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Co-living: a hit with Gen X-Y-Z

Amid rising rental costs and busy lifestyles, more Indian professionals opt for the ease of co-living, a means to combat the loneliness epidemic

MAGAZINE » PAGE 1



Why can't world leaders agree on a plastic ban?

FAQ » PAGE 14

Kash Patel: Donald Trump's die-hard loyalist

PROFILES » PAGE 15

Australia has India on the mat in the second Test

SPORTS » PAGE 17

IN BRIEF



U.P. invokes ESMA, imposes ban on protests

LUCKNOW
The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), banning strikes by government employees in all State-run offices. » Page 9

Businessman shot dead in national capital

NEW DELHI
A 52-year-old businessman was shot dead by two bike-borne men in east Delhi's Shahdara on Saturday morning, the police said. » Page 2

MAGAZINE » 8 PAGES
CLASSIFIEDS » PAGE 7

Special SC Bench will hear Places of Worship Act case

It will look into pleas seeking to 'reclaim' places of worship 'encroached' by Muslim 'invaders'; first hearing fixed on Dec. 12; 'grievances' against Mughal rulers not a valid ground, say Muslim groups

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna has constituted a Special Bench to hear petitions challenging the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991, a statute that has protected the identity and character of religious sites as they existed on August 15, 1947.

The three-judge Bench will be headed by Chief Justice Khanna, and also include Justices Sanjay Kumar and K.V. Viswanathan. The first hearing of the case is scheduled for 3.30 p.m. on December 12.

The listing of the case before the newly formed Special Bench was shown in the causelist published

Act's ambit

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 lays down the rules to prevent the conversion of religious places

SECTION 2(C) defines 'place of worship' to include "temple, mosque, gurdwara, church, monastery or any other place of public religious worship..."

SECTION 3 prohibits the conversion of any place of worship

SECTION 4 imposes a positive obligation to maintain the religious character of every place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947

PHOTO: R.V. MOORTHY

Eye of the storm: The Gyanvapi mosque committee has also sought to intervene in the challenge against the 1991 Act.

by the court on Saturday.

The case involves a slew of petitions challenging the legality of the 1991 Act. The petitioners, including advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, blame the 1991 law for barring Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from approaching courts to "re-claim" their places of worship which were al-

legedly "invaded" and "encroached" upon by "fundamentalist barbaric invaders".

Muslim organisations such as the All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) and the Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, however, have countered it. They say that these pleas, in the guise of public interest petitions, cannot challenge a Central law which has guarded the spirit of fraternity and secularism, virtues from the Preamble of the Constitution, as well as parts of the "Basic Structure" of the Constitution, through protection of the religious character of religious places.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 9

Militants 'near' Damascus; Syria denies troop retreat

Agence France-Presse

BEIRUT

Islamist militants on a lightning advance through Syria said on Saturday they have begun to encircle Damascus as government forces denied they had withdrawn from areas near the capital.

"Our forces have begun the final phase of encircling the capital, Damascus," said militant commander Hassan Abdel Ghani, with the Islamist-led alliance that launched the offensive.

The Defence Ministry flatly denied the Army had fled its positions. "There is no truth to news claiming our armed forces, present in all areas of the Damascus countryside, have withdrawn," it said.

Earlier, a war monitor and Abdel Ghani said rebels were within 20 km of Damascus as government



Gaining ground: Rebel fighters on a motorcycle in Homs, after Syrian rebels pressed their advance on Saturday. REUTERS

India advises citizens to avoid travelling to Syria

NEW DELHI
As Islamist-led rebels continue to make advances in Syria, India has advised its citizens to avoid travelling to the Arab nation and urged those staying there to exercise "utmost precaution" and restrict their movements. » Page 10

'Healthy India, Happy India' campaign begins



Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin launching the campaign on Saturday. Also seen are N. Ram, Director, The Hindu Group; G.V. Sampath, Founder and Chairman, Naruvi Hospitals; Ministers Ma. Subramanian, Duraimurugan and R. Gandhi; L.V. Navneeth, CEO, The Hindu Group. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

The Hindu Bureau
VELLORE

"Healthy India, Happy India", a joint initiative of *The Hindu* and Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, to build awareness on preventive healthcare, was inaugurated by Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Saturday.

He appreciated the partnership to take the message on health to people. G.V. Sampath, founder and chairman, Naruvi Hospitals, explained the genesis of the project, while N. Ram, director, The Hindu Group, highlighted Tamil Nadu's leadership in healthcare initiatives.

The partnership will fea-

ture a series of 15 webinars on a variety of topics emphasising prevention and holistic health, to build awareness among people and start them on a journey of prioritising their health. These will be anchored by *The Hindu*'s editorial team, with participation of experts from Naruvi Hospitals, and specialists.

The webinar series kicked off with an offline event at the hospital in Vellore, featuring experts, including pulmonary and respiratory medicine specialists, who weighed in on the twin burden of stress and sleep.

MORE REPORTS
» PAGE 11

SP to quit MVA over post on Babri Masjid

Abhinav Deshpande

MUMBAI

The Samajwadi Party on

Saturday announced its decision to quit the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), citing a controversial post by

Uddhav Thackeray's aide.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 9

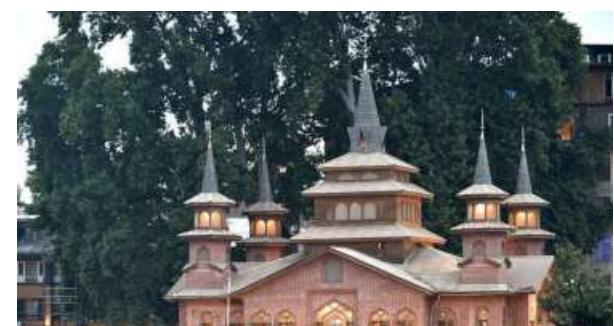
Kashmir mosques lend themselves to a solar storm

Uniquely multi-tiered, broad-sloped roofs of these places of worship in the Valley are an ideal fit for tapping the sun; J&K Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo gives the nod to include religious places under the flagship PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

The uniquely multi-tiered and broad-sloped roofs of mosques in Kashmir are set to be part of an ambitious project to generate renewable energy in the Valley.

J&K Chief Secretary Atal Dulloo, at a meeting held in Srinagar recently, gave the nod to include religious places, especially mosques in Kashmir, under the flagship 'PM Surya Ghar (sun house)-Muft Bijli Yojana' (free electricity scheme)' to boost the generation of



Ambitious plan: With there being a mosque in every locality, Kashmir has a great potential for solar generation. IMRAN NISSAR

renewable energy sector in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, feels the initiative could be a game-changer.

"It has huge potential, given that there are

mosques with wide roof surfaces in every locality in the Kashmir Valley. Religious sites have no load requirement at night, can easily become self-sufficient in the summers, and supply surplus electricity to the Power Department with an on-grid system. They can generate 3 KW (kilowatt) to 5 KW of electricity," he said.

Mr. Malik said Gulberg colony in uptown Srinagar, which has 10 mosques in its vicinity, is apt to understand the potential. "This one colony could easily generate 50 KW of

electricity," he said. Most mosques in Kashmir are registered as domestic consumers. Several vendors are petitioning caretakers of mosques to install rooftop solar panels.

However, many of them told *The Hindu* that mosque caretakers were reluctant due to the low subsidy. "Mosques are not income generating units. It needs additional handholding from the government to install solar panels," Ejaz Ahmad, a caretaker in Hawal, said.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 9

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TUESDAY, DEC. 10	
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Worsening law and order to prove costly for BJP in poll: Atishi

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

jured in the attack is receiving treatment.

"This is the same area where an on-duty constable was shot dead just two weeks ago. And this morning, in Shahdara, a person on a morning walk was shot at. I want to know what the Central government is doing?" she said. Delhi Police is under the control of the Union Home Ministry.

'People living in terror'

The Shahdara murder also drew a sharp response from Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal. "[Union Home Minister] Amit Shah ji has ruined Delhi. He has turned Delhi into a *jungle raj*. People are living in terror. The people of Delhi will have to unite and raise their voice," he said in a post on X.

When reached for comments, the BJP did not offer a response.

Chief Minister Atishi on Saturday met the family of an 18-year-old man who was stabbed to death by his neighbours in south-east Delhi's Govindpuri on Friday night. She said the "deteriorating law and order" would prove costly for the BJP in the upcoming Assembly election.

Sudheer, who worked at a scrap shop, died of stab wounds following a fight with his neighbours - Bhikam Singh, his wife Meena, and their three sons Sanjay, 20, Rahul, 18, and a minor boy - over a common toilet not being flushed.

All five have been apprehended.

"Criminals roam fearlessly and if law and order isn't restored, Delhiites will teach them [BJP] a lesson," the CM said after visiting AIIMS, where another member of the family in-

Businessman shot dead in Shahdara while returning home from morning walk

Bike-borne assailants repeatedly fired at victim riding pillion on scooter; friend says businessman begged for life before being killed at traffic signal; questioning his friends, family members; police

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



A 52-year-old businessman was shot dead by two bike-borne men in east Delhi's Shahdara on Saturday morning, the police said.

The incident took place around 8.30 a.m. when Sunil Jain, a resident of Krishna Nagar, who owned a utensils business, was returning home riding pillion on a scooter from Farsh Bazar's Yamuna Sports Complex, where he had gone for a morning walk.

The scooter was being driven by his friend Sumit, 37. Two more friends of Jain were on another two-wheeler.

mach while the other aimed at his head and pulled the trigger.

The assailants sped away on a motorcycle after the attack, the police said. Jain was rushed to a hospital, where he succumbed to the injuries.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) Prashant Gautam said the murderers fired six rounds at the victim, four of which hit him.

'Did not have enmity'

"His friend (Sumit) said Jain had implored the assailants not to shoot him but it all happened in a matter of a few seconds," said the officer.

Mr. Gautam said family

members said Jain did not have enmity with anyone nor had he received any threats. "But we are investigating the case from all angles," he said, adding that the footage of the CCTV cameras in the area is being scanned to identify the assailants.

According to the police, Sumit, who befriended Jain around six months ago, had a gambling case registered against him. "We are interrogating Jain's friends and family members," Mr. Gautam added.

The victim is survived by his wife and two married children. Jain's son Rishabh assisted him in his business, the officer said.

(With inputs from PTI)



'Sankalp Patra' vans will make rounds of the city to seek public inputs for BJP's manifesto. PTI

BJP gets new election office, starts 'Sankalp Patra' drive

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi unit of the BJP on Saturday inaugurated its office for the upcoming Assembly election and launched a campaign to collect feedback from voters to help draft the party's manifesto.

Senior party leaders, including Delhi BJP election in-charge Baijayant Panda, flagged off 14 vans, which will traverse through the city to collect suggestions that will be used to draft the party's manifesto or 'Sankalp Patra'.

Speaking at the event, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said despite making "grand promises", the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has "failed miserably on all fronts, including controlling pollution and improving basic infrastructure".

The BJP, which has been out of power in Delhi since 1998, is going all out to unseat the ruling AAP.

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The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is inviting Expression of Interest (EOI) from reputed financial institutions and banks for raising loans to finance a large-scale underground infrastructure project. This project, currently referred to as "Bengaluru Twin Tunnel Project", is an underground vehicular tunnel which aims to enhance mobility, reduce congestion, and foster sustainable growth in Bengaluru.

(1) All Financial Institutions (including Multi-lateral Development Banks, Bilateral Development Banks, Indian Development Financing Institutions, Scheduled Public and private commercial Banks) are eligible to participate. Financial institutions should be registered with RBI or relevant authority and have minimum 5 years lending experience.

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Pre-payment	BBMP shall have the right to prepay the loan amount either in full or in part at any time, without any pre-payment premium / condition.
Withdrawal of Funds	The BBMP reserves the right to draw the amount based on requirement. The proposed loan's first installment is proposed to be withdrawn from 1st April 2025 and will be drawn completely before 31st December 2027.

The Quotation bid shall be submitted as a sealed cover physically to the Office of the Special Commissioner (Finance), BBMP with in the stipulated deadline bearing the identification "Financial Bid for funding requirements of the Underground Vehicular Road 3-lane Twin Tunnels with Tunnel Boring Machine for the North-South Corridor of Bengaluru starting from Hebbal Esteem Mall Junction to Silk Board KSRP Junction in the State of Karnataka on BOT (Toll) Mode". Address: Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, N.R. Square, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560002.

Following is the calendar of events for the process: (1) Notice inviting tender for raising funds: 7.12.2024. (2) Submission of query and enquiry: 9.12.2024 to 11.12.2024. (3) Purchase of DPR of the tunnel project @ INR 25,000/- (Rupees Twenty Five Thousand only) demand draft payable to Chief Commissioner BBMP: 9.12.2024 to 12.12.2024. (4) Pre bid meeting in the Office of Special Commissioner (Finance): 16.12.2024. (5) Last Date for submission of bid sealed cover: 19.12.2024 upto 4:00 p.m. (6) Opening of bids: 19.12.2024.

You may kindly contact the following officials for any further information / clarification: Dhananjay K.K. (+91-9845208023) or Shilpa (+91-9986553232)

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Man kills mother for objecting to marriage

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old man, Sawan, was arrested from west Delhi's Khyala for killing his mother, Sulochana, after she refused to let him marry a woman of his choice and threatened to

disinherit him, the police said on Saturday. "When his brother's marriage was fixed, Sawan told his mother about the girl he wanted to marry, but she scolded him. He strangled her and took away her earrings to make the crime appear like a robbery," the officer said.

Delhi election: Cong's month-long yatra ends

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress's Delhi unit completed its month-long 'Nyay Yatra' on Sunday, covering all 70 constituencies in the Capital ahead of the Assembly election due in February next year.

Held in four phases, the

yatra ended at Naharpur village in Rohini. It was organised on the lines of party leader Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra'. Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav said they covered over 650 km on foot during the foot march.

THE HINDU REWIND 2024 TRIVIA QUIZ

DAY 08

- Who won the women's singles title at the India Open Badminton 2024, held in Delhi in January?
- Who became the first Indian to travel beyond Earth's atmosphere as a space tourist in May 2024?
- Which state launched India's first submarine tourism initiative in collaboration with Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) in January 2024?

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IN BRIEF



Mahadev case: ED attaches fresh assets worth ₹388 crore

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday said it has attached fresh assets worth about ₹388 crore in its ongoing money laundering investigation into the Mahadev online betting case in which various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh are alleged to have been involved. These include movable assets – investment made by Mauritius-based company Tano Investment Opportunities Fund related to Dubai-based “hawala operator” Hari Shankar Tibrewal through FPI and FDI – and properties in Chhattisgarh, Mumbai and Madhya Pradesh in the name of promoters of multiple betting apps and websites, panel operators and associates of the promoters, the federal agency said in a statement. PTI

Uttarakhand to levy green cess on vehicles entering State

The Uttarakhand government will soon impose a green cess on out-of-State vehicles, an official said on Saturday. The amount ranges from ₹20 to ₹80 and will apply to commercial and private vehicles alike, he said. Two-wheelers, electric and CNG vehicles, those registered in Uttarakhand and those engaged in essential services like ambulances and fire brigades, will be exempted, he said. The tendering process for implementing the cess levying system has been initiated, Joint Commissioner (Transport) Sanat Kumar Singh said. “Our target is to operationalise the system by December-end,” he said.

Court grants bail to suspended Jharkhand IAS officer

A special PMLA court here on Saturday granted bail to suspended Jharkhand cadre IAS officer Pooja Singhal in a money laundering case. She was given bail on the condition of furnishing two bonds of ₹2 lakh each and depositing her passport. Ms. Singhal’s lawyer said that she was granted bail after the court heard her bail petition for two days. She has been in custody since May 11, 2022, after raids were conducted at properties linked to her in connection with the money laundering case. The case relates to alleged corruption in implementing MGNREGA. The ED has accused Ms. Singhal, a former State Mines Department Secretary, of money laundering. The agency also seized over ₹36 crore in cash linked to alleged illegal mining in two money laundering cases. PTI

It's clear Centre does not want to talk, we'll resume 'Dilli Chalo': farmer leader

Punjab farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher says 101 farmers will march to Delhi on Sunday noon; we waited for a day to hear from the govt. about our demands but received no response, he adds

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after suspending their ‘Dilli Chalo’ march, farm leaders at the Shambhu border between Punjab and Haryana on Saturday said a group of 101 farmers will start a peaceful foot march towards the national capital on Sunday afternoon. The farmers have gathered near Ambala, where prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Surksha Sanhita have been imposed.

The protesters had attempted to march to Delhi on Friday but called off the stir after some of them got injured from the tear gas shells used by the Haryana police to disperse them. Farmer union leaders decided to pause their agitation on Saturday to hear what the Centre had to say regarding their demands,



(Left) An aerial view of the Shambhu border between Punjab and Haryana; Kisan Mazdoor Morcha coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher addressing the media on Saturday. ANI/PTI

which include a legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all crops and also a farm loan waiver.

Addressing the media at the Shambhu border on Saturday, Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher said, “We are yet to receive any message from the Centre regarding talks. The BJP-led Central government is in no mood to hold talks.”

“Had talks started, a so-

lution could have been found. For us, the ruling party (at the Centre) and the Opposition are the same – they all just engage in politics,” added Mr. Pandher.

The farmers had earlier attempted to march into the national capital on February 13 and February 21, but they were stopped by security forces at Shambhu and Khanauri on Punjab-Haryana borders. They are also demanding a debt waiver, pension for farm-



(Right) Kisan Mazdoor Morcha coordinator Sarwan Singh Pandher addressing the media on Saturday. ANI/PTI

ers and farm labourers, and a ban on power tariff hikes.

The reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013 and compensation to the families of farmers who died during the 2020-21 agitation are also part of their demands.

Regarding the police action on Friday, the KMM leader said 16 farmers had suffered injuries, and one had lost hearing due to the tear gas shells fired by the Haryana police.

Oppn. must ensure all poll promises are met: Pawar

Press Trust of India
KOLHAPUR

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) president Sharad Pawar on Saturday said the Opposition should not lose heart over its rout but go back to the people who do not seem to be enthused by the massive victory of the BJP-led Mahayuti in the Maharashtra elections.

The Opposition's priority would be to ensure that all the election promises made by the ruling alliance, including increasing the financial assistance to women under the Ladki Bahin scheme from ₹1,500 to ₹2,100 are implemented at the earliest, he said.

