries, and consumers to prioritise health over aesthetics

Study to determine how many people use life jackets

Zubeda Hamid

Just about a month ago, India was rocked by the death of 15 persons, including four women and two children, who died after an Indian Navy speedboat crashed into a ferry, leading to its capsizing off the Mumbai coast. The ferry was carrying passengers to Elephanta Island, a UNESCO world heritage site and popular tourist destination.

The incident threw the spotlight, once again, on water safety in India after survivors alleged that the ferry did not have enough life jackets for its passengers, and officials said the vessel was carrying over 100 passengers against its capacity of 90.

A staggering 71% of deaths caused by drowning in India are due to accidental falls into water bodies. In 2022, India reported 256 boat capsizes as per the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) statistics.

And yet, usage of life jackets and the implementation of regulations requiring life jackets on water transport facilities, remain poor, says Jagnoor Jagnoor, a public health researcher and programme lead for injury at The George Institute for Global Health.

To understand how often people wear life jackets and how more usage can be encouraged, the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR), as part of its first-ever initiative on drowning prevention, has now begun a study.

Focused on fishermen, boat operators, and tourists in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where water transport use is common, the study aims to find out how many people wear life jackets and why they choose to wear or not wear them. It also aims at developing a strategy to encourage more people to use life jackets



Fire, and Police personnel search for missing people on a lake. MURALI KUMAR K

by engaging with experts and local communities. The study will then evaluate if this plan was effective in increasing the use of life jackets and therefore reducing the risk of drowning. The project is also expected to develop a tested behaviour change intervention to improve the use of life jacket wear among boaters.

This is "the first research in India aimed at gathering evidence to promote life jacket use and reduce risk of drowning," the ICMR said in an email communication to *The Hindu*.

The ICMR is collaborating with The George Institute for Global Health, India, on this project. Dr. Jagnoor, who is working on the project said that overall, we know very little about where drowning happens, especially among adults. While globally, children aged under 5 account for the largest single share of drowning deaths, in India, the picture, as per NCRB statistics, is a little different: over half of all drowning deaths (51%) are amongst the economically active 18 to 44 age group.

More men than women in India die of drowning: over 80% were men, as per NCRB figures.

Higher risk for males

"While the risk is higher for males, attributed generally to higher exposure to water and risk-taking behaviour, a chunk of drowning deaths in India are caused by hazardous occupational settings – livelihood hazards," Dr. Jagnoor said.

According to the ICMR, the project has received about ₹60 lakh in funding; it is one of three projects funded under ICMR's drowning prevention initiative with a total budget of around ₹2 crore. "Due to the huge coastlines in the Southern States and the frequent use of water transport, the study is based in these two States. It will involve 1,400 people using water vessels. It is being conducted in Alappuzha and Thrissur in Kerala, as well as Tiruvallur and Nagappatinam in Tamil Nadu," Dr. Jagnoor said.

Wearing a proper life jacket can increase survival chances in water accidents by over seven times, yet very few people use them consistently, the ICMR said.

While there has been an increase in awareness about ensuring there are life jackets and life buoys on board boats, fishermen still, for the

most part, do not wear life jackets while fishing, said E. Ragupathi, a boat owner and ex-president of the Chennai Mechanised Boat Owners Association. Primarily, he said, this was because fishermen found the jackets uncomfortable and cumbersome. "The life jackets available here are very thick – about eight inches or so – making them uncomfortable to wear for long durations. These are water-resistant, not waterproof. The better quality jackets used by the Navy, for instance, are only three inches thick and are waterproof. But even the government subsidies are for the thick, water-resistant jackets that have to be replaced every two years," he said.

Fishermen instead, used life buoys more, Mr. Ragupathi said, finding them more convenient and useful. He added however that even now, more water safety awareness is needed, along with basic first-aid training for the community.

A senior official of the Tamil Nadu Fisheries Department said that awareness of and enforcement of rules regarding life saving buoyancy/floatation devices to be carried on small vessels were essential. "Some small vessels do not carry them due to space constraints. But in cases of accidents, cyclones, or inclement weather, flotation devices become crucial in the sea."

(zubeda.h@thehindu.co.in)

BIG SHOT



Mosquito repellent is sprayed as part of a prevention campaign against dengue fever in Banda Aceh on January 22. AFP

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