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IN BRIEF



Will move court as voters being harassed: Mamata

KOLKATA
Alleging harassment of voters in the ongoing special intensive revision of the electoral rolls in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday said she would move the court against the exercise. » Page 4

BJP legislator's son booked in hit-and-run case

RAIPUR
The son of former Union Minister and sitting BJP MLA Renuka Singh was booked in a hit-and-run case after his car allegedly hit a motorcycle, leaving the rider seriously injured in Chhattisgarh's Raipur on Monday. » Page 4

Trump asserts India cut Russian oil to please him

U.S. President says that Prime Minister Modi wanted to 'make him happy'; Senator Graham claims that India's Ambassador asked him to mediate with the President for lowering 25% penalty tariff

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday asserted that India cut its oil imports from Russia in recent months in an effort to "make him happy", and to secure the India-U.S. trade deal, even as he threatened more tariffs could "come quickly" if India continues its purchases from Russia.

Backing Mr. Trump's claim, U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham said that India's Ambassador to the U.S., Vinay Kwatra, had brought up India's declining oil imports from Russia during a meeting in December 2025, requesting Mr. Graham to ask Mr. Trump to "relieve the tariff" of 25% imposed by the U.S. over


He [Prime Minister] Modi knew I was unhappy and it was important to make me happy. They do trade and we can raise tariffs on them very quickly and it would be bad for them
DONALD TRUMP
U.S. President

and above 25% reciprocal tariffs.

"I was at the Indian Ambassador's house about a month ago and all he wanted to talk about is how they are buying less Russian oil. Would you tell the President to relieve the tariff? This stuff works," Mr. Graham said during a press

conference held by Mr. Trump.

"They [India] wanted to make me happy," interjected Mr. Trump. "Basically, he wanted to... [Prime Minister] Modi is a very good man. He's a good guy. He knew I was unhappy and it was important to make me happy. They do trade and

Congress targets Centre over Trump's threat

NEW DELHI
The Congress on Monday criticised the Centre after U.S. President Donald Trump said the U.S. could raise tariffs on Indian imports "very quickly", saying that public displays of bonhomie with the American leader had yielded little diplomatic dividend. » Page 10

we can raise tariffs on them very quickly and it would be bad for them," he added. The External Affairs Ministry did not respond to requests for comments on the claims by the U.S. leaders.

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SC denies bail to Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam for Delhi riots

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday denied bail to activists Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam in a case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) relating to the alleged "larger conspiracy" behind the February 2020 riots in New Delhi. The court said the evidence on record *prima facie* attributed to them a "central and formative role" in the orchestration of the violence.

A Bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and N.V. Anjaria, however, granted conditional bail to five other co-accused, drawing a clear distinction between their alleged roles and those attributed to Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam. The court held that the allegations against Gulfish Fatima, Meera Haider, Shafiqur-Rehman, Mohd. Saleem Khan, and Shadab Ahmed reflected conduct of a sub-


In the case of the alleged masterminds, namely Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid, the prosecution material comprises direct, corroborative, and contemporaneous evidence... Where evidentiary strength varies materially between accused persons, the need for continued detention likewise varies

SUPREME COURT BENCH

This is my life now, says Umar after SC ruling

NEW DELHI
After he was denied bail by the Supreme Court on Monday, former JNU student Umar Khalid said that he is happy for the others who got bail. Speaking to his partner Banojotsna Lahiri over phone from Tihar jail, Mr. Khalid said, "I am really happy for the others... So relieved". "Ab yahi zindagi hai (This is my life now)", Ms. Lahiri posted on X quoting Mr. Khalid. » Page 11

Maduro in U.S. court; interim leader offers to work with Trump

Agence France-Presse
NEW YORK

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro arrived at a New York court on Monday, just days after being seized in Caracas in a U.S. military operation that paved the path for Washington's plans to control the oil-rich country. Mr. Maduro, 63, faces narco-trafficking charges along with his wife, Cilia Flores.

On Monday morning, Mr. Maduro was escorted by heavily armed law enforcement officers to a courthouse in New York.

All eyes are on Venezuela's response to the swiftly moving events, and late Sunday, when interim Venezuelan leader Delcy Rodriguez stepped back from her initial defiance by offering to work with Mr. Trump. "We extend an in-

vitation to the U.S. government to work together on an agenda for cooperation," the former Vice-President said.

Total access'
When asked what he needs from Ms. Rodriguez, Mr. Trump said on Sunday: "We need total access. We need access to the oil and other things in their country that allow us to rebuild their country."

Meanwhile, some 2,000 Maduro supporters, including rifle-wielding men on motorcycles, rallied on Sunday in Caracas even as the Venezuelan military, loyal to Mr. Maduro, announced it recognised Ms. Rodriguez and urged calm.

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'WILL ENFORCE CHANGES'
» Page 14



Captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro arrives with heavy security at the Downtown Manhattan Heliport in New York City on Monday as he was taken for an initial court appearance to face U.S. federal charges. REUTERS

Foul air: NGT notice to Centre on plea over newborn's ill health

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued a notice to the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas (CAQM) and other agencies on a complaint by a man named Shubham Verma, alleging that construction at the Union government's Centre for Development of Telematics campus in violation of a CAQM ban triggered serious health issues for his two-month-old daughter. In its order dated December 23, the Principal Bench of the tribunal stated that the plea raised "substantial issues" pertaining to compliance with

environmental norms.

It took note of Mr. Verma's plea that he is suffering from allergic bronchitis and is compelled to stay away from his daughter. "On account of health complications suffered by the applicant and the medical expenses incurred on this account, the applicant has claimed compensation of ₹7,11,000," it noted.

In his complaint, Mr. Verma said he had flagged the "illegal construction" to the Delhi government and the CAQM, but no action was taken. The pollution watchdog had banned construction in Delhi-NCR on December 13 amid a spell of hazardous air. It lifted the ban on January 2.

Bangladesh cites 'hurt sentiments' to ban IPL telecast after Mustafizur's exclusion

Kallop Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Two days after Indian Premier League (IPL) franchise Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) dropped Bangladeshi fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman from its team, Dhaka banned the telecast of the IPL upcoming season starting March 26 citing "hurt public sentiments".

"It is being requested in these circumstances that all sports and events of the Indian Premier League should be stopped till the next order," said a notification signed by Mohammad Feroz Khan, Assistant Secretary of Bangladesh's Information and Broadcasting Ministry.



Bangladeshi pacer Mustafizur Rahman with his Delhi Capitals teammates during the 2025 IPL season. FILE PHOTO

The decision came two days after the sports and youth affairs adviser of the interim government Asif Nazrul's request to the Ministry to ban the IPL's telecast.

The Board of Control of

to "recent developments" going on "all across".

KKR had picked Mr. Rahman in the December 16, 2025, auction for ₹9.20 crore, but on January 3, it announced that he had been dropped following instructions from the BCCI.

'Condemnable' action
Bangladesh interim government's adviser on cultural affairs Mostafa Sarwar Farooki said KKR's treatment of the bowler was "condemnable". He expressed doubts on whether BCCI's decision was a fallout of Bangladesh Foreign Ministry's recent expression of concern about alleged atrocities on minority communities in India.

SC allows petitioner to approach Centre on timely revision of EPFO wage ceiling

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday allowed a petitioner to approach the Centre with a representation on the revision of wage ceiling for Employees Provident Fund Scheme (EPFO).

A Bench headed by Justice J.K. Maheshwari permitted petitioner Naveen Prakash Nautiyal, an academic and activist, represented by advocates Pranav Sachdeva and Neha Rathi, to file a representation with the government in two weeks, along with a copy of Monday's court order. The government was asked to take a call in four months thereafter.

The petitioner argued



currently excludes from coverage those whose wages exceed ₹15,000 per month. However, the wage ceiling has historically been revised inconsistently, sometimes after 13-14 years, without any fixed periodicity or linkage to relevant economic indicators such as inflation, minimum wages, per capita income or consumer price index," the petition said.

The erratic approach, the petition argued, had resulted in the exclusion of large sections of the workforce, contrary to the object of providing social security to employees in the organised sector.

CONTINUED ON
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M CA-CAE

SPOTLIGHT



A cremation ground sits right on the banks of the Cauvery at Thiruvaiyaru, with waste dumped nearby. Municipal solid waste often piles up along the banks of the river in Thanjavur district, turning the area into a breeding ground for stray animals. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

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No: EE/KSPH&IDCL/CNT/Tender/04/2025-26/334 Date: 05.01.2026

SHORT TERM NOTICE INVITING TENDER

KSPH & IDCL invites online tender as per KTPP 2000 Act & as per Standard Tender Document through KPPP <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> for the below works.

01 Construction of Post-Metric Hostel Buildings for Girls & Boys at various locations in (Kalyana Karnataka Area) Koppal, Ballari, Bidar, Kalaburagi & Yadagiri District (Assisted by Backward Class Welfare Dept. & Kalyana Karnataka Area Development Board) - Phase-2 (Two Tender Document System).

Interested eligible contractors may participate in the tendering process. The details such as Tender fee, EMD, Tender documents etc., are available on KPPP from 07.01.2026 onwards.

"KSPH & IDCL reserves the right to accept or reject any or all Bids without assigning any reasons."

Note: Henceforth any changes / modifications in the Tender will be updated only on KPPP.

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BENGALURU SOUTH CITY CORPORATION

Office of the Executive Engineer (QA/QC) Division,
BSCC, First Floor, Commercial Complex, 9th Cross Road,
9th Main Road, Jayanagar 2nd Block, Bengaluru-11.

No. EE(QA/QC)/Z-1/BSCC/TEND/01/25-26 Date: 05.01.2026

TENDER NOTIFICATION

Two Cover System (Only through GoK KPP Portal)

The Executive Engineer, Quality Assurance / Quality Control Division, BSCC, Bengaluru on behalf the Commissioner, BSCC invites Request for Proposal from interested Persons / Firms those who have similar type of work for Consultancy Services for Project Management including Supervision, Quality Control (PMC) for the below works.

Sl.No. Name of the Work

PROVIDING PMC SERVICES INCLUDING SUPERVISION, QUALITY CONTROL for the following works.

1 Improvements to roads and drains in Bengaluru South Assembly Constituency (GO Order No. UDD 474 MNY 2025 (E), Bengaluru Date: 03.11.2025 GO (Annexure-5) Sl.No: 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44). Project Cost: Rs. 2500.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 75,000/-.

2 Improvements to existing asphalted road by resurfacing with proper camber, shoulder formation, side drain, improvement and road safety measures to selected arterial, sub-arterial and other important roads under Capital Support for Special Infra Projects (CSSIP) (Comprising of 4 works in GO BSCC Sl.No. 16, 17, 28, 29) Package No. CSSIP-UHD-01. Project Cost: Rs. 2567.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 77,000/-.

3 Improvements to existing asphalted road by resurfacing with proper camber, shoulder formation, side drain, improvement and road safety measures to selected arterial, sub-arterial and other important roads under Capital Support for Special Infra Projects (CSSIP) (Comprising of 5 works in GO BSCC Sl.No. 18, 19, 20, 21, 27) Package No. CSSIP-UHD-02. Project Cost: Rs. 2338.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 70,200/-.