“It is true that we have been defeated. We should not fret over it, but go back to the people, as no enthusiasm is visible among the people about the election results. There is a lot of resentment,” the senior politician said at a press conference here.

The ruling BJP-NCP-Shiv Sena alliance won 230 of the 288 seats in the November 20 elections. The Opposition's strength in the Assembly is low but many



NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar.

young Opposition MLAs will show their mettle after a couple of sessions, Mr. Pawar said.

To a question on Samajwadi Party State chief Abu Asim Azmi announcing that his party was pulling out of the Opposition's Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance after the Shiv Sena (UBT) hailed, in a newspaper advertisement, those who demolished the Babri Masjid, Mr. Pawar sought to play down the development.

The Central leadership of the Akhilesh Yadav-led party was of the view that Opposition unity is necessary, he said. Opposition parties cannot demand that a Leader of Opposition be appointed as they do not have the required numbers, Mr. Pawar added.

CAG report points to ‘irregularity’ in handling COVID-19 funds in Odisha

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

In an explosive report, the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India alleged that a chunk of funds earmarked to deal with COVID-19 pandemic was siphoned off during Naveen Patnaik's tenure.

The CAG's report on ‘Public Health Infrastructure and Management of Health Services in the State’, which was tabled on Saturday, claimed that excess payments were made to dedicated COVID hospitals (DCHs) without verifying their claims.

Dietary reimbursements did not tally with the number of doctors and

paramedical staff. Besides, the hospitals submitted forged bills to buy personal protective equipment (PPE).

The apex audit agency said ₹144.88 crore were paid to eight different hospitals without proper scrutiny. “The bills submitted by the eight DCHs, out of the 18, had not been properly scrutinised by the authorised Medical Officers (AMOs) for ensuring that the claims incurred towards the treatment of COVID-19 patients were in order and as per the guidelines,” the report said.

More than half the payment was made to SUM Hospital. “The DCH (SUM

Hospital) had submitted an abstract of the bills to the Bhubaneswar Municipal Corporation (BMC) without verification and countersignature by the AMOs. The BMC had approved the claims for payment without verifying the actual number of patients admitted, type of beds availed by the patients, and patient-wise claims,” the CAG said.

The CAG stated that despite the PPE kits being supplied free of cost to the DCHs, by Odisha State Medical Corporation Limited (OSMCL), the DCHs had not deducted the cost of the PPE kits from their bills, which were submitted to the Collectors or municipal authorities.

Four Myanmar fishers rescued off T.N. coast after three weeks at sea

The Hindu Bureau
NAGAPATTINAM

Four Myanmar fishermen, who were stranded at sea for nearly three weeks, were rescued by the Indian Coast Guard and brought to the Nagapattinam port in Tamil Nadu on Friday morning.

The fishermen, who only speak Burmese, had set out on a bamboo raft from Bogale, Myanmar, on November 7, 2024. Severe weather conditions, including rough seas and the aftermath of the recent floods in Myanmar, had caused their anchor to break, pushing their raft over 1,000 nautical miles into the Indian waters.



The fishermen on their bamboo raft being rescued by the Coast Guard off the Tamil Nadu coast. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

nam, noticed the raft while returning from a fishing trip and approached it.

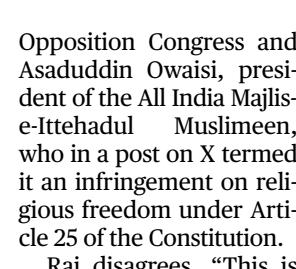
Weak, starving
The Myanmar fishermen were found weak and starving, so they provided them with food and alerted the Coast Guard. Responding swiftly, the Coast Guard dispatched a rescue vessel and brought the fishermen and their raft to Nagapattinam.

The rescued individuals are now in the custody of the Nagapattinam Marine Police. After their rescue, with the help of locals familiar with Burmese, the Marine Police confirmed the fishermen's identities and learned that they had lost their way.

Sermon surveillance on the rise as Chhattisgarh Waqf Board to vet mosque prayer content



The Ashaful Auliya Masjid in Raipur, Chhattisgarh; (top) Ismail Gafoor, the caretaker of the mosque. SHUBHOMOY SIKDAR



Opposition Congress and Asaduddin Owaisi, president of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, who in a post on X termed it an infringement on religious freedom under Article 25 of the Constitution.

Raj disagrees. “This is not the case. We have kept maulanas and imams away from it. We have only included the mutawallis as we have authority over them,” he says. However, only maulanas or imams are entitled to deliver religious sermons, with mutawallis following up with announcements related to the management or upkeep of mosques. Raj says in the videos, he found mutawallis delivering these speeches.

Setting a narrative
November 29 was the first Friday that speeches were vetted. Till the previous

day, nearly 150 mosque committees had sent the proposed content of their speeches to the board; none of them was found to be “insensitive”. Ashraful Auliya Masjid, however, was not one of those.

After the Friday prayers, Ismail Gafoor, 68, who has been the mutawalli of the mosque since July 2023, remains defiant. “We do not need permission to carry out our regular activities. I have not seen the order, but learnt about it through the press and I feel it is not binding,” he says.

Others, too, feel that Raj has overstepped his brief. Salam Rizvi, who was at the helm of the State Waqf Board from 2019 to 2020, says while the law does not allow issuing such an order, the board can issue guidelines from time to time. He adds that these guidelines are not binding on mosque management committees.

“There is no religious sanction to give any inflammatory speech or deal with any subject beyond the Koran or Hadith (teachings from the Prophet's life). The community itself doesn't like it. There were no prevailing circumstances for issuing such an order,” says Rizvi.

In response to Owaisi's comment on X, Pankaj Jha, media adviser to Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai, backs the decision, while distancing the government from it, saying that the members of the State Waqf Board were appointed by the previous Congress government.

Sushil Anand Shukla, Congress spokesperson, and Amit Jogi, president of the Janta Congress Chhattisgarh (J), point out that the order should not be seen in isolation and is the “latest chapter in the wider narrative of the BJP and the RSS targeting Muslims”.

A widening gap
The order came days after violence broke out in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal amid a survey at the Shahi Jama Masjid to ascertain if it was built over a temple. Around the same time, the claim of a temple under the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer, Rajasthan, came up, with a local court giving time to the Sufi shrine management committee.

“There is no religious sanction to give any inflammatory speech or deal with any subject beyond the Koran or Hadith (teachings from the Prophet's life). The community itself doesn't like it. There were no prevailing circumstances for issuing such an order,” says Rizvi.

“There is definitely a common national thread, be it the Waqf issue or the issue of ‘ghuspaithiyas (intruders)’ that the BJP raised during our rule (un-

til 2023). If infiltration is happening, what has the State government done to check it and is it not the Centre's failure?” Shukla says. Politically, Muslims exert influence over a handful of urban seats in the State Assembly. One of them is Raipur South that recently had a bypoll, which the BJP won.

Jogi alleges that the BJP whips up sentiments in these areas. He cites the examples of the 2021 Kawardha communal violence when two communities had a dispute over where to hoist saffron and green flags; and the 2023 Bemetara incident when a clash between two teenagers escalated.

In the Assembly election that followed, the father of the Hindu youth killed in the Saja constituency of Bemetara contested as a BJP candidate and won. The election also saw Mohammad Akbar, the lone Muslim MLA and Minister in the previous regime, losing from Kawardha. “Muslims face alienation and they do not see anyone raising their voices for them,” says a source in the Congress.

LINK TO FULL STORY
» <https://bit.ly/41t7thd>



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MARRIAGE BUREAUS

WEDDING ARRANGEMENTS

BUSINESS

VENNIYI KULA Khatriya Bride 31years Be Working in Govt. Service Bridegroom Govt/ Pvt/ Bank Same Caste Preferable Ct: 978910972 / 944493493. Mail id: kumarguru59@gmail.com

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HINDU MUDALIAR Age 29 / 171cm Fair & Charming Working in MNC Seeks Working Boy from Mudaliar / Pillai / Soliya Vellalar Caste Ct 9444149262

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SEEKING NEVER Married Christian Tamil/Vellalar Groom age(41-44) working in Chennai/ MS for Naidu Bridegroom. Ct: 9962805093/ hemapriya.h@bmsl.com

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KAMMA NAIDU- age 27 ht 170 cm, Fair, Doc/ Engg/ Tech, Simman/magam, Raghu Kethu Dosham, seeks groom preferably working in Bangalore. Ct: 9838700143

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PILLAI REMARRIAGE 30 / 57 V Fair M_Arch Canada seeks suitable Abroad / India Profiles Geetham Ct: 9844325317

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Hindu Agumudayar Rajakulam 28 yrs MBBS seeks suitable doctor groom, pref. Chennai or any Districts. Subsec no bar. Ct: 82208 79684 / 94447 80749.

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HINDU, SC, PR, 28yrs / 5.6, Poosan, Kadagam, MBBS, doing MD (Peds), Parents Govt. service, seeks MD / MS ongoing PG Groom, preferably Govt. Doctors.

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HINDU NADAR Chennai, Only Daughter (25) Fair & Good Looking, MBBS, (MD) DVL, Rich Affluent, well-educated family seeks suitable Good Looking Doctor Groom with clean habits from Hindu Nadar. Ct: 94447 59246 68235

NAIR GIRL, PG Doctor, 32/168, Pooyam, MS, DNB, Kolanji District, Private Hospital, invites alliance from Doctors/ Engineers / Managers / Officers in Govt / Public sector. 9447559795.

DOCTOR BRIDE Hindu SC, PR, 28yrs / 5.6, Poosan, Kadagam, MBBS, doing MD (Peds), Parents Govt. service, seeks MD / MS ongoing PG Groom, preferably Govt. Doctors.

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From Page One**Special SC Bench will hear Places of Worship Act case**

The AIMPLB pointed out that even the Ayodhya judgment had observed that the 1991 Act spoke "to our history and to the future of the nation... In preserving the character of places of public worship, the Parliament has mandated in no uncertain terms that history and its wrongs shall not be used as instruments to oppress the present and the future".

The Gyanvapi mosque management committee has also sought to intervene in the challenge against the 1991 Act in the top court. The Gyanvapi mosque is at the centre of multiple civil suits by Hindu plaintiffs claiming the presence of a temple under the mosque, and their right to worship.

The Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Varanasi, which represents the Gyanvapi mosque, has argued that rhetorical claims and "purported grievances" caused by ancient rulers of the Mughal period cannot be grounds for challenging the validity of a legislative enactment like the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act.

The Union government has chosen to remain tight-lipped so far, promising to file a counter-affidavit in the pending challenge against the 1991 Act.

The constitution of the Special Bench and listing of the case on a specific day has come amidst frenetic judicial interventions by local courts in States like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh in civil suits challenging the origins and character of mosques.

Militants 'near' Damascus; Syria denies troop retreat

The monitor said government forces were also pulling out of towns as little as 10 kilometres from Damascus.

Abdel Ghani said earlier that "our forces were able to control the Saesa (security) branch in the Damascus countryside. The advance towards the capital continues."

Air strikes and shelling by government forces and their ally Russia killed at least seven civilians near the city of Homs, as the army sought to slow the rebel advance there.

SP to quit MVA over post on Babri Masjid

On Friday, Shiv Sena (UBT) MLC Milind Narvekar shared a poster on X featuring images of the Babri Masjid demolition along with a quote from Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray: "I am proud of those who did this." The post also included photographs of Mr. Uddhav and his son Aaditya Thackeray.

Reacting to the post, SP's Maharashtra unit chief Abu Azmi criticised the Shiv Sena (UBT), saying, "If anyone in the MVA uses such language, how are they different from the BJP? Why should we remain in this alliance? We are quitting the MVA. I am speaking with SP president Akhilesh Yadav. The Congress must decide whether it can align with such a party."

The SP has two MLAs - Mr. Azmi and Raees Sheikh - in the 288-member Assembly. Both took oath on Saturday, while the remaining MVA legislators boycotted the first day of the Assembly's special session, alleging misuse of electronic voting machines. In response, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav defended his party's consistent stance on the Babri Masjid since 1992, questioning why the SP had suddenly raised the issue after 31 years. Mr. Jadhav and several Congress leaders accused the SP of shifting allegiance toward the ruling alliance.

Mr. Azmi further claimed there was no effective coordination within the MVA during the Maharashtra Assembly election.

Kashmir mosques lend themselves to solar storm

"The government should either increase the subsidy components for mosques, or hire a third party to invest in sharing and selling surplus energy," Mr. Ahmad added. The J&K government offers a subsidy component of only ₹9,000 in the Union Territory, unlike in other States, including Uttarakhand, where the State's subsidy component is ₹23,000 per kilowatt, and ₹17,000 for 3 KWs.

The Central scheme, which is currently applicable in J&K, provides ₹36,000 as the subsidy component per kilowatt, ₹72,000 for 2 KW, and ₹94,800 for 3 KW.

Till November this year, the Kashmir Power Distribution Corporation Limited (KPDC) generated 1 MW (megawatt) of solar energy from rooftops, and disbursed ₹1 crore as Central subsidies to 110 domestic beneficiaries.

Official data show 249 residential rooftops are already equipped with solar panels. "On average, households have opted for larger systems, typically around 4 KW, maximising the financial and environmental benefits of solar energy. Around 1,549 consumers have finalised agreements with empanelled vendors and are progressing through the procurement and installation phases," KPDC's spokesperson said. KPDC is poised to achieve its target of 3.5 MW installed capacity within the next two months, the spokesperson added.

Show-cause notice sent to 86 IIT faculty members

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

A section of faculty members at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, is at loggerheads with the institute administration over the show-cause notice to 86 teachers. The rift began when the IIT Teachers' Association (IITA) filed a complaint with the Union Education Ministry citing arbitrary recruitment, favouritism, and irregularities at the institute.

According to sources in the IIT, the issues began in September when the professors complained about "unprecedented nepotism, arbitrary faculty recruitment, failure in starting a multi-specialty hospital, and unlawful recovery of payment from faculty".

Four IITA office-bearers were sent show-cause notices after filing the complaint and were asked to justify their claims. The situation became more tense when 86 other professors submitted another mass petition to the institute. The institute sent show-cause notices to these 86 professors and it snowballed into a row.

U.P. invokes ESMA, imposes six-month ban on protests

Decision comes amid the upcoming Maha Kumbh and other events; the Opposition calls it 'undemocratic' and suppression of employees' rights

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Saturday invoked the Essential Services Maintenance Act (ESMA), banning strikes by government employees in all State government departments, corporations, and authorities for six months.

"In exercise of the powers under sub-section (1) of section-3 of the Uttar Pradesh Essential Services Maintenance Act, 1966 (U.P. Act No. 30 of 1966), the State government prohibited strikes for a period of six months from the date of the notification," reads the notification issued by the government.

The decision came amid the upcoming Maha Kumbh, which is going to be held in the State, and other important programmes.

The Act gives the police the power to arrest the em-



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during a visit to review preparations ahead of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Saturday. PTI

ployees violating the provisions of the Act without a warrant. The punishment is imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or a fine which may extend to ₹1,000 or both, to any person who instigated a strike which was illegal under the Act.

The Opposition described the decision as undemocratic, aimed at curtailing the right to protest. "The ruling BJP-led Uttar

Pradesh government is anti-people and anti-democratic to the core. Everyone, including government employees, has the right to protest. Such a decision shows that the present government is scared of listening to the grievances of any section of the population including its own employees. It is a black law, we condemn the move," said Anil Yadav, a senior Congress leader.

Rajnath to oversee commissioning of Tushil in Russia

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The first of two stealth guided missile frigates, *Tushil*, under construction in Russia, is set to be commissioned during the three-day visit of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh beginning on Sunday for the 21st meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC).

Mr. Singh and his Russian counterpart, Andrey Belousov, will co-chair the 21st meeting of the IRIGC-M&MTC in Moscow on December 10, a Defence Ministry statement said. "The two leaders will review the entire range of multi-faceted relations between the two countries in the field of defence, including military-to-military and industrial cooperation. They will also exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest."

Mr. Singh will travel to Yantra Shipyard in Kaliningrad for the commission ceremony of the frigate during which he will be accompanied by Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi. In addition, he will pay tributes at 'The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier' in Moscow to honour the Soviet soldiers killed during the Second World War. He will interact with members of the Indian community. *Tushil* is an upgraded Krivak III class frigate of Project 1135.6 of which six are already in service - three Talwar class ships, built at Baltiskiy shipyard, St. Petersburg, and three follow-on Teg class ships, built at Yantar shipyard, Kaliningrad. The ship's construction was closely monitored by an Indian team of specialists from the Warship Overseeing Team stationed at Kaliningrad, under the aegis of the Embassy of India, Moscow, the Navy said in a statement.



Rajnath Singh

Disappointing,' U.S. says in response to BJP's accusations

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The U.S. reacted sharply on Saturday to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) allegation that the U.S. State Department was behind targeted attacks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Indian businessman Gautam Adani, denying the accusations and saying they were "disappointing".

In response to the series of posts by the BJP on 'X', which included accusations that it was behind an investigative reporting portal Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), the U.S. government said it had been a "champion of media freedom around the world", and does not influence editorial decisions by these organisations.

"It is disappointing that the ruling party in India

would make these kinds of accusations," a spokesperson for the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi told *The Hindu*.

The U.S. Embassy spokesperson did not deny the allegation it was funding groups such as the OCCRP, but said the U.S. government "works with independent organisations on programming that supports professional development and capacity building training for journalists", adding that this "programming does not influence the editorial decisions or direction of these organisations".

The strong statements exchanged indicate a new low in ties between New Delhi and Washington, that have been under a strain.

The Ministry of External Affairs has so far refused to comment on the statements made by both the BJP and the U.S. Embassy response.

BSF deployment moved to zero line along Bangladesh border in Bengal

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Border Security Force has shifted the deployment of its personnel to the zero line along the border with Bangladesh in Murshidabad district of West Bengal. The border is a long stretch of char lands along the Padma river, and the forces had so far been deployed a few hundred metres from the border inside the Indian territory.

Farmers who have their farmlands in the chars until now had to register with the BSF to access and cultivate the lands.

