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IN BRIEF

Double life term for 10 in Periyar twin murder case

KOCHI
Ten convicts in the Periyar twin murder case were awarded double life term on two counts on Friday for murder and conspiracy. Four others got five years' imprisonment for helping an accused flee police custody. » Page 5

Alka Lamba of Cong. to take on Atishi in Kalkaji

NEW DELHI
The Congress on Friday pitted Alka Lamba against senior Aam Aadmi Party leader and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi from the Kalkaji constituency for the Delhi Assembly election due in February. » Page 2

Scare in the air



Under control: Officials work on arresting a gas leak in Coimbatore after pressure gauge of an LPG tanker broke following an accident on a flyover on Friday. Traffic was diverted and educational institutes were shut in central part of the city as precautionary measure. M. PERIASAMY

Protests erupt in Pithampur over arrival of Bhopal waste

Mehul Malpani

Two men suffered burns on Friday after they tried to immolate themselves as protests erupted during a call for bandh in Madhya Pradesh's Pithampur, a day after toxic waste from the Bhopal gas tragedy was moved from the defunct Union Carbide factory to the industrial town.

According to police, demonstrators gathered at several places across the town to protest the disposal of the waste at an incineration facility. The police used water cannons and resorted to brief baton charge at some places where protesters tried to march towards the facility.

2 men try to immolate themselves; CM Yadav assures people that the disposal is being guided by scientists

sion on the immediate burning of the waste has also not been taken yet. It has only been dumped and we are moving forward as per the directions of courts and scientists," he said.

In the late evening, the Dhar district authorities imposed Section 163 of Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita, which prohibits the assembly of five or more people among other restrictions, within the 100 metres of the incineration facility - Ramky Group's Pithampur Industrial Waste Management Private Limited until January 12.

The orders were issued after a group of protesters tried to march towards the facility and the police thwarted their attempts.

Union Health Ministry monitors HMPV outbreak in China, assures situation is not worrisome yet

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

NEW DELHI

The Union Health Ministry said on Friday that it was closely monitoring the alleged outbreak of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in China. The Ministry said while China had reported a rise in respiratory illness, particularly HMPV, India had not registered any unusual spike in winter respiratory diseases.

Five years after the COVID pandemic, China is experiencing a surge in HMPV cases, particularly in children under 14 years. Symptoms include cough, fever, and shortness of breath, with potential complications like bronchitis and pneumonia. The coun-

try has seen cases rise in its northern provinces, Reuters had reported. Cases of HMPV had been reported in 2011-12 in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

The Ministry's National Centre for Disease Control is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country and is in touch with international agencies, noted a senior official.

Meanwhile, Director-General of Health Services Atul Goel informed reporters on Friday that no case of the respiratory illness - HMPV - has been reported in the country yet. Stating that the government was closely monitoring news about the possible HMPV outbreak in China, he ad-



The Ministry said it is closely monitoring respiratory and seasonal influenza cases in the country. FILE PHOTO

ded that as of now, there was no cause for alarm.

"HMPV is like any other respiratory virus that causes flu-like symptoms," said Dr. Goel, adding that respiratory illnesses are common in winters and hospi-

tals in India are equipped to deal with them.

No major cases'
"Special medicines are not needed as there are no anti-viral drugs against this. There are no major cases,

in hospitals or as per Indian Council of Medical Research data," he added.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the public health agency of the U.S., HMPV can cause upper and lower respiratory disease in people of all ages, especially among young children, older adults, and people with weakened immune systems.

Discovered in 2001, the HMPV belongs to the Pneumoviridae family along with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). Broader use of molecular diagnostic testing has increased identification and awareness of HMPV as an important cause of upper and lower respiratory infection.

PM hands over keys of newly built flats to 1,675 slum dwellers

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday handed over the keys of newly constructed flats for slum dwellers in north-west Delhi's Ashok Vihar to 1,675 beneficiaries. During the ceremony, Mr. Modi mentioned that he had lived in the area during the Emergency.

Recalling Emergency
"At the time [Emergency], I resided in Ashok Vihar. That is why the memories return whenever I come here," the PM said while addressing the beneficiaries at Ashok Vihar's district park.

During the event, several beneficiaries of the Swabhiman Apartment in situ slum rehabilitation project were called onto the stage and handed over symbolic cardboard keys.

Mr. Shah, who weaves mats for a living, stated that he and his family felt glad when Mr. Modi called them "residents of Ashok Vihar".

Under the scheme, ₹25 lakh is spent by the government on building a flat, and eligible beneficiaries pay less than 7% of the total amount totalling ₹1.42 lakh as a nominal contribution and ₹30,000 for five years of maintenance.



Flats in Swabhiman Apartment complex. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

Pledged to fulfilling dreams of poor, middle class families in Delhi: Modi

Addressing beneficiaries of a Central housing scheme, PM said the BJP-led govt. is committed to providing houses to poor, middle class households; says he met children from these families and found that their aspirations are 'taller than buildings'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday set the tone for the upcoming Delhi Assembly election by saying how the BJP-led Centre is "fulfilling the dreams of those who come from far-off places" and ensuring that "every family, whether poor or middle class, has the opportunity to own a good home".

While addressing the beneficiaries of the Swabhiman Apartment housing scheme in Ashok Vihar, Mr. Modi said he had interacted with children from these families and found their aspiration to be "taller than the new apartment buildings".

'Condition of Yamuna'
He also spoke about people from the Purvanchali community in his speech. The PM said he had met someone from Bihar who told him they could not celebrate Chhath Puja in Delhi this year due to the



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the Centre will build 3,000 more houses in the national capital. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"condition of the Yamuna river".

Purvanchalis, a term used for residents of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and those hailing from there in the national capital, have been at the centre of a political tussle between Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party and the Opposition BJP.

The community, one of the largest voter bases in the city, is expected to play an important role in the

poll due in February.

'Transformative push'
Referring to Friday's announcements, Mr. Modi, in a post on X, stated, "Today is a landmark day for Delhi, with transformative projects in housing, infrastructure and education being launched to accelerate the city's development."

The projects he unveiled include the World Trade Center at Nauroji Nagar, which replaces hun-

dreds of old government quarters with multi-storey commercial towers, and a block of around 2,500 flats in Sarojini Nagar for Central government employees.

The PM also inaugurated a new academic block in Delhi University's (DU) East Campus in Surajmal Vihar, an academic block in DU's West Campus in Dwarka, and Veer Savarkar College in Najafgarh's Roshanpur in south-west Delhi. He also opened a Central Board of Secondary Education office built at ₹300 crore.

"Our cities, where people from far-off places

come with big dreams and spend their lives fulfilling those dreams with complete honesty, have a very big role in building *Viksit Bharat* (developed India)," said Mr. Modi.

He added, "This is the reason why the BJP government at the Centre is committed to providing a good quality life to every family in cities."

"Our government is en-

suring that every family, whether poor or middle class, has the opportunity to own a good home," said the PM, adding that one crore houses have been constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) in the past decade, of which 30,000 have been built in Delhi. He said 3,000 more houses will be constructed under the scheme in the national capital.

A decade ago, students of government schools often ended up working as drivers, mechanics, or at shops. Today, the students are clearing NEET and JEE examinations and securing admissions to some of the country's top medical and engineering colleges," she said. The academic block inaugurated by Ms. Atishi has 46 classrooms, six state-of-the-art laboratories, a hockey ground and a multipurpose hall, read a statement by AAP.

Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel, who was also present at the event, said, "The school had a Class 12 pass percentage of 60 in 2014. Today, it is 95%."

Increased classrooms by 83% in 10 years: Atishi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Atishi on Friday inaugurated a new academic block of a government school for girls in Jhilmil Colony in east Delhi. The CM said the "education revolution" in Delhi has provided better educational opportunities for students, with the number of classrooms growing from 83,600 in 2014 to 1,55,000 at present, a jump of over 83%.

He added that in light of the increasing population and urbanisation in the Capital, the Union government will speed up development projects in Narela sub-city.

The PM also said the New Education Policy (NEP) is aimed at providing opportunities to children from poor and middle-class households.

"It is not easy for middle-class or poor families to educate their children in English-medium schools," he said, adding that the NEP is changing this by encouraging studies in regional languages.

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT E-Procurement Notice INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

The Executive Engineer HPPWD Dharamshala Division on behalf of Governor of H.P. invites the Percentage rate bids, in electronic tendering system, for following works from the eligible and approved contractors registered with HPPWD:-

Sr. No.	Name of work	Estimated cost in Rs.	Earhest Money	Time Limit	Cost of tender form	Start date for downloading of bid	Deadline for submission of Bid
1.	Annual Repair & Maintenance of Residential building under General Pool Accommodation at Dharamshala, Distt. Kangra HP (SH-I), P/L floor & Wall tile, wood work and other minor repair works etc in Type-II quarters, (Under Khanjara and College section) III, Repair of Qtr. No.7 Type-II near Education Board Dharamshala III).	55,94,929/-	1,11,900/-	Three Months	200/-	08.01.2025	15.01.2025
2.	Construction of Play ground at Gram Panchayat Narwana in Tehsil Dharamshala Distt. Kangra HP (Deposit work) SH- Construction of wire crate wall at RD 0/000 to 0/012 including granular filling	9,70,682/-	19,500/-	Three Months	350/-	08.01.2025	15.01.2025

The bidders are advised to note other details of tenders from the departmental website <https://htptenders.gov.in>. The Executive Engineer reserves the right to reject any tender or all tenders without assigning any reasons. Date of Opening of tender is 16.01.2025 at 11:30 AM.

Executive Engineer, Dharamshala Division, HPPWD, Dharamshala.
On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh.
No. PWD-DD/CB/M-27-2024-25-8761-90 Dated-02.01.2025
HP /4290/24-25 HIM SUCHANA AVAM JAN SAMPARK

कार्यालय, कार्यपालक अधिकारी, लघु सिंचाई प्रमण्डल, जगा	
शुद्धि पत्र	
एतद् द्वारा सर्वं साधारण को सूचित किया जाता है इस कार्यालय के प्रतांक 3015 दिनांक 04.12.2024 द्वारा आमंत्रित की गयी विवादा आमंत्रण सूचना संख्या 02/2024-25 (PR NO 014221 (MWRD) 2024-25 में निम्नलिखित तिथि तक संशोधित समझा जाये—	
Executive Engineer, Dharamshala Division, HPPWD, Dharamshala. On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh.	
परिवार की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय	
1 परिवार विप्रत्र प्राप्त करने की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय	
दिनांक 10.01.2025 से दिनांक 17.01.2025 के अपराह्न 05:00 बजे तक सिर्फ वेबसाईट (WWW.EPROC2.BIHAR.GOV.IN) पर	
2 प्रो-बीड मीटिंग का स्थान तिथि एवं समय	
मुख्य अधिकारी, लघु जल संसाधन विभाग, पटना के कार्यालय में दिनांक 13.01.2025 को पूर्वाह्न 11:00 बजे से अपराह्न 03:00 बजे तक	
3 निवादा अपलोड करने की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय	
दिनांक 17.01.2025 के अपराह्न 05:00 बजे तक सिर्फ वेबसाईट (WWW.EPROC2.BIHAR.GOV.IN) पर	
4 तकनीकी निवादा खोलने की अंतिम तिथि एवं समय	
दिनांक 18.01.2025 के पूर्वाह्न 10:00 बजे से संबंधित प्रमण्डलीय कार्यालय में	
5 तकनीकी निवादा ऑफलाइन का स्थान	
दिनांक 20.01.2025 लगातार	
6 वित्तीय बीड खोलने की अंतिम तिथि एवं स्थान	
सक्षम प्राधिकार द्वारा बाद में घोषणा की जायेगी।	
शेष यात्रावाल रहेंगे। उत्तर सूचना STATE.BIHAR.GOV.IN/PRDBIHAR पर भी देखी जा सकती है।	
PR-016301 (MWRD) 2024-25	
नशो से बचने का है एक ही उपचार, दृढ़ संकल्प और परिवार से प्यार	

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER: PWD: DISPUR AMD DIMORIA TERRITORIAL BUILDING DIVISION, DISPUR:GHY-6 PRESS NOTICE

The Executive Engineer, PWD, Dispur and Dimoria Territorial Building Division, Dispur, Guwahati-6 on behalf of Governor of Assam invites item rate bids for the following works under P.W.D.(Bldg) Assam Class-(A/B/C) contractors of A.P.W.D. having requisite experience in similar nature of work. Details may be seen at e-procurement portal website i.e. www.assamtenders.gov.in.

Pack-age No.	Name of work	Approx. value of work (Rs. in Lakh)	Time of completion	Bid Security	Bid security to be paid	Coast of Bid
1	Upgradation of the Office Chamber along with staff rooms of the Chief Commissioner, ASCRTPS at Khanapara, Guwahati-22 (Civil, Sanitary &W/S & Electrical Works)	Rs. 194.17246 Lakh	30 (Thirty) Days	2% of NIT value (for General) and 1% of NIT Value (for reserved category)	Internet Banking/ NEFT/RTGS	Rs. 3890.00

Note:- 1. NIT value may be changed during uploading of tender in the website, which may be seen in Detailed NIT of the bid document.

2. The Bidders must be enrolled in www.assamtenders.gov.in.

3. The prospective bidder must visit the work site before submission of tender. The bidders have to submit evidence of site visit in the form of a certificate duly certified by the concerned Executive Engineer, P.W.D.

Executive Engineer, P.W.D.
Dispur & Dimoria Territorial Bldg. Division
Dispur, Guwahati-6

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Open E-Tender Notice No.: WS/IZN/Elect/OT/4/24-25 Dt. 03.01.2025
E-Tender are invited by Workshop Electrical Engineer/N.E. Railway/ Izzatnagar For & on behalf of the President of India for the following work:- Description of work:- Electrical work in connection with Provision of new covered shed of size 90 x 20 meters including foundation at store depot/Izzatnagar; Approximate tender value (in ₹) : ₹6,99,097.57; Earnest money (in ₹): ₹14,000/-; Cost of tender paper (in ₹): Nil; Date & time of closing E-tender: 28.01.2025 at 15:00 hours; Completion time from the date of issue of letter of Acceptance: Three Months. • Manual offers are not allowed against this tender and such manual offer received shall be ignored. • The tenderer can be viewed at website <http://www.reps.gov.in>. • The tenderer/bidders must have Class-III. Digital signature certificate & must have registered on IREPS portal. • Only registered tenderer/bidders can participate in e-tendering. • All relevant papers must be uploaded at the time of participating in e-tendering.

By Chief Electrical Engineer/
CPO/EL-203
Izzatnagar

DO NOT SMOKE BID/CIGARETTE IN TRAINS

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

NABARD RIDF XXX

The Superintending Engineer, 15th Circle, HPPWD, Una H.P. on behalf of Governor of H.P. invites the online bids on percentage rate basis in electronic tendering system, in 2 Cover System for the under mentioned works from the eligible and approved class of Contractors / Firms registered with HPPWD and HP Jal Shakti Vibhag (Contractors of HP Jal Shakti Vibhag are eligible participants for the works having amount put to tender above Rs. 100 Lacs). Non registered contractors may submit the bids; however successful bidder has to register in appropriate class with appropriate authority in HPPWD.

Sr. No.	District / Division	Name of the work	Estimated Cost (Rs. Lakh)	Total Cost (Rs. Lakh)	Period of Completion	Bid Security (Rs. Lakh)

<tbl_r

Mammootty visits MT's home

The Hindu Bureau
KOZHIKODE

Actor Mammootty visited the residence of late M.T. Vasudevan Nair in Kozhikode on Friday and consoled his family members. Mr. Mammootty could not visit his mentor before he passed away, nor could he attend the funeral as he was in Azerbaijan for the shooting of a movie. He was accompanied by actor-director Ramesh Pisharody. Meeting M.T.'s wife Saraswathy, daughter Ashwathi, and son-in-law Sreekanth, the actor expressed his condolences and shared his memories.

Timings		
SATURDAY, JAN. 04		
RISE 07:15	SET 17:38	
RISE 10:30	SET 22:12	
SUNDAY, JAN. 05		
RISE 07:15	SET 17:39	
RISE 11:02	SET 23:15	
MONDAY, JAN. 06		
RISE 07:15	SET 17:40	
RISE 11:34	SET 00:00	

Delhi Weather max min
Delhi City 21 07
Safdarjung 21 07
Palam 17 07

Delhi Palam Today
15°C The weather will be dry.
The cold day like conditions to prevail. Sky conditions will be obscured due to fog layer.

Delhi Palam Tomorrow
15°C The weather will be dry and uneasy. The cold day like conditions to continue. Night also will be very cold and uneasy.

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THE HINDU
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Odisha treats unseasonal rain as disaster, to pay farmers subsidy of ₹291.59 cr. for loss

Report by District Collectors states 6.66 lakh farmers suffered losses of 33% in ready-to-harvest crops in 2,26,791 hectares of land due to two spells of rain in the last week of December

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR



Odisha CM Mohan Charan Majhi interacting with farmers in Nayagarh. FILE PHOTO

Considering unseasonal rains as disaster, the Mohan Majhi government in Odisha has announced input subsidy of ₹291.59 crore for farmers who have suffered crop loss above 33%.

Report by District Collectors states 6.66 lakh farmers suffered losses of over 33% in ready-to-harvest crops in 2,26,791 hectares of land. These farmers will get the assistance from the State Disaster Relief Fund.

Inaugurating the three-day-long Agriculture Odisha-2025, Mr. Majhi said over 2.61 lakh farmers had applied for compensation under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, and insured farmers who suffered

crop loss are getting compensation from Friday.

"The government is committed to supporting farmers in every possible way. We hope these efforts will not only help offset your losses but also instil hope and confidence in the farming community. Moreover,

comprehensive assistance will be provided for the rabi crop in the coming days," he said.

The CM added that under the Samruddh Kisan Yojana, an additional input support of ₹800 is being provided over the minimum support price of

₹2,300 per quintal of paddy.

Two spells of unseasonal rain in the last week of December wreaked havoc on ready-to-harvest paddy and vegetable crops.

The issue sparked a political controversy, with the main Opposition party, the Biju Janata Dal, accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party government of being sluggish in assessing crop losses and providing compensation. On Thursday, former CM and Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly Naresh Patnaik wrote to Mr. Majhi, urging him to ensure timely and adequate compensation for affected farmers.

Earlier, Mr. Patnaik had toured Ganjam, Puri, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, and Kendrapara districts.

Teams formed in Delhi to detect illegal immigrants

Alisha Dutta
NEW DELHI

the Capital, following orders by Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena on December 11, 2024.

One such IIDT in the South East district identified and initiated deportations of five Bangladeshis on January 1, said the officer.

Five deported

"The accused had entered India on the pretext of obtaining work permits from the Embassy of Bosnia but did not return to Bangladesh upon the expiry of their visa," the officer added.

"Sheikh Sofiul Alam Sabir, Md. Takkir Khan, Bijoyohmod Sahi, Habibur Rahman, and Md. Musa Miah Khan came to India in August 2024. Despite their tourist visa having expired between October and November, they were staying at a private lodge in Madanpur Khadar," said the officer.

The development comes amid a special two-month drive launched by the police to identify and deport "illegal Bangladeshi immigrants" residing in

the golden jubilee celebrations of NIMHANS in Bengaluru, the President said issues and concerns of mental health had not received enough attention in some societies in the past.

"In recent times awareness about mental health has been rising. The unscientific beliefs and stigma are a matter of the past, making it easier for those suffering from various ailments to seek help. This has been a welcome development, because a variety of mental health issues are taking epidemic proportions," she said.

Over 300 flights delayed as fog grips northern India

Jagriti Chandra
NEW DELHI

website flightradar24. These include 73 arrivals and 230 departures that faced delays of over 45 minutes.

Other airports in the northern parts of the country that were impacted due to poor visibility were Leh, Srinagar, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Varanasi as well as Guwahati.

"There was intense fog at IGI Airport between 6 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. Between 7 a.m. to 9.30 a.m., there was the biggest dip in visibility conditions with general visibility dropping to



Several flight operations were delayed due to low visibility at Delhi and other airports. FILE PHOTO

50 metres, and the runway visual range remaining between 100 metres to 300 metres," IMD scientist R.K.Jenamani told

The Hindu.

Runway Visual Range (RVR) is the range over which the pilot of an aircraft can see the runway surface markings or the lights that help identify the centre line on the runway.

He said this was the season's worst fog so far in terms of both its visibility and duration.

One diversion

Srinagar airport witnessed one diversion, and seven delays out of the total 64 aircraft movements, which include both ar-

rivals and departures, according to Airport Director Javed Anjum.

Visibility below 50 m.

At Amritsar airport too, visibility remained below 50 metres through the day, and landings were carried out under CAT-IIIB conditions, i.e. with the help of precision instrument landing aids on the runway.

There were 22 flight delays, while five flights were cancelled, according to flightradar24.

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DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIES & COMMERCE

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THE 6TH EDITION OF ENCHANTING LADAKH AT DILLI HAAT, INA NEW DELHI



Crafts persons from Ladakh will be showcasing and selling exquisite products made from the Luxury pashmina fibre, other Handloom and handicraft products and Food processing and cosmetic items. The GI Tagged and ODOP products of Ladakh like Seabuckthorn, Raktsey Karpo apricots, Pashmina and Wood carved items will also be on display and sale.



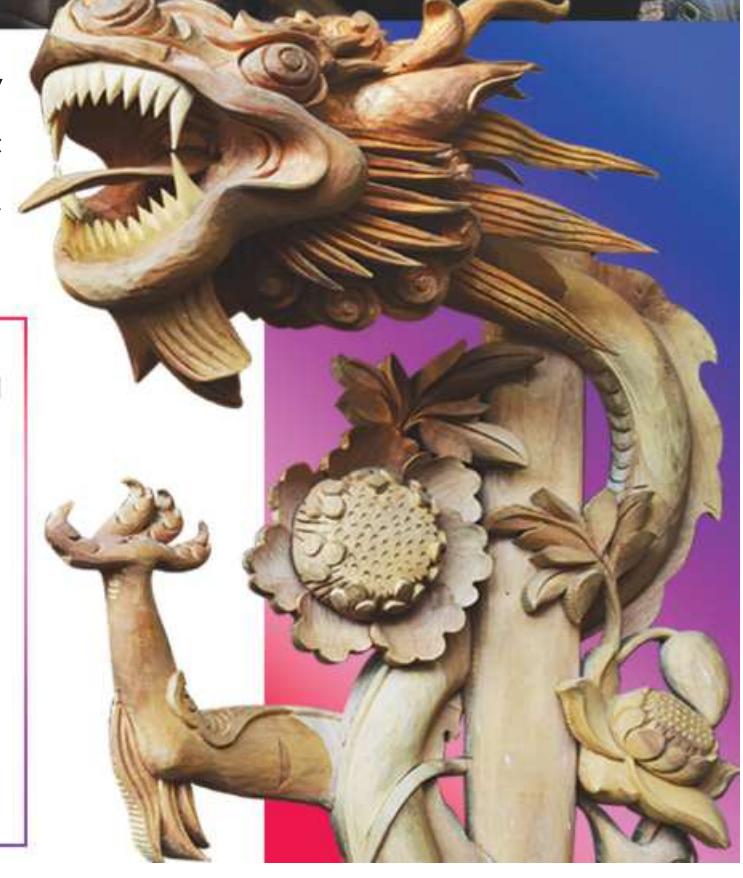
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Ministry of Textiles, Government of India



Development Commissioner (Handlooms)
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India



IN BRIEF



Khushbu detained for taking out rally without permission

Madurai City Police on Friday arrested BJP functionary Khushbu Sundar and other members of the party's women's wing as they tried to take out a rally – without police permission – from Madurai to Chennai to demand justice in the Anna University sexual assault case. The protesters gathered near Simmakkal, adorning themselves with flowers, and raised slogans demanding a thorough investigation into the case. Addressing the protesters, Ms. Sundar said they knew they would not be given permission to take out the rally because it was against the DMK government.