4 Improvements to existing asphalted road by resurfacing with proper camber, shoulder formation, side drain, improvement and road safety measures to selected arterial, sub-arterial and other important roads under Capital Support for Special Infra Projects (CSSIP) (Comprising of 6 works in GO BSCC Sl.No. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 30) Package No. CSSIP-UHD-03. Project Cost: Rs. 2977.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 89,300/-.

5 Resurfacing to existing asphalted road, Improvements to Drains, footpath and Development of parks in Padmanabhanagar Division, Bangalore South City Corporation under Chief Ministers Infrastructure Development Program (CMIDP) (Comprising of 24 works in GO Annexure-5 Sl.No. 07 to 30) Package No. CMIDP-PN-01. Project Cost: Rs. 1975.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 50,000/-.

6 Improvements to existing asphalted road by resurfacing with proper camber, shoulder formation, side drain, improvement and road safety measures to selected arterial, sub-arterial and other important roads under Capital Support for Special Infra Projects (CSSIP) (Comprising of 3 works in GO No: UDD475 MNY 2025 Dated: 14.11.2025 BSCC Annexure-5 Sl.No. 11, 12, 13) Package No. CSSIP-PN-01. Project Cost: Rs. 2100.00 lakhs. EMD: Rs. 63,000/-.

Period of completion : 6 months for Sl.No. 1, 11 months for Sl.No. 2 to 6.

Calendar of Events: (1) Tender documents may be downloaded from KPP Portal <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in> from 07.01.2026. (2) Date of Pre-bid meeting : 13.01.2026 at 11.30 am. (3) Last date & time for receipt of tenders : 21.01.2026 upto 4.00 pm. (4) Date of opening of technical bid : 22.01.2026 at 4.30 pm. (5) Validity of tender: 90 days from last date of receipts of tender. Further details may be obtained from the above office during office hours or from KPP Portal <https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in>. Sd/- Executive Engineer (QA/QC) Zone-1, BSCC

SPOTLIGHT

Troubled waters: sewage, effluents sink the Cauvery

The Cauvery, which rises in the Western Ghats of Kodagu and flows through Karnataka and Tamil Nadu before meeting the Bay of Bengal, sustains millions of people, and is home to South India's oldest agrarian delta. And yet, today, its waters run sullied and turgid with effluents and other industrial and domestic waste, reveals an investigation by **The Hindu team**

Along its course, the Cauvery receives water from multiple tributaries – many of which function less like rivers and more like drains. Reservoirs like the Mettur Dam regulate its flow, while hundreds of towns and industrial clusters draw water from it for drinking, irrigation, and manufacturing. For generations, the river's rise and retreat have dictated planting seasons, sustained temple towns, and impacted political fortunes. Today, however, it increasingly absorbs the sullage and sewage that cities and industries are unable – or unwilling – to treat. Only a fraction of the sewage generated across the basin is treated adequately. The rest enters the river largely untreated, often diluted during monsoons and released when flows are high.

It is in this context that farmers, activists, and residents along the Cauvery speak of a river that appears alive but behaves like a sink. Their accounts – of effluents released at night, sewage mixing with irrigation water, and illnesses without obvious cause – are rarely acted upon. But recent scientific studies are beginning to confirm what these communities have long suspected: the Cauvery carries an invisible load of contaminants that conventional systems neither detect nor remove.

At Mettur, where the Cauvery is first restrained by a massive dam before it begins its long journey across Tamil Nadu, farmers describe a ritual that plays out every flood season. When surplus water is released, industrial effluents are allegedly discharged into the river under the cover of night. M. Thangaraj, president of the Tamil Nadu Jayarkai Vivasayigal Munnetra Sangam, says the timing is deliberate. The force of the release dilutes the waste, washing it downstream before it can be detected. Untreated sewage and wet waste from the Mettur municipality are also said to enter the river. "In the morning, we see the result," he says, referring to dead fish floating near the banks. Mettur municipal authorities counter that three sewage treatment plants have been operational for the past six years and sewage is no longer discharged into the Cauvery. The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) maintains that there are no effluent discharge points near the river and monthly water samples show no pollution.

Erode, for example, represents one of the most acute urban pressure points along the Cauvery. The river flows about 84 km through the district, but a 17-km stretch within the Erode Corporation, between R.N. Pudur and Vendipalayam, remains the most contaminated. The city hosts over 500 bleaching, dyeing, and tannery units. Wastewater from many of these units enters streams such as Pichai Karanpallam, Nochippallam, and Sunambu, which drain into the river.

Erode generates 35 to 40 million litres per day (MLD) of sewage, but only about 8 MLD is treated. The rest enters the river untreated. In 2022, the Central Pollution Control Board classified this stretch of the Cauvery as polluted. Although the TNPCB directed the Corporation to accelerate the underground sewerage work, the progress remained slow until March 2024, when the State announced new sewage treatment plants at six discharge points.

Downstream, the scepticism deepens. In Namakkal district, the river encounters a different kind of pressure. A. Adhavan, State general secretary of the Lok Janshakti Party and resident of Pallipalayam, traces the problem back to the Noyyal river crisis in Tiruppur. When dyeing units there faced closure, many relocated to the Cauvery banks, setting up shop in Komarapalayam, Pallipalayam, and Kokkarayappetai. Each dyeing machine, Mr. Adhavan says, can discharge up to two lakh litres of effluents a day. Regulations require this wastewater to be treated and recycled. "But most factories don't do that." Instead, land is purchased close to the river or its channels. Borewells pump Cauvery water into the factories illegally, and the same pipelines are used to release effluents back into the river.

Complaints to the TNPCB, Mr. Adhavan says, lead to temporary closures or

the registration of token cases. Operations invariably resume soon. Along the riverbanks, fear has altered daily life. "People no longer drink the water supplied by municipalities. They buy packaged water because they are afraid of pollution and the potential risk of cancer," he alleges.

In Karur, years of farmers' protests and a landmark Madras High Court ruling forced dyeing units to adopt zero liquid discharge systems (an advanced industrial water treatment process that recycles and reuses nearly all wastewater). This reduced direct effluent release into the Amaravathi, a tributary of Cauvery. Yet, domestic sewage and industrial waste continue to flow unchecked. Effluents once stored at the Orathupalayam dam are discharged directly downstream, eventually entering the Cauvery at Semangi. "The impact isn't visible when the river is full," says R.S. Mugilan of the Tamil Nadu Environmental Protection Movement. "But environmentally, the damage is enormous."

Effect of encroachments

Further downstream, the crisis becomes structural rather than episodic. Sundara Vilam Nathan, secretary of the Tamil Nadu Cauvery Farmers' Protection Federation, points to the dismantling of traditional safeguards that once protected the river. Historically, two buffer zones – *neer nilai porambokku* (waterbody commons) and *vella karai porambokku* (flood-bank commons) – prevented construction and industry along the river's edge. These zones absorbed floods and filtered waste before it reached the water. Today, they have been systematically encroached upon. Commercial establishments, housing layouts, and informal settlements sit directly on the banks, discharging septic waste and raw sewage into the river.

In Thanjavur district, the situation is especially dire around Kumbakonam, a town nestled between the Cauvery and the Arasalar. Its 44 temple tanks, once fed by river channels, now function as repositories for urban waste. Here, municipal solid waste often piles up along the banks of the river, turning the area into a breeding ground for stray animals. Industrial pollution compounds the problem. Near Thirumandankudi, untreated effluents from sugar factories and distilleries are released into the Pazhavar drain, contaminating water used by farmers downstream.

In Tiruvarur district, P.S. Masilamani of the Tamil Nadu Vivasayigal Sangam (affiliated to the CPI) describes the irrigation canals as so polluted that they can no longer support agriculture. At places like Kottappattu, the water has become unusable. The absence of proper waste management in small towns means sewage routinely mixes with irrigation water.

He calls for a special scheme to create dedicated drainage and treatment systems to prevent the mixing of sewage with irrigation water. He points to the textile belts of Karur, Erode, and Namakkal as major contributors because the treatment systems there are failing. The damage, he warns, is not always visible in the water itself. Instead, it shows up on the bodies of farmers, in the form of recurring skin conditions such as persistent itching.

Irrigation channels face impact

According to *The Hindu*'s findings, the civic bodies in towns along the Cauvery in the delta, including Thiruvaiyaru, Kumbakonam, and Mayiladuthurai, had largely curtailed the direct discharge of untreated domestic sewage into the river, but the impact of sewage discharge was increasingly felt in the irrigation channels branching off the Cauvery.

An action plan drafted by the State government, following a direction from the National Green Tribunal, recommended that the district authorities upgrade their sewage treatment plants to meet the discharge standards prescribed under the Environment (Protection) Amendment Rules, 2017.

Compiled by Geetha Srimathi with inputs from M. Sabari in Salem, S.P. Saravanan in Erode, C. Jaisankar in Karur, Nacchinarkkinian M. in Tiruchi, and N. Sai Charan and B. Kolappan in Chennai.

40 students
get jaundice at
Odisha school

Press Trust of India
BHUBANESWAR

Over 40 students were taken ill after a jaundice outbreak at the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Odisha's Khurda district, officials said on Monday.

Public Health Director Nilakantha Mishra said one student was diagnosed with jaundice after returning to the residential school from Christmas vacation. Later, several other students tested positive, he said.

Water samples taken
"District Health Department personnel visited the school on Sunday, while a State-level team arrived today. We are closely monitoring the situation and taking necessary steps," he said.

Water Corporation of Odisha (WATCO) general manager Rajendranath Nayak said samples have been collected from the school and sent for testing. "The water supplied by WATCO might not be contaminated. We suspect that the disease spread due to some outside food items," he added.

NGT notice to Centre, U.P. over 'violations' near Taj Mahal

Agra civic body constructing kiosks, paved paths, and structures near Taj Mahal and Fort, alleges applicant; trees cut without permission for metro work; matter posted for hearing on March 12

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has issued notice to the Union Environment Ministry, Uttar Pradesh government and others on allegations of illegal felling of trees, illegal construction and encroachment in the ecological sensitive zone of Agra, particularly around the Taj Mahal, along Agra-Gwalior Highway, as per an order.

SC's nod needed

The Principal Bench of the NGT, comprising of Chairperson Prakash Srivastava and expert member A. Senthil Vel, was hearing an application, which also alleged that the Agra Development Authority was constructing kiosks, paved paths, and brick-cement structures in Shahjahan Park situated between the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort.

According to the applicant, as per the Supreme



A view of the Taj Mahal engulfed in dense fog, in Agra on Sunday. (ANI Video Grab) ANI VIDEO GRAB

Court, any tree felling within a 5 km aerial distance from the Taj Mahal requires prior permission of the top court, irrespective of the number of trees involved, the order said.

The allegations raise a "substantial issue" relating to compliance of environmental norms, as per an NGT order dated December 23.

"Applicant submits that in the course of construc-

tion pits have been dug up near the roots of century old trees and the green cover have been destroyed and the habitat of birds and butterflies is affected. Further allegation of the applicant is that the Agra Municipal Corporation is illegally raising concrete structure for "selfie point" on the green belt ahead of Madhu Nagar on Gwalior Road," the order said.

"The applicant has also

alleged that numerous private individuals have cut trees and erected buildings on the mandatory green belt on both sides of the highway from the 509 Army Base Workshop to Saiya and the L&T has also indiscriminately cut the trees without obtaining necessary permissions in the metro construction work," the order said.