"There are three battalions in Murshidabad, where there is a problem of char lands. Everywhere, we have deployed forces along the zero line from Farakka to Kakmarichar," Deputy Inspector-General Anil Kumar Sinha of the BSF Baharampur range told presspersons.



West Bengal shares a 2,216-km border with Bangladesh, and it is manned by three frontiers of the BSF. SHIV SAHAY SINGH

The official said the deployment has been made from three battalions - Battalions 73, 146, and 149 of the South Bengal Frontier of the BSF.

'Long-pending demand'

While sources in the security establishment said that the turmoil in Bangladesh may have prompted the deployment, BSF officials said it was a long pending demand of farmers in the

area. Chars are pieces of land formed of sand and silt that appear and disappear depending on the flow of river.

The chars along the Bangladesh border are created by the Padma. They don't have power and water supply, which is why the forces had been stationed inside the Indian territory.

BSF officials said that the work on surveying and

erecting fences along the International Border will start soon.

Better protection
Jufikar Ali, secretary, Border Development Committee of Murshidabad, who has repeatedly demanded deployment of the BSF at the zero line in the chars, welcomed the move. He said it will benefit thousands of farmers.

"Now farmers can access their land without having to take permission from the BSF. This would also help in better protection of our borders," he said.

Mr. Ali said that two Indian nationals were arrested and are still lodged in prison in Bangladesh after they crossed over to work in their fields on September 2. West Bengal shares a 2,216-km border with Bangladesh, and it is manned by three frontiers of the BSF.

Design phase of indigenous nuclear attack submarines to take 4-5 years

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The design phase of the indigenous nuclear attack submarines (SSN) will take four or five years and the construction of the first one, building on the experience of the ballistic nuclear missile submarine programme (SSBN), will take another five years, officials in the know said.

The third SSN leased from Russia is expected to be delivered to the Indian Navy in 2028 after delays.

Last week, Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi said that "as per their timelines, 2036-37 was the very realistic timeframe when the first SSN can be inducted followed by the second one in a couple of years".

The design and development should take four or five years, and the construction another five



INS Arihant with a displacement of 6,000 tonnes was commissioned into service in August 2016. FILE PHOTO

years, the sources said. An SSN is different from an SSBN but the experience of building the latter is helpful and the reactor and other specifications will be finalised considering the requirement of speed and endurance that SSNs need, the sources said.

The SSNs are a critical requirement for the Navy to keep a watch over the Indo-Pacific as they give unlimited endurance to perform a variety of tasks.

India had leased two SSNs, INS *Chakra* 1 and 2, in the past from Russia. The third one, contracted on lease, has seen several delays due to COVID, hold-

ing up the finalisation of the hull that was to be refurbished. It is now expected by 2027-end or early 2028, according to sources.

The second SSBN, INS *Arighat* (S3), which retains the same reactor specifications and dimensions with several technological upgrades, was commissioned in August.

The third SSBN *Aridham* (S4) is currently undergoing sea trials and is expected to be commissioned into service next year, sources said.

October saw two major developments - the Cabinet Committee on Security approved the indigenous

Centre at Dhaka set on fire, says ISKCON

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

"A centre of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) was set on fire in Dhaka in Bangladesh," a spokesperson of the religious order said on Saturday.

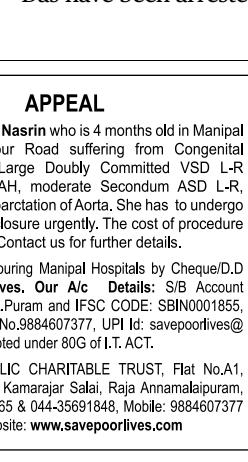
India currently has two SSBNs in operation.

INS *Arihant* with a displacement of 6,000 tonnes and powered by an 83-MW pressurised light-water reactor with enriched uranium was commissioned in August 2016.

The second SSBN, INS *Arighat* (S3), which retains the same reactor specifications and dimensions with several technological upgrades, was commissioned in August.

The third SSBN *Aridham* (S4) is currently undergoing sea trials and is expected to be commissioned into service next year, sources said.

rayan Temple, located in Dhour village, under the jurisdiction of Turag Police Station, Dhaka district," Radharaman Das, the spokesperson posted on X. He said all items inside the temple were burned down completely. According to ISKCON, there are more than 100 centres of the religious order in Bangladesh and its monasteries including Chinmoy Krishna Das have been arrested.



APPEAL
Save the Baby of Nasrin who is 4 months old in Manipal Hospitals, Saripur Road suffering from Congenital Heart Disease, Large Doubly Committed VSD L-R, Parachute MV, Coarctation of Aorta, She has to undergo early VSD+ASD closure urgently. The cost of procedure is Rs.6,00,000/- Contact us for further details.
Send donation favouring Manipal Hospitals by Cheque/D.D. No.20000913487, State Bank of India, R.A.Puram and IFSC CODE: SBIN0001855, No.244607377, UPI ID: savepoorlivess@gmail.com
SAVE POOR LIVES REGISTERED PUBLIC CHARITABLE TRUST, Flat No.1A, Ceebos Garden, Ground floor, Old No.76 Kamarpur Salai, Raja Annamalaiapuram, Chennai - 600028. Contact No.044-2044165 & 044-35691848, Mobile: 9884607377 Email: savepoorlivess@gmail.com Our website: www.savepoorlivess.com

Trinamool names Ritabrata as RS candidate

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Saturday nominated Ritabrata Banerjee as a candidate for the upcoming election to the Rajya Sabha from West Bengal.

"Under the inspiration of Hon'ble Chairperson Mamata Official, we are pleased to announce the candidature of Shri Ritabrata Banerjee for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha by-elections. We extend our heartfelt wishes to him. May he work towards upholding Trinamool's enduring legacy of indomitable spirit and continue advocating for the rights of every Indian," the Trinamool Congress said.

Mr. Banerjee heads the trade union wing of Trinamool, Indian National Trinamool Trade Union Congress (INTTUC). Once elected, this will be his second term in the Upper House. In 2014, Mr. Banerjee was nominated by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to the Rajya Sabha from West Bengal. However, he was suspended from the CPI(M) in 2017 for anti-party activities and later joined the Trinamool.

Trinamool Congress general secretary Abhishek Banerjee described the nomination as "truly well-deserved, reflecting the tireless effort".

A vacancy was created after Trinamool Congress MP Jawhar Sircar resigned from the Rajya Sabha.

MLAs-elect of MVA skip oath, boycott first day of first session

Opposition legislators refuse to be sworn in, alleging 'EVM manipulation and suppression of democratic rights'; a total of 173 Mahayuti MLAs take the oath; Speaker's election tomorrow; Fadnavis government will seek trust vote soon after

Abhinav Deshpande
MUMBAI

Mid slogans of "Jai Shri Ram" and "Jai Bhavani, Jai Shiva ji", 173 newly elected MLAs, including Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his deputies, Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, of the Mahayuti alliance took oath on the first day of a three-day special session of the Maharashtra Assembly on Saturday.

However, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) boycotted the session, alleging misuse of electronic voting machines (EVMS) and questioning the massive mandate won by BJP-led Mahayuti.

Refusing to take the oath, Opposition leaders, including State Congress president Nana Patole, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray, and NCP(SP) MLA Jitendra Awhad, protested against the curfew and arrests at Markadwadi village in the Malshiras constituency of Solapur district as people demanded a mock poll using ballot papers.

Speaking to *The Hindu* while exiting the Assembly, Mr. Patole and Mr. Aaditya said the boycott was a stand against "EVM manipulation and the suppression of democratic rights". The leaders said they



New beginnings: Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, his deputies, Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, with other leaders on the first day of the Assembly Session in Mumbai on Saturday. EMMANUEL YOGINI

were not against taking oath as MLAs, but they had chosen not to do so on the first day. The boycott is in protest against EVM manipulation and curfew and arrests of villagers at Markadwadi, they said while heading to Matoshree for a meeting with Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray.

Mr. Fadnavis, representing the Nagpur South-West Assembly constituency, was sworn in as a member of the Maharashtra Assembly for the sixth time, having been first elected in

1999. Pro-tem Speaker Kandas Kolambkar, a nine-time MLA from Wadala, presided over the oath-taking ceremony that began at 11 a.m.

Senior MLAs
Chainsukh Sancheti and Jaykumar Rawal of the BJP, Manikrao Kokate of the NCP, and Ashish Jaiswal of the Shiv Sena were the first to take oath as they had been appointed members of the pro-tem Speaker's panel by Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan. The turn of Mr. Shinde, ex-Chief Mi-

nister and member of the House since 2004, and Mr. Ajit Pawar, who has been consistently re-elected since his first term in 1991, came later. Mr. Pawar, wearing a traditional red *pheta* (headdress) with a golden border, was greeted with cheers of "Ekach Dada, Ajit Dada [The one and only elder brother Ajit]" by his party members.

Seven BJP MLAs – Girish Mahajan, Seema Hire, Prashant Thakur, Sudhir Gadgil, Nitesh Rane, Pratap Adsad and Ram Kadam – took oath in Sanskrit. Ku-

mar Aliani of the BJP did so in Sindhi. Abu Azmi of the Samajwadi Party took oath in Hindi, and Mufti Mohammad Khalique of the All Indian Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen in Urdu. NCP leader Hasan Mushrif invoked Allah.

The Speaker's election will be held on Monday. The Fadnavis government, which was sworn in on December 5, will go for the trust vote later.

Election results

The Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, the Shiv Sena led by Mr. Shinde, and the NCP led by Mr. Pawar, retained power by winning 230 of the 288 seats. The BJP won 132 seats, the Shiv Sena 57, and the NCP 41. The MVA won only 46 seats, with the Shiv Sena (UBT) getting 20, the Congress 16, and the NCP(SP) 10.

During the proceedings, Mr. Aaditya and several Opposition MLAs remained seated until the top leaders from the ruling alliance took their oath. As they exited, ruling alliance members called out, "Respect democracy. Why are you leaving?"

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav appealed to the ruling parties to honour legislative traditions by giving the Deputy Speaker's post to the Opposition.

Four Ministers take oath as Assam CM expands Cabinet

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A four-time MLA, a legislator in his second term, and two first-timers are among the new appointees

MLAs. Three ministerial berths were vacant before Saturday's swearing-in. While one was kept vacant, two were vacated by BJP veterans Parimal Suklabaidya and Ranjit Dutta, who were elected as MPs from the Silchar and Tezpur constituencies earlier this year. The fourth slot was created by dropping Sanjay Kishan as the Labour and Tea Tribes Welfare Minister.

The MLAs – Prasant Phukan (representing the Dibrugarh seat), Kaushik Rai (Lakhipur), Krishnendu Paul (Patharkandi), and Rupesh Goalal (Doomdoooma) – were sworn in by Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya.

The Chief Minister and his Cabinet colleagues were present at the oath-taking ceremony.

Mr. Phukan, a four-time MLA since 2006, and the first-timer Mr. Goalal are from the tea-growing belt of eastern Assam. Mr. Paul, in his second term, and Mr. Rai, a first-timer, represent the Barak Valley seat in southern Assam which is dominated by Bengali speakers.

"It is an honour that the party has found me worthy of the new assignment, which I hope to do justice to," Mr. Phukan, said.

A maximum of 19 Ministers can be inducted into the Cabinet in the 126-member Assam Assembly. The BJP heads the NDA government, which has 84 MLAs. The Asom Gana Parishad and United People's Party Liberal are the two other constituents.

At pre-Budget meet, farmers seek increase in income support, industries call for tax breaks

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met representatives of farmers' associations, agriculture-based industries and agricultural economists in New Delhi on Saturday as part of her customary pre-Budget consultations with stakeholders from various sectors.

Farmers asked her to double the income support under the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi to ₹2,000 and reduce costs on input materials, while industries sought tax breaks and subsidies for expanding their network of infrastructure.

At the meeting, Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) leader Dharmendra Malik said the Centre



Major demands: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and others at the pre-Budget meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

had neglected the agriculture sector for long, and sought steps to ensure timely availability of seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, power and labour. Mr. Malik said the minimum support price arrived at under the present calculation system did not cover input costs,

and urged the Centre to implement the formula given in the M.S. Swaminathan Commission's report to calculate the MSP. He urged the Centre to bring more crops within the ambit of the MSP, and demanded that the PM Kisan Samman Nidhi assistance

be increased to ₹12,000 a year from ₹6,000 a year given at present.

The Sangh Parivar-backed Bharatiya Kisan Sangh's Badri Narayan Chaudhary said in a memorandum that the Kisan Nidhi amount had not been increased in the past six years. He asked the Centre to provide the facility of input tax credit in the Goods and Service Tax to farmers too. He demanded direct benefit transfer of fertilizer subsidy to farmers instead of providing it to fertilizer companies.

The Kisan Sangh supported the policy on natural farming, and asked the government to make use of the livestock in the country to boost natural farming.

Farmers' Forum chairman Ajay Vir Jakhar said

the most problematic area is perishable fruits and vegetables. "Uniform taxation in agricultural markets across India (like GST) will pave the way for improved governance, systems efficiency, mitigation of food inflation and price fluctuations, ignite entrepreneurial spirits to drive competition to benefit farmers and consumers alike," he said.

Industries demanded GST exemption on agricultural machinery, fertilizers, seeds, and medicines. The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked the Centre to reduce GST on pesticide from 18% to 5%. Its chairman (agribusiness committee), R.G. Agarwal, urged the Centre to curb sale of smuggled and spurious pesticides.

Leave at the earliest, India tells its citizens living in strife-hit Syria

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI



Indians currently in Syria are requested to remain in touch with the Indian embassy in Damascus at their emergency helpline number for updates.

MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

cus@mea.gov.in for updates," it said.

"Those who can are advised to leave by the earliest available commercial flights if they can."

The Islamist rebels had almost taken control of the central Syrian city of Homs on Thursday after capturing much of Aleppo, the country's largest city. Tens of thousands of people have been fleeing Homs.

The Ministry urged the Indians residing in Syria to remain in touch with the Indian Embassy in Damascus.

"In view of the situation prevailing in Syria, Indian nationals are advised to avoid all travel to Syria, until further notification," the Ministry said.

"Indians currently in Syria are requested to remain in touch with the Indian embassy in Damascus at their emergency helpline number +963 993385973 (also on WhatsApp) and email ID hoc.damas-

Mayawati flays Congress, SP for 'exploiting' Sambhal issue

The Hindu Bureau
LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Saturday accused the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress of exploiting communal tensions for political dividends in Sambhal and inciting divisions within the minority community.

"These two parties are pitting Turks and non-Turks in the Muslim community against each other in Sambhal. Muslims must remain cautious from such tactics," she said.

'Silence on Bangladesh' The former four-time Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister targeted the Congress for its silence on the plight of Hindus in neighbouring Bangladesh and committing historical blunders during Partition. "The Congress remained silent on atrocities against Hindus in Bangladesh but [is] shouting about Sambhal, only to cater to Muslim voters, ignoring the broader issues," she said.

Ms. Mayawati targeted Dalit MPs for being silent on community-related issues and expressed disappointment. She accused them of prioritising party loyalty over the interests of Dalits, whether in India or Bangladesh.

Over 100 farmers get notices from Waqf Board in Maharashtra

Press Trust of India
LATUR

More than 100 farmers in Latur district of Maharashtra on Saturday said the Waqf Board had sought to take over their land on which they have been cultivating for generations.

The claim has been filed in the Maharashtra State Waqf Tribunal in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar and notices have been issued to 103 farmers having total land measuring 300 acres, they said.

Two hearings
"These lands have been passed down to us through generations. These are not Waqf property. We want

Christian MPs object to some provisions in Waqf Bill

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Christian community should highlight its positive points, the important role it played, and "not just be reactive to negative news", Christian MPs from the Opposition bloc are learnt to have told the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) at a recent meeting here.

The CBCI, the apex body of Catholics in India, called a meeting of all Christian MPs on December 3 to streamline the working of the Waqf Board and ensure efficient management of its properties. The Bill has been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee. The Bill, among many clauses, changes the composition of the Central Waqf Council and Waqf Boards to include non-Muslim members.

parliamentary party leader Derek O'Brien, Congress MPs Hibi Eden, Dean Kuriakose, and Anto Antony, and CPI(M) MP John Brittas were among those who attended the meeting.

BJP leader and Union Minister George Kurian joined the meeting late, and most Opposition MPs were done speaking by then, a source said.

Two Christian MPs of the BJP were absent.

A MP from Kerala raised the issue of abolition of seats reserved for Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha and 10 Assemblies. Complaints were raised about the cancellation of FCRA licences of some Christian organisations in recent years.

(With PTI inputs)

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER,
DHENKANAL (R&B) CIRCLE, DHENKANAL**

Corrigendum to Bid identification No. C.C.E. DKL (R&B)12/2024-25

Letter No.2410 /Dtd. 05/12/2024

The Bids invited vide Bid Identification No.C.C.E. DKL (R&B) 12/2024-25 vide letter No.2352 dt.29.11.2024 has been modified are as follows.

The Bid document for the above notice will be available in the website: www.tendersodisha.gov.in from Dt.13.12.2024 to 5.00 PM of Dt.27.12.2024 for online bidding and shall be opened at 11.00 AM on Dt.30.12.2024.

All other terms and conditions of the above tender call notice will remain unchanged.

Chief Construction Engineer,
Dhenkanal (R&B) Circle, Dhenkanal
OIPR-3432/11/0023/2425

INBRIEF**Approval granted to open 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas: PM**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said his government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible with the Cabinet approving the opening of 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas. "Our government has taken another big decision to make school education as accessible as possible. Under this, 85 new Kendriya Vidyalayas will be opened across the country. While this step will benefit a large number of students, many new employment opportunities will also be created," Mr. Modi said in a post on X. He said the government was committed to providing school education to every section of society.

PTI

YouTuber Faizal Khan not arrested: Bihar Police

Educator and YouTuber Faizal Khan, popularly known as 'Khan Sir' of Khan Global Studies coaching institute in Patna, has not been arrested, and the coaching institute's X handle had a "misleading, baseless and provocative" post, the Bihar Police said on Saturday. "This handle has made a misleading post. 'Khan Sir' was not arrested or detained by the police. Legal action will be taken against the social media handle of Khan Global Studies coaching institute for propagating fake, baseless and provocative information regarding the 'arrest' of Khan Sir," Anu Kumar, Sub-Divisional Police Officer of the Patna Secretariat Police Station-I, said.