Haryana to mark Phule's birth anniversary every year: CM

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Friday made a slew of announcements to mark the birth anniversary of iconic social reformer Savitribai Phule including that the State government will now officially celebrate the day every year. Mr. Saini also announced that the State government will expedite the proposal to extend the metro line from Bahadurgarh to Asaudha. He said the Bahadurgarh Municipal Council will be upgraded to a municipal corporation. The Chief Minister made the announcements at a programme in Bahadurgarh on the occasion of Savitribai Phule Jayanti. PTI

ED searches DMK MP's house, four other locations in T.N.

The Hindu Bureau
VELLORE

Sleuths of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted searches in at least five places, including an engineering college and the house of DMK MP D.M. Kathir Anand in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, on Friday.

Sources said the searches began around 7.30 a.m. in these locations, primarily at the house of Mr. Anand and his father Duraimurugan in Katpadi. Duraimurugan is the Minister for Water Resources and the general secretary of the ruling DMK.

Some of the other locations where the searches were conducted include



Standing guard: Security personnel outside the residence of DMK MP D.M. Kathir Anand. VENKATACHALAPATHY C.

Christian service to sanctify Meghalaya's first State university

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The first State university in Meghalaya, where the National People's Party (NPP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party are ruling as part of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance coalition, will be sanctified with a Christian prayer service. State Education Minister Rakkam A. Sangma said this on Thursday, insisting there was nothing wrong with such consecration when the new Parliament building was blessed with Hindu rituals.

Outside Meghalaya, the NPP is also a part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

The consecration of the Captain Williamson Sangma State University, named after Meghalaya's first CM, will be held on January 13.

"As a Christian State, we want to consecrate the first State university with a massive prayer meet," Mr. Sangma told journalists in Shillong. The Vice-Chancellor

of the university will also assume the office on that day, he said, adding that all the Ministers in the State and representatives of all denominations of churches would attend the event.

The new Parliament building was consecrated in May 2023 with the installation of the 'Sengol' – a gold-plated silver sceptre – amid the chanting of Vedic mantras. The ceremony had started with a Ganesh puja.

In January 2023, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma had inaugurated a building of the Captain Williamson Sangma State University at Balalgre, a village in the South West Garo Hills district. It is yet to start functioning formally.

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BJP, Congress spar over decision to increase bus fares by Karnataka govt.

Oppn. leaders protest by giving roses to male passengers, say govt. had made bus travel free for women but doubled it for men; Transport Minister says most hikes occurred under BJP rule

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka Cabinet decision a day earlier to approve a 15% hike in fares of all types of bus services operated by the four road transport corporations (RTCs) triggered a war of words between the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP on Friday. The Siddaramaiah government had earlier rolled out the Shakti scheme, which provides free bus travel for women on non-premium State-run buses.

Speaking to presspersons in Hubballi, Union Minister for Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution Pralhad Joshi said that in order to mobilise funds for its guarantee schemes, the Congress-led government in the State has increased the prices of almost every essential commodity, including electricity, milk and fuel. "And, now, it has increased bus fare. For the sake of power, the Congress will stoop to



Leader of Opposition R. Ashoka distributes roses to passengers to protest increase in bus fares, in Bengaluru on Friday. MURALI KUMAR K.

any level. In Himachal Pradesh, the Congress government has reached the stage of almost stopping its guarantee schemes, while in Karnataka, unable to give salaries to transport corporation employees, it has given permission to raise loans. Due to corruption and misrule, Karnataka has been reduced to a State with no revenue," he said.

Opposition leaders R. Ashoka and Chalavadi Narayanaswamy protested

against the State Cabinet's decision by giving roses to male passengers and apologising to them "on behalf of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah" at Kempegowda bus station in Bengaluru. They said the government had made bus travel free for women, but doubled it for men.

"This government has hiked the taxes on fuel, power tariff, registration fee, excise tax, and now bus fares. The hike in the

price of milk and water tariff are in the offing soon. To fund the guarantee schemes, the government has been increasing fares, tariffs, and taxes in the State. They are taking away money from the people to give them back through guarantee schemes. This is nothing but cheating people," said Mr. Ashok.

Protests were held in other parts of Karnataka as well against the fare hike that comes into effect on Sunday.

Govt. mounts defence

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy justified the hike citing an "inherited liability" of ₹5,900 crore from the previous BJP government. The hike, he explained, was essential to cover rising costs and accumulated dues. Referring to Mr. Ashoka's mode of protest (distributing roses to men passengers), he said women would not vote for the BJP for the party's stand against the pro-women scheme.



The 2013 riots had resulted in the deaths of over 60 people and displaced 40,000. FILE PHOTO

and 353 (assault or use of criminal force against public servant on duty) of the erstwhile Indian Penal Code, along with provisions of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. The next hearing is scheduled for January 30, prosecution officer Niraj Singh said.

According to the prosecution, the accused participated in a panchayat meeting at Nagla Madore village on August 30, 2013. They delivered speeches that incited violence and violated prohibitory orders, it was alleged.

The 2013 riots had resulted in the deaths of over 60 people and displaced more than 40,000 individuals in Muzaffarnagar and neighbouring areas in August and September of that year.

Saamana lauds Fadnavis's development plans for Gadchiroli; Sule echoes praise

Purnima Sah
MUMBAI

The Opposition Shiv Sena (UBT)'s mouthpiece, *Saamana*, on Friday praised Devendra Fadnavis for announcing plans for the development of Gadchiroli on January 1 during his first full-fledged visit to the Naxal-hit district since assuming office as Maharashtra Chief Minister.

The editorial titled, 'Congratulations Deva bhau', in a reference to Mr. Fadnavis, said if the Chief Minister wants to give Gadchiroli new identity as a 'steel city', it "should be welcomed and he truly deserves praise". "He needs to show that initiatives an-

nounced for the development of Gadchiroli are for the betterment of the common, poor people and not for mining barons," it said.

The editorial said Mr. Fadnavis had inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of several development projects in Gadchiroli, heralding a new era of progress. "This step would positively impact not just Gadchiroli but entire Maharashtra. We congratulate him and hope his initiatives will transform the lives of the tribals," it said.

Taking a dig at the law and order situation in Beed following the murder of a sarpanch, the editorial said: "Guns rule Beed. Still, if there is a rule of the Con-

sition in Gadchiroli, then Chief Minister Fadnavis deserves praise."

The editorial highlighted that while Mr. Fadnavis chose to start the first day of the year from Gadchiroli district, several Ministers in his Cabinet were "stuck in the trap of getting lucrative portfolios and guardian ministership of specific districts". "If all he has said is going to happen for real, this will be a positive change and major turning point for our State," it said.

Later, Supriya Sule of the NCP (SP), an ally of the Sena (UBT), echoed this sentiment, praising Mr. Fadnavis's visit to Gadchiroli and describing him as "the only Minister in action

mode in the State".

Saamana executive editor and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut said it has been the tradition of his party since the time of its founder Bal Thackeray to applaud good governance regardless of ideology.

Ideology no bar

"We all have some responsibilities towards this State. So, even if the government is not of our ideology, but has taken steps that are beneficial to the State, its law and order, and social equations, we must leave our political differences aside and praise it," he said.

Responding to the editorial, Mr. Fadnavis said in Satara: "Good. Thanks."

Dismissal of Vedanta stems from colonial mindset: V-P

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Commenting on the political controversies over statements on Sanatana Dharma, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar said it was ironic that any reference to Sanatana evoked baffling reactions.

Inaugurating the International Congress of Vedanta at the Jawaharlal Nehru University here on Friday, Mr. Dhankhar said the dismissal of Sanatana Dharma and *Vedanta* often stemmed from "perverted colonial mindsets" and poor understanding of the country's intellectual heritage.

Recently, the ruling BJP had criticised Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for his statement that the 19th century social reformer Sree Narayana Guru had challenged Sanatana Dharma.

'World embracing it'
Mr. Dhankhar said global disciplines were now embracing the *Vedanta* philosophy.

"They are exploiting our gold mine, if I may say so, when we faced COVID, *Atharva Veda* dominated because it was encyclopaedic on health. They are doing it but some in our country, some in this land of spirituality, dismiss *Vedanta* and Sanatani texts as regressive. They are doing it without knowing it, not even physically seeing them, much less go through them. This dismissal often stems from perverted colonial mindsets, inefficient understanding of our intellectual heritage. What a travesty! These elements, who act in a structured manner, in a sinner fashion; the design is pernicious," he said.

The Vice-President said such elements camouflaged their destructive thought process with perverted versions of secularism. "Secularism has been used as a shield. It is the duty of every Indian to expose such elements," he added.

Delhi schools fare much better in digitalisation than national average, show Ministry of Education data

Ashna Butani
NEW DELHI

As Delhi schools kept adjusting their modes of teaching between online, offline or hybrid due to the pollution-related curbs, Ministry of Education annual data show that the percentage of city schools with digital facilities was significantly higher than the national average.

According to Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) data, 99.1% of Delhi schools have functional desktops compared to 32.4% across the country.

Assam had the least number of schools with functional desktops (12.8%), followed by Bihar (13.3%) and Jharkhand (17%).

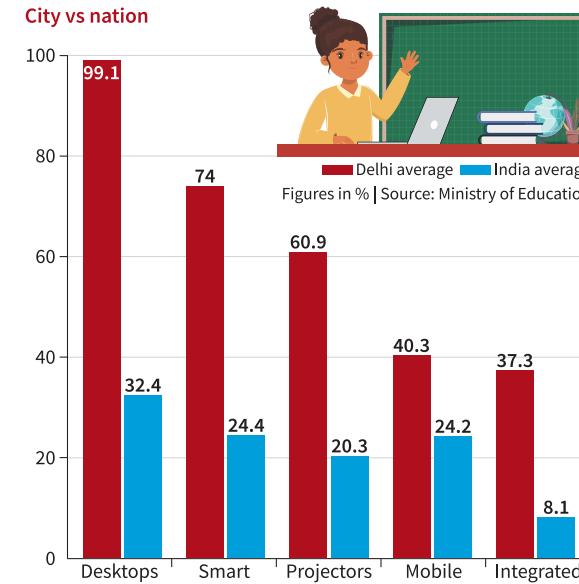
Similarly, 60.9% of schools in Delhi had functional projectors while the national average stood at 20.3%.

For integrated teaching-learning devices, 37.3% of Delhi schools have the facility against 8.1% across

Digital divide

Delhi struggles to narrow the gap between private and govt. schools in digital infrastructure

City vs nation



the country. In this regard, Chandigarh tops the list with 42.2% while Meghalaya is at the bottom with 2.4%.

Seventy-four percent of Delhi schools have smart classrooms against the national average of 24.4%.

The UDISE+ report is based on voluntary uploading of data by schools across the country.

Digital divide
According to the report, private schools are leading government schools in digitalisation.

For instance, 50.6% of private unaided schools and 43.1% of government-aided schools have mobile phones for teaching purposes in comparison to 30.2% of government schools. Similarly, 45.9% of priv-

ate unaided schools are equipped with integrated teaching-learning devices against 30.3% of government schools.

Moreover, 70% of government schools have smart classrooms, while in private schools, the percentage stood at 79.5%.

'Pandemic fuelled rise'
Sudha Acharya, principal of I.T.L. Public School in Dwarka, said the pandemic fuelled the increase in digitalisation. "Teachers began innovating teaching as we were no longer confined to textbooks," she said.

A government school principal, who did not wish to be named, said that although government schools have started receiving the facilities for online classes, some students still do not have devices to join classes online. "When online classes were announced in November, around 30-35% of his students failed to attend," said Virendra Singh Yadav, a government school teacher in Delhi.

The Vice-President said such elements camouflaged their destructive thought process with perverted versions of secularism. "Secularism has been used as a shield. It is the duty of every Indian to expose such elements," he added.

Double life term for 10 in Periyē twin murder case

Four others, including a former CPI(M) MLA, get 5-year sentences for helping the second accused escape police custody; the judge appreciated journalist's deposition on the acts of four accused

The Hindu Bureau
KOCHI



Proven guilty: K.V. Kunhiraman, the former CPI(M) MLA convicted in the case, at the CBI court in Kochi on Friday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Ten convicts in the Periyē twin murder case were awarded double life imprisonment on two counts on Friday, for murder and conspiracy, and four others, including former Uduma MLA and Communist Party of India (Marxist) leader K.V. Kunhiraman, five years' imprisonment for helping Saji George, second accused, flee police custody.

The prosecution argued that the accused murdered Youth Congress leaders Kripesh and Sarath Lal at Kannadippara, near Periyē, due to political hostility. The case reflected the bizarre offshoot of political

vandalism culminating in the premature death of two vibrant youth, observed the court.

The convicts Peethambaran, Saji George, Suresh, Anilkumar, Jijin, Seerag,

will run concurrently.

Besides Kunhiraman, Manikandan, Velutholi Raghavan, and K.V. Bhaskaran were among the convicts awarded five years' imprisonment. The four were also fined ₹10,000 each. The bail of these accused was cancelled.

The judge appreciated journalist Madhavan's deposition regarding the acts of four accused to rescue the second accused.

The judge quoted the Supreme Court, that while the top leaders belonging to different political parties socialise with each other without any personal acrimony, it is a pity they do not encourage that attitude to percolate down to the grassroots level."

Cong. lauds Periyē case verdict, terms it a blow to CPI(M)

The Hindu Bureau
KASARAGOD

Congress workers in Kerala welcomed the CBI court judgment in the Periyē double murder case on Friday. They raised slogans at the memorial to Kripesh and Sarath Lal, and joined their families in expressing dissatisfaction with the 'leniency' shown to certain accused.

The Congress termed the verdict an indictment of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). All India Congress Committee general secretary K.C. Venugopal told reporters in Kozhikode that the judgment was a slap in the face to the CPI(M) for its backsliding from socialism to criminalism.

KPCC president K. Sudhakaran said the judgment was wanting on several counts. He said the Congress would appeal for more severe punishment to the "killers and conspirators" and also bring to book those who got a reprieve in the trial court. He welcomed the double life sentences for the 10 of the accused. Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan said the judgment was a blow to the CPI(M)'s criminality. He said the party and the government had walked the extra mile to save the "killers".

Meanwhile, CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan said the CBI had failed to prove the conspiracy angle in the case. BJP State president K. Surendran welcomed the judgment and termed it a moral and legal indictment of the CPI(M)'s use of brute forces to deny political space to Opposition parties.

M.P.: Dalit woman, daughter dragged on road; 2 arrested

The Hindu Bureau
BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Police on Friday arrested two men for allegedly assaulting a Dalit woman and her daughter and dragging them on the road in Morena district's Ambah, officials said.

According to the police, the incident took place over throwing of cow dung on a barking dog by the woman's minor son after which the accused, identified as Rajesh Tomar and Kumheir Singh Tomar, arrived at her home with some more men and attacked the family members with sticks and knives.

A video of the incident also went viral on social media showing two men dragging the woman on a village road while her mi-

nor daughter clings onto her and some other locals screaming at the men. Later, the woman could be seen bleeding from the head and face while her daughter is crying.

The Congress targeted the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in the State over the incidents of atrocities against Dalits in the State.

"[Chief Minister] Mohan Yadav has made Madhya Pradesh number one in atrocities against Dalits. In Ambah of Morena, goons beat a Dalit mother and daughter with sticks in public and injured their heads. In the State, goons on the streets and police in police stations, both are setting new records of atrocities against Dalits," State Congress chief Jitu Patwari wrote on X.

Actor Allu Arjun gets conditional bail in stampede case

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD



The Nampally court of Hyderabad granted a conditional bail to actor Allu Arjun on Friday in connection with the ongoing investigation of the Sandhya 70 MM theatre stampede case, which claimed the life of a woman and left her son hospitalised during the benefit show of *Pushpa 2* on December 4.

The court directed the actor to submit two sureties of ₹50,000 each. Among the conditions imposed by the court, the actor has been asked to visit the Chikkadpally Station House Officer (SHO) every Sunday for two months or until the chargesheet is filed.

The actor was arrested on December 13 after a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder was booked against him.

The Nampally Court had sent the actor in judicial custody for 14 days and he was lodged in the Chanchalguda jail for a night.

His lawyer approached the High Court, which granted him interim bail the same day.

Temple customs row: CPI(M) backs Pinarayi and 'meaningful' talks

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM



A day after Nair Service Society (NSS) general secretary G. Sukumaran Nair criticised Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan for endorsing the call to end the practice of men removing shirts before entering temples, CPI(M) State secretary M.V. Govindan threw his weight behind Mr. Vijayan.

Inaugurating the CPI(M) Kottayam district conference delegates' meet at Pampady on Friday, Mr. Govindan said Mannathu Padmanabhan, founder of the NSS, would never have emerged as a leader had he not stood against regressive practices. "The NSS general secretary's stance that customs and practices

should remain unchanged is fundamentally flawed. Kerala society must engage in meaningful discussions about this," he said.

Defending Mr. Vijayan's remarks on Sanatana Dharma, Mr. Govindan said: "Sanatana Dharma institutionalises casteism, marginalising communities such as Scheduled Castes/Tribes and Other Backward Classes."

Speculation over Ministers' meet hosted by Jarkiholi

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

nister D.K. Shivakumar in conducting party activities and his "interference" in works of other departments.

However, Minister for Public Works Satish Jarkiholi, who hosted the dinner, insisted that there was no need to give political colour to a New Year get-together.

State Youth Festival Haryana

Shri Vishwakarma Skill University
Dudhola, Palwal

3rd January to 5th January, 2025

Yuva Sammelan and Cultural Evening

4th January, 2025 | 4:00 PM
Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Sports Stadium, Palwal

Chief Guest
Sh. Nayab Singh Saini
Chief Minister, Haryana

Guest of Honour
Sh. Gaurav Gautam
Minister of State for Youth Empowerment & Entrepreneurship and Sports (I.C.)

Scan the QR code to join the programme

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Losing momentum

GST receipts and other recent indicators suggest consumption is still a concern

Several economic indicators released over the past week are bad news for the Finance Ministry and Reserve Bank of India's hopes of a growth rebound in the second half of 2024-25 – at least for the October-December quarter. While GDP growth slipping to 5.4% in the second quarter was termed a transient blip, policymakers have acknowledged slowing consumption demand led by restrained spending trends in urban India. They have also exuded optimism about a festive boost from cities along with a resilient rural demand outlook lifting the momentum. The latest data points are also important as they are part of the final gauges for the Finance Ministry to assess before it finalises its economic blueprint for 2025-26 in the February 1 Union Budget. Bank credit growth has slowed for the fifth straight month in November, while core infrastructure sectors – about 40% of industrial output – expanded at a four-month high pace of 4.3%. However, production levels were 3.3% below October with six of eight sectors operating at lower capacities. The Purchasing Managers' Index shows factory activity levels through November and December were the worst through 2024, even as input cost inflation spurred price hikes that would hit demand somewhat over time.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) receipts for December, based on transactions concluded in November, do not have much succour to offer either, especially on the consumption engine of the economy. Gross revenues were at a three-month low of almost ₹1.77 lakh crore, and just 7.3% higher than last year, marking the joint-second slowest uptick in three and a half years. December's revenues, in fact, mark the fourth straight month of below-10% growth, with the pace decelerating every passing month, and the year-to-date rise in revenues is now just 8.6%, making the 11% growth estimate in the Budget a tall task to catch up with in the final quarter. Net revenues after refunds were just 3.3%, the slowest this fiscal, although this may partly be explained by high refund payouts in December. Revenue growth from domestic transactions slowed to 8.4%, while import revenues grew just 3.9% – the former may perhaps be linked to tighter retail credit flows and a post-Deepavali spending pull-back, but the latter is a tad puzzling as November's goods import bill had shot up 27% to a record high of \$70 billion. The poor revenue growth rates for major consumer States such as Uttar Pradesh (1%) and Gujarat (4%), and the persistent contraction in Andhra Pradesh and a few northeastern States (including Manipur), also need closer scrutiny. For the Budget's formulation, the Centre would do well to try to understand and address the pain points afflicting consumption, including high inflation.

Water woes

India needs to deal with rising levels of nitrate in groundwater

An annual assessment by the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) on the state of groundwater, and its quality, has some worrying portents. First, the number of districts with excessive nitrate in their groundwater has risen from 359 in 2017 to 440 in 2023. This translates to a little more than half of India's 779 districts having excessive nitrate, or more than 45 mg/L (milligram per litre). There are two major concerns with excess nitrate content: first, methemoglobinemia, or a reduced ability of red blood cells to carry oxygen. This sometimes causes 'Blue Baby Syndrome,' in infants. The bigger problem is environmental: once nitrates in groundwater rise to the surface and become part of lakes and ponds, algal blooms throttle the health of aquatic ecosystems. What the CGWB found, from analysing 15,239 groundwater samples across the country, was that close to 19.8% samples had nitrates – nitrogen compounds – above safe limits. However, this proportion has not shifted much since 2017, when 21.6% had excessive nitrate (13,028 samples).