The matter has been posted for March 12.

BJP leaders remember Sushil Kumar Modi on his birth anniversary

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

The Bihar unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) observed the 73rd birth anniversary of veteran party leader and former Deputy Chief Minister late Sushil Kumar Modi.

Senior party leaders and Modi's wife Jessie George were present at the event where Chief Minister Nitish Kumar unveiled a life-size statue at Sushil Modi Memorial Park in Rajendra Nagar.

Union Minister Giriraj Singh, Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary, Assembly Speaker Prem Kumar, Water Resources and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary,



Bihar CM Nitish Kumar paying floral tributes to Sushil Kumar Modi in Patna on Monday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Health Minister Mangal Pandey, Industries Minister Dilip Kumar Jaiswal, MP Radhamohan Singh, BJP State president Sanjay Sarangi, BJP organisational general secretary Bhikhubhai Dalsania, Bihar BJP in-charge Vinod Tawde were present.

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Ranchi 21 11
Imphal 23 05
Kolkata 21 14

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Kolkata Tomorrow 21°C Morning will be very cool with fog and mist. Day will be pleasant. Night also will be very cool. Dry weather to occur.

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**OBITUARY &
REMEMBRANCE**
DEATH
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(1948-2026)
DEEPLY MISSED BY HIS WIFE, KAVERI, RAMYA, RAJESH, RAVI, RUKMANI AND HIS GRANDCHILDREN
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LITERARY TRIVIA CHALLENGE

- Which of Arundhati Roy's books borrows its evocative title from the Beatles' song 'Let It Be'?
- Which Tamil epic prominently features the port city of Puhar (Kaveripattinam)?
- Which classic adventure novel follows the orphan Jim Hawkins on a dangerous sea voyage in search of pirate treasure?

Scan QR code or visit <https://newsth.live/LFLQUIZ> to take the quiz. Top 3 winners* every day win gift vouchers.

Answer to yesterday's quiz:
1. G.U. Pope | 2. The Mirror of Erised | 3. 24

Yesterday's Winners:

1. Iqbal Singh, Punjab | 2. Indrani Koner, Cuttack | 3. Jharna Karfa, Jaipur

THE HINDU

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- No. of work : 02 nos.
- Tender Paper Cost : Rs.10,000.00 (On-line)
- Class of Contractor : Special / Super Class Contractor
- Available of bid document in the website
- Date of opening of Bid : 05.02.2026 at 11.30 AM
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website : <https://tenderodisha.gov.in/>. Any addendum / corrigendum / cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said website.

Chief Engineer, Bridges, Odisha, Bhubaneswar.

OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF (CIVIL), ODISHA, BHUBANESWAR

OIPR-34174/11/0056/2526

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF, WATER RESOURCES, ODISHA, BHUBANESWAR.

e-Procurement Notice No.CEMKS 16 OF 2025-26

Sl. No.	Name of the Work	Amount put to Tender (Rs. in Lakh)	Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	EMD (Online) (in Rupees)	Period of Completion
01	Cement Concrete Lining of Distributory No.-14 from RD 0.00 km to 8.90 km off-taking at RD 3.50 km from Distributory No.-14	Rs.1043.05	Chief Engineer & BM, Mahanadi Kathajodi System, Bhubaneswar.	CEMKS MSD 04 of 2025-26	10,43,500/-	18 (Eighteen) Calendar Months
02	CC Lining of Distributory No.-14 B from RD 0.00 km to 8.90 km off-taking at RD 3.50 km from Distributory No.-14.	Rs.1080.73	CEMKS MSD 05 of 2025-26	10,80,730/-	18 (Eighteen) Calendar Months	

- Cost of Bid Document : Rs. 10,000/- each (online)
- Class of Contractor : A* and Super Class Contractor.
- Date of Availability of Tender : 03.01.2026 10.00 Hours to 21.01.2026 17.00 Hours
- Date of Opening : 22.01.2026 11.00 Hours.
- e-mail Id : cemksbmsr@yahoo.co.in

Further detail conditions can be seen from the Govt. website : www.tendersodisha.gov.in/

The Corrigendum/cancellation of Tender, if any, will be uploaded and can be seen from the above website only.

Chief Engineer & Basin Manager, Mahanadi Kathajodi System, Bhubaneswar

OIPR-32252/11/0027/2526

Odisha doctors boycott OPD services; patient care affected

The Hindu Bureau

BHUBANESWAR

Patient care was affected as hundreds of doctors in government hospitals and medical facilities across Odisha boycotted outpatient (OPD) services for two-hours on Monday, demanding salaries based on the Central pay structure.

"The governments in nearly 20 States have started paying their doctors salaries in line with the Central pay structure. The Dynamic Assured Career Progression scheme has also been implemented in several States. However, successive governments in Odisha, including the previous Naveen Patnaik government, have resorted to delaying tactics," Odisha Medical Services Association president Kishore Chandra Mishra said.

"Disheartened by the low salary structure, government doctors are switching to the private sector," Dr. Mishra added.

Over 6,000 doctors at 32 hospitals, 300 community health centres and PHCs participated in the strike.

Delhi: man beaten, stripped, mother groped; one arrested

Shrimansi Kaushik

NEW DELHI

One person has been arrested while a search is under way for three others for allegedly stripping a man in full public view, sexually harassing his 51-year-old mother, and beating his 52-year-old father in east Delhi's Laxmi Nagar on January 2, the police said on Monday.

Purported videos of the assault by Satish Yadav, alias Pintoo, who has been arrested, and his accomplices on the family, went viral on social media. In

one of them, a group of men can be seen thrashing a man, dragging him and stripping him on a road as he pleads for mercy.

The police have registered an FIR under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita. Medical examination of the victims showed injuries, said the police. The woman told the police that in 2016, they employed Mr. Yadav as the caretaker of their gym. However, over time, the accused started claiming its ownership and threatened the family when asked to vacate.

U.P. approves 3-year age relaxation for police posts

The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government on Monday approved a one-time relaxation of three years in the upper age limit for candidates applying under the Direct Recruitment-2025 for constable-level posts in the police

and prison departments. The decision, on the direction of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, follows the recruitment advertisement issued on December 31, 2025, inviting online applications for 32,679 posts.

"The welfare of the youth is our top priority," wrote the CM on X.

KOLKATA MUNICIPAL CORPORATION e-TENDER

ABRIDGED NIT

The Director General (Electrical), Lighting, KMC invites e-tender online percentage bid systems for the following work:
NIT No. : LTG/340/WD-10/BR-II/Z/I/12/25-26
Name of the work: Installation of AC machines in first floor at Sutanuti Community Hall within Ward No.-10. Estimated amount: ₹ 9,98,581.75. Earnest money: ₹ 20,000.00. Period of completion: 20 days. Last date of submission of bid: 15.01.2026 at 3 P.M. The bid forms and other details are available on and from 23.12.2025 at 3 P.M. from the website: <https://wbtenders.gov.in>

The C.M.E. (SWM), KMC invites e-tender percentage rate two bid systems for the following work:

NIT No. : SWM-I/E/01/BR-XV/25-26
Name of the work: Repairing and renovation of eighteen (18) nos. different temporary waste storage point in Ward No.-135, under Borough-XV, under SWM-I Department. Estimated amount (Including GST & CESS): ₹ 6,75,390.00. Earnest money: ₹ 14,000.00. Time of completion: 45 days. Price of tender: NIL. Bid submission start (online) date: 07.01.2026 (2 P.M.). Bid submission closing (online) date: 17.01.2026 (2 P.M.). The tender documents will be available on and from 05.01.2026 (6:30 P.M.) from the websites: <https://wbtenders.gov.in> and <http://kmcgov.in>

The Director General, Water Supply, KMC invites e-tender for the following work:

NIT No. : KMC/WS/West/W68/T-14/2025-26
Name of the work: Laying of 100 mm dia DI main for development of filtered water supply from Premises No. 46/3A to 20/1/1, Ballygunge Place East in Ward No.-68. Estimated amount: ₹ 6,36,849.00. Earnest money: ₹ 12,740.00. Period of completion: 12 days. Last date of receipt/opening of tender (online): 19.01.2026 at 1 P.M. The bid forms and other details are available from the websites: <https://etender.wb.nic.in> & <http://wbtenders.gov.in>

The Director General (Parks & Squares), KMC invites quotation online percentage rate two bid system for the following work:

NIT No. : KMC/DG_PS/II/20/AP6/25-26 (1st Call)
Name of the work: Road side Garden repairing work at 1 to 38, B. K. Paul Avenue in Ward No.-020. Estimated cost: ₹ 6,24,778.77. Earnest money: ₹ 12,500.00. Period of completion: 30 days. Last date and time of submission of bid: 20.01.2026 - 1 P.M. Date of opening tender: 24.01.2026 - 2 P.M. The bid forms and other details shall be available on and from 0

IN BRIEF



Amit Shah participates in Pongal celebration in Tiruchi

The military ground at Mannarpuram in Tiruchi city came alive on Monday as the BJP heralded the harvest season festivities by organising a 'Nammo Ooru Modi Pongal' with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in attendance. Senior BJP functionaries and several women's wing members of the party participated in the event. As many as 1,008 pots were placed in rows on the ground to prepare sweet Pongal. Mr. Shah arrived at the spot a little after noon, accompanied by Union Ministers Piyush Goyal and L. Murugan and BJP State president Nainar Nagenthiran.

Filmmaker Vikram Bhatt's plea in cheating case rejected

The Rajasthan High Court on Monday rejected filmmaker Vikram Bhatt's petition seeking the quashing of an FIR against him, his wife and his associates in a cheating case in Udaipur. Mr. Bhatt and his wife are currently lodged in jail for criminal breach of trust and cheating Ajay Mardia, a resident of Udaipur, of ₹40 crore for the rights of a film. Justice Sameer Jain of the Rajasthan High Court, while refusing to interfere, observed that the matter does not appear to be merely a breach of contract but *prima facie* involves deliberate diversion and misappropriation of funds, and the police investigation will continue. PTI

Plea in HC for probing mass withdrawal of nominations

The Hindu Bureau

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena leader Avinash Anant Jadhav has filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court on Monday challenging the events that led to several candidates being elected unopposed in the municipal corporation elections in Maharashtra.

Filed under Articles 226 and 227 of the Constitution, the petition names the State of Maharashtra and the Election Commission as respondents. It sought a court-monitored inquiry into the "mass withdrawal" of nominations and a stay on election results.

Mr. Jadhav also urged the court to direct the State government to amend the Maharashtra Municipal Corporations Act, 1949, to introduce a provision mandating a minimum vote share for candidates elected unopposed.

R. Ravikanth Reddy

HYDERABAD

Former Bharat Rashtriya Samithi (BRS) leader K. Kavitha on Monday turned emotional during her last speech in the State Legislative Council, and declared that Telangana Jagruti, a cultural organisation founded by her during the Telangana movement, will be turned into a political party.

The daughter of former Chief Minister and BRS president K. Chandrasekhar Rao (KCR), Ms. Kavitha had quit the BRS after being suspended from the party and sent her resignation as a Member of the Legislative Council in September last year.