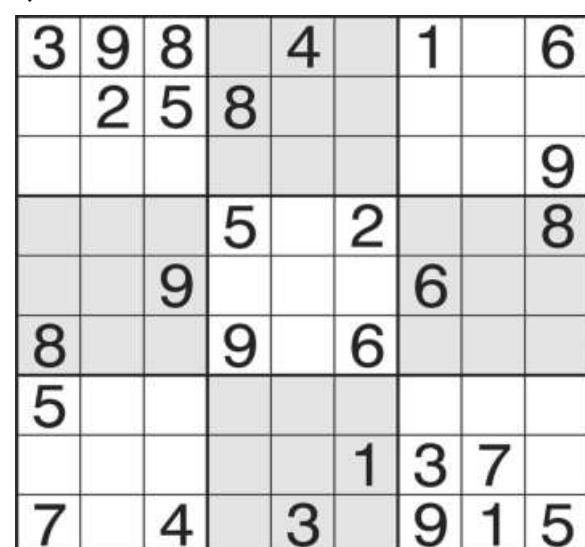
Mumbai Police get message warning of threat to Modi

The Mumbai Police on Saturday received a message threatening to kill Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an official said. The number from which the message was sent was traced to Ajmer in Rajasthan and a police team was sent there immediately to nab the suspect, said an official. The WhatsApp message, received on the helpline of the traffic police in the early hours, mentioned two ISI agents and a plot to carry out a bomb blast to target Mr. Modi, he said. The investigators suspect that the sender is a mentally disturbed person or was under the influence of alcohol but further probe was on, the official added.

PTI

NMDFC, DICCI sign MoU to empower marginalised groups

The National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) and the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) on Saturday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to promote entrepreneurship among marginalised communities. Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said, "This collaboration between the NMDFC and the DICCI is a significant step towards building an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. By promoting entrepreneurship, we are empowering individuals to become job creators and role models, transforming lives and communities across the nation."

SUDOKU

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

No. SS6363 Distribution: www.hindufeatures.com

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

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

CM YK

T.N. tops health sector with its schemes: Udhayanidhi

Deputy CM says services are brought to the doorsteps of people to create a significant impact; he launches 'Healthy India, Happy India', a collaborative initiative by Naruvi Hospitals and *The Hindu*

The Hindu Bureau

VELLORE

N. Ram, Director of The Hindu Group, presenting a framed front page of *The Hindu* to Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin at an event in Vellore on Saturday. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY

Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin on Saturday said the State's Health Department was the frontrunner in the country when it came to reaching out to people with its various flagship health schemes.

Mr. Udhayanidhi was speaking at the inauguration of "Healthy India, Happy India", a collaborative initiative by Naruvi Hospitals and *The Hindu*, in Vellore.

He said the Health Department was recently honoured with the U.N. Inter-Agency Task Force award for 2024 for one of its flagship schemes, "Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam" (Healthcare at people's doorstep). "The scheme has created a significant impact on the lives of nearly two crore people in the State by providing them essential health services. In its report, the NITI Aayog stated that Tamil Nadu was the frontrunner in at least 13 key departments, including health, in the country," he said.

Mr. Udhayanidhi said Mr. Stalin had taken the Health Department in the State to the "next level" by introducing various schemes, including the

"Innuyir Kappom-Nammai Kakkum 48", which funds the treatment of persons injured in road accidents for the first 48 hours. "In fact, such proactive measures have also led to the remarkable increase of 42% in the total number of organ donors in the State. Such initiatives will be amplified only when people and organisations such as *The Hindu* and Naruvi Hospitals come together to support them," he said.

Role model

In his special address, N. Ram, Director, *The Hindu* Group Publishing Pvt Ltd, said that in the annual ratings of the *India Today* magazine in its "State of States" report, Tamil Nadu topped the list of States in the country, especially in

the health sector. In that sense, the State's Health Department was not only a role model to the rest of the country but also to the world, he added.

"Under the inspiration of Chief Minister Stalin, 'Makkalai Thedi Maruthuvam' has become an internationally known health scheme as it bagged an award from the United Nations. The Health Department is also appreciated for its initiatives in non-communicable diseases," he noted, and lauded the efforts taken by the DMK government in the health sector.

G.V. Sampath, founder and chairman of Naruvi Hospitals, said the important partnership with *The Hindu* would take the message of awareness of health

and wellness to the people.

"It is the right step towards making informed decisions on health for the people," L.V. Navaneeth, CEO of *The Hindu* Group, said.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Ma. Subramanian and Handlooms and Textiles Minister R. Gandhi were present.

The "Healthy India, Happy India" initiative aims at promoting health and wellness as essential pillars of national strength.

The initiative seeks to inspire individuals and communities to prioritise their health and adopt healthier lifestyles, contributing to a brighter and better future for India. To learn more about the campaign, visit healthyindiahappyindia.thehindu.co.in.

Mobile phone addiction leads to sleep deprivation'**The Hindu Bureau**

VELLORE

Vellore
Presents

Fear of missing out on things that happen around them is making people of all age groups glue themselves to their mobile phones that deprives them of a good sleep, which should be seven or eight hours a day, said a group of experts on Saturday.

At a panel discussion titled "Stress and sleep: The twin burdens that deter us from achieving full potential", which was organised as part of "Healthy India, Happy India", a collaborative initiative of Naruvi Hospitals and *The Hindu* here, Maria Antony, specialist in child and adolescent mental health, said excessive usage of mobile phones is inimical to sleep.

"Mobile phone usage has become the new-age ailment for many people as they think smartphones are the only way of recreation," she said. The hour-long discussion was moderated by Ramya Kannan, Chief of Bureau (Tamil Nadu), *The Hindu*.

M. Satish Kumar, specialist in respiratory medicine, said that the concept of sleep hygiene is to have a set pattern of activities, including going to bed at a regular time. "Getting up during sleep and feeling sleepy during the day is referred to as sleep fragmentation – it should be avoided for better sleep hygiene with less stress," he said.

urging people to keep a diary of sleep and wake times and naps taken.

Pulmonologist Prince James said snoring is the result of obstruction to the smooth flow of oxygen into the lungs. Obesity is one of the main causes of obstructive sleep apnea, a condition that can turn out to be dangerous.

Mary Kurien, an otolaryngologist, spoke of the physiological causes that cause snoring among children and prevent them from getting adequate sleep. While some causes might resolve themselves as the children grow up, others might need intervention, she added.

Relatives of women, children killed in Jiribam violence seek death penalty for perpetrators**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI



Family members of the victims of violence perpetrated in Manipur's Jiribam narrate their ordeal in New Delhi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Manipur extends ban on mobile data services**IMPHAL**

The Manipur government extended the ban on mobile data services in nine restive districts till December 9, the order issued by the Home Department said. The order was issued after reviewing the prevailing law and order situation, the government said.

flict that began last year until June 2024, when two murders – one of a Kuki-Zo man and another of a Meitei man – pushed the district into the centre of the conflict, with widespread arson and violence internally displacing thousands more.

With tensions mounting since then, se-

curity officials in Manipur reported an alleged attack by armed militants near the Borobekra police station in Jakuradhor on November 11, to which they responded with firing and killed 10 militants from the Kuki-Zomi-Hmar community. While the Kuki-Zo civil society outfits in Churachandpur insisted that the men killed in the gunfire with the CRPF were "village volunteers", the police reported that during the gunfire, six women and children from the Meitei community were abducted and two elderly persons burnt to death.

Days later, the bodies of the women and children, which included a 10-month-old child, were found floating in the Barak river, which borders Jiribam district.

Nadda opens 100-day campaign against TB**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

"The rate of TB (tuberculosis) decline in India has doubled from 8.3% in 2015 to 17.7% today, much ahead of the global average. Deaths due to TB have also reduced in India by 21.4% in the last 10 years," Union Health Minister J.P. Nadda said at the launch of the intensified national '100 day TB elimination' campaign on Saturday in Haryana.

The goal of the campaign, to be implemented in 347 districts across the country, is to find and treat 'missing TB cases', especially in high-risk groups, and reduce TB deaths significantly.

The Union Health Minister said that the campaign had been launched with the intention to provide new momentum to the goal of 'TB-mukt (free) Bharat'. He said that TB is now detected early due to a pan Indian network of over 1.7 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs.

"The government has significantly scaled up diagnostic services by increasing the number of laboratories from 120 in 2014 to 8,293 laboratories today. It has also introduced a daily regimen of drug-sensitive TB, including a new, shorter and more effective regimen, which has improved TB treatment success rate to 87%," the Minister said.

The Health Ministry in its release added that it had now made it mandatory for even private medical practitioners to notify new TB patients, so that their treatment could be followed up immediately. "This might look like a small step but it has led to an 8-fold increase in the rate of TB notifications in the private sector," the release said.

The Hindu journalist wins accolades at IPI India Awards for reporting on Manipur**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Hindu journalist Vijaita Singh's reporting on Manipur's ethnic strife, raging for over 18 months now, won accolades at the International Press Institute India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2024 on Saturday.

The IPI, in a statement, said that there were several entries in the print, digital, and broadcast categories, covering different angles of the strife in Manipur and as a result, the jury had decided to recognise the five best entries for cash prizes and citations as a "mark of appreciation and acknowledgement of the media's efforts to bring out the various facets of the human

tragedy caused by the civil strife".

The citation for Ms. Singh, Deputy Editor at *The Hindu*, came along with recognition of the reporting done on the conflict by other journalists and newsrooms, which included *The Print*, *The Caravan* (Greeshma Kuthar), *Scrol.in* (Arunabh Saikia and Toru Agarwala), and *India Today* (Ashutosh Mishra).

The IPI India Award for Excellence in Journalism, 2024, was awarded to photojournalist Bhanu Prakash Chandra for his account of the war in Ukraine – Sunflower fields and no man's land end – published in *The Week*. This award comes with a cash prize of ₹1 lakh, a trophy and a citation.

Human tragedy

Ms. Singh's reporting on the ethnic conflict in Manipur has spanned the length and breadth of the issues facing the north-eastern State – from the granular details of the brutality of the conflict to the broader themes of how it began and has been playing out over the past 18 months, including covering the human tragedy faced by tens of thou-

sands of civilians across communities in the strife-torn State.

Ever since the conflict began on May 3, 2023, over 250 people have been killed, thousands more injured, and over 60,000 people have been left internally displaced.

After the awards were announced, Ms. Singh said, "I am very grateful to *The Hindu* for consistently providing space to report on an issue that I believe ought to be etched in public memory." The IPI added, "The Jury was unable to select any entry in the broadcast category deserving the award."

SCIENCE

Intermittent fasting inhibits hair regeneration in mice: study

The Hindu Bureau

Intermittent fasting has proven benefits for metabolic health, but a new study shows that it could slow hair growth – at least in mice. Researchers report in the *Cell* that mice subjected to intermittent fasting regimes show improved metabolic health but slower hair regeneration compared to mice with 24/7 access to food. A

similar process might occur in humans, based on a small clinical trial that the team also conducted, but it's likely to be less severe since humans have a much slower metabolic rate and different hair growth patterns compared to mice.

In addition to its metabolic benefits, previous studies have shown that fasting can improve the stress resistance of stem cells associated with

blood, intestinal, and muscle tissue, but little is known about how it impacts peripheral tissues such as skin and hair. The researchers hypothesised that fasting might also be beneficial for skin tissue regeneration, the process by which old and damaged cells are replaced.

To test this, they examined hair regrowth in mice that were shaved and then subjected to different

intermittent fasting regimes. Some mice were fed on a time-restricted feeding (TRF) schedule that involved eight hours of food access and 16 hours of fasting each day, while other mice were subjected to alternate-day feeding (ADF).

They were surprised to find that fasting inhibited hair regeneration. While control mice that had unlimited access to food had regrown most of their hair

after 30 days, mice on both intermittent fasting regimes showed only partial hair regrowth after 96 days.

Phases of activity

The team showed that this inhibited hair growth occurs because hair follicle stem cells (HFSCs) are unable to cope with the oxidative stress associated with switching from using glucose to fat. HFSCs go

through phases of activity and dormancy, and hair regrowth depends on these cells becoming active. While the control mice's HFSCs began to become activated around day 20 post-shaving and remained active until their hair had regrown, the intermittent fasting mice's activated HFSCs underwent apoptosis (programmed cell death) during extended fasting periods.

SNAPSHOTS



Single mutation can make H5N1 spread among humans

A recent study led by scientists at Scripps Research reveals that a single mutation in the H5N1 virus – which has recently infected dairy cows in the U.S., causing a few mild human cases but retaining specificity for avian receptors – could enhance the virus' ability to attach to human cells, potentially increasing the risk of passing from person to person. A single glutamic acid to leucine mutation at residue 226 of the virus hemagglutinin was sufficient to enact the change from avian to human specificity.

Preventing malaria using genetically modified parasites

Genetically modified malaria-causing parasites do not cause disease; they instead prime the immune system during the initial stage of their life cycle in the liver

R. Prasad

Two vaccines against malaria have been rolled out in some countries in Africa. Besides vaccines, scientists have been using genetically altered mosquitoes to stop the spread of malaria. One is the release of radiation-sterilised male mosquitoes to prevent eggs from hatching.

Another is engineering mosquitoes that slow the growth of malaria-causing parasites in the gut thereby preventing transmission of malaria to humans. The other method is using genetically modified mosquitoes that can spread resistance to malaria-causing parasites by thriving and mating with wild mosquitoes.

Now, in a radical approach, scientists have shifted their focus from genetic modification of malaria-causing mosquitoes to malaria-causing parasites. They have genetically modified malaria-causing parasites so that the parasites do not cause disease. Instead, they prime the immune system during the initial stage of their life cycle in the liver and before they enter the bloodstream. Malaria-causing parasites cause infection and symptoms begin to show only when they move into the bloodstream from the liver stage.

The priming of the immune system, like in the case of vaccines, by the genetically modified malaria parasites shields the individuals when malaria-causing mosquitoes bite them later. While the genetic modification kills the para-

Focus shifts to GM parasites

Mosquitoes are used to deliver genetically modified parasites

- Genetically altered parasite in the liver stage primes the immune system
- The genetic modification kills the parasites by completely arresting its growth on day one (early-arresting) or day six (late-arresting) during the liver stage
- Nine participants were bitten by mosquitoes carrying late-arresting parasites, eight by early-arresting parasites, and three belonged to the placebo group
- All participants were exposed to controlled human malaria infection three weeks after the third immunisation session



Genetic frontiers: Till now, scientists have been genetically altering the mosquitoes to stop the spread of malaria

- The late-arresting parasite group had 89% immune protection compared with 13% for the early-arresting arm
- The amount of antibody produced was the same immaterial of parasites being killed on day one or day six in the liver
- Parasites killed on day six produced certain T cells that were not seen in participants bitten by mosquitoes carrying parasites that died on day one

sites by completely arresting their growth on day six during the liver stage (late-arresting parasite), the parasites have sufficient time to prime the immune system far more effectively than when the parasites are killed on day one (early-arresting parasite) of entering the liver.

In a small trial, researchers exposed nine healthy adults who had not had malaria to 50 bites by mosquitoes that carried the genetically modified late-arresting parasites that were designed to die on day six of the liver stage, eight healthy adults with the early-arresting parasites, and three adults in the placebo group who were bitten by uninfected mosquitoes.

The 50 mosquito bites were considered as one immunisation session, and the participants were exposed to three such sessions in all. Each successive immunisation session was set at 28-day intervals.

Three weeks after the third immunisation session, all participants were exposed to controlled human malaria infection by means of five bites from mosquitoes infected with the genetically unaltered *P. falciparum* parasite. This was to test the efficacy of genetically modified malaria parasites in priming the immune system.

As per the results published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the efficacy results were striking. While eight of nine (89%) participants primed by late-arresting parasites were protected from malaria when exposed to mosquitoes carrying unaltered *P. falciparum* parasite, only one of eight (13%) participants who were primed by early-arresting parasites was protected from malaria. No participants in the placebo arm were protected from malaria. "This suggests an important independent role of late-liver-stage antigens in eliciting gamma delta T-cell responses," they write.

Sporozoites, which

targeting key *P. falciparum* antigens in both the early-arresting and last-arresting parasite groups were far higher than those observed in the placebo group and did not differ between participants in the two intervention arms. This suggests that the vastly different timings of killing the parasites in the liver did not affect the amount of antibodies produced.

However, there were differences in the cellular immunity in the two intervention groups. Though the overall cellular frequency T-cell lineages remained similar, certain *P. falciparum*-specific T cells were seen only in participants who were primed by mosquitoes carrying the last-arresting parasites.

"This suggests an important independent role of late-liver-stage antigens in eliciting gamma delta T-cell responses," they write.

Sporozoites, which

are the infective stage of the malaria parasite, when attenuated by radiation also offer protection against malaria. In contrast to the genetically modified parasites used in this study, the protection offered by radiation-attenuated sporozoites against malaria ranged between 50% and 90%.

However, administration of radiation-attenuated sporozoites by means of mosquito bites requires higher doses (approximately 1,000 mosquito bites) to reach levels of protection similar to the level offered by last-arresting parasites used in this study.

"Our findings suggest that parasites arresting late during the liver stage offer improved protection, as compared with early-arresting sporozoites, and provide a step toward a next-generation malaria vaccine," they write. However, they also caution that the conclusions from the trial are limited by the small sample size, and urge that studies with greater numbers of participants be done for better understanding of both the efficacy and the safety profile of genetically modified last-arresting parasites.

They also note that the "immunologic assessments were exploratory, and the relevance of the variables associated with last-arresting-induced protection needs confirmation". Also, the durability of immune protection offered by last-arresting parasites needs to be assessed especially against heterologous *P. falciparum* strains where malaria is endemic.



A new catalyst can turn methane into useful polymer

Although less abundant than carbon dioxide, methane gas contributes disproportionately to global warming because it traps more heat in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. MIT engineers have now designed a new catalyst that can convert methane into useful polymers, which could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The new catalyst works at room temperature and atmospheric pressure, which could make it easier to deploy at sites of methane production, such as power plants and cattle barns.