Rajasthan, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu reported the largest extent of nitrate contamination, with 49%, 48% and 37% of the samples reporting numbers beyond the limit. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat have a perennial nitrate problem, primarily from geological factors, with relative levels fairly constant since 2017, the report says. However regions in central and southern India are reporting a rise, which is a reason for worry. Through the years, several studies have established the correlation between elevated nitrate levels and the practice of intensive agriculture. Other significant chemical contaminants affecting groundwater quality were fluoride and uranium. Fluoride concentrations exceeding the permissible limit were "a major concern" in Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The report drew attention to the fact that States with over-exploited groundwater blocks – where extraction is more than replenishment – were more likely to have excessive chemical contaminants. Overall, the country's degree of groundwater extraction is 60.4%, or roughly the same as it has been since 2009. About 73% of the blocks analysed for groundwater levels are in the 'safe' zone, meaning that they are replenished enough to compensate for the water drawn out. While it is a good sign that India now has a robust, scientific system of assessment to monitor the health of groundwater blocks annually, efforts are lacking in getting States to act on these findings. There needs to be more concerted awareness programmes led by the highest levels of leadership to contain the crisis.

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The looming threat to federalism and democratic tenets

The ruling government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party/National Democratic Alliance, has been pursuing the One Nation, One Election framework (ONOE) with all seriousness. This proposal seeks to synchronise the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections under one single electoral cycle. While the advocates of the ONOE have cited several administrative and fiscal efficiencies, its opponents point to the far-reaching consequences of this plan on the democratic and federalist character of India, as laid out in the Constitution of India.

The historical context

Simultaneous elections are not something very new in India. During the initial years after Independence, the Election Commission of India (ECI) used to conduct simultaneous elections for both Parliament and State Assemblies. But this cycle of cooperative federalism was disrupted at the very outset with the appearance and imposition of Article 356, which is popularly known as President's Rule. When this was done for the first time in Kerala in 1959, an element of federal overreach began to take hold of the Union-State relations, as the will of the Union appeared to override State autonomy. The arrangement was essentially meant to be a constitutional mechanism and provided for restoring normalcy in States where governance had become well-nigh impossible.

Article 356 was optimistically termed a "dead letter" by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, to be used sparingly. Yet, as H.V. Kamath aptly remarked, "Dr. Ambedkar is dead, and the Articles are very much alive", reflecting the misuse that is implicit in this provision as a tool of political expediency. From 1950 to 1994, successive governments, notwithstanding their political hue, indulged in the misuse of Article 356 to the extent of dismissing 'politically obnoxious' elected State governments. Even after the S.R. Bommai case judgment, which aims to restore the federal government's rights and limit the arbitrary acts of Governors, incidents continue. Its frequent invocation – over 130 times since Independence – has distorted that purpose.

Defection has also emerged as a strong threat to the stability of State governments. Democratically-elected governments have fallen after legislators have changed sides over various enticements. It was to prevent this form of democratic erosion that the Anti-Defection Law was enacted through the 52nd Amendment Act of 1985 as part of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, which attracts the disqualification penalty against defectors. But there are still loopholes. The absence of any sort of time-bound framework for Speakers to decide on

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'One Nation One Election' should not become a device for the centralisation of powers; issues such as a strengthening of anti-defection laws cannot be glossed over

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disqualification petitions and provisions for "group defections" has rendered the law ineffective. The result is that defections are still commonplace, leading to unconstitutional changes in regimes.

This is where the proposition put forward by the ONOE to align State election cycles with that of the Lok Sabha gets deeply problematic. In fact, the proposal goes all the way to make amendments in the Constitution, particularly in Articles 83 and 172, which guarantee a five-year term for Parliament and State Assemblies. Some blatant omissions in the governance regime include the misuse of Article 356 and the inadequacy of anti-defection laws. The State governments would face a much tighter squeeze in the ONOE, as their terms would be curtailed or extended to bring them in line with the national election cycle. This reduction in State autonomy is more than an administrative nuisance. It constitutes a deep attack on the federalist structure of the Constitution.

Federal structure under siege

The federal system of India, being a basic feature of Indian democracy, enables States to function as relatively independent units in solving problems of a localised nature. State elections that would have to be held along with the national elections would blur and impair the ability of electors to evaluate the performance of the State government. If the ONOE is held and if there happens to be a midterm ONOE, then State governments which were elected only for 'abbreviated' tenures would breach the democratic principle of "one person, one vote, one value". In case a State government falls midterm, say after three years, the ONOE would lead to elections for a new government that would serve only the remaining time in the synchronised electoral cycle, roughly two years.

This cuts down the tenure of a government, making the mandate of the voter of little value; a new government would not complete its full term, reducing the democratic principle of complete representation. Truncated terms are not only an issue when it comes to State governments but are also of concern to the Lok Sabha too. For instance, from the political turbulence of the mid-1990s, there were elections in 1996, 1998, and 1999.

In fact, if the ONOE had been in place, there would have been another election in 2001, which would add up to four elections in five years. The frequency of elections results in increased costs – financial, administrative, and in terms of human capital – which are not realised in the efficiency that the ONOE is touted to bring. On nominal and practical grounds, each government needs a realistic time period to analyse the existing

socio-political-economic state of affairs, frame adaptive policies and do course corrections. This artificially imposed reduction in the tenure of a government could disrupt governance, resulting in negative consequences that outweigh the usual policy paralysis caused by the enforcement of the Model Code of Conduct during elections.

The challenges in terms of logistics in implementing the ONOE are monumental. India's large electorate base, of over 900 million voters, demands enormous resources to conduct elections. If the Lok Sabha, State and local body elections are aligned, the burden would increase manifold and eventually affect the ECI, security forces, and administrative machinery. The risk of voter fatigue and confusion cannot be ruled out.

Address the issues first

There needs to be reflection before the ONOE can be espoused for fiscal and administrative efficiencies. There is a need to revisit some of the systemic challenges that plague State governments. There needs to be a course correction to ensure that the ONOE does not become a device for the centralisation of powers without addressing issues such as the misuse of Article 356, a strengthening of anti-defection laws, and the issue of the stability of State governments. The federal character of the Constitution is not an arrangement in procedure but a recognition of the diversity and the plurality that constitute the country. Forcing States to fall in line with a unified electoral cycle unduly erodes the autonomy of States and dilutes the democratic essence of governance.

A hurried imposition of the ONOE, without sets of systemic reforms that are necessary to stem the erosion of federalism, would indeed be a frontal attack on the Constitution's basic structure. If this does not happen, then the ONOE can even be a blot instead of being deliverance for Indian democracy.

The fact that a malfunctioning fax machine sat at the heart of a cynical operation aimed at dispensing with the elected government of Jammu and Kashmir, illuminates the frailty as well as opacity regarding certain institutional processes in India, all too sharply. A few such instances make it clear that systemic reform is the immediate need so that people become accountable to the principles of the Constitution.

As long as these foundational areas remain unsorted, the ONOE, rather than solving those structural vulnerabilities, may end up making them starker. True democratic governance requires much more than a routine exercise of simultaneous elections. It is an imperative commitment to the letter and spirit of federalism and to strengthening State governments as equal partners in the federal polity of India.

India, cross-border insolvency and legal reform

The growth in international trade has amplified cross-border insolvency challenges, highlighting the need for effective regulation. A reliable and predictable insolvency framework is essential for economic stability, attracting foreign investments, and facilitating corporate restructuring.

Under the British Raj, India faced significant challenges in managing financial failures and cross-border commerce. To address domestic insolvencies, the Indian Insolvency Act of 1848 was introduced as the first insolvency law. This was later replaced by the Presidency-Towns Insolvency Act 1909, which applied to Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, and the Provincial Insolvency Act, 1920, which governed insolvencies in mofussil regions. While these laws provided a framework for handling domestic insolvencies, they failed to address the complexities of cross-border insolvencies, leaving a critical gap in the legal system.

An evolution

After Independence, these laws remained unchanged, despite the Third Law Commission's 26th Report (1964) recommending modernisation. It was only in the 1990s, driven by economic liberalisation and the pressures of globalisation, that the need for a comprehensive insolvency law, with provisions for cross-border cases, became a focus of national discussions. Committees such as the Eradi Committee (2000), Mitra Committee (2001), and Irani Committee (2005) recommended adopting the United Nations Commission On International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, 1997. In 2015, the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee, drafted the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) Bill, focusing on domestic insolvencies.

Following concerns from the Joint Parliamentary Committee about the absence of cross-border insolvency provisions, clauses 233A and 233B were added, later codified as Sections 234 and 235 of the IBC. Section 234 allows the



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The dismal state of cross-border insolvency law and regulation, with unenforceable governing sections and slow progress on amendments, needs to be reversed

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Indian government to enforce IBC provisions in foreign countries through reciprocal agreements, while Section 235 outlines the procedure for seeking assistance from foreign courts through a letter of request.

Cross-border insolvency challenges in India

The State Bank of India vs Jet Airways (India) Limited (2019, SCC OnLine NCLT 7875), brought Sections 234 and 235 of the IBC under scrutiny. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) identified two critical issues – first, the absence of a reciprocal arrangement between India and the Netherlands for cross-border insolvency resolution, and, second, the non-notification of these sections by the central government, making them legally unenforceable. The case highlighted the inactive status of these provisions, effectively labelling them as "dead letters" – provisions that exist in theory but cannot be applied in practice.

To address this regulatory gap, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs constituted two expert committees: the Insolvency Law Committee (2018) and the Cross-Border Insolvency Rules/Regulation Committee (2020). Both committees identified the shortcomings in the current framework and recommended adopting the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency. These recommendations were later endorsed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance in its Thirty-Second Report, "Implementation of IBC - Pitfalls and Solutions" (2021), and reiterated in its Sixty-Seventh Report", (2024).

In both reports, the Standing Committee stressed the urgent need for a cross-border insolvency framework to strengthen the IBC, 2016. However, the dismal state of cross-border insolvency regulation in India persists, with unenforceable governing sections and extremely slow progress on necessary amendments.

In *Jet Airways (India) Limited vs State Bank of India* (2019, SCC OnLine NCLAT 1216), the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) considered a "cross-border insolvency

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protocol", an internationally recognised approach now used as an ad hoc solution for regulating cross-border insolvencies.

The need for reform

First, while protocols have been effective in addressing individual cases, they remain an ad hoc/temporary solution. The need for court approvals increases judicial burden, transaction costs, and delays resolutions, reducing the debtor's asset value. Experts underline the importance of adopting a structured framework. Therefore, it is recommended that India adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law.

Second, reforming the outdated communication methods between Indian and foreign courts is crucial, especially for cross-border insolvency cases. The adoption of the Judicial Insolvency Network (JIN) Guidelines (2016) and its Modalities of Court-to-Court Communication (2018) would modernise judicial coordination, enhance transparency, and improve efficiency in handling cross-border insolvency matters.

Third, Section 60(5) of the IBC, with its non-obstante clause, restricts civil courts from exercising jurisdiction over insolvency matters, including cross-border cases, leaving the NCLT as the sole adjudicating authority. However, the NCLT lacks the power to recognise or enforce foreign judgments or proceedings, which significantly limits its effectiveness in managing cross-border insolvency matters. This limitation is further exacerbated by the failure to implement Rule 11 of the NCLAT Rules, 2016, for IBC matters, preventing the NCLT from exercising inherent jurisdiction or comity to address cross-border insolvency issues. To resolve these challenges and ensure effective management of cross-border insolvency cases, it is imperative to expand the powers of the NCLT.

Implementing these key recommendations will pave the way for India to develop a strong and sustainable framework for managing cross-border insolvencies.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Terror attack

The Editorial, "Force of ideas" (January 3), was interesting. But I wonder whether there is any such thing as a 'lone wolf'. The terrorist is an integral component of a vast conspiracy.

Jacques Fortier,
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

The world needs to get

together to wipe out terror. Sharing vital inputs and a single-minded focus are necessary. The Islamic State needs to be watched closely while the sources of funds would need hawk-like vigil.

Balasubramanian Pavani,
Secunderabad

'BLS' in curriculum

It is apt to consider including BLS (basic life

support), which includes cardio pulmonary resuscitation(CPR), a life-saving skill, as a part of the curriculum for students of Class 10. Irrespective of the syllabus, all students in State schools, private and aided school students of secondary school/high school should be trained in CPR/BLS, assessed and

certified. A pass in BLS should be made mandatory before issuing the senior secondary school examination certificate. BLS training is essential because it teaches individuals how to properly manage critical medical emergencies, such as cardiac arrest and obstructed airways. Without immediate and appropriate attention, victims of cardiac

arrest and obstructed airways can lose their lives. As young people are the country's future, teaching them life-saving techniques is necessary.

Dr. A.G. Malavika,
Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

The essence of cricket

The game of cricket has

been considered a gentleman's game, with an

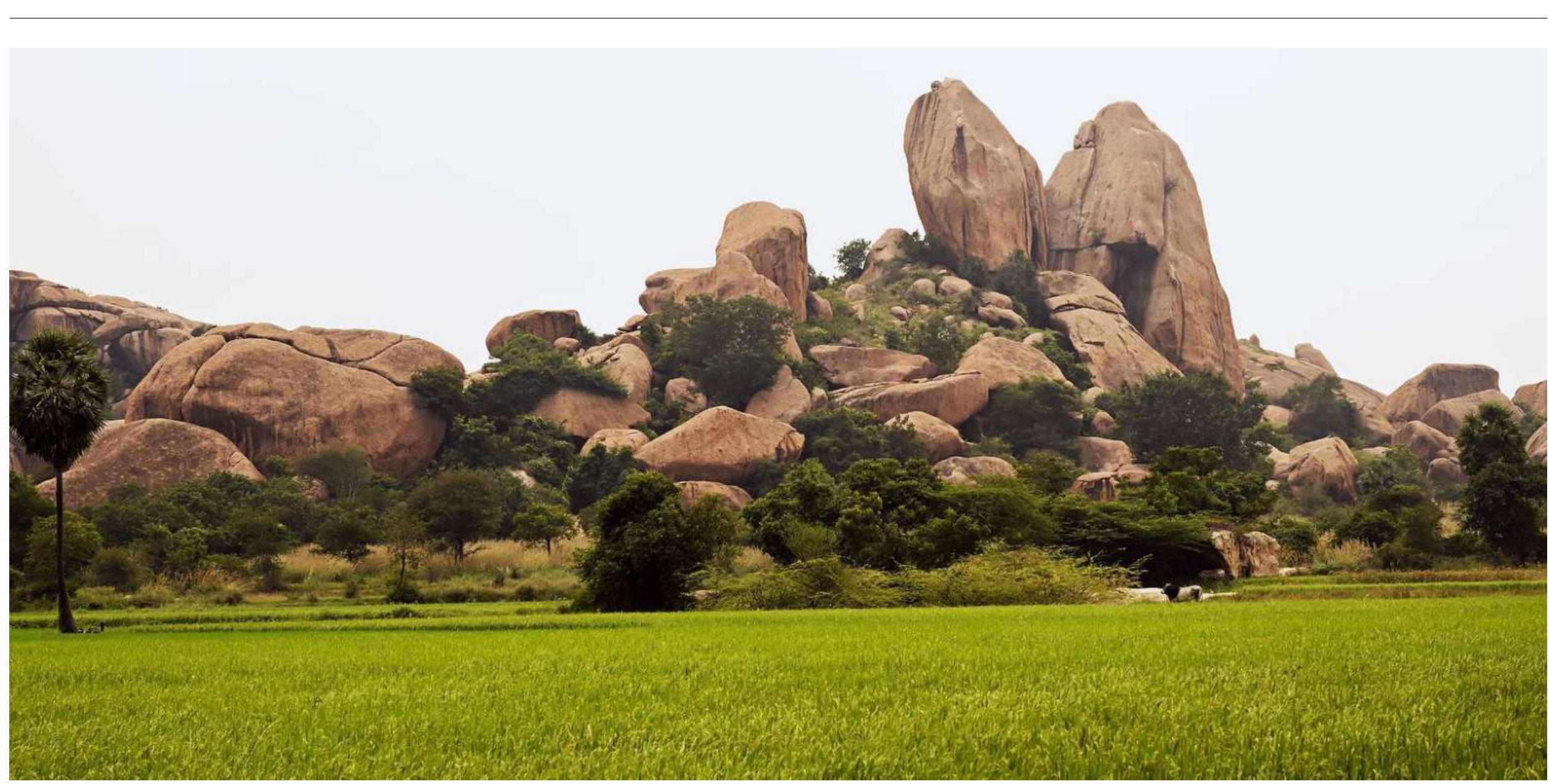
emphasis on fair play with mutual respect. Players like Sir Garfield Sobers are a living testimony to the embodiment of this game. Let it not deteriorate and become ugly. Let us hope that the 'cricket elders' are able to counsel the present generation.

Dr. V. Purushothaman,
Chennai

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GROUND ZERO



Aritappatti, a biodiversity heritage site, at Melur taluk in Madurai. G. MOORTHY Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F> Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+Bu7senHpQdhODg1>

In Madurai, mining for tungsten and trouble

There have been sustained protests in Madurai district of Tamil Nadu ever since the Union government announced in November 2024 that it had granted tungsten mining rights in eight blocks to Hindustan Zinc, a subsidiary of Vedanta. The residents of the region, particularly Melur taluk, which has the Aritappatti biodiversity heritage site, worry about their land, lives, and livelihoods, reports C. Palanivel Rajan

On the hot afternoon of December 29, more than 300 women at Kesampatti village in Melur taluk in Madurai district, stand in a circle. Most of them are daily wage labourers or farm workers and are of different ages. Clad in colourful sarees, the women clap their hands, sing, and dance in a synchronised fashion. This is *kummi*, a folk dance that is performed in parts of Tamil Nadu.

However, this is not a festival or religious event, when *kummi* is generally performed; it is a protest site at the entrance of the village. Through performance, the women are agitating against the Union government's proposed extraction of tungsten, a rare element found in this region, which is critical for automobile and defence industries and green energy technologies. "Enga mala sami kavalkarana irunthu makkalayum nilathayum kappan (Our hill god being a protector will protect both our people and land)," goes their *kummi* song.

A. Kalpana, who has never participated in a protest, says, "Our art, religion, food, culture, and tradition are interlinked with this landscape. Without our land, we will become nothing."

The *kummi* protest is part of the weekly agitations that have been organised by activists and the residents of panchayats in Melur taluk since November 7, 2024. The Ministry of Mines announced that it had granted tungsten mining rights in eight blocks, spanning 5,000 acres, through an auction, to Hindustan Zinc Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta Limited, a listed company. The Melur region, proposed for mining, includes the villages of Aritappatti and Nayakkarappatti, which are rich in scheelite, a key source of tungsten, and are also home to several heritage sites.

On November 23, more than 20 panchayats of four panchayat unions in Madurai passed resolutions against the project. A few days later, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin urged the Modi government to cancel the award of tungsten mining rights in Madurai district and said that he would not allow it as the people were opposed to it. The Ministry, in turn, issued a statement saying "inputs were taken from the Government of Tamil Nadu before the block was put up for auction."

C. Jeeva, resident of Kesampatti and an organiser of the protest, says, "Though we have organised similar protests and rallies against granite quarrying in the Melur region in the past, we know that the struggle this time is against the Union Ministry and one of the biggest conglomerates in the world. It is going to be a tiring and prolonged battle, but we will persist."

Anger in Aritappatti

K. Selvaraj, 44, an environmental activist based in Kambur village near Melur taluk, is critical of the Ministry's decision of naming the project after a hamlet of about 20 houses.

"By naming it after Nayakkarappatti, they made sure that it did not get immediate attention from the public. If it had been named Melur or Madurai tungsten block, the opposition to this would have been instant and more intense," he says.

Selvaraj has been part of protests earlier. Last year, hundreds of residents from over 15 villages in Melur taluk staged a sit-in protest at Sekkipatti

Our art, religion, food, culture, and tradition are interlinked with this landscape. Without our land, we will become nothing.

A. KALPANA
Protester

village condemning the district administration for inviting tenders for the operation of granite quarries in the taluk. This time, he was among the first few to oppose the project through petitions and Gram Sabha resolutions. "I went around telling people about the problems that the project will cause, and organised meetings to discuss protests and legal remedies," he says.

Selvaraj says no panchayat president opposed the resolutions. "Since, this is a government project, some of the presidents were hesitant to record our resolutions, but eventually they agreed," he says.

The protests and resolutions, Selvaraj says, were necessary, since Nayakkarappatti block comprises 11 villages, including Aritappatti, a biodiversity heritage site.

A. Durka Devi, 26, the only postgraduate degree holder from Nayakkarappatti, says the seven rocky granite hills that include areas of the Koolampatti, Aritappatti, Nayakkarappatti, and Meenakshipuram villages have historical significance. "These hills contain evidence dating back to the 16th century Pandya kingdom. They also feature several megalithic structures, rock-cut temples, Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, and Jain beds. If not for these historical records, this place would have been turned into stone, dust, and sand long ago," she says.

Noting the importance of the Melur region, a group of archaeologists, including C. Santhalirangan, released a statement supporting the people's protest against the mining project. In it, they wrote that two Brahmi stone inscriptions dating back 2,300 years could be found in the Kazhinja malai, one of the seven hills. They also said that the Laguleesar sculpture in a 7th-8th century rock cut temple in the area was rare and should never be disturbed.

Devi says Aritappatti was notified as Tamil Nadu's first biodiversity heritage site in 2022. The site covers the Aritappatti and Meenakshipuram villages in Madurai district. "It houses around 250 species of birds, including three raptors – the Laggar falcon, the Shaheen falcon, and Bonelli's eagle; 200 natural spring ponds; and three check dams," she says, the information at her fingertips. The region is also home to wildlife, including the Indian pangolin and slender loris.

The rocky hills stand tall and are surrounded



Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader, Vaiko, staging a protest in Melur taluk against the proposed project in Madurai. G.MOORTHY



The people know that the State government had no say in projects like these. But our hope is that the government will at least stand by our side

K. SELVARAJ
Environmental activist

by green patches of farmland. The farms, which are mostly fed by the Mullaperiyar dam, use the ponds as their water source, say residents.

Given the massive opposition to the project, especially in Aritappatti, on December 24 the government asked the Geological Survey of India to redefine the boundaries of the Nayakkarappatti block by excluding the biodiversity heritage site from it. It also asked the Tamil Nadu government to keep the process of issuing the Letter of Intent to the preferred bidder, Hindustan Zinc, on hold for the time being.

But the resurvey order caused more fear. The residents say they had thought the project was coming to a halt altogether as the Tamil Nadu government had passed a resolution in the State Assembly on December 9 saying it would not allow the mining project.

Selvaraj sits on one of the hillocks near Aritappatti along with villagers to discuss the next steps. They decide that they will embark on a 25-kilometre-long protest march from Narasingampatti in Melur taluk to Tallakulam in Madurai city on January 7.

Turning away from the villagers, Selvaraj says the entire population of Melur taluk depends on land for their livelihood, as their primary income is through farming and livestock management. But more importantly, the people consider the hills sacred, he says.

"Humans who did some sort of sacrifice for the village or to the people became gods. And they now reside in these hills, so we celebrate them and worship them," says K. Revathi, 25, an agricultural worker from Nayakkarappatti.