Mahayuti's 'hunger for power swallowing democracy': Cong. on unopposed wins in civic polls

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI



Maharashtra Congress chief Harshwardhan Sapkal

corporations, with 33,606 nominations filed for 2,869 seats, according to the Election Commission (EC).

Addressing a press conference in Mumbai, Mr. Sapkal alleged that Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Deputy Chief Ministers Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar have "wrapped up democracy" by using pressure, threats, and money power to force rival candidates out of the fray.

The civic polls cover 893 wards across 29 municipal

Mr. Sapkal demanded that voters be allowed to exercise the NOTA (None of the Above) option even in wards where candidates have been elected unopposed. "Citizens must have the right to reject candidates. Denying this choice undermines the very essence of democracy," he said.

Targets Speaker
The Congress leader further targeted Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar, accusing him of misusing his Constitutional position to benefit relatives contesting from Colaba wards. Mr. Sapkal alleged that Mr. Narwekar obstructed Opposition candidates and weakened the anti-defection law, demanding that the President of India dismiss him from office. Mr. Narwekar has denied the allegations, calling them politically motivated.

Madras HC judgment on Deepathoon row today

The Hindu Bureau

MADRASI

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court will on Tuesday pronounce the judgment on appeals preferred against the order of Justice G.R. Swaminathan, who had directed the Subramaniya Swamy Temple management in Thirupparankundram to light the Karthigai Deepam at the *deepathoon* besides the usual places.

A Division Bench of Justices G. Jayachandran and K.K. Ramakrishnan said the court would pronounce the judgment on Tuesday after a mention was made before it regarding the restriction imposed on the total number of participants for the Santhanakoodu Urs festival on the hill to 50. The judges said this issue would also be discussed in the judgment. The judges began hearing the appeals on December 12, 2025.

Opposition turns heat on AAP govt., says Punjab witnessing 'total collapse' of law and order

Vikas Vasudeva

CHANDIGARH



Police personnel at the wedding venue where an AAP leader and village sarpanch was shot dead in Amritsar on Sunday. PTI

the daylight murder of a village sarpanch in Amritsar, murder of an NRI woman in Kapurthala and a panchayat member in Moga," she added.

Cabinet Minister and AAP State president Aman Arora, however, said the roots of the current crisis lies in the "misrule and patronage of goons" by the previous governments. The Chief Minister, meanwhile, issued strict instructions to the police for the identification and arrest of the culprits involved in the killing of the sarpanch.

Speaking to mediapersons in Bathinda, Ms. Kaur said that there was a complete collapse of the law and order situation in the State. "Every day, there are sensational incidents like

gangs, Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring said, "Police seem to have ceased to exist in the State."

BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh urged all political parties to come forward to protect the border State of Punjab from the dangerous designs of anti-national forces and criminal networks, which he alleged were flourishing under the AAP regime.

Referring to the targeted killings by the criminal

In farewell speech in Council, Kavitha breaks down, tears into BRS, promises a solo political plunge



Former BRS leader K. Kavitha stepping out of the House after rendering a speech in Hyderabad on Monday. RAMAKRISHNA G.

Breaking down while announcing her resignation and recounting her long public and political journey, she said she was "happy to leave an unethical" party and vowed to re-

turn to public life as a strong political force. She said the Telangana Jagruti will contest the next Assembly election in the State due in 2028.

Ms. Kavitha also levelled

serious allegations against the BRS and its leadership and claimed that the party acted against the constitutional spirit by framing an eight-page constitution, which "is a joke". She accused the BRS of suspending her without an opportunity to explain her stand.

Telangana agitation

Recounting her political journey, Ms. Kavitha said she joined the Telangana movement in 2006, inspired by her father, the late Jayashankar, a leading ideologue of the Telangana movement. Through Telangana Jagruti, she worked to protect Telangana culture, document its history and fight for the rights of all,

she said. Ms. Kavitha said she never intended to enter electoral politics, but accepted the Nizamabad Lok Sabha ticket in 2014 after careful thought.

Alleging that the BRS failed to live up to the expectations of people, she said she had questioned policy decisions like the contract job system in government, removal of Dharna Chowk, arrests of farmers, corruption in major public projects and sub-standard constructions. But all these led to her being marginalised within the party.

Referring to her relationship with KCR, she said being his daughter gave her the courage to question him directly.

BJP MLA's son booked in hit-and-run case; victim dragged along with car for a few metres, critical, say police

Shubhomoy Sikdar

RAIPUR

The son of former Union Minister and sitting BJP MLA Renuka Singh has been booked in a hit-and-run case after his car allegedly rammed into a motorcycle, leaving the rider, a disc jockey, seriously injured in Chhattisgarh's Raipur Monday.

A police officer confirmed that the accused Balwant Singh alias Lucky, 34, has been booked for rash and negligent driving and endangering human life. The incident took place around 1 a.m. when Mr. Balwant, who was driving his friend's car hit the

rib, legs and back. He is in a critical condition. An FIR has been registered against Balwant under sections 125 (a) (act endangering personal safety of others) and 281 (rash and negligent driving) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). We will explore more sections as and when the victim recovers," said an officer from the Telibandha Police Station where the case was registered.

Mr. Balwant's mother was a Union Minister for Tribal affairs (2019-2023) and an incumbent MLA from Bharatpur-Sonhat constituency from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in Chhattisgarh.

YEAR ENDER 2025 | GOVERNANCE IN REVIEW

CM Yogi Adityanath's Investment Model Redefines Uttar Pradesh

From Reform to Results: How Uttar Pradesh Emerged as a Trusted Investment Destination in 2025



In 2025, Uttar Pradesh, under the leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, emerged as one of India's most sought-after investment destinations. Driven by transparent policies, time-bound approvals, and efficient digital processes, the state strengthened investor confidence. Proactive institutional support, robust infrastructure development, and focused sectoral incentives helped attract significant domestic and foreign investments, while governance reforms positioned Uttar Pradesh as a competitive, reliable, and future-ready hub for industry and enterprise.

INVEST UP: A TRUSTED PARTNER

Reshaping the Investment Ecosystem

In 2025, strengthening investment facilitation and investor handholding through Invest UP emerged as one of the State government's most significant achievements.

Invest UP provided end-to-end support, from project conceptualisation and MoU execution to inter-departmental coordination and grievance resolution. Its integrated framework ensured predictability, accountability, and timely resolution, key factors in enhancing investor confidence.

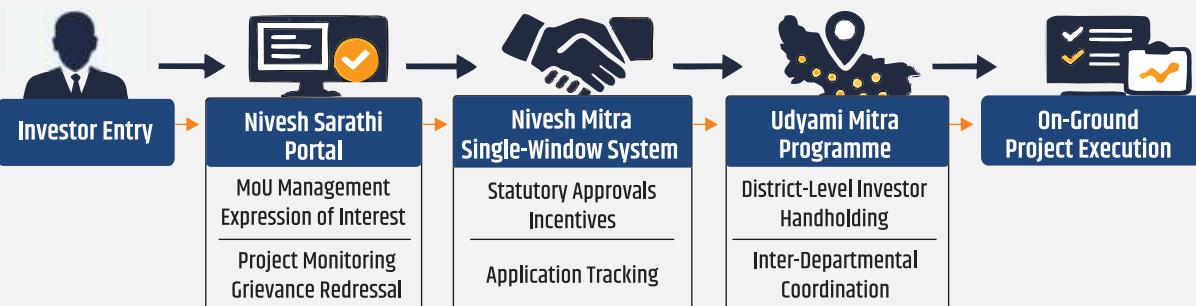
Key Institutional Interventions

- Dedicated sectoral desks for:
 - Textiles & Apparel
 - Automobile & E-Mobility
 - Chemicals
 - Electronics
 - Global Capability Centres (GCCs)



Sify chairman Raju Vegesna with CM Yogi

Integrated Investment Facilitation Framework



A unified digital and institutional framework for seamless investment facilitation

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE: NIVESH MITRA AS THE BACKBONE

Single-Window, Fully Online, Transparent

The Nivesh Mitra portal emerged as the backbone of Uttar Pradesh's Ease of Doing Business reforms in 2025. ■ 525+ services from 43 departments ■ Over 20 lakh approvals processed digitally ■ 97% application disposal rate ■ 96%+ user satisfaction ■ Mandatory online applications eliminated physical paperwork

Nivesh Mitra: Measurable Outcomes



Fully digitised approvals ensuring transparency, efficiency, and accountability.

All approvals, incentives, and clearances were brought onto a unified digital platform, ensuring transparency, traceability, and time-bound delivery.

UDYAMI MITRA: PERSONALISED INVESTOR HANDHOLDING

Governance with a Human Interface



The Chief Minister's Udyami Mitra Scheme proved to be a key pillar of investor support in 2025.

- Each investor was assigned a dedicated Udyami Mitra to:
 - Coordinate across departments
 - Provide policy guidance
 - Resolve district-level and local issues

With statewide coverage, the scheme functioned as a bridge between investors and government, enabling rapid coordination, on-ground problem-solving, and seamless translation of approvals into execution.

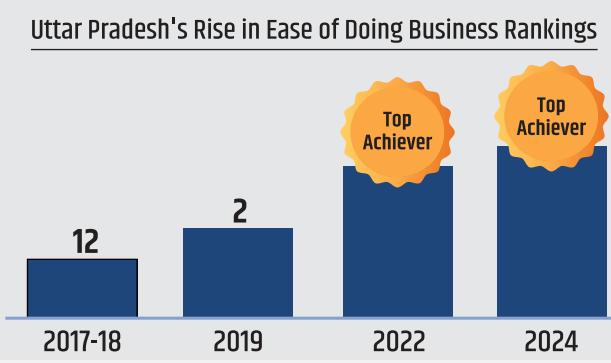
EASE OF DOING BUSINESS: MEASURABLE GAINS

From Reform to Rankings

In 2025, Uttar Pradesh recorded major gains in Ease of Doing Business, guided by the principle of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.

Key Outcomes

- Improvement from 12th rank (2017-18) to 2nd rank (2019)
- Recognition as 'Top Achiever' under BRAP 2022 and BRAP 2024
- 'Top Achiever' status in three critical BRAP 2024 areas: (Enterprise Establishment, Labour Reforms, Land Administration)



Post-2024, the government implemented 426 reforms across 24 areas, covering land, labour, environmental clearances, construction permits, and single-window systems, significantly reducing compliance burdens.

WHAT LIES AHEAD: NIVESH MITRA 3.0 (2026)

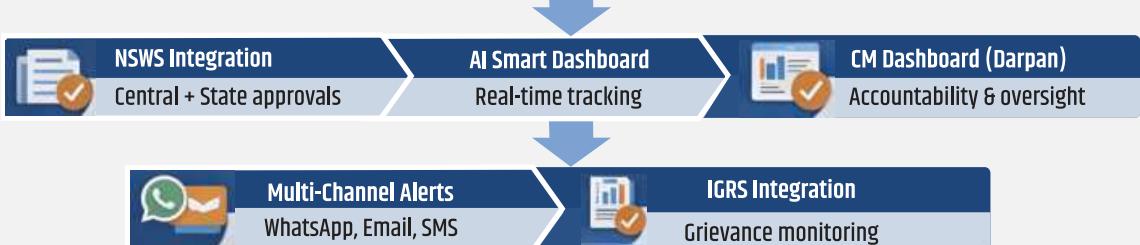
Next-Generation Ease of Doing Business

As Uttar Pradesh enters 2026, the State government is preparing to roll out Nivesh Mitra 3.0, an advanced, AI-enabled single-window clearance system.