Coffee wilt disease linked to gene transfer from fungus

Researchers compared the genomes of 13 historic strains and multiple disease outbreaks of coffee wilt disease to investigate how the pathogen *Fusarium xylarioides* has adapted to coffee plants. They found that *F. xylarioides* is made up of at least four distinct lineages, and also found evidence that these strains had repeatedly received segments of DNA from another fungal pathogen, *F. oxysporum*, which enhanced *F. xylarioides*'s ability to infect coffee plants.

New insights into how Long COVID affects the brain

Rajeev Jayadevan

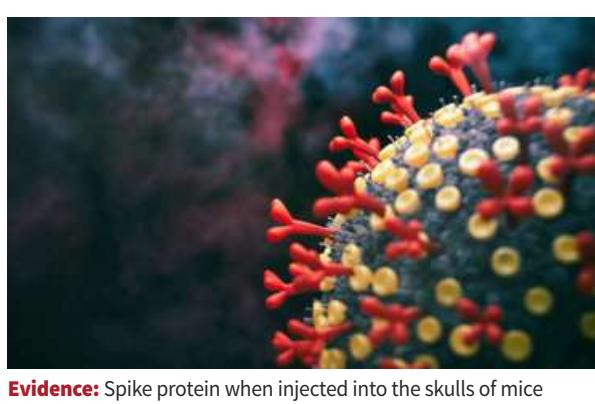
Long COVID is a condition marked by multiple persistent symptoms that sometimes occur even after mild infections. Among these, memory loss, brain fog and sleep disturbances indicate brain involvement. MRI scans done before and after COVID-19 show shrinkage in certain brain regions, pointing to tissue loss. This raises crucial questions: how does a respiratory virus go on to affect the brain? And what drives brain inflammation in these patients? Two recent papers provide insights into how the virus might indirectly affect the brain.

A study published in *Cell Host & Microbe* concludes that the continued presence of the virus spike protein could be triggering inflammation and neurodegenerative changes in

the brain. The spike also activates inflammatory pathways. When researchers injected spike protein into the skulls of mice, they observed brain inflammation along with behavioural changes.

The authors found that spike protein-based vaccines do not have similar effects. They found that vaccinated mice infected with the virus had lower spike protein levels. Moreover, Long COVID symptoms are rarely linked to vaccination. This suggests that it is the immune response to the virus, not vaccination, that is responsible for the widespread presence of spike protein in the body.

In human studies, the researchers identified spike protein within the skulls of people who died of causes other than COVID. This indicates that spike protein is found within the skull? The hol-



Evidence: Spike protein when injected into the skulls of mice caused brain inflammation. GETTY IMAGES

body long after the initial infection, which may have occurred several months earlier. Long COVID patients with persistent spike protein also had elevated levels of biomarkers such as tau protein in their cerebrospinal fluid. These biomarkers are released when brain cells are damaged. What is so special about spike protein being found within the skull? The hol-

The next question is how exactly these immune alterations lead to brain damage. A paper published in *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity - Health* examines the interaction between the virus and microglia, the brain's resident immune cells. These cells function similarly to macrophages found in the rest of the body, clearing debris, eliminating viruses, and coordinating immune responses.

Like a gardener trimming a hedge to maintain its shape, microglia also prune unwanted connections between brain cells, a process essential for early brain development and neuroplasticity. However, dysregulation of this pruning can contribute to various brain disorders. Under normal conditions, microglia remain at rest. However, when activated – such as after COVID-19 – they can trigger

prolonged brain inflammation, potentially leading to memory problems and other symptoms.

So it appears that this virus leaves a footprint in the body long after it has gone, resulting in persistent health problems in a few.

Currently, there is no definitive cure for Long COVID, though some individuals improve over time. The lack of specific treatment reflects an incomplete understanding of the involved mechanisms and the challenge of effectively targeting these complex pathways without harming the body.

Understanding these pathways could pave the way for treatments that prevent or alleviate symptoms, and restore quality of life for people living with Long COVID. (Rajeev Jayadevan is co-chairman of the National IMA COVID task force)



Question Corner

Not a straw

How do hummingbirds drink nectar at frenetic speed?

Hummingbird bills look a little like drinking straws. The frenetic speed at which they get nectar out of flowers and backyard feeders may give the impression that the bills act as straws, too. But new research shows just how little water or nectar, that comparison holds. The team discovered that a drinking hummingbird rapidly opens and shuts different parts of its bill simultaneously, engaging in a highly coordinated dance with its tongue to draw up nectar at lightning speeds. By analysing the footage and combining it

The row over tungsten mining near Madurai

Who had got the rights? Why have there been protests? What's the Tamil Nadu government's stand?

C. Palanivel Rajan

The story so far:

The Ministry of Mines recently announced it had granted tungsten mining rights to Hindustan Zinc Limited, a subsidiary of Vedanta Limited, through an auction on November 7. One of the areas chosen was a band in Melur in Madurai district. Following protests, the State government of Tamil Nadu said that it would soon pass a resolution to reject it.

What does the Ministry say about mining?

The Union government, through a statement on November 7, stated that the Ministry of Mines had successfully concluded the auction of eight critical mineral blocks, launched under Tranche IV of the auction of critical and strategic mineral blocks. It attributed the success of the auction to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, which leveraged the Union government's authority to grant mineral concessions for key minerals listed in Part D of the First Schedule. Following the issuance of the Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) on June 24 for 21 mineral blocks, 10 mineral blocks advanced to the second round of e-auction. They contained deposits of strategic minerals such as

The major argument against mining at Melur is because of the location's rich flora and fauna, say activists

phosphorite, graphite and vanadium, essential for high-tech and green energy applications.

As the Nayakkarappatti tungsten block is one among eight blocks selected for mining, the Mineral Exploration and Consultancy Ltd. of the

Ministry of Mines in its report noted that the 2,015.51 hectares earmarked for tungsten mining was found to be rich in scheelite – an important ore of tungsten. The water source for mining in the area was listed as the Periyar canal.

Why is there opposition?

The public, environmental activists and politicians have staunchly opposed the move to start tungsten mining in the biodiversity-rich heritage area at Melur. Though the Ministry claimed that it had taken inputs from the Tamil Nadu government, which reportedly showed no opposition before the auction, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to cancel the mining rights awarded to the private firm before announcing that the State government would pass a resolution to cancel mining rights. The earmarked area for mining comprises Melur, Terkutteru, Muthuvellappatti, Kulanipatti, Kidaripatti, Etimagamalam, Arittappatti, Vallalappatti, Sillippayappatti, Chettiyarpatti, and Nayakkarappatti.

Locals and environmental activists fear that mining would destroy its rich flora and fauna in addition to distorting its cultural significance. The major argument raised by opposing voices is the location's significance as a biodiversity heritage site, declared by the Tamil Nadu government through a notification in November 2022, to protect the site comprising 139.63 hectares in Arittappatti village (Melur block) and 53.8 hectares in Meenakshipuram village (Madurai East taluk) from quarrying and other developmental activities.

Though the Ministry had explained that out of the total area of 20.16 sq.km, only 1.93 sq.km within Arittappatti and Meenakshipuram villages had been notified as a biodiversity heritage site, activists are sceptical about the impact of mining on the environment and cultural sites like temples and Jain beds located around the area.

R.S. Mugilan, an environmental activist known for his protest against projects like Sterlite, Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant, hydrocarbon Project in Neduvvasal, and Neutrino project, said, "Vedanta – the company that won the auction for tungsten mining, is known for pollution practices at its copper smelting unit in Thoothukudi." Highlighting issues from the climate change perspective, Poovulagin Nanbargal, an environmental organisation based in Tamil Nadu, notes that the tailings (the left-over materials from the processing of mined ore) when stored after the mining extraction, would release heavy metals like copper, cadmium, zinc, lead, arsenic, and would be detrimental to humans and the environment.

Is there a Centre-State rift?

Though the State government says it vehemently opposed the mining of tungsten block in Melur, the Union government alleges: "Since February 2024, when the block was first put to auction till the declaration of result of the auction of November 11, there was no communication from any quarter including the State government regarding any opposition to the auction. Nor did the State government request the Union government to drop the block from auction." However, the State Minister for Water Resources pointed out that repeated conversations were held with the Union government over mining. He clarified: "When the Union government sought the details of the land, we had pointed out that there was a biodiversity heritage site at the proposed area. Without taking into account such factors, the Union government has awarded the rights to the company."

Why can't the world agree on a plastic ban?

How much plastic waste is produced now? What is the most common type of plastic waste found in the environment? Why are several countries averse to tackling plastic pollution? Why did talks fail at Busan? Is another round of negotiations likely?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

The 5th Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) on plastic pollution was a conclave of delegations from about 170 countries mandated to establish a legally binding treaty to end plastic pollution, informally called the Global Plastics Treaty. Despite a week of meetings, the INC-5 failed to meet its mandate.

What is the Global Plastics Treaty?

The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolved in March 2022 to "end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment." To that end, INC committees were constituted and tasked with negotiating a treaty before the end of 2024. Over the last two years, countries met five times, and attempted to bridge divergent views on how to end plastic pollution. Several countries are enthusiastic about ways and means to encourage recycling and prohibit certain plastics that lead to littering – India for instance has banned single-use plastic since 2022 – but many of them are reluctant to limit plastic production. Several countries are either petro-states or those that have significant industries that manufacture plastic polymers. Before the latest, and what was expected to be the last round of negotiations, began in Busan, South Korea, the Chair of the INC-5, Luis Vayas Valdivieso, circulated a draft text called a 'non paper.' This was roughly a synthesis of the views of all countries on managing plastic production but in the end, it turned out that despite long negotiations, the chasm between countries who viewed addressing plastic pollution as a waste

Currently, the world produces about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste every year

management problem, and those that saw it as unachievable without cutting its production at source, was one that was too wide to bridge.

How bad is the problem of plastic pollution?

According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) factsheet, plastic waste generation nearly trebled from between 1970 and 1990. In the early 2000s, the amount of plastic waste generated rose more in a single decade than it had in the previous 40 years. Currently, the world produces about 400 million tonnes of plastic waste every year. If historic growth trends continue, global production of primary plastic is forecasted to reach 1,100 million tonnes by 2050. There has also been a worrying shift towards single-use plastic products, items that are meant to be thrown away after a short use.

Approximately, 36% of all plastics produced are used in packaging, including single-use plastic products for food and beverage containers, of which 85% ends up in landfills or as unregulated waste. On top of that, about 98% of single-use plastic products are produced from fossil fuel, or "virgin" feedstock. The level of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, use and disposal of conventional fossil fuel-based plastics is forecast to grow to 19% of the global carbon budget by 2040. Of the seven billion tonnes of plastic waste generated globally so far, less than 10% has been recycled. Millions of tonnes of plastic waste are lost to the environment, or sometimes shipped thousands of kilometres to destinations where it is mostly burned or dumped. The estimated annual loss in the value of plastic packaging waste during sorting and processing alone is \$80-\$120 billion. Cigarette butts – whose filters contain tiny plastic fibres – are the most common type of plastic waste found in the environment. Food wrappers, plastic bottles, plastic bottle caps, plastic grocery bags, plastic straws, and stirrers are the next most common item.

What is India's position on the treaty?

India said that it would be "unable" to support any measures to regulate the production of primary plastic polymers as it has larger implications in respect of the right to development of member States. Indian delegation leader, Naresh Pal Gangwar, of the Environment Ministry, said at the concluding plenary session India had always been "committed" to the principle of consensus in decision-making in respect of substantive matters under multilateral environmental agreements. This principle reiterated collective decision-making and reflects shared

responsibilities and commitment. Elaborating on these points, India's position was that it had banned 22 kinds of single-use plastic and put in place an Extended Producer Responsibility regime. This means that companies had to ensure a certain percentage of their plastic-packaging waste was recycled and that the littering of some of the most common kinds of plastic waste was banned. However, virgin polymer production is one of India's major products and exports, with conglomerates such as Reliance having significant stakes in the industry. India viewed calls to cut plastic production and regulate its supply as akin to introducing barriers to trade. Its position was closer to that of China, Saudi Arabia and several other oil and petrochemical-refining states. At the talks, 85-100 of the gathered countries were supportive of cuts to plastic production, year-wise targets to achieve them and restrict supply and trade. Finally, India has strongly opposed proposals for countries to vote on propositions in draft texts that were produced at negotiations such as INC. In INC-like negotiations – like the Conference of Parties talks in climate – every single word and punctuation has to be agreed upon by all countries. This inevitably leads to deadlock that can take years to resolve. There have been proposals to include voting rights to engineer progress but countries have opposed this, on the ground that it violates the principle of equity.

Is this the end of the road?

By no means. It is expected that an "INC 5.2" will likely be convened sometime later next year to resume conversation and find common ground to firm a treaty. The final treaty, if agreed to, will lead to the beginning of a periodic Conference of Parties (COP) – just like in the climate talks. The UN talks in Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, was where countries decided to address carbon dioxide emissions. It took three years until the first COP was organised in Berlin and in the 29 years since, the world has moved at a glacial pace to address CO2 emissions.

According to an analysis by the Center for International Environmental Law, multilateral environmental agreements have taken varying amounts of time to negotiate treaty text due to a range of factors, ranging from just over a year to nearly five years between the start of negotiations and treaty adoption. In addition, depending on the number of countries required to ratify, it is not unusual for several years to pass between adopting the treaty and its entry into force. For example, the Intergovernmental Conference on an international legally-binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction held five sessions over five years. It met seven times by holding a "resumed" fifth session and a "further resumed" fifth session.



Complete ban: An environmental activist wears a banner reading "No plastic" during a campaign to reduce plastic use in Seoul on December 3. AFP

How will martial law flip-flop affect S. Korea?

What led to the declaration, and the subsequent swift withdrawal, of emergency provisions? What are the key reasons for the development? How many times has martial law been imposed in the country? What happened to the impeachment motion against President Yoon Suk Yeol?

Adithya Narayan

The story so far:

For a brief while on December 3, South Korea, a country with a history of military rule, had fleeting visions of its past, as President Yoon Suk Yeol imposed emergency martial law. This would have curbed the activities of political parties, brought the media under the ambit of law, and required protesting workers to resume duties.

What followed the declaration?

Yielding to pressure, Mr. Yoon repealed the law within six hours after lawmakers braved Army troops to vote 190-0 against it at the 300-member strong Parliament. This included 18 members of Mr. Yoon's People's Power Party (PPP). The opposition filed an impeachment motion against the President. But on Saturday, lawmakers from the PPP staged a walkout when the National Assembly met to discuss impeaching the President, and therefore, the motion failed.

What is the history of the law?

South Korea's constitution states that martial law can be imposed to "cope with a military necessity, or to maintain the public safety and

The conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol has faced a series of challenges in his tenure

order, by mobilisation of the military forces in time of war, armed conflict or similar national emergency." The law can be repealed if overturned by a majority in the National Assembly. Between the end of the Second World War and South Korea's transition to democracy in 1987, martial law has been imposed 16 times.

Park Chung-hee, who came to power in 1961 through a military coup, had imposed martial law multiple times during his 17-year reign. Major General Chun Doo-hwan, who came after Park, oversaw one of the darkest chapters in the history of martial law when troops cracked down on a pro-democracy uprising in the city of Gwangju, killing at least 200 people in 1980.

What led to the decision?

At the time of Mr. Yoon's ascension to the President's chair in 2022 (with a razor-thin majority of 0.8 percentage-points), the National Assembly was already dominated by the opposition Democratic Party. A victory for them in this year's parliamentary elections landed Mr. Yoon in a precarious position, making him the first South Korean leader in decades without a majority in the National Assembly. This led to constant bickering, with the President vetoing Bills and accusing the opposition of filing 22 impeachment motions against his administration officials. Coupled with the latest argument over a Budget Bill, the stand-off culminated in Mr. Yoon declaring martial law to stop "shameless pro-North anti-state forces that plunder the freedom and happiness of our people", terming the Assembly a "monster that destroys the liberal democratic system".

What has been Mr. Yoon's track-record?

A prosecutor by profession, Mr. Yoon came to power succeeding Moon Jae-in from the Democratic Party. During his career, the 63-year-old has handled several high-profile cases, including the investigation and conviction of former President Park Geun-hye. In comparison to Mr. Moon, who struck a conciliatory tone with North Korea by meeting its leader Kim Jong-un, the Conservative Mr. Yoon has adopted a hawkish approach. He called for increased military drills and economic



In rage: A demonstrator holds a poster during a protest calling for the ouster of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in Seoul on December 7. AFP

sanctions on Pyongyang, in moves perceived as an overture to bolster ties with the U.S.

On the domestic front, increasing home prices and rising unemployment have kept his administration busy. The country is home to an ageing population and has the world's lowest birthrate. The government's efficacy was first put to test on October 29, 2022, at the Halloween weekend stampede where 159 people were killed at a popular nightlife district in Seoul. The authorities' response to the incident came under sharp criticism. The second challenge came in the form of the doctors' protest which began in February 2024, when the government decided to admit more medical students to address staff shortages. The medical workers wanted the government to address their harsh working conditions and dismal pay before recruiting more students. Another blot on Mr. Yoon's career was the bribery charges levelled against his wife, Kim Keon Hee, who was caught on camera receiving a \$2,200 Dior pouch as a gift. These factors, clubbed with his anti-feminist policies and attacks against the media for spreading 'fake news', led the President's approval points to drop to 17% last month.

What has been the aftermath?

While Mr. Yoon apologised, senior aides to Mr. Yoon offered to resign *en masse*. Defence Minister Kim Yong-hyun, who is believed to have recommended martial law to Mr. Yoon, resigned from his post. The opposition's impeachment motion had the backing of citizens and labour unions who have gone on strike in Seoul. Allies of Mr. Yoon such as the leader of his PPP party, Han Dong-hoon, termed the martial law imposition wrong and suggested withdrawing President Yoon's constitutional powers. However, lawmakers from the PPP staged a walkout during the discussion on the impeachment motion. The National Assembly is empowered to impeach the President if more than two-thirds of the members support the motion. The opposition currently holds 192 seats in the 300-strong Parliament while Mr. Yoon's party has 108 members. The opposition needed eight members of the PPP to break ranks and join its cause for impeachment to come through.

Under South Korean constitutional law, if a President is removed from office, his powers are suspended until the Constitutional Court makes a final decision. Once his or her termination is confirmed, the election for a new President must be held in 60 days.