Devi says she does not understand the Union government's plan. "What is the point of saying they will leave out Aritappatti alone when they want to destroy the rest?" she asks.

The State government's say

There is also suspicion about the State government's position and motives. I. Selvam, 42, a farmer in Aritappatti, says while the State government had initially said it was against the mining project, Ministers have been trying to prevent villagers from passing resolutions at Gram Sabha meetings. "Knowing that the Gram Sabha decisions will have an effect on the implementation of the project, Commercial Taxes and Registration Minister P. Moorthy (representing Madurai East) influenced the villagers and told them not to pass resolutions during meetings," Selvam alleges.

"The people know that the State government had no say in projects like these. But our hope is that the government will at least stand by our side."

In an order dated October 21, 2024, the Ministry of Mines had said that it had been empowered to auction blocks for the grant of an exploration license under Section 20A of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957.

Citing the amendment, R.S. Mugilan, an environmental activist known for his agitation against the Sterlite copper plant in Thoothukudi and the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tirunelveli, says the State government's authority over resources has always been limited in matters of national interest, such as nuclear power.

"This was evident yet again when Union Minister of State R. Sudha asked in the Lok Sabha whether the Union government would ban oil and gas exploration activities in the delta districts, which have been declared as special agricultural zones by the State government," says Mugilan. "The Union Minister of State, Kirti Vardhan Singh, replied that certain areas were notified as eco-sensitive zones or areas based on proposals from States, but said that there was no such proposal from the Tamil Nadu government."

Mugilan says all political parties want to play the blame game.

The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam has opposed the project through protests and rallies and has also held the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government responsible for auctioning the mine. The BJP has slammed the two Dravidian parties for "misleading" the people. Bharatiya Janata Party State President K. Annamalai, who finds himself in a tricky spot, has said he has appealed to the Minister for Mines, G. Kishan Reddy, to keep the project on hold. Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Vaiko has accused the Centre of awarding the tungsten mining contract to Hindustan Zinc without consulting the State government. "In the midst of this, political parties fail to understand the toll that so-called developmental projects take on the lives of the people," he says.

He explains the potential effects of the tungsten project: "Studies in China show that communities near tungsten mining sites have experienced elevated levels of tungsten in soil and water, leading to increased health risks. What assurance do the people of Madurai have that their health and lives will be fine?"

Mugilan cites the Bhopal gas tragedy as an instance of government apathy. "It took 40 years for the government to remove hundreds of tonnes of toxic waste from Bhopal from the chemical factory. This shows India's backwardness in dealing with such tragedies," he adds.

After submitting a petition to G. Kishan Reddy during the last Parliament session, Madurai MP Su. Venkatesan organised a protest along with fellow cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) in Melur to inform people about the importance of their role in opposing the project.

"Though the resolution passed by the Tamil Nadu government in the Assembly may have political value, it has no legal value owing to the amendment passed in 2023 [to strengthen the extraction and exploration of critical minerals]," Venkatesan explains. As the Union government has turned a deaf ear to the people's demands, the people must keep protesting, he says.

The need for critical minerals

M. Vetriselvan, an advocate and a member of Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation based in Tamil Nadu, says, "Critical minerals, which were included in the Act in 2023, have geopolitical value. Following the U.S. government's 2018 policy to secure critical minerals to shift the country's dependence from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the international market for critical minerals such as tungsten has been opened. That is why the Indian government has chalked out ways to secure critical minerals located in various places in the country."

Vetriselvan says if the State government truly objects to the project, it will have to pass a law to protect the natural resources of Melur taluk, similar to what it did to safeguard the delta region.

Selvaraj remembers how the protesters confronted representatives of the Geological Survey of India when officials visited the areas to study rocks. "It ended in an argument. We were unaware that the study was the first step towards destroying our livelihoods," he says.

He says in addition to the Nayakkarappatti tungsten block, another 35,000 hectares of land in Kambalipatti, Rayarpatti, and Rajanampatti in Melur taluk have been studied and are ready to be auctioned. "Now, all they have to do is sanction the project," he says.

Mookai, a woman in her 70s, standing next to Selvaraj, points to a hilltop and narrates the folktale of a village informer, Vemban, who protected the villagers from robbers and invaders. She says he starved to death on the same hill after the robbers pushed away the ladder that he would use to climb to the hilltop. To honour his life, the hilltop was named Kazhinja malai.

Mookai believes that Vemban still protects the village from the hilltop. "He will prevent this region from turning into dust," she says.

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From Page One**India 'protests' China's new counties in Ladakh**

The meeting is to resolve the tension that erupted in eastern Ladakh in June 2020 that has since been termed the 'Galwan clashes'.

In another significant turn, Mr. Jaiswal categorically spelt out India's concern on the announced mega dam project over Yarlung Tsangpo in the deep gorges of the eastern Himalayas that fall under Chinese control. "As a lower riparian state with established user rights to the waters of the river, we have consistently expressed, through expert-level as well as diplomatic channels, our views and concerns to the Chinese side over mega projects on rivers in their territory," said Mr. Jaiswal.

The Chinese authorities have approved the construction of the hydel power project in the lower reaches of Yarlung Tsangpo. The mega dam is designed to be the largest infrastructure project in the world. Once constructed, the gigantic dam would dwarf even the Three Gorges Dam. The MEA spokesperson hinted that the announcement of the dam was not communicated to India through official channels as is the norm in the case of neighbours sharing major rivers and said the MEA got to know the information through a news report by Xinhua. India's view, Mr. Jaiswal said, was "reiterated, along with need for transparency and consultation with downstream countries, following the latest report."

"The Chinese side has been urged to ensure that the interests of downstream states of the Brahmaputra are not harmed by activities in upstream areas. We will continue to monitor and take necessary measures to protect our interests," said Mr. Jaiswal.

'Draft policy worse than repealed farm laws'

"The objective is the entry of corporate agri-business to convert 7,057 registered markets and 22,931 Gramene Haats across India to be integrated with Digital Public Infrastructure. This proposal aligns closely with the perspectives of the World Bank and International Finance Capital regarding the value chain as 'the full range of value adding activities required to bring a product or service through the different phases of production including procurement of raw materials and other inputs,'" the SKM statement said.

On the proposal to integrate both private and public sectors through advanced technologies such as digital public infrastructure, blockchain, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI), the SKM said these reforms also propose deregulation, effectively allowing the private sector – specifically, corporate agribusinesses – to establish dominance over production, processing, and marketing.

PM calls AAP a 'disaster' that needs to be removed

The Prime Minister hit out at the AAP-led Delhi government – which often refers to itself as *kattar imandar* (staunchly honest) – as a *kattar beiman* (dishonest to the core) government that exploited social activist Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement to come to power.

Mr. Modi accused AAP of making false promises and indulging in corruption in numerous sectors, ranging from school education to fighting pollution and liquor trade. "These people commit corruption and then glorify it," he said.

Kejriwal's retort

Addressing a press conference after Mr. Modi's address, Mr. Kejriwal said in 2015, two governments came to power, the BJP at the Centre and AAP in Delhi with both having control over the affairs of the Capital.

"If the BJP had done any work in the Capital, Mr. Modi would not have had to spend 39 minutes of his 43-minute speech cursing the people of the Capital and the government they elected with the largest mandate," Mr. Kejriwal said.

The AAP national convener added that he could list a host of developments from education and health to water and sanitation in Delhi but the Centre was unable to do so.

Mr. Modi promised that 2025 would usher in a new era of good governance in the national capital. "The year 2025 will strengthen the spirit of 'nation first, countrymen first,' and mark the launch of a new politics focused on nation-building and public welfare," he said.

He added that the people of Delhi would finally be able to benefit from good national schemes such as Pradhanmantri Suryaghar Murti Bijli Yojana and Ayushman Bharat Yojana that would provide the poor and middle class.

'A working govt.'

Commenting on the Prime Minister laying the foundation stone of a college and two new campuses for the Delhi University in 10 years, Mr. Kejriwal said: "In these 10 years, I built more than 22,000 new classrooms, three new universities, 11 vocational colleges, and six university campuses. Our government is a working government, not the one that only lays foundation stones before elections."

In a veiled attack at the former Chief Minister, Mr. Modi said he could also have built a *sheesh mahal* (glass palace) for himself but his dream was to ensure homes for everyone in the country.

Tension erupts in Kangpokpi as mob clashes with police

Photos of injured SP with injuries on forehead went viral on social media; the unrest stems from the resistance to Central forces taking possession of 'community bunkers' in Manipur's Saibol

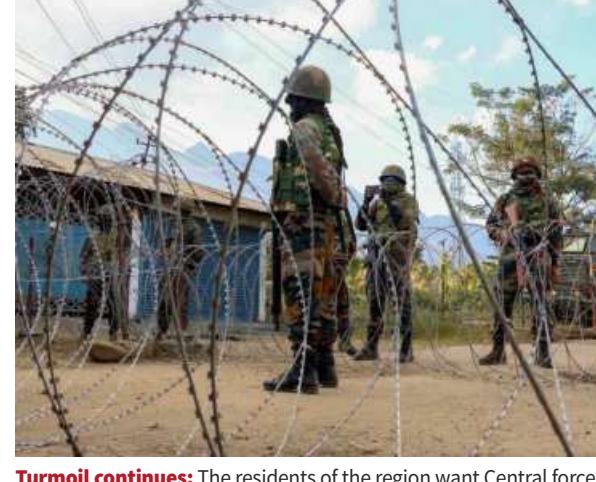
The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A mob attacked the offices of the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police in Manipur's Kuki-majority Kangpokpi district on Friday evening.

Photos of the SP with injuries on the forehead went viral on social media although there was no official confirmation.

Tension was brewing in the district for the past 48 hours after Central forces took possession of some "community bunkers" in Saibol village bordering Imphal East district. The locals wanted the district police to remove the Central forces from the area.

In the evening, the protesters marched up to the SP's office and attempted to seal it. Some protesters also tried to storm the office of the Deputy Commissioner. Videos circulating on social media platforms showed some of them were armed and in battle



Turmoil continues: The residents of the region want Central forces removed from the area. FILE PHOTO

fatigues. Resistance from the police led to stone pelting during which a few people were injured. Some vehicles at the SP's office were damaged.

Additional central forces were rushed to the spot to bring the situation under control.

Economic blockade

The Kuki-Zo Council, an apex body of Kuki-Zo communities in Manipur, imposed an economic blockade in all Kuki-Zo inhabited districts of the State from midnight on Thursday till 2 a.m. on Saturday to protest against the "disregard for tribal rights and dignity" by the State government and the Centre.

The blockade followed a "total shutdown" in the Kuki-Zo-dominated Kangpokpi district called by the Committee on Tribal Unity on Friday.

Congress created ethnic conflict, says Biren Singh

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh on Friday accused the Congress of having created the ethnic conflict in the State between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities. Mr. Singh also clarified that his apology to the people of the State on New Year's Eve was only meant for the victims of the conflict, and not the "terrorists" responsible for it.

He was speaking after Ajay Kumar Bhalla was sworn in as the new Governor of Manipur. Mr. Bhalla is a retired IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre and was the country's longest-serving Union Home Secretary.

After protests, MHA grants foreign fund registration to NGO

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Friday granted foreign fund registration to the Sambhavna Trust, an NGO that provides free treatment to the victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak. This comes five years after the Ministry cancelled the NGO's registration on the grounds that it had not uploaded its annual reports on MHA's portal.

The clinics run by the NGO, which depends on donations from 35,000 individuals outside India, are on the verge of being shut down due to paucity of funds.

Over the past week, members of the Sambhavna Trust and patients availing the treatment have been protesting the MHA's delay in processing the application.

Radhe Lal Napit, who works for the research department of the Trust, said that the association had applied for a fresh registration under the Foreign Contribution Regulation

Sambhavna Trust, an NGO, provides free treatment to the victims of the 1984 Bhopal gas leak

Act (FCRA) in 2023, after the mandatory wait of three years since the registration was cancelled in 2019.

The Trust first received FCRA registration in 1999. The registration is typically valid for five years unless cancelled earlier.

"In 2019, when the registration was up for renewal, we applied and filed the annual returns. But due to glitches in the portal, the returns were not uploaded. The Ministry issued a show-cause notice and cancelled the registration.

"Though we applied in 2023, the application was kept pending. After the protests, we got to know today [Friday] that the FCRA registration has been granted," Mr. Napit said.

SC chastises ED for 15-hour interrogation of former Cong. MLA

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has scolded the Punjab and Haryana High Court's observation that the zeal shown by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to interrogate former Haryana Congress MLA Surender Panwar at a stretch for nearly 15 hours on a charge of illegal mining linked to money laundering under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

A Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and A.G. Masih said the incident revealed a "shocking state of affairs". It refused to interfere with the High Court finding in September 2024 that Mr. Panwar's arrest under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) was illegal.

In fact, the High Court had recorded a *prima facie* opinion that Mr. Panwar was not "found involved in any illegal activity, in any manner whatsoever, attracting the offence of money laundering under the PMLA". It had also noted that illegal mining was not a scheduled offence under the PMLA.

The Supreme Court dismissed the ED's appeal against the High Court decision on the legality of the arrest. The apex court, however, clarified that the findings of the High Court were restricted to the issue of the legality of the arrest.

The top court labelled the conduct of the ED as inhumane, pointing out that Mr. Panwar was suspected of being a "beneficiary of a syndicate running illegal mining", and not a terror accused. "You have virtually forced a person to make a statement," the top court Bench remarked orally.

In a statement on the latest GST numbers, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh claimed India was locked in a "pernicious cycle of low consumption-low investment-low growth-low wages".

"The litany of demoralising news on the economic front from the deceleration in growth to the poor GST revenue collections –

Congress urges Centre to focus on economy amid 'slump' in GST collection

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday claimed that the last quarter of the current fiscal year (2024-25) witnessed the "second-slowest pace" of collection of Goods and Services Tax (GST) in the past three years and urged the government to focus on the complexities of the economy instead of imposing a tax on popcorn.

In a statement on the latest GST numbers, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh claimed India was locked in a "pernicious cycle of low consumption-low investment-low growth-low wages".

"In a statement on the latest GST numbers, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh claimed India was locked in a "pernicious cycle of low consumption-low investment-low growth-low wages".

"The litany of demoralising news on the economic front from the deceleration in growth to the poor GST revenue collections –



stead be used as a stimulus for the economy.

"A GST 2.0 – a truly Good and Simple Tax like the Indian National Congress had envisaged in its Nyay Patra for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections – must be instituted," he said.

Mr. Ramesh also added that "tax and investigative agency terrorism that was deterring private investment and leading to flight of entrepreneurs must end".

He said the latest data from December showed that GST collection receipts increased at the second-slowest pace in three-and-a-half years. "Net GST collections, after adjusting for refunds, slumped to 3.3% growth – the lowest in FY25. This is concerning news, on several fronts," he claimed.

Call for GST 2.0

The Congress leader said the Union Budget, to be presented next month, must provide income support to the poor and tax relief for the middle class. He also suggested that government expenditure must in-

SC to look into Dera chief's acquittal in murder case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday consented to look into an appeal filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) challenging the acquittal of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh and four others in the 2002 murder of Ranjit Singh, a former manager of the sect.

A Bench issued notice to the Dera chief and the other former accused in the case. The Punjab and Haryana High Court had acquitted them in May last year on the grounds of a "tainted and sketchy" investigation.

The Dera chief is currently serving a 20-year jail term for raping two disciples. He was also awarded life imprisonment for the murder of a journalist, Ram Chander Chhatrapati.

Allahabad HC stays arrest of SP MP in Sambhal case

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Allahabad High Court on Friday stayed the arrest of Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Ziaur Rahman Barq in connection with the violence that broke in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal during a survey of Shahi Jama Masjid mosque.

The court, however, refused to quash the FIR against the SP MP stating that the case *prima facie* discloses the cognisable offence against the petitioner. They mentioned that the probe against Mr. Barq would continue and asked the MP to cooperate with the investigators.

The violence in Sambhal broke out on November 24 as the people from the minority community protested against the court-ordered survey of the Mughal Era Mosque. The protest turned violent which left five dead and scores getting injured.

French aircraft carrier to have Goa, Kochi stopovers

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

French aircraft carrier strike group (CSG) led by *FNS Charles De Gaulle* on a deployment in the Indian Ocean is set to make stopovers at Goa and Kochi in the next few days. The CSG operates Rafale-M fighter jets, 26 of which India is looking to procure, and a deal is expected to be concluded in the next couple of months.

Britain has also announced that its CSG led by carrier *Queen Elizabeth* would on a deployment in the Indian Ocean Region and make a stopover in India.

Deployed in the Indian Ocean as part of Mission Clemenceau 25, the French CSG, comprising the aircraft carrier *FNS Charles De Gaulle*, along with its embarked air fleet and its escort vessels (frigates and supply ships), will be making stopovers at Goa and Kochi from January.



The *FNS Charles de Gaulle* and Indian Navy ships will take part in the 42nd edition of Exercise Varuna. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ary 4, the French Embassy said in a statement.

India and France have bilateral exercises between all three services – Ex Shakti on land, Ex Varuna at sea, and Ex Garuda in the air. India also plays host to numerous operational stopovers made by French Navy vessels, accounting for 16 port calls since 2022, it said.

During Mission Clemenceau 25, the *Charles de Gaulle* CSG and Indian navy ships will take part in the 42nd edition of Exercise Varuna. "The aim of

this aero-naval training is to develop interoperability between our two navies, and to prepare crews to deal with a multi-milieu threat [air, surface, submarine] as part of a coalition," the statement said.

As two Indian Ocean powers, India and France have long maritime cooperation. Since 2008, France has been a member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which was initiated by India and brings together 25 navies from countries of the Indian Ocean.

Ishita Mishra

NEW DELHI

A special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court in Lucknow on Friday sentenced 28 persons to life imprisonment for the murder of Chandan Gupta, 22, during a communal clash which broke out at the Tiranga Yatra in Kasganj on January 26, 2018.

The court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Vivekanand Sharan Tripathi on Thursday convicted the accused under Sections 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder), 147 (rioting), 124(A) (sedition) of the IPC along with the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act and the CLA Act. As many as seven people were also convicted under the Arms Act.

Those awarded life imprisonment are: Salim, Wasim, Nasim, Jahid 'Jagga', Asiq Qureshi, Aslam Qureshi, Akram, Taufeeq, Khilan, Shabab, Rahat, Sa-

lam, Mohsin, Asif Jimwala, Saquib, Bablu, Nishu, Waseem, Imran, Shamshad, Jafar, Sakir, Khalid Parvez, Faizan, Imran Qayum, Saqir Siddiqui, Munazir and Amir.

Among the 28 convicts, one Munazir Rafi, was already in judicial custody in connection with the murder of Mohini Tomar, a lawyer in Kasganj. As many as 26 accused were out on bail who surrendered before the court on Thursday and Friday, when the conviction and quantum of punishment were announced, respectively.

Two other accused, Nasiruddin and Asim Qureshi, were acquitted in the case.

Azizuddin, another accused allegedly involved in the matter, died a few years ago. "The prosecution will approach the court against the acquittal of two persons by the special court," Mr. Tripathi told media.

India pledges support to Maldives to help it navigate economic issues

In a meeting with the Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel 'appreciated' the financial assistance, which reflects India's 'First Responder' status for the Indian Ocean archipelago

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The Maldives is a "very concrete" expression of India's neighbourhood first policy, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said, pledging New Delhi's support to the Indian Ocean archipelago as its economy is reeling under some stress.

In his opening remarks at the meeting with Maldivian Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel, Mr. Jaishankar noted the finalisation of a framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border trade between India and the Maldives and listed New Delhi's financial assistance to Male to help it deal with economic issues.

Both sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of high impact community development projects under phase-III in



Maldives Foreign Minister Abdulla Khaleel with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

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the Maldives through grant assistance from India.

In his comments, Mr. Khaleel reaffirmed President Mohamed Muizzu's firm commitment to work closely with New Delhi in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership.

Mr. Khaleel arrived here on Thursday on a three-day visit to explore ways to bolster bilateral ties in several key areas including

"I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions has been signed," Mr. Jaishankar said. "We have increased our engagement in various sectors and I do want to say that India has always stood by Maldives. For us, you are a very concrete expression of our neighbourhood first policy," he added.

Mr. Jaishankar noted the assistance extended by

India last year to help the Maldives deal with a debt crisis. This included the resubscription of treasury bills and currency swap lines of USD 400 million and 3,000 crore rupees.

"We have also facilitated the export of essential commodities to the Maldives. That has been very much a tradition in our relationship," he said.

The Maldives is one of India's key maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region and the overall bilateral ties including in areas of defence and security witnessed an upward trajectory under the previous government in Male.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Khaleel took stock of progress made on the understandings reached during the visit of President Muizzu to India in October.

"External Affairs Minis-

ter S. Jaishankar reaffirmed the importance India attaches to its bilateral ties with Maldives and assured continued support to Maldives, under India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and Vision SAGAR," it said. SAGAR stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region.

The ministry said Mr. Khaleel, on his part, appreciated the timely emergency financial assistance extended by India to Maldives in times of need, reflecting India's role as the "First Responder" of the Maldives.

Foreign Minister Khaleel reaffirmed President Muizzu's and the Government of Maldives' firm commitment to work closely with the Government of India in realizing the Joint Vision for India-Maldives Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership," the MEA said in a statement.

IT Ministry notifies draft rules on data protection law, seeks feedback by Feb. 18

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI

Data must be deleted if a user is not social media platform for an extended period of time, say rules

protect personal data in its possession or under its control... by taking reasonable security safeguards to prevent personal data breach," the rules say, by providing for technical and operational safeguards. Within 72 hours of a data breach, the Data Protection Board of India, which is yet to be set up, should be informed, the rules say.

they're collecting, why they're collecting it, and a fair account of the details necessary to enable the Data Principal to give specific and informed consent for the processing of her personal data".

Consent managers

The draft also provides for the registration of so-called consent managers, which work with data fiduciaries for collecting consent under the specified format from users. Subject to certain 'standards', the government and its 'instrumentalities' can collect data for the purpose of

providing subsidies and benefits, the draft says. Data collected for "statistical" purposes is also exempt.

A data fiduciary "shall

protect personal data in its possession or under its control... by taking reasonable security safeguards to prevent personal data breach," the rules say, by providing for technical and operational safeguards. Within 72 hours of a data breach, the Data Protection Board of India, which is yet to be set up, should be informed, the rules say.

In certain cases where a user is not using an e-commerce provider, social media platform, or online gaming service anymore for an extended period of time, the rules say, their data must be deleted, after providing 48 hours of advance notice and time to stop deletion.