Key Features

- AI-enabled chatbot
- Investor updates via WhatsApp, Email, and SMS
- Integration with the National Single Window System
- Linkages with: ■ IGRS Chief Minister's Dashboard (Darpan) ■ Nivesh Sarathi ■ OIMS ■ India Industrial Land Bank
- AI-powered smart dashboard for real-time tracking and data-driven decisions

Nivesh Mitra 3.0 : Key capabilities (2026)



International Investment Engagement through Dedicated Foreign Desks



How 2025 Reforms Benefit People



My government is fully committed to facilitate the investors and entrepreneurs for establishing and smoothly carrying out their business operations in the state. Nivesh Mitra, the single window portal, is one of the steps in this direction. Through this dedicated single window we will ensure online clearances / approvals / NOCs, of all the departments which are required to set up and run the business in the State without any physical touch points. A centralised monitoring system, directly under my office, aims to deliver investors high quality and ever more responsive services in a time bound manner."

- Yogi Adityanath, Chief Minister, U.P.

From reform to results, Uttar Pradesh's investment journey enters a new phase in 2026.



Hierarchy of roles

The state must not be allowed to normalise prolonged incarceration

Using the terms of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Supreme Court of India has grouped the accused in the Delhi riots case of 2020 based on their 'hierarchy of participation', denying bail for Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam while granting it under strict conditions to the other five appellants, Gulfish Fatima, Meera Haider, Shifa-ur-Rehman, Mohd. Saleem Khan, and Shabab Ahmed. The Court emphasised Section 43D(5) of the Act, which only requires courts to assess whether the accusations are *prima facie* true, and thus rejected the defence of prolonged incarceration and narrowed Khalid's and Imam's options. The prosecution has always alleged that the riots were the result of a plan allegedly coordinated in protest networks and WhatsApp groups. People routinely plan protests on messaging apps and that is not inherently suspicious. But the state has persuaded the Court that the articles of organisation are evidence of a terroristic design. However, the Court has treated "terrorist acts" under Section 15 as being able to cover more than overt violence, including threatening to disrupt services, an interpretation that could have a chilling effect by emboldening governments to use stringent preventive detention under UAPA and, in political cases, to normalise the pursuit of prolonged incarceration without trial.

The Court using its 'hierarchy of participation' as the basis to relieve all but two people is unfair when the evidence to establish it has yet to be tested in court. Khalid and Imam were arrested as young men and have now spent five years in custody. The passage of time weighs more heavily on youth; if the courts find no case later, the damage done by prolonged incarceration cannot be undone. The UAPA's provisions vest the state with an unrelieved power to snare those charged under the Act and prevent easy exits. But the existence of such power should also be weighed against the charges. There is a difference between, say, the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, which informed parts of the UAPA, and Khalid's and Imam's alleged roles in the Delhi riots. The state has often invoked the Act to crush any opposition to its decisions even without an act of terrorism on the ground, revealing its overarching anxiety to quell dissent over entertaining the constitutional right to protest. The trial against Khalid and the others has not begun because, among other reasons, the sessions court has yet to frame charges and there are reportedly around 700 witnesses. That the Court granted bail to the five should be a sign for trial courts to rationalise witness lists and ensure that trials, including that of the Delhi riots, begin without undue delay.

Off the guard rails

Those abusing an AI model's capabilities with illegal requests must face action

The generative artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot Grok developed by social media platform X, formerly Twitter, has a sordid but compelling unique service proposition: it avoids the kinds of safeguards, both commonsense and cautious, that other large firms such as OpenAI and Google have instituted in their large language models. This *laissez parler* attitude has resulted in novelties, such as the chatbot freely insulting national politicians and celebrities alike. But a specific behaviour that has come to light in recent days is alarming: Grok has been responding to user requests to non-consensually generate sexually suggestive and explicit images of women. Days after New Year's eve, when such requests crowded Grok's X account, the behaviour continues, in spite of stunned reactions and demands for guard rails from India and France. In response to calls for accountability, X's billionaire owner Elon Musk has responded not with reassurances, but with a joking request for the chatbot to dress him skimpily too, as though doing so to oneself and subjecting strangers to such a crime – for it is a crime to create imagery like this – were in any way comparable. Mr. Musk's other corporate entities have chimed in with jokes of their own, dismissing the gravity of the public-facing capabilities they have put in the hands of users.

The Union government has rightly demanded that X cease image generation of this kind, and pointedly referred to the criminal nature of generating sexually explicit imagery of women in this manner. On top of the viscerally provocative nature of such patently criminal content, Grok has added to the overall hostility of being a gender minority on the Internet. There are aspects of this where neither the government nor social media platforms have inspired much confidence, with sexual violence and death threats to prominent and outspoken women transpiring with impunity in both cyberspace and the real world. X's impunity rests on an assumption that the geopolitical power of the United States, especially under its current government, will protect it from any serious blowback for its cruel handling of such sensitive matters. Even as the government pushes back against the social media platform – which it has not necessarily done with virtuous aims in the past – it must vigorously push for the prosecution of people who encourage the public creation and circulation of non-consensual intimate imagery. The easy proliferation of these tools must not be coupled with a fearlessness to leverage their worst capabilities, and this must be made clear by making an example of those who do.

Indian aviation safety, its dangerous credibility deficit

In March 20, 2006, the Chairman of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Assad Kotoko, delivered this message in Montreal while addressing the Directors General of Civil Aviation Conference on Global Aviation Safety Strategy: "It must be a strategy that recognizes that a weakness in one is a weakness in all. And the thread that must run through this strategy is transparency. By being transparent and freely sharing information with each other and the public, you recapture the ability to act as one, to reinforce each others' actions, and to strengthen public confidence."

"You will be better able to stand united against those who compromise aviation safety... For me, one accident was always one too many, and the loss of even one life, was one too many. Like all of you here, I was entrusted with a noble mission, to protect the lives and well-being of the travelling public. We have done and must continue to do everything within our power to make sure they get to their destination safely and unharmed, and that no one on the ground will be killed or injured because of an aircraft accident."

On June 12, 2025, Air India flight 171 crashed at Ahmedabad, Gujarat within a minute of its take-off. Out of the 242 passengers, there was one survivor, while 19 people were killed on the ground.

India is a signatory of ICAO and has to comply with ICAO Annex 13 Standards for Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) of the United States and the Air Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) of the United Kingdom were participants in the investigation. The Cockpit Voice Recorder (CVR) and the Digital Flight Data Recorder (DFDR) were recovered by June 16 and the NTSB's help was taken in downloading and decoding the contents of the two recorders as the Indian authorities did not have the expertise to retrieve all the data. The NTSB and AAIB were aware of the contents. The Indian government must also be aware of the contents as it ordered commando protection for the chief investigator of AAIB India. This was a clear pointer that it was a serious issue.

A vague report, the facts

The vague Preliminary report that was released a month after the crash, clearly mentioned two points. First, the fuel control switches of both engines had moved to cut off from three to four seconds after lift-off. Second, one pilot asked the other pilot 'why did you do that?' And the other responds 'I did not do that.' It has been clearly established that the fuel control switches can only be moved mechanically by lifting the spring loaded switches from run and moving and



Captain A. (Mohan) Ranganathan

is a former airline instructor pilot and aviation safety adviser. He is also a former member of the Civil Aviation Safety Advisory Council (CASAC), India

dropping them into the cut off gate. These switches do not move due to an electrical failure or software glitch. The DFDR and CVR would have clearly indicated what had happened in those critical 15 seconds – what was being spoken in the cockpit, who was handling the flight controls and all the ambient sounds in the cockpit area. The NTSB has the best expertise to identify the exact data.

If one were to go by details leaked by The Wall Street Journal in July 2025 – and also in November 2025 – it appears that there was friction between the U.S. and Indian authorities that mushroomed into serious differences on the findings. The NTSB will only support technical investigation in an accident. The transparency and the truthful report that India's Minister of Civil Aviation promised on the day of the crash, appears to be a dream. Political massaging of the report will not find favour with the NTSB. From what this writer hears from former top safety officials in the U.S., the breakdown between U.S. and Indian authorities is the worst he has witnessed and the worst he has seen in an international accident investigation.

The state of aviation

India has had three fatal accidents in the past 15 years. In 2010, Praful Patel, then Minister of Civil Aviation, declared that Mangalore airport conforms to all standards of ICAO. The Court of Inquiry committee, under his Ministry, conveniently drafted a report with a litany of lies. Blatant violations such as a rigid concrete structure holding the Instrument Landing System Localiser, that a rescue and fire fighting truck got stuck outside a gate and never reached the burning aircraft, were covered up. The only positive aspect of the report was the identification of the dangers of flying in hours during the Window of Circadian Low and the lack of rest for crew.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation's Civil Aviation Requirements have been undergoing modifications over 15 years, with extensions due to pressure from airline owners. An example is the way Indigo, a leading private airline, disrupted air travel for thousands of passengers across India and the Minister and the DGCA to their knees.

In 2020, there was the air crash in Kozhikode. There again, there was scant action by Aviation Minister, Hardeep Singh Puri, and later, Jyotiraditya Scindia on safety measures addressing the dangerous operations at the airport. The deadline set for safe operation has long passed. We are now in 2026 and there are no restrictions in operations. The DGCA, as is the norm, dances to political pressure and is failing in its duty to ensure passenger safety.

Immediately after the AI 171 crash, the site was not sanitised. Television crew and cameramen were seen moving all over the site, trampling on and shifting through crash debris even before investigations began, and wiping out important clues. The airport was opened in three hours, with the zero availability of rescue and fire fighting services. Every flight that operated in this phase did not have rescue and fire fighting services on standby, endangering the lives of every air passenger and even those on the ground.

By delaying the findings and couching the facts with misleading statements, the AAIB is playing into the hands of YouTubers and social media narratives. ACARS and Inmarsat data are being quoted as proof of the flight having operated in dangerous conditions. The data is accessible only between the company that operated the system and an authorised person in the subscribing company. The entire chain of messages will be in an encrypted format. A simple example is how users of WhatsApp are confident about their messages being secure. The refusal of Apple to comply with the Indian Government order to preload a cyber-safety app citing privacy, security, and consent issues that go against its global policies is another example. It is to the credit of the airline, Air India, that it has not commented or responded to many of these strange narratives.

A lesson to learn

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and the AAIB should note how the FAA and NTSB act after a crash. When a UPS cargo MD-11 aircraft crashed on November 4, 2025, the NTSB had press briefings on November 5, 6 and 7, with its findings after the CVR and the DFDR had been downloaded and analysed. By November 9, the FAA issued an Emergency Airworthiness Directive grounding the aircraft type.

The NTSB and the FAA were aware of the CVR and DFDR data within a week of the AI 171 crash. If there was an indication of serious system failures on the Boeing 787, as being projected by 'aviation illiterates' (as a former NTSB investigator describes them), the FAA would have grounded all Boeing 787s. The very fact that no such action has been done is a clear indication that they know the reason behind the crash.

India's standing is dropping everyday on the diplomatic front. It is the same as far as India's credibility in aviation safety investigation is concerned.