PROFILES

Syria's jihadist-in-chief

Abu Muhammad al-Jolani

The man picked by slain Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi to establish a branch of al-Qaeda in Syria is now leading the country's most potent militant organisation that has made dramatic territorial advances in recent weeks

Stanly Johny

We deputised al-Jolani, who is one of our soldiers, with a group of our sons, and pushed them from Iraq to Syria to meet with our cells in Syria and set for them the plans and drew for them the policy of work," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the then-chief of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) announced on April 2, 2014, referring to al-Qaeda's Syria arm, Jabhat al-Nusra. Abu Muhammad al-Jolani, a Saudi-born Syrian jihadist was a lieutenant of Baghdadi. It was Jolani he turned to when he decided to expand his jihadist network into Syria, where a civil war broke out in 2011. "We supplied them with half of what is in the treasury every month, and supplied them with men who had battlefield experience from among the *mujahirun* ['emigrants'; foreign fighters] and *ansar* ['supporters'; local jihadists], so they did well next to their brothers from the ardent sons of Syria," said Baghdadi, taking credit for the creation of a-Nusra.

Baghdadi was killed in an American airstrike in Syria in October 2019. The 'caliphate' he built, which at its peak had spread from eastern Syria's Deir Ezzor to Iraq's Mosul, was destroyed. The Islamic State, the jihadist organisation Baghdadi created and led, has been scattered and weakened ever since. But Jolani, the man Baghdadi chose to lead his network in Syria, is today the leader of Syria's armed insurgency. He is the 'emir' of the 'Syrian Salvation Government', which is based in the northwestern province of Idlib, and the leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the main opposition jihadist group. In the last week of November, when the whole region's focus was on a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hezbollah, Jolani's jihadists launched a surprise attack on Syrian forces from Idlib. Before most people understood what was actually happening, the HTS captured Aleppo, Syria's second-largest city.

Then his troops moved south towards Hama at breakneck speed as regime troops retreated without a fight. Now, Jolani's men are advancing

towards Homs, a strategically important city that sits at an intersection between Latakia and Tartus, the regime strongholds on the Mediterranean coast, and Damascus, President Bashar al-Assad's seat of power. "Our goal is to unseat Assad", declared Jolani, after taking Aleppo. After years of tense calm, Mr. Assad is now facing a mortal threat from a surging jihadist movement.

Loyalty to al-Qaeda

Born in 1982 in Riyadh, where his father worked as an oil engineer, Jolani, whose real name is Ahmed Hussein al-Shara, grew up in the suburbs of Damascus. He moved to Iraq in 2003, weeks before the American invasion began. He was arrested by Iraqi authorities and put in Camp Bucca, the infamous prison where Baghdadi had spent months. After his release in 2008, Jolani went back to al-Qaeda, now headed by Baghdadi. The 'emir' made him chief of operations in Mosul. After he was sent to Syria by Baghdadi, Jolani built a brutal jihadist organisation that announced its arrival through suicide bombings. "The regime will never stop except by the power of Allah and the power of weapons," al-Nusra said in February 2012 in a video message, justifying its suicide bombings.

Jolani split with Baghdadi when the latter wanted al-Nusra to join the Islamic State. Jolani wanted to retain his autonomy in Syria and he announced that al-Nusra was the true representative of al-Qaeda. "The sons of al-Nusra pledge allegiance to Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri," Jolani said in a video message in 2014, referring to the then al-Qaeda chief. Al-Nusra's world view had largely been borrowed from that of al-Qaeda. Its immediate goal was to overthrow the Assad regime, the near enemy, and establish an Islamic emirate in Syria under Sharia law. The long-term goal was to create many more such states and eventually establish an al-Qaeda Caliphate. It had termed both Israel and the U.S. "enemies of Islam" and attacked non-Sunni communities in Syria, particularly the Alawites, President Assad's sect. They could attract thousands of foreign fighters into their



ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

fold, including battle-hardened men from Iraq and Afghanistan. They also carried out harsh punishments in the name of Sharia, including beheading. Within a few years, al-Nusra emerged as the most powerful anti-regime militant group in Syria. When regional powers were focused on defeating the Islamic State, which had exported terror across the world, Jolani stayed below the radar, building his own empire in Syria.

By 2016, it was evident that the Assad regime had an upper hand. A year earlier, Russia had sent troops to Syria to help the regime. Iran had supplied Shia militias. Hezbollah had also deployed thousands of its fighters. The regime alliance took back Aleppo, and the lost territories in Hama, Homs and in the south. The militants from

different parts of the country moved to Idlib, Jolani's forte. Mr. Assad wanted to march his troops to Idlib but the Russians were not on board. Turkey had strongly opposed any attack on Idlib. The Assad regime was forced into accepting a ceasefire when Russia and Turkey entered into a detente.

Emir of Idlib

Jolani became the new emir of Idlib. The Free Syrian Army, a Turkish proxy (which is today called the Syrian National Army) also joined hands with him in Idlib. Having sensed an opportunity to retain power, Jolani realised that his al-Qaeda tag had become a burden rather than an advantage. He first renamed Jabhat al-Nusra as Fateh al-Sham. In 2017, he "dissolved" Fateh al-Sham and

announced the creation of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and said that the new organisation broke all links with al-Qaeda. He also said the HTS was not fighting against the West, but only against the Assad regime. "Syria will never be allowed as a launching pad for attacks against the West," he said in an interview in 2015. During peacetime, Jolani built a strong army under the HTS's banner, which included jihadists from different regions – Arabs, Central Asians and Uighurs. He established a government, bureaucracy and Sharia-based judicial system. He adopted the Turkish lira as the official currency of his government. He sat on the fence as the regime's allies, Hezbollah and Iran, came under attack from Israel in Syria. Jolani was careful not to upset Israel and the U.S. And Israel and the U.S. did not target him either.

Jolani, a U.S.-designated terrorist, has never denounced his jihadist ideology. In the 2015 interview, he said Syria's Alawites would be left alone "as long as they abandon elements of their faith which contradict Islam". He has called for an Islamic regime in Syria based on Sharia – that is the final goal of the HTS. In recent months, he said Syria's minorities have nothing to fear from the HTS. But he repeatedly emphasises the Salafi-jihadist character of his "revolution". The secular Syria is no longer alive in HTS territories.

When the civil war was in a frozen stage, the HTS was busy preparing for the next phase of the showdown. In November 2024, Jolani made the move. Hezbollah had been weakened in the months-long war with Israel. Iran lost several of its commanders in Syria in Israeli air strikes. The Russians are busy fighting in Ukraine. Jolani sensed that the Assad regime was weak. And he pushed ahead.

"The solution is simple," he said in an interview in February 2021. "I mean, we need to address the causes rather than the symptoms. The cause of this issue, this huge catastrophe, is this [Assad] regime. Once it is no longer there, this huge disaster would disappear. Therefore, the main issue would be toppling this regime, pushing to topple it in every possible way."

THE GIST

▼ Jolani moved to Iraq in 2003, weeks before the American invasion began, and joined al-Qaeda

▼ He established Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syria branch, which emerged as a powerful jihadist entity in the midst of Syria's civil war

▼ After capturing Idlib, he rebranded al-Nusra twice and announced that his main goal was to topple the Assad regime and not to fight jihad against other countries

▼ HTS, the outfit Jolani commands, has taken Aleppo and Hama in recent weeks, and is marching towards the strategic city of Homs

The die-hard loyalist

Kash Patel

The Indian origin Republican, who once vowed to 'shut down the FBI', has been picked by Donald Trump to lead the Bureau

Joan SONY Cherian

Part three of the children's book, *The Plot Against the King*, written by Kash Patel, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), talks about the "MAGA king" and his quest to "take down Comma-la-la-la and reclaim his throne". One can safely assume that the 'king' here is Mr. Trump and 'Comma-la-la-la', the incumbent U.S. Vice-President Kamala Harris. This also gives us an idea of what Mr. Patel, who owns a charitable foundation called Fight with Kash which among other things funds defamation lawsuits, and a clothing line which sells a variety of merchandise with his logo 'K\$H', stands for – unabashedly brazen and unapologetically loyal to the incoming U.S. President.

Mr. Patel, who was born in 1980 to Indian immigrant parents (who first moved to Canada from East Africa in the 1970s and then to the U.S.) started his career as a public defender in the State of Florida, following which he joined the U.S. Justice Department as a counter-terrorism prosecutor. A member of the Republican party, he was then appointed to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

(HPSCI) in 2017. He worked as senior aide to Devin Nunes, the chair of the HPSCI and a staunch Trump supporter. Mr. Patel rose up the ranks within Mr. Trump's inner circle when he scathingly criticised the FBI's investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential election. He, along with Mr. Nunes, authored the 'Nunes memo' which accused the FBI of being politically motivated in its investigation.

From then on, Mr. Patel rose swiftly through administrative ranks. In 2019, he became a member of the National Security Council and was later appointed Chief of Staff to the interim Defence Secretary. President Trump in his last months in office wanted to promote Mr. Patel to deputy FBI director but then Attorney-General William Barr opposed it, writing in his memoir that he told the then White House Chief of Staff that such an appointment would be 'over my

dead body'.

After Mr. Trump's first presidential term, Mr. Patel continued being a Trump loyalist as well as a decider of intelligence bureaucracies. His experience within the Justice Department had made him deeply suspicious of the FBI and other intelligence agencies. He has repeatedly stated that these agencies are controlled by the 'deep state' – a term used to refer to allegations that actors within bureaucracy control and run the government. He authored a book called *Governor Gangsters*, which is part memoir and part tirade against the 'deep state', and lists out individuals who are enablers of the system such as President Joe Biden, William Barr, Hilary Clinton etc.

Massive upheaval

He has stated in his book that top officials of the FBI need to be fired and the organisation be given a massive upheaval and reorganisation. He has been

vocal proponent for reform within the FBI stating that the organisation's footprint has gotten too big. "I'd shut down the FBI. Hoover Building on Day 1 and reopen it the next day as a museum of the 'deep state,'" Mr. Patel said in an interview. "And I'd take the 7,000 employees that work in that building and send them across America to chase down criminals."

He has vowed to go after journalists who leaked intelligence reports and the officials who facilitated such leaks. In an interview with Steve Bannon last year, he stated "We're going to come after the people in the media who lied about American citizens, who helped Joe Biden rig presidential elections. We're going to come after you...we're putting you all on notice."

Mr. Trump has repeatedly vowed to go after his political enemies and institutions which conducted investigations on him after his Presidential term in 2020.

Having Mr. Patel – a man who has appeared with him for hearings, testified for him and is also now serving on the board of the parent company of Truth Social, Mr. Trump's social network – at the helm of the FBI could give the President-elect access to potential and ongoing investigations.

The scion after 'penance'

Sukhbir Singh Badal

The former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab, who survived a bid on his life, seeks to revive the SAD, which suffered back to back electoral setbacks

Vikas Vasudeva

Sukhbir Singh Badal, the former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab and president of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), is at the centre of attention after he survived an assassination bid by a pro-Khalistan sympathiser.

Mr. Badal, who was found to be *tankhaiya*, or guilty of religious misconduct, was performing penance for his 'mistakes' at the Golden Temple, the central place for worship for the Sikhs in Punjab's Amritsar, on December 4 when a former militant, Narain Singh, opened fire at him. The two-time former Deputy Chief Minister escaped unhurt as the assailant was overpowered by security personnel.

On December 2, Akal Takht, the highest Sikh temporal seat, had pronounced religious punishment for Mr. Badal and several other Akali Dal leaders for the "mistakes" committed by the SAD government during 2007 to 2017.

Sukhbir's rise in politics was a foretold story. He became the youngest ever president of the SAD in 2008, after he took over from his father Parkash Singh Badal, the former Punjab Chief Minister. Born on July 9, 1962 in Punjab's Faridkot, Sukhbir completed his school education at The Lawrence

School, Sanawar, in Himachal Pradesh, and later completed MA (Economics) in Punjab University. He also has an MBA from California State University, Los Angeles. His political career kicked off in the late 1990s. Sukhbir firmed up his grip over the party by mid-2000. He stayed as Deputy Chief Minister from 2009-2017.

He remained a member of the Lok Sabha four times, and served as Union Minister of State for Industry during 1998-99 in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led government. He was a member of the Rajya Sabha during 2001 to 2004.

The Assembly elections in Punjab in 2012 proved a milestone in his political career as he was credited with steering the SAD-BJP alliance to a historic win, beating anti-incumbency sentiments. His agenda surrounding 'development for all' and making the SAD a 'catch all party' appeared to have paid favourable electoral outcome. However,

tions, a sense among several senior (Taksali) leaders was that during the Akali Dal's 10 years (2007-2017) of rule in Punjab, the party had come under the sway of the "Badal family". Sukhbir's attempt to change the basic character of the party, making it a "catch-all" party seeking votes in the name of the region (Punjab) instead of Sikh "panth" had not gone down well with many senior leaders, who felt that the party had deviated from its core ideology of giving voice to Sikh issues.

Sukhbir's acceptance of his "mistakes" and his plea for forgiveness from the 'panth' (the Sikh community) are being seen as a last-ditch effort to revitalise the party. In the recent Lok Sabha election, the SAD won only one seat out of the 13 parliamentary constituencies in the State. The loss was a grim reminder of the trouble that the SAD was facing, following its drubbings in the 2017 and 2022 Assembly polls.

The immediate challenge before Sukhbir, who has tendered resignation as party president, which is yet to be accepted, would be to win back the faith of the 'panth'. Many believe it could only be possible through his selfless actions towards the cause of the 'panth' and Punjab, not just through apology and 'penance'.



ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

er, in 2017, when the SAD-BJP alliance was voted out, the same agenda came under scrutiny, and senior party leaders started pointing fingers at Sukhbir's leadership competency. After enjoying political dominance in Punjab for close to two decades, his journey started to witness new challenges amid controversies and a waning support.

Election defeat
Towards the end of its rule in the State, the SAD had to face severe criticism over several issues – including the pardon granted to Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim in a blasphemy case and the Kotkapura-Behbal Kalan police firing incidents of 2015, which followed after the sacrilege of 'Guru Granth Sahib' at Bargi village. Two persons were killed in the police firing in Behbal Kalan of Faridkot district during protests.

After the SAD's dismal performance in the 2017 and 2022 Assembly elec-

WASHINGTON

Indian-Americans to protest attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh



Several Indian-Americans plan to hold peaceful rallies in Washington and Chicago over the next two days to protest the attacks against Hindus in Bangladesh. Hindus in Muslim-majority Bangladesh has faced more than 200 attacks following the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5. PTI

ABIDJAN

Burkina Faso junta chief dismisses PM and dissolves the government



Burkina Faso's ruling military leader Captain Ibrahim Traore on Friday dismissed the country's Prime Minister, Apollinaire Joachim Kyelem de Tambela, and dissolved the government. The sacked premier had served at the head of three successive governments, surviving each reshuffle. No reason was given for the dismissal. AFP

KYIV

Ukraine confirms delivery of second batch of Danish F-16s



Denmark has delivered a second batch of F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Saturday as he travelled to Paris to meet with top politicians and dignitaries. The announcement comes as Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia region marks a day of mourning for 10 persons killed in a Russian attack on Friday. AP

THE HAGUE

At least four dead in The Hague explosion and building collapse



At least four people died Saturday when an apartment complex in The Hague collapsed after a huge explosion and fire, authorities said, but firefighters managed to pull someone still alive from the rubble. The blast and resulting inferno destroyed at least five homes but it was not clear how many were buried in the debris. AFP

South Korea President Yoon escapes impeachment over martial law row

The motion, which needed a two-thirds majority to pass, failed as the ruling PPP boycotted the vote; Opposition party says it will try again amid protests; President apologised for the turmoil but said he would leave it to his party to decide his fate

Agence France-Presse
SEOUL

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol escaped impeachment on Saturday over his brief declaration of martial law, after lawmakers from his ruling party boycotted a vote despite huge protests outside parliament.

Mr. Yoon stunned the nation and the international community on Tuesday night by suspending civilian rule and sending troops to parliament, but was forced into a U-turn after lawmakers nixed his decree.

Opposition parties pro-



Failed bid: Members of South Korea's main opposition Democratic Party at the National Assembly in Seoul on Saturday. GETTY IMAGES

posed the impeachment motion, which needed a two thirds majority to pass, but a near-total boycott by Mr. Yoon's People

Power Party (PPP) doomed it to failure.

"The number of members who voted did not reach the required two-

thirds majority," National Assembly Speaker Woo Won-shik said, adding that as a result, the impeachment vote was "not valid".

The country – and the world – was watching, he said, adding it was "very regrettable that a vote could not even be held on such a significant national issue".

He said it signified "a failure to engage in the democratic process" on the part of the ruling party.

The PPP claimed after the vote that it had blocked the impeachment to avoid "severe division and chaos".

The opposition has al-

ready vowed to try again as soon as on Wednesday, and many protesters vowed to continue demonstrations next weekend.

"I will impeach Yoon Suk Yeol, who has become the worst risk for South Korea, at any cost," Opposition leader Lee Jae-myung said.

Before the vote, Mr. Yoon, 63, apologised for the turmoil but said he would leave it to his party to decide his fate.

"I caused anxiety and inconvenience to the public. I sincerely apologise," he said in the televised address, his first public appearance in three days.

Terrorists should not run Syria, says Assad-ally Russia in meeting with Iran, Turkiye

Agence France-Presse
DOHA

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said on Saturday that Syria must not be allowed to fall into the hands of a "terrorist group" as Islamist-led rebels advance on President Bashar al-Assad's seat of power.

Mr. Lavrov spoke after talks in the Gulf state of Qatar on Saturday with fellow Assad-ally Iran and Opposition supporter Turkiye aimed at preventing Syria from collapsing into chaos after the lightning rebel advances of recent days.

"It's inadmissible to allow the terrorist group to take control of territory in violation of agreements," Mr. Lavrov said, citing a 2015 UN Security Council Resolution which he said "strongly reiterated sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Syrian Arab Republic".

The Russian Minister was alluding to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, the Islamist group which has headed the assault and is rooted in the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda. HTS has sought to soften its image in recent years but remains proscribed as a "terrorist organisation" by Western governments.

Mr. Lavrov and Iran's Abbas Araghchi met with Turkiye's Hakan Fidan on the sidelines of the Doha Forum, an annual gathering for political dialogue.