Children's data
For minors, "appropriate technical and organisational measures [shall be adopted] to ensure that verifiable consent of the parent is obtained before the processing of personal data of a child," it says.

'Constructive criticism of SC verdicts vital for growth'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Retiring Supreme Court judge Justice C.T. Ravikumar on Friday said constructive criticism of Supreme Court judgments of public significance must be encouraged, while noting that the people of India are, after all, the guardians of the judiciary.

He said public discussion of SC judgments of significance was vital for the development of the law. "I am of the firm view that any judgment of public importance, there should be a public discussion and it should follow constructive criticism on it," he said at his farewell.

The judge said if the judiciary was the guardian of the Constitution, who should keep an eye on the judges but the public.

EPFO completes rollout of centralised system for pensioners

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

termised the move a historic milestone. "This transformative initiative empowers pensioners to access their pension seamlessly from any bank, any branch in the country. It eliminates the need for physical verification visits and simplifies the pension disbursement process. CPPS is a testament to our commitment to modernising EPFO services and ensuring convenience, transparency, and efficiency for our pensioners," Mr. Mandaviya said.

Paradigm shift

The EPFO has been maintaining that the CPPS is a paradigm shift from the existing pension disbursement system that is decentralised, with each zonal/regional office of the EPFO maintaining separate agreements with only three to four banks.

BJP to launch two-week campaign on Constitution, Ambedkar from January 11

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Hours after the Congress launched a campaign on Constitution, the BJP on Friday announced that it would launch its own two-week campaign on January 11 to spread awareness of the country's supreme legal document and its framers Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

The BJP's "Samvidhan Gaurav Abhiyan" is clearly aimed at positioning itself as a political force that truly understands the importance of the Constitution, following Opposition parties' relentless accusations that the BJP has attempted to weaken the values of the document. The Congress launched its "Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan" campaign during last year's Lok Sabha election

Sources said its nation-

wide campaign will run from January 11 till Republic Day on January 26, and will focus on districts with a significant population of Scheduled Castes (SCs).

Three BJP leaders – Vinod Tawde, Tarun Chugh, and Dushyant Kumar Gautam – will supervise the campaign, with Mr. Tawde named as its convener.

The BJP will organise programmes in at least 50 cities, including all State capitals, apart from numerous local-level exercises, the sources said. Different wings of the party will also reach out to students to highlight constitutional values, they added.

The issue of the Constitution has become particularly sensitive for the BJP following the Opposition's campaign during last year's Lok Sabha election

alleging that the ruling party wanted a brute majority in the Lok Sabha in order to effect radical constitutional changes, including ending reservations.

This resulted in a subpar electoral performance by the BJP though it secured a comfortable majority along with its allies.

Shah's speech

The Winter Session saw a debate on India's constitutional journey, during which the Congress and other Opposition parties seized on a part of Union Home Minister Amit Shah's speech to accuse him of insulting Dr. Ambedkar. Mr. Shah accused the Opposition parties of distorting his speech, with the BJP asserting that it is the Congress that has repeatedly insulted Dr. Ambedkar.

Senior bureaucrat Faiz Ahmed Kidwai is new chief of DGCA

Jagriti Chandra

NEW DELHI

Senior IAS officer Faiz Ahmed Kidwai is the new Director-General (D-G) of the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).



Faiz Ahmed Kidwai

D.C. Sharma, was assigned the additional charge of the D-G.

The top official has the task before him of resolving the stalemate between airlines and pilots over the latter's duty and rest norms. The new rules announced in 2024 increased weekly rest for pilots from 36 hours to 48 hours as well as curtailed night flying following concerns from the cockpit crew over mounting fatigue as well as instances of deaths of pilots while on duty.

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE
BANGALORE-560 012
Corrigendum to Advertisement No. R(HR)308-2024/5 dated 07/12/2024 for the post of Financial Controller

It is hereby notified that the last date for submission of application for the post of **Financial Controller** is hereby extended till **19.01.2025**.

The eligibility criteria and other terms and conditions remain the same.

Date : 04.01.2025

REGISTRAR

NATIONAL AGRIFOOD BIOTECHNOLOGY INSTITUTE (NABI)
(An Autonomous Institute under Department of Biotechnology, Govt. of India)
Knowledge City, Sector 81, Mohali - 140306 Punjab (INDIA)
Tel.: 91-172-5221300 Fax: 91-172-5221100 Website : www.nabi.res.in
Advertisement No.NABI/Admin/5(1)/2022-23/ACAD
Ph.D. (Biotechnology) Program - Admission 2025
National Agri-Food Biotechnology Institute (NABI), Mohali, is an autonomous R&D Institute under Department of Biotechnology, Government of India. The institute carries out cutting edge research at the interface of agricultural biotechnology, bioinformatics, biosciences, food science and technology, post-harvest technology, and nutritional sciences. NABI invites application for **admission to Ph.D. (biotechnology) Program**. Last date of receiving the applications is 31st January 2025. For details kindly visit www.nabi.res.in.
Manager (Administration)

TOURISM CORPORATION OF GUJARAT LIMITED (TCGL)
(A Government of Gujarat undertaking)
Udyog Bhavan, Block No. 16, 4th Floor,
Sector - 11, Gandhinagar - 382 011
Website: [https://www.gujartourism.com](http://www.gujartourism.com)

TENDER NOTICE

Bids are invited from reputed and experienced parties towards "Selection of an Agency for providing Domestic Inbound Call Centre Services as a Help Desk of Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited". The project requirements, technical specifications, eligibility criteria, selection process, etc. are included in the Tender documents, which shall be available for download from the websites: [https://tender.nprocure.com](http://tender.nprocure.com) and [https://www.gujartourism.com](http://www.gujartourism.com) from 04/01/2025 onwards. The last date for online submission of the Technical and Financial Bid is 24/01/2025 up to 6:00 pm. and physical submission of Technical Bid only is 27/01/2025 up to 3:00 pm.
Managing Director

ALL INDIA INSTITUTE OF MEDICAL SCIENCES Vijaypur, Jammu -184120

Notification for Non-Faculty Posts (on Deputation Basis)

Employment Notification No. 01 / 2025

Applications are invited in the prescribed Proforma for filling up of the Non - Faculty Posts (On Deputation Basis) mentioned hereunder for AIIMS, Vijaypur, Jammu:-

Sl. No	Name of Posts	Group	Pay Level (as per 7th CPC)	No. of Vacancy
1.	Assistant Controller of Examinations	A	(Level-11)	01
2.	Nursing Superintendent	A	(Level-11)	02
Total				03

For other details, application form and terms & conditions, please visit the AIIMS Jammu website www.aiimsjammu.edu.in under the head '**Recruitment**'. Duly filled in application (through proper channel) along with attested photocopies of ACRs/APARs for the last 5 years and vigilance clearance should reach to the undersigned within 30 days after the day of publishing of this advertisement in Employment News. In case of any query, mail can also be forwarded to recruitmentcell@aiimsjammu.edu.in

Sd/-

Registrar

For and on Behalf of the Executive Director & CEO, AIIMS Jammu

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PWD-ELECTRICAL DIVISION BARAN

S.No. 889

Notice Inviting Bid

(INT No 23/2024-25)

Date 27.12.2024

Bids for 01 Electrical work at Baran are invited from interested bidders up to 06.00 PM of 15.01.2025 (Wednesday). Other particulars of bid may be visited on the procurement portal <http://eproc.rajasthan.gov.in>, <http://sppp.rjnic.in> of the Rajasthan State. The approximate value of the procurement is Rs 201.01 Lacs

1. PWD2425WSOB12792

(Rachit Sharma)

Executive Engineer

PWD Elect. On Baran

DIPR/C/54/2025

GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA IRRIGATION & CAD DEPARTMENT E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
1) 'e- Procurement Notice No. 01/SE/IC-2/2024-2025, Date: 02.01.2025 Name of Work: I&CAD Dept.,-' Adoption of National Framework with Revenue Generation Model for Sediment Management and Restoration of Storage Capacity of Reservoirs in 1 Lower Manair Dam at Aluguruv(V), Thimmapur(M), Karimnagar Dist. 2) Mid Manair Dam at Manwada(V), Bonipalli(V), Rajanna Sircilla Dist & 3) Kadam at Kadam(V), Nirmal Dist'. a) Scope of Work: Restoration of storage capacity of Reservoirs; c) Value of work (Estimated contract value) Rs. 143.55,00,000/-; 2) Date/time From bid document available: 04.01.2025 from 03:00 PM; 3) Last Date and Time for download of Tender schedules Online: 20.01.2025 from 03:00 PM; 4) Last date and time for submission of Tender with required qualification documents: 21.01.2025 from 03:00 PM. 5) Period of completion of work: 240 Months (20 Years); 6) Name and Address of concerned Superintending Engineer: Sri P.Ramesh, B.Tech., Superintending Engineer(FAC), Irrigation & CAD, Department, Irrigation Circle-2, LMD Colony, Karimnagar-505 527. Mail: sevc@gmail.com, Phone: 91099 73682. Further details can be seen @ "e-Procurement" market place @ www.e-procurement.gov.in.
Sd/- Superintending Engineer (FAC), Irrigation Circle No.2, LMD Colony, Karimnagar Dist

IN BRIEF



Shah reviews infrastructure development in islands

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday reviewed the progress of the ongoing development initiatives in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep. Chairing the seventh meeting of the Island Development Agency (IDA), Mr. Shah emphasised the need to achieve the goal of 100% renewable energy generation through solar panels and windmills in these regions. Mr. Shah also directed the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to implement the 'PM Surya Ghar' scheme by installing solar panels in all households of the region. He said development of infrastructure in the islands was the priority of the government.

Four dead as van hits SUV in Raigad; 'drunk' driver held

Four persons were killed and three injured on Friday after a towing van rammed into their SUV on Mumbai-Goa highway in Maharashtra's Raigad district, a police officer said. The incident took place in the early hours of the day and the towing van driver was arrested since he was found to be driving under the influence of alcohol, the officer added. He said one of the injured is in a critical condition. "Prasad Natakar, Sameer Minde, Suryakant More, Sahil Shelar, all in the 25-30 age group, died on the spot. They are residents of Mahad. A case of causing death by negligence and other offences was registered against the towing van driver," the officer said. PTI

Pawar, Bhujbal share the stage for Phule birth anniversary

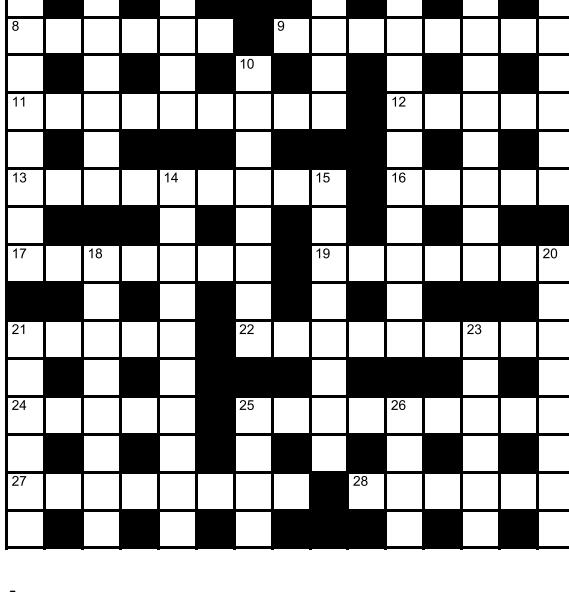
Ajit Pawar camp Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) leader Chhagan Bhujbal shared a stage with NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar on Friday to commemorate the 194th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule in Maharashtra's Pune district. The meeting took greater significance in light of Mr. Bhujbal's rumoured disappointment over his exclusion from the Maharashtra cabinet. However, Mr. Bhujbal rejected any such inferences. He said, "Whenever there are going to be such events reflecting Shahu-Ambedkar-Phule legacy, you will see leaders irrespective of parties sharing the stage. There is no need to draw political conclusions."

NGT issues notice to Centre over plan to fell 1 lakh trees

The National Green Tribunal has issued notices to Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change and Singareni Collieries Company Limited over a proposal to fell 1,05,092 trees to facilitate an opencast coal mine in Odisha's Angul district. Nine villagers of Chhendipada and Salukhaman had moved the NGT's Eastern Zone Bench stating that there was illegal transfer of forestland in favour of SCCL for the purpose of Naini Opencast Coal Project without following the due process of Forest Conservation Act 1980. The SCCL, a public sector unit jointly owned by Government of Telangana and Government of India is preparing to mine areas in Chhendipada.

TH CROSSWORD (set by Saral) 14374

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



Across

- 8 Appeared on screen initially in small roles (6)
- 9 Postponement of agreement containing note with mistake (8)
- 11 Broadcast a TV series that's bold (9)
- 12 No bar in paper publication (5)
- 13 Ordering abridged dictionary and guide (9)

Collate complaints raised about caste discrimination on campuses, SC tells UGC

Order comes on petition filed by mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi six years ago; UGC says it has been formulating new rules; court asks higher education body to place them on record

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday directed the University Grants Commission (UGC) to collate the total number of complaints of caste discrimination received under its 2012 Regulations in universities and higher educational institutions across the country.

A Bench of Justice Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan gave the Commission six weeks to collect the data on how many Central, State, deemed and private universities and institutions of higher learning have set up Equal Opportunity Cells under the UGC (Promotion of Equity in Higher Educational Institutions) Regulations of 2012; the number of complaints received by them; and action taken on these grievances.

The order was passed on a petition filed six years ago by the mothers of Rohith Vemula and Payal Tadvi, who had appealed to the Supreme Court to act against the "rampant" caste discrimination in universities which claimed their children's lives.

Rohith Vemula, a PhD scholar at Hyderabad Cen-



Seeking justice: Rohith Vemula's mother had said in the petition that there was rampant caste bias in universities. FILE PHOTO

tral University, and Payal Tadvi, a tribal student of Topiwala National Medical College, died by suicide in January 2016 and May 2019, respectively, after being subject to on-campus caste bias.

Meanwhile, as a stark reminder that caste bigotry was still claiming lives of young scholars in the country's higher educational campuses, the family of Darshan Solanki joined hands with the two mothers in the Supreme Court on Friday.

Mr. Solanki, a Scheduled Caste student at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB), died by suicide in February 2023. His death was linked to casteist insults he had suffered on campus. Justice Kant

noted the mothers' case has been in limbo for over six years in the Supreme Court. It had come up for hearing only once, in 2022.

"These petitioners have lost their children. We are also conscious of the sensitivity of the issue. We will make sure the case is listed periodically," Justice Kant assured senior advocate Indira Jaising, appearing for the mothers.

Meanwhile, the UGC told the Supreme Court that it was working on a "new" set of regulations against on-campus caste discrimination since 2023. "This petition is of 2019. You say that you have been formulating these new regulations since 2023... We are in 2025... How much time does the notification

of regulations actually take... one or two months?" Justice Kant confronted the UGC counsel.

Justice Bhuyan said it was time the UGC showed "some sympathy" in this issue. "We direct the UGC to notify the new regulations, if any, and place it on record for our consideration," the court ordered.

The court impaled the Union government and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and directed them to file counter affidavits to the petitions in four weeks. "The viewpoints of the Union of India and NAAC will be required for effective adjudication," the court noted in the order.

Ms. Jaising said the UGC must come clean on whether the 820-odd universities and other higher educational institutions were actually implementing the 2012 Regulations. She noted 115 deaths by suicide had occurred between 2004-2024, many of them belonged to the Dalit communities. The court agreed to examine Ms. Jaising's demand for exact caste-wise data on the number of deaths by suicide which had occurred in universities.

Kashmir freezes, one more snow spell likely

The Hindu Bureau

SRINAGAR



A man walking in a park in Srinagar on Friday morning amid dense fog. IMRAN NISSAR

The cold wave intensified in Kashmir on Friday as the Meteorological Department (MeT) predicted a fresh spell of heavy snowfall for the next two days with a warning of air and surface traffic disruptions. The J&K government said it has stepped up measures to combat the impact of snowfall.

According to the MeT, there is a possibility of heavy snow over the higher reaches of Kashmir and the Chenab valley during January 4 night to January 5 late night. The advisory warned of "temporary disruption of surface and air transportation, especially on January 5".

Temperatures in the Valley have dropped. Srinagar

recorded a minimum of minus 2.2 degrees on Thursday night. South Kashmir's Anantnag and Larnoo were the coldest places at minus 7.7 and minus 8.2 respectively.

The cold wave impacted normal life in Kashmir, with warnings issued by health experts to be careful while leaving homes early in the morning and late at night.

These candidates ap-

UPSC seeks details from two visually-impaired candidates who took the exam 15 years ago

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Nearly six months after the Supreme Court directed the Union Public Service Commission to consider appointments to 12 visually impaired candidates against the backlog vacancies meant for them under the persons with disabilities (PwD) quota, the UPSC has now issued a public notice saying that it can no longer find any details of two of these candidates in its records, and asked the candidates to get in touch with their details.

These candidates ap-

peared in the civil services examination held in 2008, following which some of

them have been in courts and tribunals for nearly two decades to get appointments under the PwD quota. The Supreme Court had in July 2024 directed officials to consider their appointments under the quota within three months of its order.

In a public notice issued by the UPSC, it said the dossiers containing the documents and details of two of the candidates – Anil Kumar Singh and Hira

Journalist found dead in septic tank, murder suspected

Shubhomoy Sikdar

RAJPUR



The body of a journalist, who is known for his ground reporting of the Maoist conflict in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region, was found in a septic tank on the premises of a construction contractor in Bijapur. The journalist's family has alleged that he was facing threats for exposing a scam in a road project through his reports.

Mukesh Chandrakar, 36, went missing two days ago and his body was recovered around 6 p.m. on Friday. Earlier, his elder brother Yukesh Chandrakar, a television journalist himself, lodged a man missing report with police on Wednesday evening.

A journalist for a decade, Mr. Yukesh had purportedly referred to a recent story reported on alleged irregularities in the construction of a road from Gangaloor to Nelasanar village in Bijapur, which led to the launch of an investigation into the project. He cited danger from three persons – contractor Suresh Chandrakar and two others.

Journalists from Bastar have condemned the murder and said that the incident sheds spotlight on the challenges they face on a daily basis. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai expressed sadness at the death of the journalist and said that instructions have been given to arrest the culprits and give them "the harshest punishment".

Vande Bharat sleeper trains see top speed of 180 kmph

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Vande Bharat sleeper train has achieved a peak speed of 180 kilometres per hour following multiple trials in the last three days.

A video shared by Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on X shows a nearly full to brim glass of water adjacent to a mobile on a plain surface inside a Vande Bharat sleeper train. The water level remains static as the moving train achieves near constant peak speed of 180 km per hour. The post came after third day of successful trials, in which the train in its loaded condition touched the peak speed.

Faith

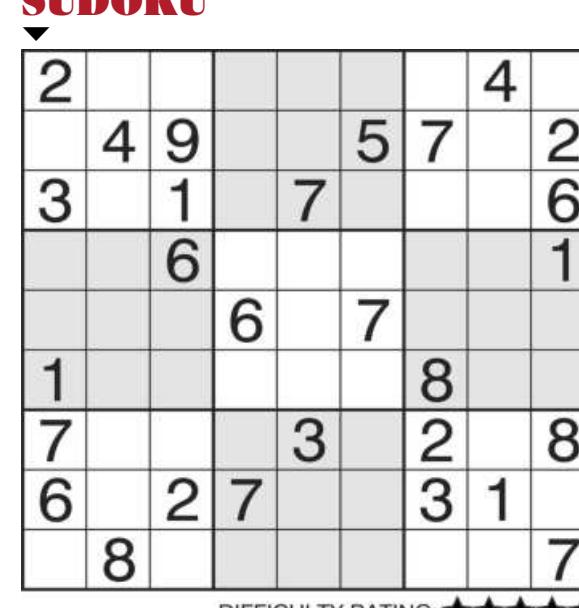
Kurattazhwan's greatness

Andal's Tiruppavai lends itself to innumerable interpretations. At a deeper level, Tiruppavai is considered to be a discourse on the nature of Ultimate Reality and the attainment of the supreme goal. One can also interpret it as encapsulating the ideal traits of a great Vaishnavite acharya like Kurattazhwan, said Tirukkudanthai Dr. Venkatesh.

The eleventh Tiruppavai, *Kattru Karavai*, in particular can be referenced to Kurattazhwan, who milked the essence of all the Vedas – Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharvana Veda being the four with the Mahabharata considered to be the fifth – and rendered them as panchastavas. The five works are Vaikunta Stava, Atimanusha Stava, Sundarabhu Stava, Varadaraja Stava and Sri Stava. It is said that goddess Veda, who wears the works of acharyas as jewels on her, symbolically, has given pride of place to Kurattazhwan's work by adorning it as her mangalasutra.

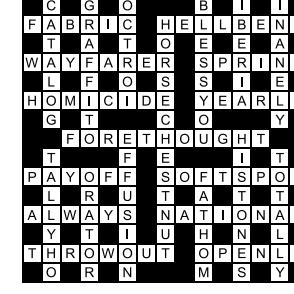
A staunch devotee of Ramanuja, Kurattazhwan met his enemies in their place without any fear or hesitation. When a king commanded Ramanuja to a debate on two different faiths, Kurattazhwan went as Ramanuja and emerged victorious; however, when it was ordained that his eyes be gouged for the impersonation, he fearlessly removed them himself. So pure was his character that Ramanuja treated him as though he were his sacred thread. Kurattazhwan, born in a wealthy family but renouncing the same to be an ordinary devotee of his preceptor Ramanuja, twined himself to him, like a creeper clinging to a pole. Devoid of the three taints, ego wrought by wealth, education or high birth, he is, as Andal says, the ideal one to wake everyone from slumber of ignorance.

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



IN BRIEF



RBI removes restrictions on Arohan Financial Services

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) removed supervisory restrictions on Kolkata-based Arohan Financial Services Ltd. with immediate effect. On October 17, 2024, the regulator issued directions to Arohan Financial Services to cease and desist from sanction and disbursal of loans, effective from close of business as of October 21, 2024 on material supervisory concerns. The RBI said subsequently the company initiated remedial action and submitted various compliances.

'Revamped 'Baanknet' to aid one-stop property e-auction'

Financial Services Secretary M. Nagaraju on Friday unveiled the revamped 'Baanknet' portal for e-auction of properties, including commercial properties, industrial land, shops, vehicles, and agricultural and non-agricultural land. This platform consolidates information on e-auction of properties from all public sector banks (PSBs) and offers a one-stop destination for buyers and investors to discover a wide range of assets, the Finance Ministry said in a statement.