The crash of AI 171 has drawn worldwide attention. For India to isolate itself with a self-centred ego, is going to take it down a dangerous path. Isolating foreign experts from the AI 171 crash report is a dangerous trend.

The parallel track that keeps U.S.-India ties going

In 2025, despite political strains and the postponement of the much-anticipated Quad Leaders' Summit hosted by India, the underlying machinery of India-United States cooperation remains vigorous and steadily advancing. While political engagement appears low, notably amid U.S. trade sanctions on India and its warming ties with Pakistan, the institutional collaboration between the two democracies continues to expand, particularly in defence and technology cooperation. The visits of India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's and the Indian Navy Chief to the U.S. must be seen in this framework.

The Quad Leaders' Summit, which New Delhi was supposed to host, has been delayed amid opaque communication from officials, reflecting current bilateral tensions that have been marked by challenges such as worsening trade relations. The U.S. tariff regime levied on Indian goods and New Delhi's recalibration of its diplomatic posture amid perceptions of a "G-2" style rapprochement between the U.S. and China have some underlying factors. India's exports to the U.S., which dropped sharply in 2025, are a stark indicator of these tensions.

Economic frictions persist, especially with U.S. tariffs on India's purchase of Russian crude oil, while China and Pakistan enjoy lower tariffs and even strengthened relations with the U.S. In return, Islamabad's offering, highlighted by port access to the U.S. and critical minerals shipments to American firms, is an economic decision with geopolitical imperatives. Washington's balance-of-interest pragmatism manifests itself in signals from U.S. officials that relations with New Delhi remain vital despite transactional pressures.

Continuing institutional cooperation

In contrast to strained political signals, institutional engagement has accelerated. The July 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in Washington unveiled new initiatives that spanned maritime security, transnational threats, economic cooperation, critical technologies and humanitarian efforts. On similar lines, Quad's Counterterrorism Working group also held its third meeting in December 2025, all demonstrating the Quad's continued operational relevance beyond high-level political optics.

Defence cooperation forms the backbone of



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this resilience. Since the 2008 India-U.S. civil nuclear deal, defence and technology agreements have steadily deepened. The landmark signing of a decade-long Defence Framework Agreement in 2025 marks a new chapter, enhancing joint coordination, information sharing and technological collaboration that is designed to buttress Indo-Pacific regional stability. This is exemplified through regular bilateral military exercises, such as Yudh Abhyas ('War Practice'), Tiger Claw and Malabar, which promote interoperability and trust among forces.

Oiled by defence and technology agreements

Since the political upheaval brought by the India-U.S. nuclear deal, bilateral ties have been predominantly driven by defence and technology agreements. Over the years, the two countries have signed various agreements, including the 2023 India-US Defence Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X) and foundational defence agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum Of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA, 2018) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA, 2020) and the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (2023) to provide and promote logistical support, cooperation and information sharing between the two militaries. India's Ministry of Defence and the U.S. Department of Defence also signed the Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA) in 2024. Despite political challenges, defence cooperation remains strong.

In October 2025, a significant 10-year defence framework agreement was signed by U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and India's Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. This long-awaited pact aims to enhance coordination, information sharing and technological collaboration to promote regional stability and deterrence.

Building on years of growing strategic convergence, the agreement reinforces defence as a core pillar of India-U.S. relations. Further bolstering defence ties, Indian aerospace giant, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited signed a billion-dollar deal, in November 2025, with the U.S.'s General Electric for fighter jet engines. Similarly the joint U.S.-India NASA ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite, launched in July 2025 for disaster resilience, agriculture and

infrastructure planning requirements adds to the technological jointmanship. At the infrastructural and regional levels, the inaugural Quad Ports of the Future Conference, held around India Maritime Week in Mumbai in early November 2025, brought together delegates from 24 Indo-Pacific partners, focusing on developing resilient and secure ports that leverage shared expertise and investments. Co-organised by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways and the Ministry of External Affairs, it emphasised that quality infrastructure development is a crucial dimension of Quad cooperation, underlining the broader regional connectivity.

Build deeper institutional understanding

Despite political challenges, this enduring institutional engagement reveals the India-U.S. relationship's dual-track dynamic. While political leaders manage strategic diplomacy with and national interests, the bureaucratic and institutional frameworks continue to sustain and evolve core collaborations. Despite institutional challenges such as domestic regulatory frameworks and concerns about technology interoperability, mutual regional interests drive this continuity.

Such institutional continuity may well be the relationship's greatest strength, fostering trust while shielding essential cooperation from political volatility. However, analysts have cautioned that bilateral ties may struggle to regain full momentum, even if trade disputes are resolved.

Looking ahead to 2026, both nations must invest in a deeper institutional understanding – defence and beyond. Learning about structures and institutions, appreciating the processes, and developing resilient relationships with other countries require continuous efforts. Expanding cooperation into broader sectors can build the mutual trust essential during political lows. The resilience of the India-U.S. partnership will depend heavily on these parallel institutional tracks, which have so far, quietly but effectively, maintained the alliance's robustness and strategic relevance in an ever-evolving geopolitical landscape. While political summits may pause, institutions keep the dialogue alive, working together on mutual areas, and having long-term partnerships that can survive the short and medium-term headwinds.

While political engagement appears low, institutional collaboration continues to expand

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The U.S.'s move
The arrogance by the Donald Trump administration, in utter violation of established laws, by taking the law into

its own hands and arresting the Venezuelan President, calls for popular condemnation. It is a shame and a pity that the Indian government is playing safe

with its diplomatic card, in a distinct departure from India's anti-imperialist stand.
S.V. Venugopal, Chennai

Cricket and politics
The release of Mustafizur Rahman by KKR, reportedly under the BCCI's direction, is a disgraceful attempt to appease communal

sentiments. Violence by extremist elements in Bangladesh, arising from failures of law and order, cannot be projected onto an individual cricketer with

no role in it.
Alur Venkat Revanth, Roorkee, Uttarakhand
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Stepping in with Maoism in rapid retreat

Maoism seems to be on its last legs with mass surrenders by Maoists in the Dandakarnaya (DK) and other regions since October 2025. While the movement was on the decline since 2011-12, and faced a setback in 2018, it changed the form of its organisation as well as struggle in August 2024. The polit bureau (PB) of the CPI(Maoist) decided to split into smaller formations to avoid encirclement by the security forces. It also decided to remain in defensive mode unless the situation warranted attacking the security forces.

However, the adoption of this strategy, the party split when some central committee (CC) members and DK special zonal committee members (since August 2024) and the general secretary, Nambala Keshava Rao (alias Basavaraju) was killed in May 2025 with almost his entire security posse was wiped out in a gun battle with the security forces in Maad (Narayanpur district in Chhattisgarh). Some leaders, particularly PB member, Venugopal alias Sonu favoured peace talks with the government and asked to consult with other senior leaders. When the government declined such conditional talks, he surrendered along with 60 others (with weapons) in Gadchiroli. Another senior cadre under the name 'Rupesh' (in-charge of the north and west sub-zonal bureau of DK) surrendered with 210 Maoists and their weapons in Jagdalpur. CC member (from Chhattisgarh) and person in-charge of the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) battalion-1, Madvi Hidma, was killed in Alluri Sitharamaraju district in Andhra Pradesh. Another CC member (from Chhattisgarh), Ramdher, surrendered recently in another special zone, Maharashtra-Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh.

The PLGA Battalion commander and the secretary South Bastar division, have also surrendered, some of the cadres



R.K. Vij
is a former IPS officer

of West Bastar and others are still holding out. The central military commission head of the CPI (Maoist), Thippiri Tirupati alias Deoji, is for continuing the fight. In October, the Ministry of Home Affairs said that only seven districts in India were Left Wing Extremism-affected districts, with only three in Chhattisgarh the 'most affected' districts.

How is the government going to address the issues which prompted the Maoists to organise the masses against the state? Some of the cadres who surrendered have said that their struggle for tribal rights in the areas is still ongoing. While the surrendered cadres are being given benefits under the surrender and rehabilitation (S and R) policy of the Centre and the States concerned, there is no doubt that the DK region which lacks even basic amenities needs to be developed.

First, the network of medical facilities should be extended to interior locations so that villagers have access to health care. Anaemia is a health issue among the tribals of DK. Cerebral malaria is also widespread in certain pockets. The lack of safe drinking water has led to outbreaks of dysentery. There is also the issue of snake bites which are not uncommon in the jungles. Health centres must cater to the needs of tribals in areas freed from the Maoist influence.

Second, most tribals depend on agriculture and forest produce for their basic needs. Maoists dug ponds and created orchards to win the confidence of the tribals and induct them into the movement. They also forced contractors to pay increased rates to villagers for plucking *tendu-patta* leaves. Later, they took up land levelling to increase production and gain even more support. The government should now ensure the supply of good seeds (including fish seeds) and create better irrigation facilities by constructing check dams. While the minimum support price of many items of

forest produce is notified by the government(s) annually, processing units need to be established where tribals can access them easily. The focus should be on increasing economic activity and the standard of living.

Third, more educational ashrams should be established in DK. This model has been quite successful in the past because it is not practical to open schools in villages that were sparsely populated. It is also necessary to undo the 'education' imparted to villagers by the Maoists through their *kranikari jantana sarkar* (revolutionary) schools. Most of the surrendered cadres are illiterate and need to be sent to government schools for basic education and rehabilitation.

Many surrendered cadres are already trained in useful vocations and their skills can be tapped. While the S and R policy provides financial benefits, jobs and housing, it must not be forgotten that most male cadres were forced to undergo vasectomy while in the Maoist movement. It is necessary they have a reverse vasectomy procedure to enable them to start a family. This facility must be provided free of cost in district hospitals. Similarly, the wives of the surrendered cadres should also be assisted with reproductive technology.

Many of the women who joined the Maoist movement were those who wanted to escape forced marriages by their families. Therefore, awareness needs to be spread through the *siyan* (elderly people) of villages to respect a girl's consent with respect to marriage.

The State government has been implementing the *Niyad Nellalar* ('Your good village') scheme to provide the benefits of government schemes (about 25) to villages which fall within five kilometres of the remote security camps (about 50). However, with districts gradually becoming free of Maoists, this scheme must be extended to previously affected villages.

The government needs to ensure consistent development in the affected tribal areas

A brewing storm over 'defections'

The focus is on the Telangana Speaker's verdict on BRS MLAs who 'defected'

STATE OF PLAY

M. Rajeev
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be entitled to bring to the notice of the Speaker the fact that a Member of the House had incurred disqualification under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution of India." The observation assumes importance as all the petitioners who filed their disqualification pleas with the Speaker are Members of the Assembly representing the BRS.

The manner in which the petitions have been dismissed has drawn the ire of the BRS and the Bharatiya Janata Party (which described the verdict as "unilateral"). The parties have alleged that the Speaker was acting at the behest of the Chief Minister, A. Revanth Reddy, and was in line with the Chief Minister's claims that there was no scope for any bypolls. The BRS has said

that it will explore legal avenues after a thorough study of the Speaker's verdict based on the Supreme Court's observation that the Speaker of a State Assembly does not enjoy constitutional immunity while acting as an adjudicating authority in disqualification petitions.