Mr. Araghchi said the three Ministers agreed on the need to launch "political dialogue between the Syrian government and



Little hope: A man rides a scooter with his children and wife in the Syrian city of Salamiyah in Hama on Saturday. AFP

legitimate opposition groups". The three countries have been partners since 2017 in the Astana process seeking to end the civil war that has persisted in Syria since 2011.

Despite repeated violations, a 2020 ceasefire agreement brokered by Russia and Turkiye had largely frozen the conflict for several years but it was blown apart by the shock offensive the rebels launched late last month.

Moscow and Tehran have offered military support to help Mr. Assad's forces hold off the rebels.

Ankara backs some of the rebel groups involved in the offensive and looks favourably on its success so far.

Surprise situation

However, the scale of the collapse of Mr. Assad's forces has taken observers by surprise with conflicting reports about how close the rebels have come to Mr. Assad's seat of power in Damascus.

Qatar – which gave early support to the rebels af-

ter Mr. Assad's government crushed a peaceful uprising in 2011 – remains a fierce critic of the Syrian leader but is calling for a negotiated end to the fighting.

'Assad's failure'

Speaking at the same event in Doha, Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani said Mr. Assad had failed to "seize these opportunities" during a period of calm in the country's war both "on the return of the refugees or on reconciling with his own people".

Ahead of the three-way talks, Mr. Araghchi said he had "very frank and direct" bilateral meetings with his Turkish counterpart and the ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called on Mr. Assad earlier this week to "reconcile with his people". On Friday he said he hoped the rebel advance would "continue without incident".

Australia defends its action on anti-semitism

Reuters
SYDNEY

Australia's government defended its record on curbing anti-semitism on Saturday after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accused it of anti-Israel policies, following an arson attack on a Melbourne synagogue.

Mr. Netanyahu accused Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's centre-left Labor government of encouraging crimes such as Friday's attack on the Adass Israel synagogue through policies including support of a recent UN motion backing a Palestinian state.

"Unfortunately, this criminal act cannot be separated from the anti-Israel spirit blowing from the Labor government in Australia," Mr. Netanyahu said.

Murray Watt, Australia's Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, responded that "the Albanese Government has taken a range of strong actions to stand against anti-semitism and to stamp it out from our community".

Since taking office in May 2022, the government had provided \$25 million to Jewish organisations to upgrade security and safety at Jewish sites, including schools, banned the Nazi salute and was taking action against hate speech, Mr. Watt said.

Mr. Albanese condemned the attack on Friday, saying there was no place for anti-semitism in Australia.

Police said on Saturday they were still looking for two persons suspected of deliberately starting the synagogue fire that injured one and caused widespread damage in Melbourne.

Fiery spirit

Anti-government protesters stage a march in central Tbilisi on Saturday in support of detained fellow activists for a 10th consecutive day. Georgians have been protesting against the government's postponement of European Union accession talks until 2028. AFP

The world is 'a little crazy', says Trump as he meets Macron

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

U.S. President-elect visits Paris ahead of the re-opening of Notre Dame cathedral on his first foreign trip since his re-election

his first term, Mr. Trump hailed his ties with the centrist French leader, saying: "We had a great relationship as everyone knows. We accomplished a lot."

Mr. Macron told Mr. Trump it was "a great honour for French people to welcome you" for the re-opening ceremony at Notre Dame, which was devastated by a blaze in 2019 during Mr. Trump's first term.

"You were president at that time and I remember the solidarity and the immediate reaction," Mr. Macron added.

Despite tensions between the two men during

OFFICE OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER PRAYAGRAJ CIRCLE, P.W.D. PRAYAGRAJ

e-Tender Notice Second Calling

Date 14-11-2024

1. The Superintending Engineer, Prayagraj Circle, P.W.D, Prayagraj on behalf of Governor of Uttar Pradesh invites for Expression Of Interest (EOI) for Operation, Maintenance Of MEP Installations Of Multilevel Parking And Advocates Chamber For Hon'ble High Court At Allahabad Including House Keeping from reputed firms having experience and expertise in the same field for short listing.

S. No.	DISTRICT	Name of Work	Approximate Project Cost (Rs in Crore)	Processing & Document Fees	Time of Completion
1	Prayagraj	Invitation for Expression Of Interest (EOI) for Operation, Maintenance Of MEP Installations Of Multilevel Parking And Advocates Chamber For Hon'ble High Court At Allahabad Including House Keeping	46.00	Stationery charges Rs 2300.00 + 18% GST	5 Years

2. Website <http://etender.up.nic.in> may be referred for detailed terms and conditions of the Invitation for Bids.
3. (EOI) document with detailed terms and conditions will be available online on website <http://etender.up.nic.in> from 28-11-2024 upto 12:00 Hours. (EOI) must be submitted online only at e-tendering portal of <http://etender.up.nic.in> on or before 12:00 Hours on 27-12-2024 (EOI) received online will be opened on 27-12-2024 at 12:30 Hours.
4. The prospective bidders who do not possess Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) must get the same issued from approved agencies before submission of bids.

(Devendra Singh)
UPID RO: 223507
RO Dt: 07/12/2024
Website: www.up.gov.in

Superintending Engineer
Prayagraj Circle U.P. P. W.D.
Prayagraj

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Bid Document download Start Date & Time	07.12.2024 : 10:00 AM
Bid Submission closing Date & Time	21.12.2024 : 05:30 PM
For more details, please visit https://tender.appprocurement.gov.in or www.tirumala.org	
TTD-40021(31)/1/2024-PRO SEC (Adv. No.252)	Dated: 07.12.2024
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VACANCY NOTIFICATION NO. 2/2024

Online Applications are invited for 12 Posts of Assistant Professor in Pay Level 10 (Pay Matrix Rs. 56,100-1,77,500) in different Departments for NIA, Jaipur. All Details are available in the Website of the Institute: www.nia.nic.in. Applications are to be filled Online only in the Website of the Institute. The Closing Date for Online Filling of Application is 21 January 2025.

Dated: 06-12-2024
(JP SHARMA)
JOINT DIRECTOR (ADMN.)

NOSTALGIC

I have happy memories of my time in India, says Greg Chappell



FILE PHOTO: K.R. DEEPAK

The former India coach Greg Chappell spoke with clarity in the media enclosure at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday. "Do I miss the chaos and drama? Not really. But I miss a lot of India. I have very happy memories of my time in India. Sure, we had some ups and downs. And you guys (reporters), you love controversy."

A METHOD

Be in a neutral position and play Bumrah as straight as possible'



AP

The Australian great Greg Chappell talked about how to tackle Jasprit Bumrah and the India pacer's tactical acumen at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday. "He is a smart guy and understands the game... I would play him as straight as I can, be in a neutral position and react appropriately," he said.

TIMING IT RIGHT

Can't leave call on exit to the players themselves: Chappell



AP

On the exit of big players, Greg Chappell said it depends on the selectors more than the individual concerned. "You cannot leave it to the player, it is the call of a robust selection panel. As for the player, you would know when your time is up, the question is would you admit it?"

STEPPING UP

Gagan propels Yoddhas to crucial win against Puneri Paltan



SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Gagan Gowda shone in UP Yoddhas' 36-33 victory over Puneri Paltan in a Pro Kabaddi League match in Pune on Saturday. Gagan scored 15 points for the Yoddhas, while Pankaj Mohite got 11 points for Paltan. Telugu Titans posted a narrow 34-32 win over Bengal Warriors in the other contest of the day.

Better safe than sorry, say Ding and Gukesh

The championship sees the seventh consecutive stalemate as the holder and the challenger play out a draw in the 10th game; the score reads 5-5 with four games remaining

P.K. Ajith Kumar
SINGAPORE

Who will blink first? The question still begs the answer. The stalemate continues at the World chess championship.

Ding Liren and D. Gukesh drew their seventh game in a row at World Resorts Sentosa on Saturday. The score is tied at 5-5. Just four games remain in the classical format. If it is a 7-7 draw, a tie-breaker of speed chess will have to be played.

With the stakes so high, and with so few games left to be played, it wasn't surprising to see both the men deciding to play it safe for the second game in a row. Games seven and eight were much sharper, though they both were drawn. But now, neither Ding nor Gukesh could afford a loss. For, it would be rather difficult to come back into the match.

Not much difference Gukesh may be the slightly happier of the two, as he managed to get a draw with black pieces, though he insisted that there wasn't much of a difference these days between



High stakes: Both players will be happy with a draw as a loss will be detrimental at this stage. PTI

the colours. Both have two games with white.

In Game 10, the opening was London System – not for the first time in this match. That was a bit of a deviation from the theme here, as both the men have looked keen to try out different openings.

All the pieces except those bishops were then traded off, and the game ended with three-fold repetition, in 36 moves.

Shortly after the duel, Gukesh said the cost of the game was higher than before.

"But my approach and my goal are still the same – to play good games," he said.

Ding said there was not much room to make mistakes.

"We need to be careful with every move," he said. That was an understatement, in true Ding style.

GAME 10: MOVES

Ding v Gukesh
1. d4 Nf6 2. Nf3 d5 3. Bf4 e6 4. e3 c5 5. Be2 Bd6 6. dx5 Bc5 7. c4 0-0 8. 0-0 Nc6 9. Nc3 dxc4 10. Bxc4 Nh5 11. Bg5 Be7 12. Ne4 Nf6 13. Nxf6+ Bxf6 14. Qxd8 Rxd8 15. Bxf6 gxf6 16. Rfd1 Bd7 17. Rac1 Be8 18. Rxd8 Rxd8 19. Kf1 Kg7 20. a3 f5 21. Ke1 Kf6 22. Be2 Ne7 23. g3 Rc8 24. Rxc8 Nxc8 25. Nd2 Nd6 26. Nc4 Nxc4 27. Bxc4 Bc6 28. f4 b6 29. Kd2 Ke7 30. Kc3 Kd6 31. b4 f6 32. Kd4 h6



Game drawn

Olonga – the conscience-keeper who stood up for what was right

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
ADELAIDE

Speedster, painter, musician, author and rebel. These diverse labels sit easily with Henry Olonga. However, the former Zimbabwean seamer and current Australian citizen, would rather be known as a man with a heart.

His fingers smudged with paint, Olonga, was busy drawing a picture of a stadium at the Adelaide Oval's Village Green area here on Saturday. Next to him a lone vocalist and a musician belted out songs. Olonga is comfortable in this universe of arts.

He also stays in touch with cricket, a game he played at the international level from 1995 to 2003. Twenty one years ago, Olonga and Andy Flower wore a black armband to protest the atrocities committed by the then Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe.

Their careers ended and Olonga moved to England,



Olonga.

and later to Australia.

This tale of exile is a constant: "I was born in Zambia and had a Kenyan father and I felt even when I played for Zimbabwe I was considered an outsider." He now feels at home Down Under: "I love Australia. I am married to an Australian wife and I have got two children."

He does multiple things, cuts music albums, delivers speeches, paints for causes, is a casual coach

with the South Australia Cricket Association and is an umpire at weekend games. "A lot of Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis play and much later they get to know who I am," he said.

A fast bowler with soft-skills may seem an anachronism but Olonga insisted that he was always into aesthetics: "I always had that soft side and I never saw it as different or odd. I always liked variety. I get bored doing one thing."

And the decision to protest and quit cricket? The answer is quick: "I stood up for what I believed. It meant the end of my career, but there are things more important than the game. When I lived in a country with a man (Mugabe), who slaughtered so many of his own people, I got to say something. No regrets."

For Indian fans, Olonga stirs a memory in association with Sachin Tendulkar. In the 1998 Coca-Cola

Cup at Sharjah, the pacer dismissed the maestro cheaply but in the final, it was payback time and a century (124 n.o.) was hammered. "Everyone remembers because it is on YouTube. I got him out and then in the final, he went crazy, I went for plenty of runs (6-0-50-0) and he smashed it," Olonga recalled.

As the conversation wound to a close, the 48-year-old conscience-keeper said: "A lot of people say, stay out of politics. But, sportspeople are human beings and have strong ideas. You should not be excluded from using your voice to convey strong feelings."

But cricket cannot be far when Olonga is around and he is quick to praise the Indian pacers: "They are amazing. (Jasprit) Bumrah is the best bowler, has got a bit of hyper-extension, which gives him a crack. He reminds me of Wasim (Akram) of the short run-up."

Head surprised by the reactions after his dismissal

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
ADELAIDE

A glorious century marred by the manner of departure was the theme when Travis Head squared upto the media here at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday night. The southpaw's 140 set Australia on a pedestal in the second Test, but talk centred around Morne Morkel's send-off to the batter after castling him.

"I was surprised at the reaction in terms of the situation of the game and the lead up, and there was no confrontation leading up to it, and I felt like it was probably a bit far at the time, and that's why I am disappointed in the reac-

tion that I gave back, but I'm also going to stand up for myself. We are pretty civil with each other as teams and that is why it was disappointing to see a couple of reactions after I was out," Head said.

Elaborating about his special hundred, the batter said: "Yeah, I was very pleased with the way I started. Very pleased with the way I was able to play against Ashwin. I guess at the start with the field up, I picked my moments and manoeuvred the field. And then sort of sensed where the game was at and I thought it was a great opportunity to put some pressure on before that new ball and try to maxi-

Bowlers did well before Head took the game away: Morkel

K.C. Vijaya Kumar
ADELAIDE

After a forgettable day for India on Saturday, bowling coach Morne Morkel turned up at the press conference for some fire-fighting. With a calm voice and a diplomat's grace, the South African deftly handled the queries.

The first volley was about Mohammed Siraj's needless send-off to centurion Travis Head and Morkel was ready: "We all know Siraj puts everything on the line, he is the kind of bowler, who will run in all day. There are some moments in a game. But I am sure off the field they will be the best of mates."

Asked about India's

bowling in the second Test so far, Morkel offered his analysis: "Yesterday (Friday), the lines and lengths could have been better, there was some extra swing too. Thought they did well today (Saturday) morning before Travis Head played his innings. He put the bowlers under pressure but that's the way he plays."

And about Rishabh Pant's approach at the batting crease, the bowling coach said: "Just like Head, this is the way Pant bats, that's his approach. Always puts the bowlers under pressure but that's the way he is."

IN BRIEF



Batters rule the roost after Atkinson's hat-trick

Gus Atkinson claimed a hat-trick before batters let loose to power England 533 runs ahead of New Zealand on Saturday in the second Test at Wellington on day two.

The scores: England 280 & 378/5 in 76 overs (Bethell 96, Duckett 92, Root 73 batting, Brook 55) vs New Zealand 125 in 34.5 overs (Williamson 37, Atkinson 4/31, Carse 4/46).

South Africa seizes the initiative against Sri Lanka

South Africa was building a defendable total against Sri Lanka as it reached 191 for three in its second innings and a lead of 221 on day three of the second Test at Gqeberha on Saturday.

The scores: South Africa 358 in 103.4 overs and 191/3 in 55 overs vs Sri Lanka 328 in 99.2 overs (Nissanka 89, Paterson 5/71).

Zeynep powers Yash Mumbai to the top of TPL

Zeynep Sonmez propelled Yash Mumbai Eagles to the top with 265 points, even though the team shared honours with a 50-50 score against Bengal Wizards in the last league match of the Tennis Premier League in Mumbai on Saturday.

The results (league): Punjab Patriots bt Hyderabad Strikers 51-49; Rajasthan Rangers drew with Bengaluru SG Pipers 50-50; Bengal Wizards drew with Yash Mumbai Eagles 50-50; Gujarat Panthers bt Chennai Smashers 52-48.

Chandan and Tanishka clinch the titles

Chandan Sinai Caro toppled fourth-ranked J.N. Sanjeev Arwindh to win the boys' u13 title in the UTT National-ranking table tennis tournament in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday.

The results: U-13: Boys (finals): Chandan Sinai Caro (Goa) bt Sanjeev Arwindh (TN) 11-6, 8-11, 11-8, 11-9. **Semifinals:** Chandan bt Rishaan Chattopadhyay (WB) 12-10, 13-11, 7-11, 6-11, 16-14; Sanjeev Arwindh bt Himon Mondal (WB) 12-10, 11-6, 5-11, 11-2. **Girls (finals):** K. Tanishka (Kar) bt Aarya Redkar (PSPB) 11-7, 11-8, 8-11, 11-9. **Semifinals:** Tanishka bt Surya (WB) 8-11, 11-6, 11-9, 10-12, 11-8; Aarya bt Avni (Har) 11-8, 11-9, 13-11.

LIVE TELECAST

Australia vs India: 2nd Test, day 3, Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Hotstar, 9.30 a.m.
Under-19 Asia Cup: (final), Bangladesh vs India, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 10.15 a.m.
Sri Lanka vs South Africa: 2nd Test, day 4, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & OJ Cinema, 1 p.m.
Chess: World Championship, FIDE (YouTube), 2.30 p.m.
F1: Abu Dhabi GP, F1 TV, F1 TV Pro App & FanCode, 6.30 p.m.
West Indies vs Bangladesh: 1st ODI, FanCode, 7 p.m.
New Zealand vs England: 2nd Test, day 4, Sony Sports Ten 5 (SD & HD) & LIV, 3.30 a.m. (Monday)

Services wins six of the 10 Greco-Roman gold medals

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

Services dominated day two of the senior National wrestling championship at the Koramangala Indoor Stadium here on Saturday, claiming six of the ten Greco-Roman golds on offer.

Of the six, Vinayak Patil had the toughest bout, in the 67kg final against Hariyana's Anil. The 23-year-old, a bronze medallist at the U-23 Asian Championship in June this year, eventually came through 2-1, stonewalling every spirited effort from Anil.

The results: Greco-Roman:
Men: 55kg: Gold: Lalit (Ser) bt Manu Yadav (Chg) 7-0 (retd);
Bronze: Neeraj Patel (MP) bt Shivappa (Kar) 3-3, Nithi (Hari) bt Rishabh Chaudhary (UP) 7-3.
60kg: Gold: Pravesh (Ser) w/o Sagar Singh (Pun); **Bronze:** Saurabh (UP) bt Shubham Sharma (Del) 9-0, Udit Patel (MP) bt Abhishek Nishad (Chg) 7-2.
63kg: Gold: Umesh (Del) bt Vijay (Ser) 5-3; **Bronze:** Parth (Mah) bt Mukul Chauhan (UP) 2-0, Sunny (Har) bt Jufikar Malik (Utk) 8-0.
67kg: Gold: Vinayak Patil (Ser) bt



Tough fight: Vinayak, top, stonewalled Anil's spirited challenge for the 67kg gold. SUDHAKAR JAIN

Anil (Har) 2-1; **Bronze:** Ankit (Del) bt M. Taibangana (Man) 8-0, Amit Kumar (Raj) bt Badal Chauhan (UP) 11-0.