Film producer Vipul Shah's Sunshine Pictures mulls IPO

Film and television producer-director Vipul Shah-backed Sunshine Pictures Ltd. has filed draft papers with the market regulator SEBI to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The IPO comprises a total offer size of 83.75 lakh equity shares, including a fresh issue of 50 lakh shares and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of 33.75 lakh shares by promoters, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). PTI

Exporters unsure of RoDTEP benefits

M. Sundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

With the expiry of the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme for exports under advance authorisation (AA), export-oriented units (EOU) and special economic zones (SEZ) schemes on December 31, 2024 and no communication regarding its extension, exporters are uncertain about RoDTEP benefits for these schemes.

An advisory, issued by the Office of the Commissioner of Customs - NS II, Centralised Export Assessment Cell, Jawaharlal Nehru Custom House, on January 2, urging exporters and customs brokers filing shipping bills under AA, EOU, or SEZ schemes to 'carefully opt' for the RoDTEP scheme, was withdrawn on January 3, adding to the confusion.

In September last year, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade issued a notification that the RoDTEP scheme was extended till September 30, 2025 for export goods manufactured in the domestic tariff area and till December 31, 2024 for goods exported under AA, SEZ or EOU schemes.

"[Now] The system does not accept RoDTEP applications under AA, EOU or SEZ schemes. Exporters need the support to be competitive," said a forwarding agent.

A textile exporter, near Erode in Tamil Nadu, said exports under AA, EOU or SEZ schemes are not affected by customs duty for imports. But, there are fuel tax, electricity tax, etc which the exporters get refunded only through RoDTEP. Hence, the scheme should be continued.

Tata plant to make chips by 2026

The 'Made in Assam' chips would be used in auto industries of countries like Japan, the United States, and Germany, says Union Minister Vaishnav; 'North East will get an excellent opportunity to be part of a future-ready industry'

Devesh K. Pandey
JAGIROAD, ASSAM

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said the semiconductor plant being constructed by Tata Electronics here would begin production of 'Made in India' chips in 2026. They will be supplied to various countries for use in the automobile and telecom industries.

After reviewing the progress of the project, Mr. Vaishnav said it was a matter of pride that the world's



New era: An electronic city was being built to provide residential facilities to 40,000 staff, the Minister disclosed. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

most advanced semiconductor industry was being established in Assam.

"The semiconductor industry will play a vital role in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of a developed India. It will

be India's largest semiconductor plant, located in Assam. The foundation of this initiative lies in PM's vision of developing Ashta Lakshmi States. Through the project, our colleagues in the North East will get an excellent opportunity to be part of a future-ready industry," he said.

Stating a complete ecosystem was being built around the plant, Mr. Vaishnav said an electronic city was being constructed for providing residential facilities to about 40,000

employees.

"I also inspected the designs and plans for the plant, and I am happy to share that the construction work is progressing rapidly. Through this 'Made in India' initiative, Assam's contribution will further elevate India's global standing," he added.

Earlier, in Guwahati, three trains were flagged off and a new road over bridge at Tetelia Station yard, built by the Northeast Frontier Railway, was dedicated to the nation.

Stock indices and Rupee end in the red

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

Frontline stock market indices on Friday fell by almost 1% on selling pressure led by banking and technology stocks.

The S&P BSE Sensex closed with a loss of 720.60 points, or 0.90%, at 79,223.11 points. The NSE Nifty fell 184 points, or 0.76%, to 24,004.75.

"Markets retreated from the recent recovery momentum. The five consecutive down sessions in U.S. markets damped sentiments from opening bell.

"Despite a marginally-positive start, the Nifty turned negative as profit booking emerged. Trading

Rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 against the U.S. dollar

activity was robust with NSE cash market volumes rising 7% compared to the previous day," he said.

Broader markets showed relative resilience, with the Nifty Midcap and Smallcap 100 sliding 0.3% and 0.24% respectively.

Meanwhile, the rupee depreciated 4 paise to close at a record low of 85.79 against the U.S. dollar as strong dollar demand from importers and a muted trend in domestic equities weighed on investors' sentiments.

"As the Government of India continues to upgrade the rail infrastructure with dedicated freight corridors

Hyundai ferried 26% of its 2024 domestic car volumes on rail

Lalatendu Mishra

MUMBAI

Hyundai Motor India Ltd. (HMIL) said it transported 26% of total domestic wholesale volumes, or 1,56,724 units, through rail freight in calendar year (CY) 2024.

"This has resulted in the prevention of 18,352 tonne of CO2 emissions in CY24 by effectively optimising the share of rail freight (vs. road-freight) in logistics, including utilising rail-medium for 100% of dispatches to the North-East region of India," the company said in a statement.

"As the Government of India continues to upgrade the rail infrastructure with dedicated freight corridors



and modern and energy efficient rolling stock, ensuring faster movement of goods, HMIL remains committed to utilising rail freight to optimise logistic operations, leading to long-term reduction in emissions," said Tarun Garg, whole-time director and COO, HMIL.

"We have been relentless

in our pursuit of promoting sustainability in all facets of our operations, be it manufacturing, dispatches, sales or after-sales support," Mr. Garg added.

"By utilising Indian Railways' extensive rail network for delivering Hyundai vehicles from our plant in Sriperumbudur to multiple locations across India, we have effectively prevented 18,352 tonne of CO2 emissions in CY24, dispatching 1,56,724 units in the process," he added.

The company said it has cumulatively dispatched 5,37,499 units by rail in the last four years between CY2021-2024, effectively preventing 63,452 tonne of CO2 emissions.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	FRIDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	79,223	-0.90
US Dollar	85.79	-0.05
Gold	79,700	-0.03
Brent oil	76.28	0.10

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2564.60	-33.10
Adani Ports	1199.55	-26.45
Apollo Hosp	7298.35	-123.30
Asian Paints	2355.95	-7.30
Axis Bank	1084.90	-1.70
Bajaj Auto	8965.70	-113.80
Bajaj FinServ	1701.10	0.45
Bajaj Finance	7407.25	18.05
Bharti Elec.	291.95	-4.85
Bharti Airtel	1598.85	-10.85
BPCL	296.40	-0.50
Britannia Ind	4834.10	-46.30
Cipla	1511.25	-26.65
Coal India	393.65	0.70
Dr Reddy's Lab	1352.65	-22.40
Eicher Motors	5310.75	2.65
Grasim Ind.	2510.00	-33.95
HCL Tech	1946.65	-25.55
HDFC Bank	1749.20	-44.55
HDFC Life	623.00	2.85
Hero MotoCorp	4243.10	-68.40
Hindalco	591.15	-7.85
Hind Unilever	2406.25	36.25
ICICI Bank	1265.05	-25.55
IndusInd Bank	997.90	6.55
Infosys	1938.75	-19.10
ITC	481.60	-7.45
JSW Steel	915.05	2.55
Kotak Bank	1838.65	1.50
L&T	3659.90	-53.60
M&M	3190.55	-20.55
Maruti Suzuki	11934.25	92.95
NestleIndia	2232.70	32.50
NTPC	339.85	1.85
ONGC	258.89	12.82
PowerGrid Corp	316.05	0.90
Reliance Ind	1251.15	9.35
SBI Life	1447.70	25.45
State Bank	793.40	-7.80
Shriram Finance	3048.35	-11.70
Sun Pharma	1849.65	-28.35
Tata ConsumerProd.	939.45	9.80
Tata Motors	790.40	25.35
Tata Steel	138.36	0.18
TCS	4099.90	-75.85
Tech Mahindra	1689.45	-37.50
Titan	3451.65	62.70
Trent Ltd.	7307.70	-13.30
UltraTech Cement	11786.00	-11.70
Wipro	294.45	-9.35

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on January 03

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	85.57	85.89
Euro	88.12	88.45
British Pound	106.22	106.63
Japanese Yen (100)	54.41	54.62
Chinese Yuan	11.69	11.74
Swiss Franc	94.15	94.50
Singapore Dollar	62.46	62.70
Canadian Dollar	59.43	59.66
Malaysian Ringgit	19.00	19.10
Australian Dollar	53.25	53.45

Source: Indian Bank

**All India Institute of Medical Sciences
Vijaypur, Jammu – 184120**

NOTICE INVITING TENDER(NIT) FOR PLANNING, DESIGNING, SUPPLYING, INSTALLATION, COMMISSIONING, MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF HOSPITAL KITCHEN AND PATIENT DIETARY SERVICES FOR AIIMS, VIJAYPUR, JAMMU

1. Notice Inviting Tender for Planning, Designing, Supplying, Installation, Commissioning, Maintenance and Operation of Hospital Kitchen and Patient Dietary Services for AIIMS, Vijaypur, Jammu has been published in CPP Portal, GOI on 28th December 2024 vide Tender Reference no. **AIIMS/JMU/Tender/Kitchen/ 24-25/1 dated 28th December 2024** and e-published Tender id no. **2024_AIJS_783289_1 dated 28th December 2024**. Interested bidders/tenderers may please download NIT document from CPP Portal (e-publishing site), GOI (<https://www.eprocure.gov.in/epublish/app>) or website of AIIMS, Jammu (<https://www.aiimsjammu.edu.in>).

2. Any Bidder/Tenderer who is unable to download the NIT document may collect the same (Hard copy) from Procurement Section located at **5th Floor Academic Block, AIIMS, Vijaypur, Jammu-184120** during Working Hours(9.30 AM to 5.30 PM) before **14th January 2025**.

Sd/-
Deputy Director (Admin)
AIIMS, Vijaypur, Jammu



**National Games Secretariat
Department of Sports
(Govt. of Uttarakhand)**
**Maharana Pratap Sports College,
Thano Road, Raipur, Dehradun-248008**

Date- 03/01/2025

RFP References- 60/2024

Notice Inviting Tender

The National Games Secretariat Department of Sports, Uttarakhand on behalf of the Governor of Uttarakhand invites bids from reputed and experienced firm/agencies/companies for:

Sr. No	RFP	Bid Security	Reference No.

JERUSALEM

Israel Army intercepts missile and drone launched from Yemen



Israel's military reported that it shot down a missile and a drone launched from Yemen on Friday, the latest in a series of attacks from the country targeting Israel in recent weeks. Israel's emergency service provider said it had treated several people who were injured or experienced panic attacks on their way to shelters. AFP

KYIV

'Trump's strength, unpredictability can help end the war with Russia'



U.S. President-elect Donald Trump is "strong and unpredictable," and those qualities can be a decisive factor in his policy approach to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, according to the Ukrainian President. However, Volodymyr Zelensky said it will not be possible to end the war in one day, as Mr. Trump claimed he could do. AP

DAMASCUS

Top European diplomats call for inclusive transition on Syria visit



The European Union backs a peaceful, inclusive transition in Syria, top French and German diplomats said on a Damascus visit to meet with new leader Muhammad al-Jolani. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot and his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock were in the Syrian capital for talks on behalf of the EU. AFP

BANGKOK

Myanmar enacts cybersecurity law with many censorship provisions



Military-ruled Myanmar, already notorious for cracking down on free speech, has enacted a new cybersecurity law with wide-ranging controls on the flow of information. The new law, which came into effect, has provisions mainly targeting means of communications and providers of services such as virtual private networks (VPN). AP

South Korean investigators abandon arrest of impeached President Yoon

If the warrant is carried out, it would make Yoon Suk Yeol the first sitting President in South Korean history to be arrested; following a stand-off with Yoon's security officials say concern for their safety led to the decision to halt the arrest attempt

Agence France-Presse

SEOUL

South Korean investigators abandoned their attempt to arrest impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol at his residence on Friday over a failed martial law bid, citing safety concerns after a stand-off with his security team.

Mr. Yoon, who has already been suspended from duty by lawmakers, would become the first sitting President in South Korean history to be arrested if the warrant is carried out.

The President, who issued a bungled declaration on December 3 that shook the vibrant East Asian de-



Seething anger: Members of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions march toward the residence of Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul. AP

mocracy and briefly lurched it back to the dark days of military rule, faces imprisonment or, at worst, the death penalty.

"Regarding the execu-

Office (CIO), probing Mr. Yoon over his martial law decree, said.

"Concern for the safety of personnel on-site led to the decision to halt" the arrest attempt, the statement said of the confrontation with Mr. Yoon's presidential security service and its military unit.

Around 20 investigators and 80 police officers were heavily outnumbered by around 200 soldiers and security personnel linking arms to block their way after entering the presidential compound, a CIO official told a briefing.

"I understand there were minor and major physical altercations," said the official, adding that

buses and cars were also parked to block their way.

Negotiations ultimately faltered and the investigators decided to leave for their team's safety, although another execution of the warrant could take place after a review, the official said.

The deadline for the warrant is Monday, leaving it in limbo with just a few days remaining and Mr. Yoon defiant, vowing this week to "fight" authorities trying to question him.

Mr. Yoon's security service – which still protects him as the country's sitting head of state – has previously blocked attempted police raids of the presidential office.

At least 30 people killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza Strip

Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH

At least 30 people, including children, were killed in Gaza by Israeli strikes overnight and into Friday morning, hospital staff said, as sirens also sounded across Israel and stalled ceasefire talks were set to resume.

Staff at the al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital said more than a dozen women and children were killed in strikes that hit various places in Central Gaza, including Nuseirat, Zawida, Maghazi and Deir al Balah.

Dozens of people were also killed across the enclave the previous day, bringing the total of people killed in the past 24 hours to 56.

Strikes on Thursday hit Hamas security officers and an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone. Among



Broad daylight: Smoke billows as sand and debris scatter following an Israeli strike in Deir Al-Balaa on Friday. REUTERS

those killed early Friday was Omar al-Derawi, a freelance journalist.

On Friday, Israel issued a new warning for people to leave an area of central Gaza immediately, saying it was going to attack following launches from there toward Israel.

As the attacks were underway, efforts at ceasefire

negotiations were expected to resume on Friday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he had authorised a delegation from the Mossad intelligence agency, the Shin Bet internal security agency and the military to continue negotiations in Qatar. The delegation is leaving for Qatar on Friday.

Biden blocks U.S. Steel's takeover by Japan's Nippon Steel

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Joe Biden on Friday announced he has blocked the controversial \$14.9 billion sale of U.S. Steel to Japan's Nippon Steel, citing a strategic need to protect domestic industry.

"This acquisition would place one of America's largest steel producers under foreign control and create risk for our national security and our critical supply chains," Mr. Biden said in a statement.

"That is why I am taking action to block this deal."

Mr. Biden's decision, less than three weeks before he leaves office, follows extended political wrangling over competing domestic political, economic and trade demands.

The Democrat, who



made rebuilding of the U.S. manufacturing base a major goal of his administration, had criticised the deal for months, while holding off from a decision that could risk damaging relations with Tokyo.

There was rare bipartisan agreement on the issue, with Republican President-elect Donald Trump and the incoming Vice-President, J.D. Vance, also campaigning against the sale.

Trump calls to 'open up' North Sea and get rid of windmills

Reuters

WASHINGTON

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump called to "open up" the North Sea and get rid of windmills in a post on his social media platform Truth Social on Friday.

Oil companies have been steadily exiting the North Sea in recent decades with production declining from a peak of 4.4 million barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) at the start of the millennium to around 1.3 million boe/d today.

Apache's exit Mr. Trump's post was in response to a report about U.S. oil and gas producer APA Corp's unit Apache's plans to exit North Sea by year-end 2029.

The company expects

Oil production in the region declined from 4.4 mn barrels a day to around 1.3 mn barrels a day today

North Sea production to fall by 20% year over year in 2025.

In October last year, the British government said it would increase a windfall tax on North Sea oil and gas producers to 38% from 35% and extend the levy by one year.

The government wants to use the revenue from oil and gas to raise funds for renewable energy projects.

North Sea producers have warned that the higher tax rate could lead to a sharp drop in investments and are exiting from the ageing basin ahead of the new tax increases.

Alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States, after tobacco and obesity, increasing risk for at least seven types of cancer," Dr. Murthy's office said in a statement accompanying the new report.

It is responsible for 1,00,000 U.S. cancer cases and 20,000 cancer deaths each year, more than the 13,500 alcohol-associated traffic crash deaths, it added.

In the U.S., there are about 20,000 alcohol-related cancer deaths annually, according to the report.

Alcoholic beverages in the United States currently carry a health warning label that advises pregnant women to not drink them and that their consumption impairs a person's ability to drive a car or operate machinery. This label has not changed since its inception in 1988.



how much to drink, alongside current warnings on birth defects and impairments when operating machinery.

Shares of U.S.-listed al-

coholic beverage makers fell between 1% and 2% in premarket trading, with Brown-Forman Corp leading the declines.

Third leading cause

"Alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States, after tobacco and obesity, increasing risk for at least seven types of cancer," Dr. Murthy's office said in a statement accompanying the new report.

It is responsible for 1,00,000 U.S. cancer cases and 20,000 cancer deaths

Your feedback will keep us Cleaner, Sharper and Bolder

Call our toll-free number
1800 102 1878

Or write to us at
customercare@thehindu.co.in

Scan the QR code to register your feedback

THE HINDU thecorner.thehindu.com

FRONTLINE frontline.thehindu.com SPORTSTAR sportstar.thehindu.com YOUNG WORLD youngworld.thehindu.com THE HINDU

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LIMITED

(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001)

Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813 : Website : www.pspcl.in Mobile No. 96461-55525

E-Tender Enq. No. 589/P-3/JEMPW-12905 dated 02.01.2025

Dy.Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-3) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2025_POWER_132276_1 for Breakdown/Preventive Mtc. & Overhauling of DM Plants, D.G. Sets, Compressors, Hydrogen gas handling, Fire protection system, AC system and other allied Mechanical Auxiliaries of stage-II and III for 4 units BIHEL make 210 MW each and work of Central Mechanical Workshop at GGSSTP, Rupnagar. For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from dated 03.01.2025 / 12:00 Noon onwards.

Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

RTP - 01/25 76155/12/3789/2023/40507

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.

Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall, Patiala-147001

Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813 :

Website : www.pspcl.in (Contact No. 96461-22185)

Tender Enquiry No. 343/SS(D)-383/Spares dated 03.01.2025

Dy.CE/Substation Design/ TS Organization, C-1 Shakti Vihar, PSPCL, Patiala invites E-tender for Manufacturing, Testing and Delivery of 250.80 KL Naphthalene Base Transformer Oil. For detailed NIT & Tender Specification, please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 08.01.2025 (09:00 AM onwards).

Note: Corrigendum and amendments, if any, will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>

C - 15/25 76155/12/3788/2023/40502

HIMACHAL PRADESH PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

No. : PW/EDP/CB/TA/INT/2024-25/-5602-5606 Dated: 31.12.2024

Invitation for Bids (IFB)

The Executive Engineer, Electrical Division, HPPWD Palampur, Distt. Kangra, HP on behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh invites the item rate bids in Two Covers system in Electronic Tendering System from approved and eligible contractors/firms registered with HPPWD (E) fulfilling the qualifying criteria along with the documents for the works as detailed below in the table:

Sr. No	Name of Work	Estimated Cost	Earliest Date	Time Limit	Cost of bid document
1.	Construction of Judicial Court Complex at Dehra, Tehsil Dehra, Distt. Kangra, HP under centrally sponsored scheme for the development for infrastructure facility for Judiciary (SH: Providing E.I. therein).	9086641/-	123400/-	Two Years	2000/-
2.	Construction of Adarsh Gram Suhk [53230748/-] 564900/- Two Years	5000/-	Aashrya Parivar Village Luthan Jawalamukhi, Distt. Kangra, HP (SH: Providing E.I. in Admin cum Residential Block therein).		

The bidders are advised to note other details and terms & conditions of tenders from the departmental website.

Executive Engineer, Electrical Division,

HPPWD Palampur - PIN - 176061

e-mail: ee-elep-hp@nic.in

On behalf of Governor of Himachal Pradesh

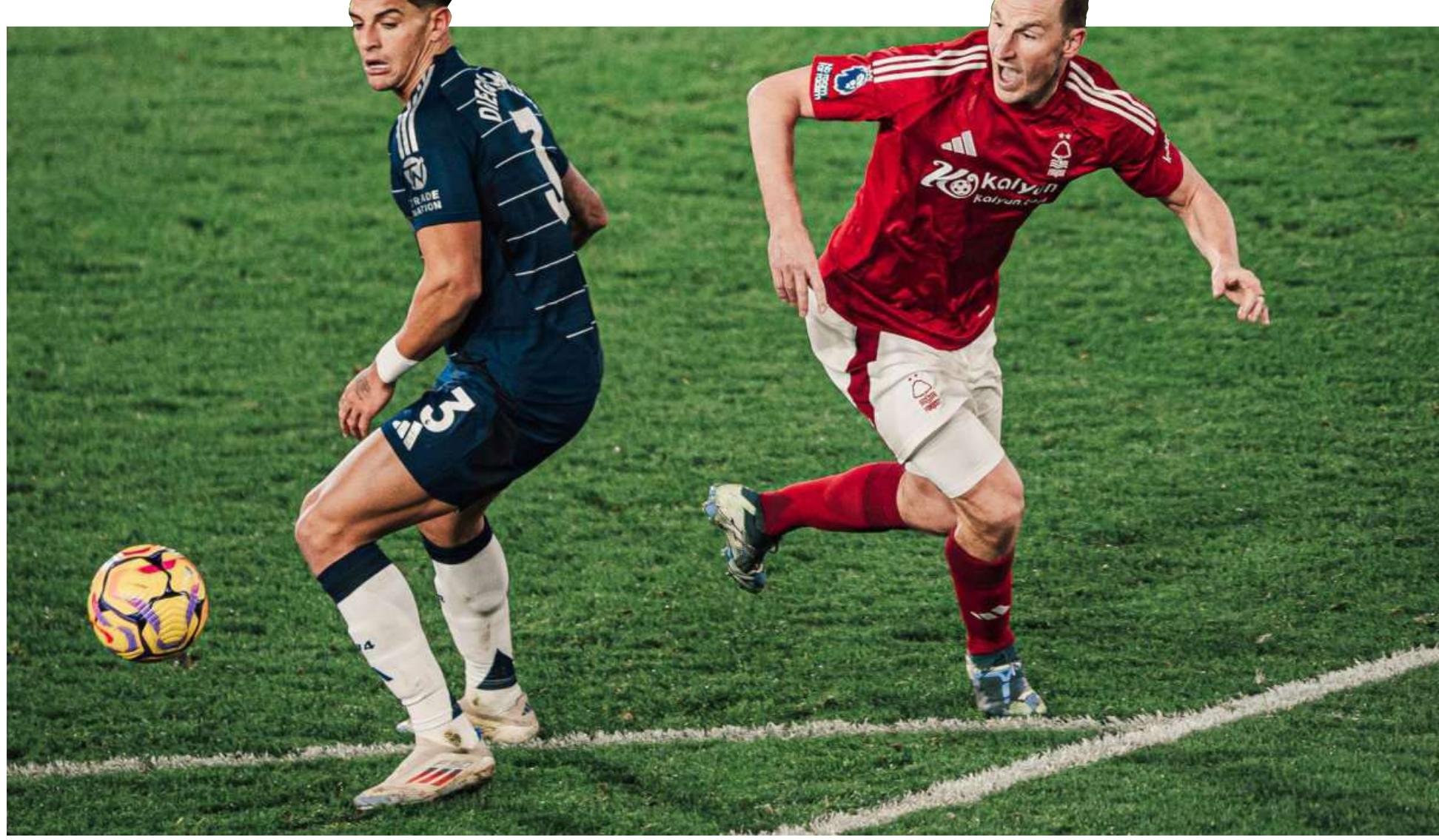
HP / 4285/24-25

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knows how to play off his teammates.