The action in delivering the verdict pertaining to disqualification petitions filed against five of the 10 MLAs appears largely driven by the deadline set by the Supreme Court. The Court, while dealing with the petitions filed by the BRS leaders, had said it was about time that Parliament reviewed its expectation that Assembly Speakers and Chairmen would live up to the dignity of their high office and crush the "evil of political defection" by deciding disqualification proceedings against legislators in time and without favour.

The Speaker did not factor in the observation made by the Supreme Court of India, in the *Speaker of Odisha Legislative Assembly vs Utkal Keshari Parida* which raised the *locus standi* of a non-member of the House in submitting a petition for disqualification.

The Court had held that "not only a member of the House, but any person interested would also

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO JANUARY 6, 1976

Mythological Programmes on TV Enjoyed Most by Villagers'

From Our Correspondent

VISAKHAPATNAM, Jan. 5

"Television audiences in rural India are highly appreciative of the mythological programmes dealing with subjects like Ramlila, Karna and Kunti and Devaki and Krishna. However, if these programmes are used for conveying development messages, even if they are enjoyed, the message is lost." This was stated in a paper presented at a symposium on "Mass media and integrated rural development" as part of the Indian Science Congress here to-day. In his paper, Mr. Binod C. Agarwal of the Research and Evaluation Cell of the Space Applications Centre, Ahmedabad, said the preliminary findings of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) showed that the farmers preferred programmes with a direct development message.

Data were being collected by anthropologists stationed in nine villages of seven States to which the SITE programmes were beamed. The audience in general showed a high level of awareness of the family planning campaigns due to repeated exposure to the family planning programmes, but the programmes had not generated any further interest. Instead, the audience seemed indifferent to the family planning programmes. Culinary programmes for women audiences had evoked mixed reactions. Observations showed that

schoolchildren were the most sincere viewers in the villages under study. Drop-outs and non-school going children were induced to come to school due to the TV programmes.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JANUARY 6, 1926

Excavations at Ur

Remarkable New Find

(British Official Wireless)

LEAFIELD (Oxford), Jan. 6

Excavations at Ur of The Chaldees have led to the discovery of the site of the place of Dungi, who reigned 2,250 years before Christ. It was already the custom, as it is to-day, to bury, in the foundation of buildings, relics typical of the time and such were found by Mr. Leonard Woolley, leader of the excavations. They were in brick boxes and consisted of copper statuettes of Dungi, carrying on his head a basket of mortar, of the laying of first brick and stone tablets inscribed with the dedication of the work.

Old alliances, new markets: Two-path formula for export growth

India has replaced its lost U.S. sales by deepening its ties with existing partners and exploring new destinations

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy
Nitika Francis
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Last month, we noted that India's trade data for November had shown a continued resilience in exports despite mounting U.S. tariffs. Not only did India's overall exports grow, but shipments to the U.S. also rebounded. However, the exact drivers were harder to discern at the time, as detailed data were still awaited.

Foreign Trade Performance Analysis data show several new trends. This analysis focuses only on items where India's export dependence on the U.S. was already significant. To isolate the impact of the tariffs, the figures for September through November 2025 were compared against the 2023-24 average for those same months.

Not all commodities exported to the U.S. were impacted by tariffs. Notably, exports of telecom instruments to the U.S. – most of which are not tariffed, particularly smartphones – surged by 237% between the periods considered (Chart 1A). Exports of electrical machinery also grew by 15%.

That brings us to the items hit by the U.S. tariffs and other challenges. Exports of pearls and precious stones declined by about 78.5% between the periods considered (Chart 1B). Gold jewellery exports to the U.S. declined by 39%, cotton fabrics by 23%, marine products by 17% and ready-made cotton by 4.6%.

Overall, the surge in smartphone exports to the U.S. masked the decline in sectors hit by tariffs. This explains why total exports to the U.S. rose despite the new duties. But what about the items that did suffer? The explanation follows two distinct paths: for some commodities, the blow from U.S. tariffs was partially blunted (Chart 2B), while for others, Indian ex-

A shift in India's trade gaze

The data (charts) were sourced from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. For this analysis, only the top 20 exported products and the top 20 countries they were exported to, in any given month, were considered to narrow the focus

CHART 1A: % change in exports to the U.S. between Sept.-Nov. 2025 and the 2023-24 average for the same months

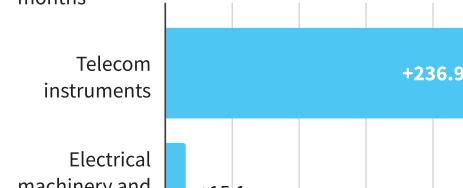


CHART 1B: % change in exports to the U.S. between Sept.-Nov. 2025 and the 2023-24 average for the same months

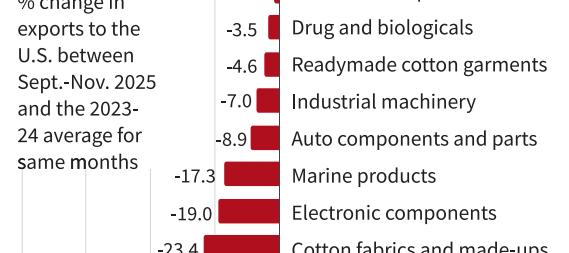


CHART 2A: % change in total exports between Sept.-Nov. 2025 and the 2023-24 average for the same months

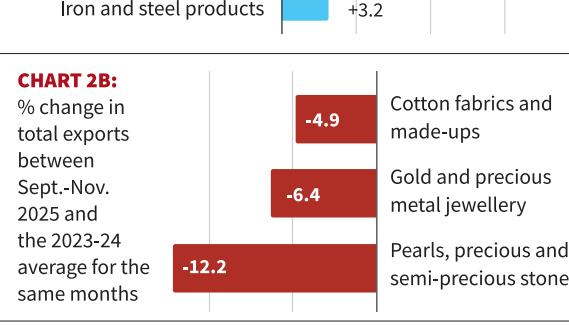
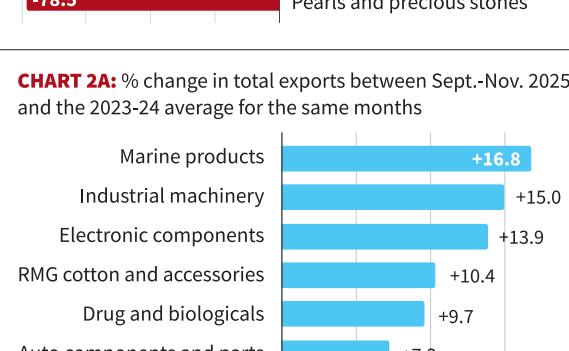


TABLE 3A:

Partner	2025	Change
Total	2557.8	+16.8
U.S.	570.0	-17.3
China	556.6	+22.8
Belgium	124.5	+124.3
Italy	56.3	+23.3
Spain	51.8	-
UAE	42.6	-5.1
U.K.	31.7	-0.3
The Netherlands	31.4	+56.0
Germany	30.2	+65.3
Malaysia	28.0	+81.0
France	23.9	+41.2
Hong Kong	17.9	+8.1
South Korea	14.9	+466.6

TABLE 3B:

Partner	2025	Change
Total	1989.2	+10.4
U.S.	580.3	-4.6
U.K.	180.8	+15.5
UAE	163.5	+29.9
Germany	117.9	+20.0
The Netherlands	107.3	+16.4
France	87.4	+22.6
Australia	61.5	+1.1
Italy	57.8	+28.8
Spain	49.1	New
Saudi Arabia	40.3	+20.8
Belgium	31.4	+20.1
South Africa	13.9	-6.2
China	12.0	+29.1

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Duration of daily OPD boycott by Odisha doctors

2 In hours. Doctors across government hospitals in Odisha began a two-hour daily boycott of OPD services, affecting outpatient care from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The protest is over long-pending demands, including filling over 50 percent vacant posts. PTI

Number of presumed deaths during Hasina-era abductions

287 A Bangladesh commission investigating abductions during former PM Sheikh Hasina's rule reported that at least 287 individuals are presumed dead. The investigation covered 1569 abduction cases. AFP

Maximum term limit plans for Malaysia's Prime Minister

10 In years. Malaysia's PM Anwar Ibrahim announced plans to introduce legislation limiting the tenure of the PM to a maximum of 10 years or two full terms. The move aims to prevent leaders from clinging to power and ensure generational transition. AFP

Reward amount on inter-State criminal arrested

1 In ₹ lakh. Police arrested an inter-State criminal carrying a bounty of ₹1 lakh after a brief encounter in Gurugram. The accused is wanted in nearly two dozen cases, including attempted murder and robbery, across Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. PTI

Value of the bridge project to connect Sagar Island in Bengal

1,670 In ₹ crore. CM Mamata Banerjee laid the foundation stone for the Gangasagar Setu, a 5-km bridge over the Muriganga river connecting Sagar Island. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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What does the SHANTI Bill change?

How open is India's nuclear sector now? What role will private firms play? What powers does the AERB now have? How self-reliant is India's nuclear programme? How has nuclear liability changed? Why is the Opposition opposing SHANTI?

EXPLAINER

Saeed Pande

The story so far: Parliament has cleared the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy in India (SHANTI) Bill, despite Opposition demands for amendments and review by a Select Committee. To achieve India's energy security needs, the government has boosted the Nuclear Energy Mission with ₹20,000 crore dedicated to Small Modular Reactors and advanced pressurised water reactors. India's nuclear power sector has remained State-controlled and unchanged since 1956. The private and foreign partnership has been restricted under earlier laws – the Atomic Energy Act, 1962, and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages Act, 2010. Private and Foreign companies avoided India due to its strict liability laws.

What is the SHANTI Bill?

The SHANTI Bill is an overarching legislation that opens India's nuclear power sector to private and foreign participation, which was earlier entirely State-controlled and deeply regulated. Under the Bill, private Indian companies can seek licences to own, build, and operate nuclear power plants. It is also open for foreign supplier participation.

The SHANTI Bill allows up to 49% private participation, while maintaining 51% government control over sensitive activities such as nuclear fuel production, heavy water manufacturing, radioactive waste management, safety mechanisms, licensing, and strategic oversight.

The Bill ends the monopoly of Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) in plant operations. It allows private companies and joint ventures to build, own, and operate nuclear power plants. The private sector will be involved in fuel fabrication, equipment manufacturing, plant operations, and research and development. It will essentially be a public-private partnership model aimed at attracting private capital with government oversight.

The Bill facilitates advanced nuclear technologies by enabling private participation and regulatory clarity. It supports the deployment of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and indigenous reactor designs, contributing to the clean energy transition and long-term energy security.