72kg: Gold: Ankit Gulia (Ser) w/o Akash (Har); **Bronze:** Deepak (Del) bt Ravinder (Raj) 5-1, Gaurav (UP) bt Akash (Pun) 7-1.

77kg: Gold: Karan (Ser) bt G. Amit Kumar (Jhk) 11-2; **Bronze:** Amar Thakran (Del) bt Deepak (Har) 10-7, Aurangzeb Khan (MP) bt Chhagan Meena (Raj) 5-2.

82kg: Gold: Aman (Har) w/o Rahul (Ser); **Bronze:** Bhagwant Singh (UP) bt Shiv Kumar (Utk) 10-0, Aryan Kamboj (Pun) bt Mudassir Khan (MP) 8-0.

Women: 50kg: Gold: Shivani Pawar (MP) bt Vinita (Har) 12-4; **Bronze:** Nandini (Mah) bt Ritika Sharma (HP) 10-0, Preeti (Pun) bt Shweta Sanju (Kar) 2-2.

72kg: Gold: Priyanka (Har) bt Laxmi Pandey (UP) 4-0; **Bronze:** Kritika Jamwal (HP) bt Devu Sankar (Ker) 2-0, Bipasha (Del) bt Vaishnavi (Mah) 2-0.

Vinod Singh (Pun) 2-0, Sushant (Ser) bt

Anshu and Amanat hog the limelight

ATHLETICS

Y.B. Sarangi
BHUBANESWAR

Anshu, the daughter of Paralympian and Asian Games silver medallist shot putter Virender Dhankhar, hurled the shot to a new national mark as she bagged the under-18 women's gold medal in the National junior athletics on Saturday.

A boxer-turned shot-putter, Anshu, hailing from So-nepat, achieved the feat with a mark of 16.85m in her third attempt. "After my shot was rejected, I managed with the one given to me," said Anshu.

Asian under-20 silver medalist Amanat Kamboj broke the 12-year-old meet record while claiming the under-18 gold. Amanat, born to athlete parents, unleashed a nice and flat throw to 52.89m in her first attempt before facing some issues with her release.

Asian under-20 silver medalist Vinod Singh won the gold by clocking his per-

sonal best 29.43.39.

Prachi Devkar made her 5,000m debut memorable by winning the title with 17.22.37. Abhinaya Rajarajan shattered Rashmi Shergar's nine-year-old meet record (II.89) as she equalled Dutee Chand's under-18 National record of 11.62 in 2013 in the heats.

The results: Finals: U-20: Men: 10,000m: 1. Vinod Singh (MP) 29.43.39, 2. Gurava Bhosale (Mah) 29.43.46, 3. Arun (Har) 29.43.48;

Women: 1,500m: 1. Vineeta Gurjar (UP) 4:29.26, 2. Chanchal Jakhad (Har) 4:29.36, 3. Manju Choudhuri (Raj) 4:29.37; **5,000m:**

1. Prachi Devkar (Mah) 17:22.79, 2. Sonam Parmar (MP) 17:25.70, 3. Neeta Ranu (UP) 17:27.47;

Discus: 1. Nikita Kumari (Raj) 48.31, 2. Neha Jaglan (Har) 47.65, 3. Akhila Raju (Ker) 47.41m; **4x400m mixed relay:** 1. Maharashtra 3:31.11, 2. Haryana 3:33.02, 3. Tamil Nadu 3:33.90.

Winners only: Under-18:

Men: Shot put: Anshu (Har) 16.85m (NR, Old 16.75m, Gurleen Kaur, 2023); **Discus:** Amanat Kamboj (Pun) 52.89 (NMR, Old 49.54m, Navjeet Kaur Dhillon, 2012); **U-14: Boys: Triathlon:**

Imran Alam (Bih) 2,275 points;

Girls: Devika (Raj) 2,519.

John Wick should redeem himself in the HPSL Golconda 2000 Guineas

HYDERABAD: The three-year-old colt John Wick, who won the Mysore 2000 Guineas and ran fourth in the Mysore Derby, is in good shape and should redeem himself in the HPSL Golconda 2000 Guineas (Gr. II), the stellar attraction of Sunday's (Dec. 8) races.

MEGATOP PLATE (Div. D, 1,200m, (Terms) Maiden, 2-y-o only (Cat. II) – 12:30 p.m.: 1.

Ayushman (8) Kuldeep Sr. 56, 2. Gold Giver (3) Saqlain 56, 3. Lake Michigan (4) Akshay K 56, 4. Royal Warrior (1) P. Sal K 56, 5. American Affair (2) H.M. Akshay 54.5, 6. Dubai Touch (5) R.S. Bhati 54.5, 7. The Purpose (6) Afroz K 54.5 and 8. Whistledown (7) Trevor 54.5.

1. WHISTLEDOWN, 2. AMERICAN AFFAIR, 3. GOLD GIVER

2 BAKRANGLAN PLATE (Div. II, 1,200m), 5-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. III) – 1:05.1: Clefairy (4) M. Mark 60, 2. Wind Sprite (9) Shivanash 60, 3. Marju Warrior (8) Afroz K 58.5, 4. Park Lane (5) D. Ismail 56.5, 6. Master Touch (3) Mukesh 55, 7. Golden Inzio (1) Kuldeep Sr. 53, 8. Pancho (7) B. Nikhil 51.5 and 9. Sadiya (2) Surya Prakash 50.5.

1. WIND SPRITE, 2. QUALITY WARRIOR, 4. GOLD GIVER

3 MEGATOP PLATE (Div. II, 1,200m, (Terms) Maiden, 2-y-o only (Cat. II) – 1:40: 1. Cherie Chevalier (3) P. Sai K 56, 2. King's Code (7) R.S. Bhati 56, 3. N.R.I. Blaze (8) A.A. Vikrant 56, 4. Walking Thunder (5) Trevor 56, 5. Ashwa Changze (6) Gaurav 54.5, 6. Blue Candy (4) Nakhat 54.5, 7. Foxy Girl (1) Akshay K 54.5 and 8. French Lady (2) Md. Ismail 54.5.

1. WALKING THUNDER, 2. FOXY GIRL, 3. ASHWA CHANGZE

4 BASALATH JAH MEMORIAL CUP (Div. II) (1,200m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 60 to 85 (Cat. II) – 2:15: 1. The Inheritor (4) Gaurav 60, 2. Encore (3) R.S. Jodha 59, 3. Kingston (6) Nakhat 57, 4. D. Minchu (5) P. Ajeebh K 56, 5. Delhi Heights (12) Mukesh 55.5, 6. She Can (7) Akshay K 55, 7. Reigning Beauty (9) Saqlain 53.5, 8. Armstrong (1) P. Sal K 53, 9. Nagarjuk (8) Santosh Raj 53, 10. Malibu (11) Md. Ismail 52.5, 11. Dyoanoosh (10) Angad 52 and 12. Amrya (2) Afroz K 51.5.

1. MINCHU, 2. REIGNING BEAUTY, 3. THE INHERITOR

5 RAJA NARASIMHA RAO MEMORIAL CUP (Gr. II) (1,600m), 3-y-o and upward, rated 40 to 65 (Cat. II) – 2:45: 1. Anhilator (8) Mohit 57, 2. Dapper Look (9) Nakhat 57, 3. Duke Of Tuscany (11) Trevor 57, 4. Espionage (1) Kuldeep St. 57, 5. John Wick (5) Akshay K 57, 6. Kalki (6) Mukesh 57, 7. King Immortal (4) Chisty 57, 8. Nonpariel (3) B.R. Kumar 57, 9. Oliver's Mount (7) Gaurav 57, 10. Secret Saint (2) Saqlain 57 and 11. Vafadar (10) Hindu Singh 57.

1. JOHN WICK, 2. SECRET SAINT, 3. DUKE OF TUSCANY

6 BAKRANGLAN PLATE (Div. I, 1,200m), 5-y-o and upward, rated 20 to 45 (Cat. II) – 4:15: 1. Classical Music (4) H.M. Akshay 60, 2. Crimson Rose (9) B.R. Kumar 60, 3. Sucker Punch (2) Deepak 59, 4. Grand Duke (5) R.S. Jodha 58, 5. See My Attitude (3) Mohit 57.5, 6. Top In Class (1) Mukesh 56.5, 7. Silver Linings (7) Afroz K 53.5, 8. Muaser (8) P. Ajeebh K 52 and 9. Exponent (6) Nakhat 51.

1. CRIMSON ROSE, 2. CLASSICAL MUSIC, 3. SEE MY ATTITUDE

7 BASALATH JAH MEMORIAL CUP (Div. I) (1,200m), 4-y-o and upward, rated 60 to 85 (Cat. II) – 3:45: 1. Best Buddy (4) R.S. Jodha 60, 2. Lucky Zone (13) Ashad Asbar 59, 3. Minecraft (10) Akshay K 58.5, 4. Berrettini (5) P. Sai K 56.5, 5. Adbhut (1) Saqlain 55.5, 6. Tanala: All races.

CM YK

F1 constructors' battle set to go down to the wire

McLaren leads Ferrari by 21 points; 1-2 finish nets 43 points, plus another one for the fastest lap

ABU DHABI GP

S. Dipak Ragav

In Formula One, two championships are handed out every year. While the drivers' title is the most prestigious, the other one awarded to the team with the most points – the constructors' title – is more significant for the team and its employees.

Though the drivers' crown has been part of the sport since its inaugural year in 1950, the first constructors' title was awarded only in 1958.

However, as the sport has grown in terms of fan base and commercial success, the constructors' title determines the prize money, which forms a crucial portion of a team's revenue.

This year, Max Verstappen sealed his fourth straight drivers' crown in Las Vegas a fortnight ago,



Advantage: With McLaren locking up the top two spots in the grid, the Woking based team is well-placed to come on top. AFP

but the battle for the constructors' title remains alive ahead of the finale in Abu Dhabi on Sunday.

McLaren leads Ferrari by 21 points, with 44 points up for grabs on Sunday. A 1-2 finish for a team nets 43 points, plus another one for the fastest lap in the race.

The last time the constructors' battle was alive till the season's final race was in 2021 at Abu Dhabi

when Mercedes pipped Red Bull.

McLaren is the odds-on favourite, considering its healthy cushion.

Even if the Ferraris finishes 1-2, McLaren can finish four and five, along with the fastest lap, to triumph.

If neither Ferrari nor McLaren wins the race and the teams are still tied, McLaren will emerge winners on countback.

The British squad will have five wins, the same as the Italian marquee, but it has 10 second-place finishes to Ferrari's four so far.



Angry sea: Tidal waves hit the coast under the influence of the cyclone at the Kasimedu fishing harbour in Chennai. Boats were kept anchored at the harbour following the weather warning. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM



Death and destruction: An earthmover being used for rescue on a landslip site at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu where seven members of a family died after being trapped in their house under debris and boulders. C. VENKATACHALAPATHY



In the eye: Strong winds blow near the Shore Temple in Mamallapuram ahead of Cyclone Fengal. B. VELANKANNI RAJ

Wrath of the slow cyclone

Cyclone Fengal remained a low-pressure system after forming in the far eastern Indian Ocean on November 14 and became a depression in the Bay only after 10 days; it moved leisurely, bringing heavy rain to parts of Tamil Nadu and Puducherry

While heavy rain during the northeast monsoon is common at this time of the year in Tamil Nadu, the State and the Union Territory of Puducherry did not expect Cyclone Fengal to cause such widespread devastation when it crossed the eastern coast on the night of November 30. On December 1, unusually heavy rainfall of 40 cm to 50 cm was recorded in many places in Puducherry and the northern and northwestern parts of Tamil Nadu.

The cyclone then slowly drifted westward, dumping rain, causing floods, submerging acres of crops, damaging civic infrastructure, and displacing thousands of people. When it later moved inland, it pummelled several districts. Mailam in Villupuram district received 51 cm of rainfall on December 1 and Uthangarai in Krishnagiri district received 50 cm on December 2. Some areas of Villupuram received more than 33 cm of rainfall on a single day.

While the effects of the cyclone was felt in

Andhra Pradesh on the eastern coast, which is normal for such weather systems, Cyclone Fengal in a rare occurrence crossed the Western Ghats, bringing rain to parts of Kerala.

It remained a low-pressure system after forming in the far eastern Indian Ocean on November 14 and became a depression in the Bay of Bengal only after 10 days. It moved relatively slowly for another week before the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said it had become a cyclone. On November 28, the IMD announced that Cyclone Fengal would cross the north Tamil Nadu-Puducherry coast on the morning of November 30. The cyclone moved at a leisurely pace. While fast-moving cyclones tend to retreat quickly, slow-moving ones weaken into a deep depression, dumping heavy rain.

A Central team visited Tamil Nadu and Puducherry to assess the damage. The Centre has approved the release of ₹944.80 crore to Tamil Nadu from the State Disaster Response Fund. (Text by K. Lakshmi)



Taking a toll: Vehicles that were swept away by flood water near the Uthangarai highway in Krishnagiri had to be moved with the help of cranes. N. BASHKARAN



On a war footing: Workers prepare sandbags as protection against high tidal waves on the Shangumugham beach in Thiruvananthapuram. NIRMAL HARINDRAN



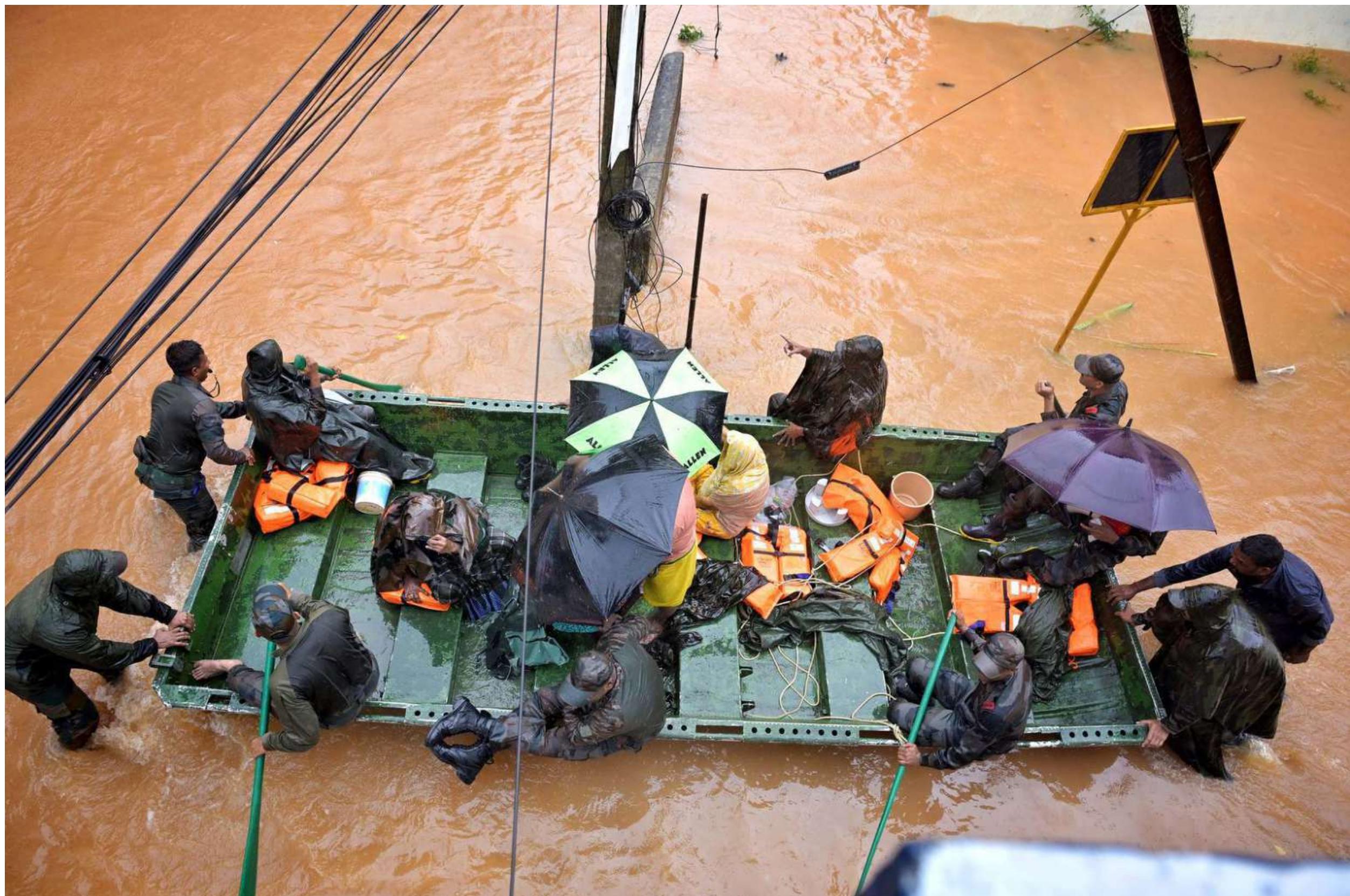
No way forward: A tree uprooted on East Coast Road at Marakkanam in Villupuram district following heavy rain and strong wind. S.S. KUMAR



Salvation drive: Damaged documents and certificates of students and staff of a private school left out to dry in Arakandanallur of Villupuram district. S.S. KUMAR



Safe haven: Fishing boats anchored at the Visakhapatnam fishing harbour following an alert ahead of Cyclone Fengal v. RAJU



On the job: Indian Army personnel rescue people from a flooded area in Puducherry. S.S. KUMAR



Worst affected: (clockwise from left) Farmers remove damaged saplings from a paddy field in Thrissur of Kerala; damaged paddy at Kalathur in Ranipet district of Tamil Nadu; an early harvest near Vijayawada city to salvage grain. K.K. NAJEEB, C. VENKATACHALAPATHY & K.V.S. GIRI