"I'm not a man who is going to beat two or three players and stick it in the top corner, I'm a man who relies on service," he told the BBC. "If they can't supply me, I can't score. You have to find where you are appreciated. Managers have their own style. That's not anything I can control. It just means you might not be in the right area or the manager's cup of tea. It's about trying to find the role which fits everyone and fortunately under Nuno it has."

Wood, who built a reputation in New Zealand as a natural goal-scorer before moving to England in his teens, has made it to the top level the hard way. After joining West Brom's academy in 2009, he had several loan spells before breaking through with Leeds in the Championship.



I must say I misjudged the quality of the player. He's a better footballer than I thought he was originally. I don't mind owning that he's done really well

GARY LINEKER
Former England striker

Contract situation

Following a successful period at Burnley and a less memorable stint at Newcastle, Wood has found his footing at Forest. The 15 million pounds the club spent on his transfer is increasingly looking like one of the better bargains in Premier League history. With his contract running out at the end of this season, Forest risks losing him on a free, with both AC Milan and Napoli reportedly interested in adding Wood to their attacking range.

Reports in the English media suggest the discussions between Wood and Forest centre on the length of his extension, with the player wanting a two-year deal and the club offering one. Irrespective of how those negotiations progress, Wood is on course to surpass his best top-flight league tally (14 goals for Burnley in 2019-20) and power Forest to its highest Premier League finish since placing third in the 1994-95 season.

Fans, who are enjoying the season to the fullest, are dreaming of Europe, but Wood is focusing on the present. "It is about working hard and taking your opportunities when it comes," he said. Spoken like a true striker, for Wood has done nothing but work hard and take his opportunities in front of goal all his career. It's just that this season more people are noticing.

Prolific Wood has Forest flourishing

The 33-year-old New Zealander may look like an old-school No. 9, but he is much more than just a lumbering target-man from a bygone era. The proven goal-scorer is on course to surpass his best top-flight league tally and power Nottingham to its highest Premier League finish in decades

Reuters
Associated Press

Nottingham Forest and its free-scoring striker Chris Wood are proving to be the surprise package of the Premier League season so far.

The 2-0 win over Everton last weekend and Chelsea's loss to Ipswich Town on Monday meant Forest, which battled against relegation for much of last season, finished 2024 at No. 2 on the Premier League table – its highest position at the end of a year for more than 30 years.

Unlikely hero?

A central figure in Forest's incredible first half of the 2024-25 season is Wood – an unlikely hero, on the face of it. But look closer and you begin to perceive the 33-year-old New Zealander's considerable value.

The 6'3" Wood is a centre-forward with many qualities that are associated with the traditional, old-school No. 9. An aerial threat, who can win headers and outmuscle markers, he is a nightmare to defend against in the box when the crosses pour in.

He can also help his own defence release pres-

I'm not a man who is going to beat two or three players and stick it in the top corner. If they can't supply me, I can't score. It's about trying to find the role which fits CHRIS WOOD

sure, serving as a target for hastily hoofed 'outballs'. By holding defenders off and protecting the ball, he gives his teammates an opportunity to advance up the pitch; at the very least, he wins them some breathing room.

But to limit Wood to a lumbering target-man from a bygone era is to do him an injustice. He has many other facets to his game, some of which were evident in the win over Everton. Sean Dyche's side has proven difficult to break down, as Arsenal, Chelsea and Manchester City discovered during Everton's run of three consecutive draws, but Wood and Forest found a way.

For the first goal, Wood nodded down a long ball to Anthony Elanga on the counter-attack, which the Swedish winger headed back into the centre-forward's path. What followed was exquisite, Wood deftly lifting a delicate lob over the advancing Jordan Pickford. The run in the channel, giving his team an outlet; the vision to first spot Elanga and then control the headed pass; the poise and awareness to find the most efficient finish: this was the work of a first-rate striker.

Wood turned provider for Forest's second, setting up Morgan Gibbs-White. Gibbs-White deserves credit for his neat footwork before firing home, but Wood's assist, while understated, was pivotal. The giant Kiwi dropped deep, finding

space to rescue a broken-down counter-attack. He then slid the ball into Gibbs-White's stride, exploiting Everton's temporary disorganisation.

Racking up numbers

With 11 Premier League goals this season, Wood has netted double-figures for the sixth time in England's top-flight – commendable in itself, but even more remarkable given he has achieved the feat with Forest and previously Burnley, not the most productive teams in attack. What's more, he has outperformed his expected goals (xG) of 7.51, which reflects well on his finishing.

It was at Burnley that Wood played under Dyche, who now holds Everton's reins, and his former manager was well aware of the threat the 33-year-old posed. "I thought he was excellent [against us], doing all the hard yards... not touching the ball very often but everything he needs to be an armful," said Dyche. "He gives them a big focal point and he was the difference in my opinion."

Dyche also spoke of how Forest's game-model under Nuno Espírito Santo, with "wide players" and the ability "to get the ball to Woody quickly", was helping. "A lot of credit to him, credit to his professionalism to keep on top of himself," said Dyche. "He had a quiet spell when he first went there, a few question marks over him. That can happen with strikers. He's had that before and he's come through it. Certainly a very good player, and someone I've got a lot of respect for."

Others are beginning to realise what Dyche has long known. Gary Lineker, one of England's finest strikers and now a broadcaster, confessed he had underestimated Wood. "I must say I misjudged the quality of the player," said Lineker. "He's a better footballer than I thought he was originally, I don't mind owning that he's done really well. And again you're talking about intelligence, he makes the best of his assets with his movement."

Wood's self-awareness has played a big part in his ability to maximise his strengths. The combination of his physicality and the speed of the rest of the Forest forward line has worked to great effect so far this season, not least because Wood

STACKING UP



ATP Men's Top 15					
#	Player	Age	Points	Events	
1	Jannik Sinner	23	11,830	17	
2	Alexander Zverev	27	7,915	21	
3	Carlos Alcaraz	21	7,010	18	
4	Taylor Fritz	27	5,100	22	
5	Daniil Medvedev	28	5,030	17	
6	Casper Ruud	26	4,255	25	
7	Novak Djokovic	37	3,910	18	
8	Andrey Rublev	27	3,760	27	
9	Alex de Minaur	25	3,745	23	
10	Grigor Dimitrov	33	3,350	19	
11	Stefanos Tsitsipas	26	3,165	22	
12	Tommy Paul	27	3,145	21	
13	Holger Rune	21	3,025	23	
14	Ugo Humbert	26	2,765	26	
15	Jack Draper	23	2,685	22	



Top Indians ▶		
	Sumit Nagal	Rank 98 ▲ 1 spot

WTA Women's Top 15					
#	Player	Age	Points	Events	
1	Aryna Sabalenka	26	9,416	21	
2	Iga Swiatek	23	8,295	18	
3	Coco Gauff	20	6,530	22	
4	Jasmine Paolini	28	5,344	20	
5	Qinwen Zheng	22	5,340	21	
6	Elena Rybakina	25	5,171	20	
7	Jessica Pegula	30	4,705	19	
8	Emma Navarro	23	3,589	25	
9	Daria Kasatkina	27	3,368	24	
10	Barbara Krejčíková	29	3,214	17	
11	Danielle Collins	31	3,178	19	
12	Paula Badosa	27	2,908	20	
13	Diana Shnaider	20	2,895	27	
14	Anna Kalinskaya	26	2,743	20	
15	Jelena Ostapenko	27	2,588	21	

Top Indians ▶		
	Ankita Raina	Rank 285 ▲ 1 spot

Shravnil Bhamidipati		
		Rank 324 ▼ 3 spots

English Premier League Standings									
#	Team	GP	W	D	GF	GA	GD	PTS	
1	Liverpool	18	14	3	1	45	17	28	45
2	Arsenal	19	11	6	2	38	17	21	39
3	Nottingham Forest	19	11	4	2	26	19	7	37
4	Chelsea	19	10	5	4	38	23	15	35
5	Newcastle	19	9	5	5	32	21	11	32
6	Man. City	19	9	4	6	32	26	6	31
7	Bournemouth	19	8	6	5	29	23	6	30
8	Fulham	19	7	8	4	28	25	3	29
9	Aston Villa	19	8	5	6	28	31	-3	29
10	Brighton	19	6	9	4	29	28	1	27
11	Tottenham	19	7	3	9	41	28	13	24
12	Brentford	19	7	3	9	33	35	-2	24
13	West Ham	19	6	5	8	23	35	-12	23
14	Man. United	19	6	4	9	21	26	-5	22
15	Crystal Palace	19	4	8	7	20	27	-7	20
16	Everton	18	3	8	7	15	24	-9	17
17	Wolves	19	4	4	11	31	42	-11	16
18	Ipswich Town	19	3	6	10	18	33	-15	15
19	Leicester City	19	3	5	11	22	42	-20	14
20	Southampton	19	1	3	15				

'I don't live in the past – I love the fact that I now have a shot at winning Tour titles'

Once Indian tennis' biggest singles hope, Yuki Bhambri has found success in doubles after several battles with injury. In this chat, he talks about not missing singles, learning to trust his partner, enhancing his net game, and aiming in 2025 to better last season's two-trophy tally

INTERVIEW

Yuki Bhambri

N. Sudarshan

When Yuki Bhambri won the Australian Open junior singles title in 2009, he was India's biggest tennis hope. But over the next decade, Bhambri, who peaked at No. 83 in singles, stumbled from one injury to another and his otherwise fine court-craft never reached a crescendo.

Now, as a 32-year-old, he is back on his feet and enjoying his time on the court, albeit as a practitioner of the less intense art of doubles. In fact, 2024 was the first year he did not play even one professional singles match and his once brittle body has given him an emphatic thumbs up.

At 48, he is the second-highest-ranked Indian doubles player, after Rohan Bopanna, and last season, with Frenchman Albano Olivetti, he won two ATP Tour-level titles (third overall) and reached two other finals. In an interview with *The Hindu*, Bhambri discusses his transition to doubles, the state of his tennis and his dreams for the future. Excerpts:

How will you describe your 2024 season?

I would probably say I didn't start off well, but ended well. Going into the Australian Open and not winning matches [three consecutive first-round defeats including Melbourne] to reaching the semifinals at an ATP 500 in Dubai and then getting the first clay-court title [ATP 250, Munich]... I am happy about that. I still think there were opportunities for us as a team to do better, especially in the Slams. So that's something we are targeting for 2025, to go a step further and make breakthroughs in the bigger events.

You've been in and around the top-60 since mid-2023, and top-50 since July 2024. What has this period told you as a player?

Like you mentioned, I am just making those small strides. The higher you go, the more difficult it gets and you don't see as many big jumps [in rankings] as you would [early on]. It just shows that I'm on the right path. Rankings don't lie and tennis rewards consistency. You've to play the whole year, the 19 best events well, and that determines where you're at. It gives you confidence that you are doing the right things, and that's what I take from this. I hope I can keep moving forward in this direction and make those breakthroughs and small gains even in 2025.

How did you decide singles was not for you anymore?

It really was my injuries. My knee took a very long time to heal and I knew I didn't want to be stuck in a rut where I play a year of tennis and sit out for another year. Before the knee, it was my elbow. The older you get, it gets more and more difficult to go back and start out at a lower level and build your game back only to get hurt again. I had played a bit of doubles when I was playing singles, and had some success on the Challenger Tour and



My sole focus has been on how to improve my half-court game. A lot of the players are probably aware of my game now. So you're really trying to find those small advantages



I did what I could in singles and would like to do better in doubles. I don't want to be sitting out at 31, 32 with another injury and waiting for two more years to go back. I think I can have a good eight-to-10-year career in doubles

derstand how certain individuals play.

Coming to my game, I'm focusing a lot more on volleying. Doubles is fast-paced, so a lot more serve and volley, faster drills and more reflexes.

How difficult has it been to adapt? Doubles, as a format, is pretty fickle, competitive and teams are closely bunched...

You don't adapt. It is always running up and down. You win by a point and you lose by a point. Most matches are like that. Especially with the 10-point tie-break [replacing the third set in Tour events], it doesn't give you much margin for error. But that's what makes the game exciting too. In the end, good players and good teams will find a way. You will still see consistent teams winning the super tie-breaks and winning matches. So it's fun to play and it always gives you an opportunity.

Indian doubles has impossibly high standards to live up to. Does that motivate you?

When Sania Mirza did well, a lot more women's tennis players emerged in India. When you have Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Rohan Bopanna winning Grand Slam tournaments, that's the reason why other Indian athletes have picked up [doubles]. I have seen someone like Divij Sharan at close quarters. He had considerable success on the doubles Tour, which is why I bought into it.

In fact, one of the reasons why I went to the Nick Bollettieri Academy [2007] was because there were a lot of other singles players there from whom I could learn and understand what was needed to become a good player. The reason why in 2024 a lot of our doubles guys have had success is because of the 'Doubles Dream' project [tech firm KPI's Corporate Social Responsibility initiative]. Every Indian doubles player had a career-high ranking [in 2024] and that's because we have two fantastic coaches and two fantastic trainers travelling with us.

What did you work on ahead of the 2025 season?

It is just the small things. You can always serve better, volley better and return better. I am trying to add a lot more variation. A lot of the players are probably aware of my game now. So you're really trying to find those small advantages.

In 2023, you got one title; in 2024, two. Any targets for 2025?

Hopefully a few more than two... maybe three or four titles. That would mean that we are doing well.

a few rounds at Slams. So, I believed I could play. And when you see a lot of your contemporaries and friends doing well, that gives you the belief. After I hurt my knee, I was out for almost three-and-a-half years and I took the call. I don't want to be sitting out at 31, 32 with another injury and waiting for two more years to go back. I think I can have a good eight-to-10-year career in doubles.

Regardless of the injuries, do you miss singles?

No! I find it more and more difficult when I see the Sinner and Alcaraz playing. I don't regret things and live in the past. I'm enjoying playing doubles, being at the big events, at the Slams. More than that, I love the fact that I have a shot at winning Tour titles, which I didn't realistically

have at most Tour-level singles events.

How have you approached playing doubles? Is singles, sometimes, still at the back of your mind?

It's not. Mentally, I had made the switch a couple of years ago, and even before that, I always knew that this was something I would try. If you've taken up this role of wanting to play and win doubles, you are also practising that way. So, it's not restrictive as such. I did what I could in my singles career and I would like to do better in doubles. So my sole focus has been on how to improve my half-court game.

What adjustments did you have to make?

You've got to learn to trust your partner and un-

GAME THEORY

LaLiga: goals vs. expected goals

Robert Lewandowski leads LaLiga's scoring charts so far this season, but he is underperforming his expected goals (xG), much like Kylian Mbappe, who is joint-third. Raphinha has scored the number of goals he was expected to score, while Ante Budimir is the only player in the top three to outperform his xG. A look at the top goal-scorers in Spain's premier division this season and the margin between their tallies and the xG they have generated (xGdiff):



Player	Club	Games	Goals	xG	xGdiff
Robert Lewandowski	Barcelona	18	16	17.51	-1.51
Raphinha	Barcelona	19	11	11	0
Ante Budimir	Osasuna	18	10	8.71	1.29
Kylian Mbappe	Real Madrid	16	10	12.4	-2.4
Alexander Sorloth	Atlético	18	8	8.07	-0.07
Ayoze Pérez	Villarreal	12	8	4.75	3.25
Dodi Lukebakio	Sevilla	18	8	5.51	2.49
Vinícius Junior	Real Madrid	14	8	6.25	1.75
Antoine Griezmann	Atlético	18	7	4.21	2.79
Giovanni Lo Celso	Real Betis	12	7	3.16	3.84
Oihan Sancte	Athletic Club	16	7	5.21	1.79
Sandro Ramírez	Las Palmas	15	7	2.6	4.4
Thierry Barry	Villarreal	17	7	10.26	-3.26
Iago Aspas	Celta Vigo	16	6	5.15	0.85
Javi Puado	Espanyol	16	6	5.6	0.4
Jude Bellingham	Real Madrid	14	6	3.39	2.61
Cyle Larin	Mallorca	16	5	5.35	-0.35
Dani Olmo	Barcelona	11	5	2.4	2.6
Fabio Silva	Las Palmas	13	5	3.96	1.04
Federico Valverde	Real Madrid	18	5	0.65	4.35
Gorka Gurutza	Athletic Club	18	5	2.74	2.26
Julian Alvarez	Atlético	18	5	3.65	1.35
Kike García	Deportivo Alavés	17	5	3.34	1.66
Lamine Yamal	Barcelona	16	5	5.52	-0.52
Rodrygo	Real Madrid	15	5	2.39	2.61

Source: whoscored.com

PICTURE THIS



Ride and carry

Cyclo-cross, often described as 'the steeplechase of cycling', involves riders attempting to complete several laps of a 2.5-3.5km course comprising sections of pavement, grass, steep hills, wooden trails, ditches, ve-

ry deep mud, and even obstacles.

It sometimes requires athletes to dismount, carry their bicycles — as Hungary's Blanka Vas does in this photograph — over or around the hurdle, remount and continue cycling.

As you can imagine, the sport severely tests a rider's aerobic

endurance, physical strength and bike-handling skills. Given the harshness of the conditions, riders are allowed to change bicycles and receive mechanical assistance from a pit crew during the race.

Many of the best cyclo-cross riders cross-train — and compete — in other cycling disciplines. But the discipline has grown to such a level that many riders choose to specialise in it.

The international or 'World Cup' season runs from October to February, with races typically being held in the autumn and winter. The cyclo-cross World Championships is the sport's pinnacle one-day event.

EMOTIONAL DECISION

Team management took the call to rest Rohit, says Pant



Indian stumper Rishabh Pant admitted to a touch of emotion within the ranks when news about Rohit Sharma missing the fifth Test spread. "He is our captain and obviously there will be some emotion. It was a management call so I was not part of that conversation so I can't explain anything other than that," Pant said.

POSITIVE VIEW

'Forget the past and give your best' is captain Bumrah's message



India's Rishabh Pant spoke about stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah's captaincy in his press conference at the end of the opening day of the Sydney Test. "Mostly his message is positive all the time and don't think about what has already happened, just give your best on the field. That's what you want from your captain," Pant said.

STRANGE EXPLANATION

Ponting surprised by the term 'opting out' for Rohit's absence



Ricky Ponting said he was "surprised" by the Indian camp's wording around Rohit Sharma's absence from the fifth Test. Jasprit Bumrah, who walked out for the toss, said Rohit has "opted to rest" from the Sydney Test. "I was very surprised when I heard the term 'opting out' coming into such an important game," Ponting said.

IN COMMAND

Rickelton, Bavuma tons help South Africa take opening day's honours



Ryan Rickelton and Temba Bavuma smashed hundreds as South Africa ended up with 316 for the loss of four wickets on the opening day of the second Test against Pakistan in Cape Town on Friday. **The scores:** SA 316/4 in 80 overs (Rickelton 176 batting, Bavuma 106) vs Pakistan. **Toss:** South Africa.

No change in India's fortunes as batting horrors continue

Pant fights hard to be the visitor's top-scorer on a lively Sydney track; Boland puts the home side on top with a four-for; stand-in skipper Bumrah makes a plucky 22 and follows it up with a wicket

IND IN AUS

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

SYDNEY

Friday dawned to the wet streaks of rain, just about enough to accentuate the green on leaves. When the dampness paused, it was time for cricket's annual pilgrimage to the Sydney Cricket Ground.

India turned up with Jasprit Bumrah at the helm while Rohit Sharma, according to the former, opted to rest. A change in leadership, however, did not usher in a difference in the manner the visitor batted on a pitch that seemed more Perth and less Sydney.

There was movement and some bounce, and as the fifth Test's opening day stretched, the template of wilting Indian batters against resurgent Australian pacers, was on view. At close, Australia scored nine for one in reply to India's first innings total of 185. A fired up Bumrah, after a chat with Sam Konstas, dismissed Usman Khawaja.

Earlier, the Indian stint was punctured by the regular fall of wickets interspersed with few partnerships. In the last session, Rishabh Pant (40), stifled by the host's attack, tried to strike one over the fence but miscued it off Scott Boland. The relentless speedster made it an encore by scalping Nitish Kumar. And it fell upon Washington Sundar to avert the hat-trick, which he barely managed.

The incisions continued as Mitchell Starc pegged Ravindra Jadeja back and won the lbw appeal. Later, Washington was adjudged caught behind off Cummins even as doubts lingered about the edge. The tail withered while Bumrah swung his bat around.

This batting meltdown



Fatal error: Kohli fell to Boland after doing all the hard work. AFP

SCOREBOARD**INDIA — 1ST INNINGS**

Yashasvi Jaiswal c Webster b Boland 10 (26b, 1x4), K.L. Rahul c Konstas b Starc 4 (14b), Shubman Gill c Smith b Lyon 20 (64b, 2x4), Virat Kohli c Webster b Boland 17 (69b), Rishabh Pant c Cummins b Boland 40 (98b, 3x4, 1x6), Ravindra Jadeja lbw b Starc 26 (95b, 3x4), Nitish Kumar Reddy c Smith b Boland 0 (1b), Washington Sundar c Carey b Cummins 14 (30b, 3x4), Prasidh Krishna c (30b, 3x4), Prasidh Krishna c

KONSTAS — 1ST INNINGS

Konstas b Starc 3 (10b), Jasprit Bumrah c Starc b Cummins 22 (17b, 3x4, 1x6), Mohammed Siraj (not out) 3 (16b); Extras (b-7, lb-13, nb-6): 26; Total (in 72.2 overs): 185.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-11 (Rahul, 4.6 overs), 2-17 (Jaiswal, 7.4), 3-57 (Gill, 24.6), 4-72 (Kohli, 31.3), 5-120 (Pant, 56.4), 6-120 (Nitish, 56.5), 7-134 (Jadeja, 62.4), 8-148 (Washington, 65.6), 9-168 (Prasidh, 68.2).

AUSTRALIA BOWLING

Bumrah 2-0-7-1, Siraj 1-0-2-0.

Toss: India.

was the frayed common thread that linked all the sessions. In the middle one, Virat Kohli tried to ride the bounce that Boland extracted around off-stump. The impetus to play overwhelmed the batter's late effort at restraint and the edge flew to debutant Beau Webster.

It was left to southpaws Pant and Jadeja to plaster the cracks. The former eschewed his usual charge-and-slam and tumble-and-scoop routines. Pant withstood terrible blows and this was him embracing the spirit of Cheteshwar

Pujara. Once he hoisted Webster into the sight-screen.

Meanwhile, Jadeja remained sombre, and enjoyed two slivers of luck as Steve Smith and Nathan Lyon dropped him, and India moved to 107 for four at tea.

In the morning, Bumrah won the toss and elected to bat. Yashasvi Jaiswal forced Starc past long-on for four but the speedster found relief when K.L. Rahul flicked straight to Konstas. The soft dismissal ushered in Shubman Gill, who had replaced Rohit in the eleven.

But India struggled as Jaiswal fell to Boland. It would have become worse but when Kohli edged his first ball, Smith, jugged the catch and popped it to Marnus Labuschagne at gully. A catch was claimed but television replays hinted at a probable scraping of the turf.

Kohli and Gill buckled down before the latter gave the charge to Lyon at the stroke of lunch. The batter sliced the ball to Smith. India 57 for three at the break and the batting horrors continued for a large part of the day.

Tom Craig making full use of a defensive blunder by Arthur van Doren immediately on resumption of play. van Doren failed to control the ball at the edge of the circle and Craig pounced on it, stepping in and smashing a reverse hit into the board.

An advantage awarded by the umpire after his shot was saved in the 43rd minute saw Hendrickx step up to smash in the rebound and it looked like Lancers would finally get full points but Jip Janssen at the other end had other ideas, bringing his team level again as Dragons upped

the ante in the final quarter.

With four goals each in the shoot-out, it came down to sudden death but it looked like never-ending as Nathan Ephraums and Thierry Brinkman were successful for TND and Lancers respectively. However, while Moritz Ludwig managed to get his second of the day against Toby Cotterill Reynolds – brought on by the Lancers for the SO – Dilpreet Singh finally faltered.

The result: Tamil Nadu Dragons 2 (Craig 31, Janssen 51) drew with Kalinga Lancers 2 (Hendrickx 24, 43). Dragons won 6-5 in shoot-out.

Rohit episode reveals shocking lack of grace and transparency

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

SYDNEY

Finally there was closure to the question around Rohit Sharma. The 'will he play or won't he play' question was emphatically answered when Jasprit Bumrah strode out to the toss ahead of the fifth Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground here on Friday. As if to drive home the point, the Board of Control for Cricket in India's note on the playing XI and the entire squad did not have Rohit's name.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, Bumrah said: "Our captain has shown leadership by opting to rest in this game. That shows there is a lot of unity in this team." Until Bumrah spoke, there was



End of the road: Rohit, in all likelihood, has played his final Test. AFP

no official word on the manner of Rohit's exit and the entire issue reveals a shocking lack of grace and transparency.

While speaking to the media on Thursday, coach Gautam Gambhir evaded a direct reply to the question around Rohit's spot in the

playing XI. It set the field ripe for speculations and conspiracy theories. Entirely needless ahead of a vital clash of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy series.

Having made a smashing Test debut against the West Indies at Kolkata's Eden Gardens in 2013 with

a sparkling 177, Rohit played 67 Tests, scored 4301 runs with an average of 40.57 and with 12 hundreds to boot. His last innings was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on December 30, last year. The then Indian captain scored nine from 40 deliveries and succumbed to his Australian counterpart Pat Cummins.

Last tango
Always a bigger player in the blue shade, perhaps Rohit will get one last taste in limited overs cricket in the ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates from February 19 to March 9. India will play all its games in Dubai. And that might well be Rohit's final act in international cricket.

Very competitive score on a tough pitch: Pant

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

SYDNEY

Having dealt with a gruesome car accident, a red cherry hurtling into his body is perhaps the least of Rishabh Pant's worries. He battled hard against the Australian attack and was India's top-scorer with a 40 in the fifth Test that began at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

Struck eight times on his torso, Pant competed hard and was one of the bright spots in a dreary Indian first innings.

Reacting to the tough outing, he said: "Definitely it's painful but sometimes you have to do the hard work for the team and that's okay. I was not thinking about where I got hit but just played the ball to the best of my abilities." Later, he added: "I think this is the first time I have been hit so much."

Being in proximity when Jasprit Bumrah and Sam Konstas exchanged words, Pant explained: "They wanted to waste some time. I feel that's the reason. He had a conversation with Jassi (Bumrah). He said something. I didn't hear. He wanted to waste some time so we don't bowl one more over."

Queried about his pitch-impressions, Pant replied: "It was a little bit tough pitch. The ball was doing off the wicket quite a bit. I wouldn't say 185 is a par-score. But I think anything over 220-250 would be a par-score, but still a very competitive score because the way the ball is moving, there is a lot of help for the bowlers."

And on the Washington Sundar dismissal, Pant said: "I feel whatever decision we make on the field, it has to stay with the on-field umpire. Until and unless it's (evidence) so conclusive to change the decision, I think we should stay with the on-field umpire. Technology can be a little better I guess."

It seamed around all day, says Webster

K.C. Vijaya Kumar

SYDNEY

Beau Webster turned up at the press conference with a swagger belying a debutant's nerves. But then he is 31 and has played a decade of first-class cricket. Hailing from Tasmania, the land of David Boon and Ricky Ponting, Webster has some history to inspire him further.

He did well in the fifth Test that commenced at the Sydney Cricket Ground here on Friday. He plucked two fine catches, bowled tight spells and saw a probable maiden Test wicket being dropped. Webster, though, seemed unfazed: "It was good to have my family here and to get the cap from Junior (Mark Waugh). Got some catches and that settled the nerves."

Asked about the pitch, the Australian all-rounder quipped: "It seamed around all day and at times it was a bit difficult to control the seam. Would 185 (India's total) be ideal, I don't know what would be a competitive score. With (Jasprit) Bumrah around, it would be challenging for the batters tomorrow."

Probed on the fiery climax of day one with Bumrah, Sam Konstas and Indian fielders involved in a tense exchange, Webster said: "Ah, we were at the change-room, and we saw him (Konstas) hit Bumrah over mid-wicket for four. It is no longer a surprise and we were like okay 'so he is up and away'. The youngsters these days! He loves to have a chat."

Dragons earn their first win as Lancers falter again in the shoot-out

HIL

Uthra Ganesan

ROURKELA

Local favourite Kalinga Lancers suffered yet another shoot-out heartbreak, going down 6-5 in sudden death to Tamil Nadu Dragons after the teams were tied 2-2 at the end of regulation time in the eighth game of the Hockey India League here on Friday.

With both teams having suffered shoot-out setbacks in their respective opening games, they would have wanted to avoid it and while the Lan-

cers did look like they would finally get a regulation win under their belt, Dragons came from behind twice to first stretch the game into penalties and then take the bonus point for their first win of the competition.

With some of the top drag-flickers in their ranks, it was clear early on that both teams were aiming to earn as many penalty corners as they could.

Lancers' Alexander Hendrickx converted his team's fourth PC in the 24th minute, putting one past David Harte. Dragons came back with a bang,

Tom Craig making full use of a defensive blunder by Arthur van Doren immediately on resumption of play. van Doren failed to control the ball at the edge of the circle and Craig pounced on it, stepping in and smashing a reverse hit into the board.

An advantage awarded by the umpire after his shot was saved in the 43rd minute saw Hendrickx step up to smash in the rebound and it looked like Lancers would finally get full points but Jip Janssen at the other end had other ideas, bringing his team level again as Dragons upped

the ante in the final quarter.



Saviour: Dragons' goalkeeper Harte rose to the occasion when it mattered. BISWARANJAN ROUT

Gharami slams century as Bengal romps home against Bihar

Skipper's innings helps team ace the chase comfortably; opener Porel chips in with a breezy fifty; teenager Suryavanshi comes up with a cameo

HAZARE TROPHY

V.V. Subrahmanyam

HYDERABAD

Sudip Kumar Gharami led from the front with a superbly paced century (107 n.o., 128b, 13x4, 1x6) to guide Bengal to an emphatic six-wicket win against Bihar in a Vijay Hazare Trophy one-day cricket championship Group E match at the Gymkhana Ground here on Friday.

Chasing 236, Bengal was off to an impressive start with openers Abishek Porel (55, 53b, 7x4) and Gharami, who was dropped on



Captain's knock: Gharami got the job done for Bengal against Bihar. V.V. SUBRAHMANYAM

17 when Piyush Kumar floored a simple catch at point when the batter cut

pacer Amod Yadav in the seventh over, putting on 111 for the first wicket in 17.4

overs when the former was more fluent while the captain was more content in

placements.

Porel once again looked set for a big knock before he holed out to long-on off leg-spinner Himanshu Singh. Then, offie Suraj Kashyap struck double blow having Sudip Chatterjee (1) stumped and then trapping in-form Anustup Majumdar for a second-ball duck in the 18th over to reduce Bengal to 112 for three in 18.4 overs.

Fruitful

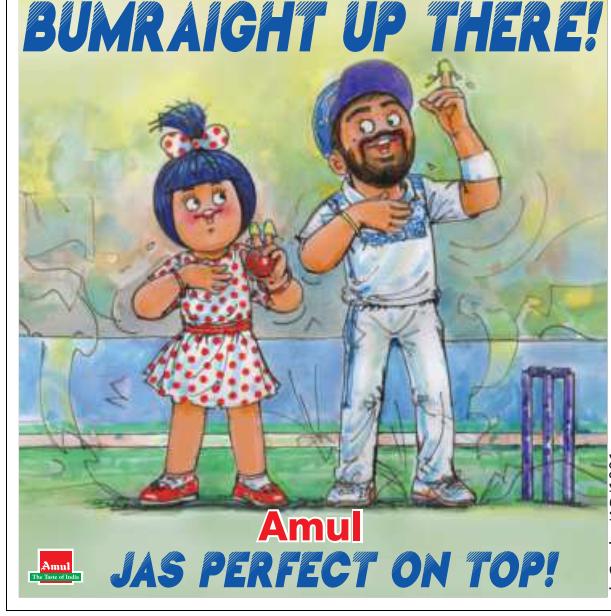
Then, a fruitful stand of 53 between Gharami and the free-stroking Sumanta Gupta (30, 29b, 2x4, 1x6) put the Bengal innings back on track, its cause helped by some shoddy

ground fielding. Later, Gharami and the enterprising Karan Lal (37 n.o., 39b, 4x4, 1x6) ensured there were no more hiccups.

Piyush comes good

Earlier, Bihar owed its decent total, on a pitch where the odd ball kept low, thanks to a fine knock by Piyush Kumar Singh (89, 112b, 9x4) and a handy contribution from Bipin Saurabh (34, 44b, 3x4, 1x6).

The 13-year-old opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi (26, 16b, 3x4, 2x6) played a cameo before India pacer Mohammed Shami had him edging to wicketkeeper in the fifth over.



VIJAY HAZARE SIXTH-ROUND SCORES

Group-A: Jaipur: Manipur 162 in 50 overs (Avinav Choudhury 3/25) lost to Assam 163/4 in 36.5 overs (Denish Das 55 n.o., Saahil Jain 54 n.o.). **Toss:** Manipur; **Points:** Assam 4(8), Manipur 0(0).

Goa 117 in 35.4 overs (K. Siddharth 43, Axar Patel 3/14) lost to Gujarat 118/4 in 16.5 overs (Urvi Patel 61). **Toss:** Gujarat; Gujarat 4(24), Goa 0(12).

Odisha 268/5 in 50 overs (Swastik Samal 42, Rajesh Dhupe 69, Sandeep Pattnaik 69 n.o., Prayash Singh 50) lost to Haryana 274/6 in 47 overs (Yuvraj Singh 67, Ankit Kumar 62, Parth Vats 47, Rahul Tewatia 59). **Toss:** Haryana; Haryana, Haryana 4(20), Odisha 0(8).

Jharkhand 249/8 in 50 overs (Ayush Bhardwaj 44, Anukul Roy 52, Aditya Sethi 4/45) lost to Uttarakhand 256/5 in 48.5 overs (R. Samarth 104, Avneesh Sudha 75 n.o.). **Toss:** Jharkhand; Uttarakhand 4(12), Jharkhand 0(12).

Group-B: Mumbai: Himachal Pradesh 234/8 in 50 overs (Digvijay Rangi 96, Mayank Dagar 41) bt Services 202 in 44.3 overs (Mohit Ahlawat 73, Kanwar Abhinay 3/18). **Toss:** Services; HP 4(12), Services 0(4).

Sikkim 181 in 44.2 overs (Palzor Tamang 53, Nafees Siddique 4/36, Chaman Pushp 3/26) bt Meghalaya 151 in 47.1 overs (Akash Choudhary 62, Palzor Tamang 3/27). **Toss:** Sikkim; Sikkim 4(4), Meghalaya 0(0).

Railways 345/9 in 50 overs (Suraj Ahuja 115, Sahab Yuvraj Singh 81, Upendra Yadav 55, Khaleel Ahmed 4/65) lost to Rajasthan 348/9 in 49.5 overs (Kartik Sharma 100, Samarjit Joshi 116 n.o., Rahul Sharma 3/63, Akshat Pandey 3/82). **Toss:** Rajasthan; Rajasthan 4(20), Railways 0(16).

Navi Mumbai: Andhra 270/7 in 50 overs (Ashwin Hebbar 49, Karna 349/7 in 50 overs



Karun set a record for most List A runs (542) without being dismissed. FILE PHOTO

Shaik Rasheed 42, Ricky Bhui 42, Bodhula Kumar 46, K.V.

Sasikiran 52 n.o., Rajneesh Gurbani 3/61) lost to Maharashtra 274/5 in 47.3 overs (Siddhesh Veer 115 n.o., Rahul Tripathi 69). **Toss:** Maharashtra; Maharashtra 4(4), Andhra 0(16).

Group-C: Ahmedabad: Nagaland 358/3 in 50 overs (Sedezhalie 138, Ron Jonathan 109, J. Suchith 43) bt Arunachal Pradesh 129 in 34.4 overs (Vino Zhimomi 5/28). **Toss:** TN; TN 4(14), Mizoram 0(2).

Uttar Pradesh 307/8 in 50 overs (Madhav Kaushik 41, Sameer Rizvi 105, Nachiket Bhute 4/65) lost to Vidarbha 313/2 in 47.2 overs (Yash Rathod 138 n.o., Karun Nair 112). **Toss:** Vidarbha; Vidarbha 4(20), UP 0(14).

Visakhapatnam: Jammu & Kashmir 337 in 47.3 overs (Vivrant Sharma 42, Shubham Khajuria 159, Ravi Kiran 3/35) lost to Chhattisgarh 339/3 in 48.3 overs (Ashutosh Singh 127, Sanjeet Desai 128, Prateek Yadav 51 n.o.). **Toss:** Chhattisgarh; Chhattisgarh 4(10), J & K 0(6).

Group-E: Hyderabad: Baroda 301/8 in 50 overs (Shashwat Rawat 82, Kunral Pandya 87, Kumari Kartikeya 3/51) bt Madhya Pradesh 217 in 40.2 overs (Harsh Gawli 42, Kunral Pandya 3/51). **Toss:** MP; Baroda 4(16), MP 0(10).

Bihar 235 in 49 overs (Piyush Singh 89, Pradipta Pramanik 3/34) lost to Bengal 239/4 in 42.3 overs (Abishek Porel 55, Sudip Gharani 107 n.o.). **Toss:** Bengal; Bengal 4(18), Bihar 0(4).

Kerala 327/5 in 50 overs (Krishna Prasad 135, Salman Nizar 42 n.o.) bt Tripura 182 in 42.3 overs (Mandeep Singh 78, M.D. Nidheesh 3/34, Aditya Sarwate 3/22). **Toss:** Tripura; Kerala 4(6), Tripura 0(6).

Jagbir suffers massive heart attack, in ICU

Uthra Ganeshan

ROURKELA

Former India coach and double-Olympian Jagbir Singh on Friday suffered a massive heart attack and was rushed to the hospital, where he was given CPR and operated upon.

Jagbir, who is currently with Team Gonasika here for the Hockey India League, complained of chest congestion during the team's training session on Friday afternoon and was immediately taken to Apollo Hospital, where he was diagnosed with a completely blocked artery.

The doctors operated and inserted a stent to open it up but Jagbir suffered a massive cardiac arrest during the procedure, sources in the know added.

He had to be revived through cardiopulmonary resuscitation but was reportedly unresponsive for approximately 10-15 minutes before recovering. He is still in ICU and on a ventilator with doctors admitting that the next 8-10 hours would be critical to assess the exact condition.

"He is showing improvement but not out of danger yet. The period when he was unresponsive is the biggest concern at the moment since the doctors are trying to assess if the lack of



oxygen for those minutes affected any internal organs. The good thing is the kidneys are responsive now and he tried to breathe normally also but the doctors do not want to take any risk," a senior Hockey India official, present at the hospital, told *The Hindu*.

The 59-year-old Jagbir was part of two medal-winning Asian Games contingent (1986 and 1990) and two Olympics (1988 and 1992). He also coached the Indian men's team briefly and is well-known as a media columnist and expert.

"We are all hoping he recovers soon. But, god forbid if things do not get better, we will have all necessary arrangements ready to airlift him to Delhi or elsewhere with advanced facilities. There will be nothing left to chance," HI insisted.

SNAPSHOTS

Parikshit and Dhakshinewar make the doubles final

Parikshit Somani and Dhakshinewar Suresh beat Chirag Duhani and Dev Java 6-3, 7-6(1) to reach the doubles final of the \$30,000 ITF men's tennis tournament at the Indore Tennis Club on Friday.

In the final, the Indian pair will play Mathys Erhard and Alastair Gray.

The results: Quarterfinals:

Alastair Gray (GBR) bt Mathys Erhard (Fra) 6-1, 2-1 (retired); Florent Bax (Fra) bt Egor Agafonov 6-3, 4-1 (retired); Oliver Crawford (GBR) bt Yurii Dzhavakian (Ukr) 6-4, 6-7(4), 6-2; Samir Banerjee (USA) bt Maxim Zhukov 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Doubles: Semifinals: Parikshit & Dhakshinewar bt Chirag & Dev 6-3, 7-6(1); Mathys Erhard (Fra) & Alastair Gray (GBR) bt Ishaque Eqbal & Aryan Shah 6-3, 6-4.

NEUFC, Mohammadan play out goalless draw

GUWAHATI: NorthEast United FC and Mohammadan SC were involved in a goalless draw in the Indian Super League here on Friday.

The host sits third on the table with 22 points from 14 games while the visitor is at the bottom with seven from the same number of games.

LIVE TELECAST

Zimbabwe vs Afghanistan: 2nd Test, day 3, FanCode, 1.30 p.m.

South Africa vs Pakistan: 2nd Test, day 2, JioCinema, 2 p.m.

ISL: Sports 18-3 & JioCinema, 5 & 7.30 p.m.

Hockey: HIL, DD Sports, Sony Sports Ten 1, 2, 3 & LIV, 6 & 8.15 p.m.

Premier League: SS Select 1, 2 & Hotstar, 6, 8.30 & 11 p.m.

Serie A: gtv.world, 7.30, 10.30 p.m. & 1.15 a.m. (Sunday)

New Zealand vs Sri Lanka: 1st ODI, Sony Sports Ten 5 & LIV, Prime Video, 3.30 a.m. (Sunday)

Australia vs India: 5th Test, day 2, Star Sports 1 & Hotstar, 5 a.m. (Sunday)

It's always about building squad depth

That doesn't mean the youngsters are just going to play; it means we've identified them and now they need to come and train; it could take them six months to a year to get up to speed because they don't have the international experience

INTERVIEW

Craig Fulton

Uthra Ganeshan

ROURKELA

The Indian men's hockey team has had a rare long break in recent months but coach Craig Fulton has been busy with a developmental side to Europe in November and scouting at the National Championships. Excerpts from an exclusive interview with *The Hindu*:

How's the Hockey India League been so far and how important do you think it's going to be in your search for new talent?

It's been good. It's still early days, just a few games in so far but I think maybe, by the second or third week, we'll start to really see who's taken the opportunity, improved from Game 1



Fulton. FILE PHOTO

to 5 or 6. But it's not just the junior or sub-junior guys, it's also very important for some of the senior guys that have just come into the core group to make their mark. I suppose for the sub-junior guys, it's really amazing. It's a great opportunity for them but I think they also have to lower their expectations and really just enjoy it because then you'll see the best of them. If they put too much pressure on themselves, if they freeze and don't really play, it's not gonna help them or the team.

Quite a few from the current side may not make it to the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028. How do you see this team moving from here in the next few years, starting 2025?

I think it's all about milestones. The World Cup and Asian Games are the next big ones on the horizon but you still got to qualify

them and now they need to come and train and then it could take them six months to a year to get up to speed because they don't have the international experience.

There's always pressure on the India coach. Has it increased after the Paris Olympics?

I just think it's more realistic because the team's competitive and the fans want to change the colour of the medal. We wanted to do that as well, we really tried but I think everyone knows that this team can play and it has a new character and it's a special moment. I'm really proud because it's such a just reward for the staff and players. But there is the World Cup (in August, 2026) – India last won a medal in 1975. And the Asian Games is three weeks later, it's a totally different dynamic. If we're relying on the same people all the time. So it's always about building depth in the positions that maybe we don't have a lot in. That doesn't mean the youngsters are just going to play; it means we've identified them and now they need to come and train; it could take them six months to a year to get up to speed because they don't have the international experience.

Cup then three weeks later, you're playing the European Championships, they would say it's not normal. You are trying to focus on the World Cup and you're also trying to peak for the Asian Games. That's why you need depth, that's why this whole programme is about having more players.

If you had to look back at one performance that you would be proud of, what would it be?

See, it will always be hard to top the Olympics quarterfinal (against Great Britain) because it was a one-off game. You make one mistake and you are out. It put us up for anything. But the Australia game in the pool was very special, that set us up to do what we eventually did. To beat them after so many years, we were ready to win that game however. After that, whatever happened, we were ready to play.

Regal Reality well prepared to complete hat-trick

BENGALURU: Regal Reality, who is in fine fettle, poised for a hat-trick in the Bookmakers' Association Bangalore Oaks (2,400m), the chief here on Saturday of the races to be held here on Saturday (Jan. 4).

Falsi rails (Width about 3m from the winning post) will be in position.

1. HEMAVATI PLATE (DIV. I, 1,200m), rated 60 to 85, 3-0: 1. Berrettini (3)

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