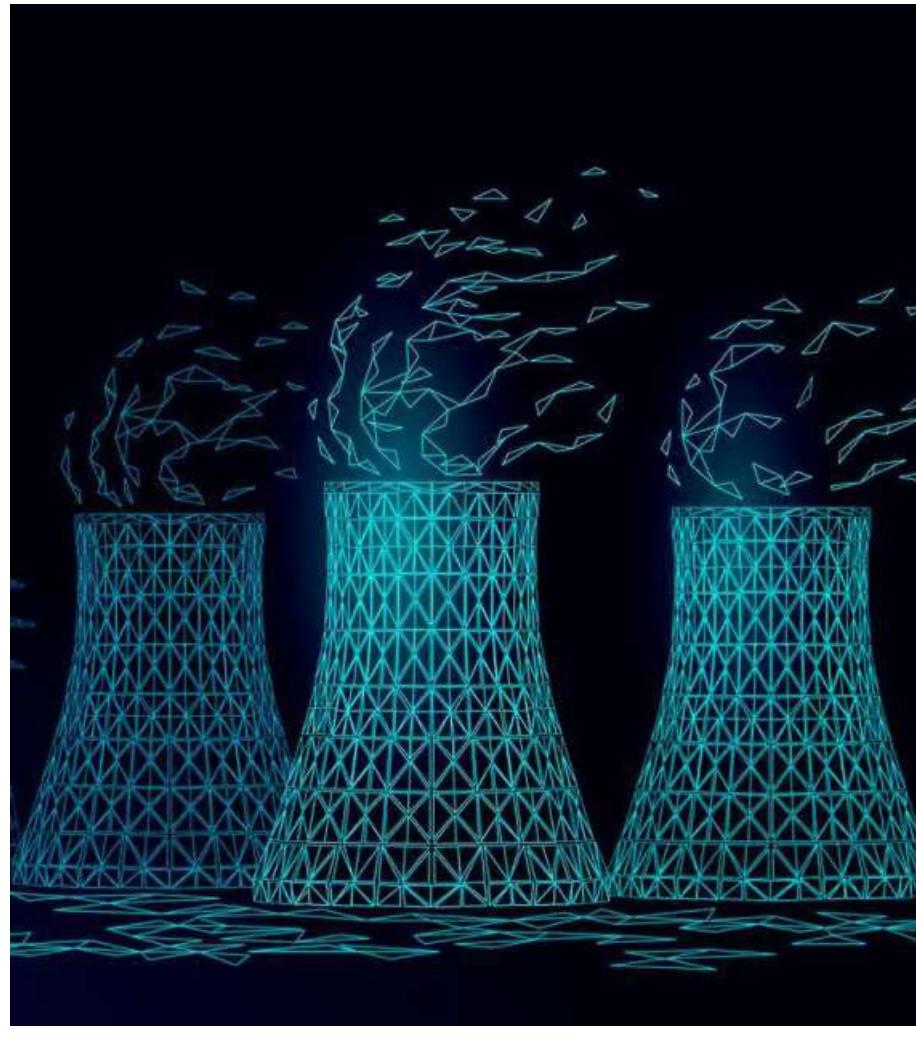
What is the role of AERB?

The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB), constituted in 1983 under the Atomic Energy Act, has now been given statutory status and is answerable to Parliament rather than solely to the executive.

The AERB is responsible for ensuring nuclear safety, radiation protection, emergency preparedness, and quality assurance across civilian nuclear installations. It issues safety measures, licences and standards; administers industrial safety provisions of the Factories Act, 1948, for units under the Department of Atomic Energy as per Section 23 of the Atomic Energy Act and conducts inspections to prevent radiation hazards. It plays a crucial role in strengthening regulatory oversight under the SHANTI Bill due to increased private sector participation. However, the Bill has been criticised for concentrating power in one institution.

What safeguards are in place?

The Bill does not explicitly permit foreign direct investment in the nuclear power



GETTY IMAGES

sector. The private companies will have to seek authorisation from the AERB. Authorisations are required for setting up a plant range from production, possession, to disposal of radioactive material and radiation generation equipment, as well as for establishing, operating, or withdrawing radioactive facilities.

The government controls the reprocessing and management of spent fuel and high-level radioactive waste; production and upgrading of heavy water; enrichment and isotopic separation of radioactive substances. The law also provides for the establishment of a nuclear liability fund to meet compensation needs in case of nuclear accidents.

What has changed with respect to liability?

Compared to the earlier regime, the SHANTI Bill ensures that the liability aspect is transparent and predictable for operators. Liability caps are fixed as follows: ₹3,000 crore for large plants of 3,600 MW capacity; ₹1,500 crore for medium plants of 1,500-3,600 MW; and ₹100 crore for Small Modular Reactors of 150 MW capacity. Penalties for legal violations in cases of severe breach are capped at ₹1 crore.

The Union government will bear liability beyond the operator's cap, with additional support from the proposed nuclear liability fund. Earlier, operators could hold suppliers liable for defective parts, faulty equipment, design inefficiency, and deliberate acts causing damage. The current Bill removes supplier accountability completely.

What is the government's viewpoint? The Centre aims to strengthen India's energy security by diversifying the power mix, reducing dependence on fossil fuels and fuel imports, and expanding atomic energy capacity.

Energy security is one of the main aims for boosting India's development index. It ensures 24x7 baseload power as compared to solar energy and wind energy, which are subject to geographical

conditions. It will be a boost for the energy sector, which is still heavily dependent on coal. It also ensures an enhancement for technology and the economy.

Nuclear power ensures clean energy with very low carbon emissions. It facilitates achieving India's net-zero targets for 2070. The Bill may also revive the stalled civil nuclear deals with the U.S., France, and Japan, reduce dependence on Russia alone, and enhance India's image as a responsible global nuclear player.

Why does India need nuclear energy? India struggles with solar, wind, and hydro energy due to its geographical and climate variables and still majorly relies on coal for electricity generation. Storage and grid integration costs for renewables remain high.

Thus, having sufficient baseload generation capacity is mandatory for an affordable and unrestricted supply. In order to achieve energy security for the growing economy, India has to strengthen and expand its nuclear energy sector. Moreover, the electricity mix must have enough baseload generation capacity in order to make it affordable and reliable for consumers. Nuclear power plants are one of the most effective in ensuring this.

What is India's nuclear energy mission?

India has a largely indigenous nuclear power programme based on a fuel cycle that aims to utilise India's vast thorium reserves. Currently, India manages 25 nuclear reactors in seven power plants – 21 pressurised heavy water reactors and four light water reactors – all managed by NPCIL.

According to R.B. Grover, distinguished Professor Emeritus at the Homi Bhabha National Institute and member of the Atomic Energy Commission, as India does not have enough uranium, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited has mastered the design and operation of pressurised heavy water reactors. The Bhabha Atomic Research Centre has developed technologies to reprocess

spent fuel to recover valuable materials and handle nuclear waste. In that sense, India is independent and self-sufficient in its nuclear power generation. India has operationalised the fast breeder reactor for thorium use.

Why has the Opposition strongly criticised the Bill?

The Opposition argues that the Bill dilutes accountability by allowing profit-driven private participation while placing liability on the State and society. There is a fear of repeating incidents like the Bhopal Gas tragedy, where accountability and remuneration were evaded by the foreign firms in spite of recourse to civil courts; moreover, such recourse is unavailable according to the new Law. Removing supplier liability and capping operator liability and penalties at a nominal cost, as compared to the actual volume and expanse of damages, is considered unreasonable. The 'polluter pays' principle has been undermined, and this compromises public safety.

Private firms have no liability for accident costs, public safety issues and long-term risks. The cap on operator liability does not change in 15 years despite inflation or long-term assessment of health, environment, livelihood cost of any serious accident.

The cases such as Fukushima and Chernobyl point out the huge expense of liability. In the case of the Fukushima disaster, the actual civil damages were 700 times more than the cap proposed by the SHANTI bill.

Section 39 of the Bill seeks to override the RTI Act of 2005. It has raised several concerns as it seeks to remove public interest review and public appeal mechanisms. This will make the most crucial nuclear sector-related information – including plant details, operations, mechanisms, regulatory submissions and data on nuclear materials – 'restricted'. This dilutes the transparency and questions the public accountability of the proposed system. The RTI Act 2005, in its wisdom, already exempts revealing information regarding India's security, national interest, commercial information, and personal data. But these exemptions are subject to justification in cases of public accountability and public interest.

Section 42 overrides occupational safety, health and working conditions for nuclear facilities. Nuclear workers are removed from the country's general labour safety framework. This has triggered opposition from ten central trade unions, including the Samyukta Kisan Morcha and the National Coordination Committee of Electricity Employees and Engineers, who have termed the Bill "draconian."

The Opposition insists that the Bill is vendor-driven despite India's self-reliance in nuclear technology. It argues that India has deep thorium reserves, around which nuclear reactors were built, which should be utilised. The Opposition demands that the private companies be compelled to install India's technology.

The Bill lacks provisions for mandatory public hearings, environmental impact assessment disclosures, community consent mechanisms, regular public reporting of safety inspections, or Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Opposition also cited the example of France, where all nuclear reactors are under government control. The Bill is criticised for being pro-profit, pro-oligarch, catering to the crony capitalists while gambling with public safety.

Saeed Pande is a freelance writer with a focus on politics, current affairs, international relations, and geopolitics

THE GIST

▼ Parliament has cleared the SHANTI Bill, opening India's State-controlled nuclear power sector to private and foreign participation, ending NPCIL's monopoly while retaining 51% government control over sensitive activities.

▼ The Bill removes supplier liability, caps operator liability, and shifts responsibility beyond the cap to the Union government and a nuclear liability fund, a move defended as providing predictable liability but criticised as diluting accountability and the 'polluter pays' principle.

▼ The Centre argues the law will strengthen energy security, provide 24x7 baseload power, support clean energy and net-zero targets, and enable SMRs and advanced reactor technologies, while the Opposition warns of weakened transparency, safety, and public accountability.

BUILDING BLOCKS

What remote-sensing reveals about plants, forests, and minerals from space

Remote-sensing technology allows engineers and scientists to map land, forests, water bodies, and minerals without physically touching the ground; by detecting spectral signatures from visible and invisible light, satellites and drones reveal the health and location of natural resources

Vasudevan Mukunth

Say you're on a desert island on a quest for buried treasure. You've lost your map and run out of clues. Now you have two options: you could walk around with a shovel, digging holes at random and hoping for the best, or you could fly a drone overhead equipped with special cameras that can 'see' through the sand or detect the magnetic pull of the gold coins.

This isn't a pirate move but an existing technology called remote-sensing. It's what engineers and scientists use to map the earth's resources without ever touching the ground. From tracking the health of a forest to finding water deep underground, their satellites and drones are changing the way humans understand our planet.

What is remote-sensing?

Our eyes only see visible light, e.g., the colours of the rainbow. But the sun emits many other types of electromagnetic energy that we can't see, like infrared and ultraviolet light.

Everything on the earth, including the rocks, the water, the trees, etc., reflects these energies differently. The reflections are called spectral signatures; they are sort of like the fingerprint of the materials these objects are made of.

By studying this light, a sensor installed onboard a satellite can look at a patch of ground and say, "This reflects a lot of near-infrared light but absorbs red light. Therefore, it must be a healthy plant." This is the basic idea of remote-sensing.

What do different materials 'look' like?

Farmers and forest rangers use satellites to check the health of plants. Healthy leaves are full of chlorophyll, which absorbs red light for photosynthesis and reflects near-infrared light to avoid overheating.

Scientists use a formula called the normalised difference vegetation index to determine if a plant is healthy based on its spectral signatures. If a satellite observes high near-infrared reflection, the crops are healthy. If the reflection of that part of the spectrum drops, the plants might be thirsty or sick.

According to a review published in the *Journal of Plant Ecology* in 2008, by analysing the spectral signatures, researchers can distinguish between different plant communities and tree species across entire forests.

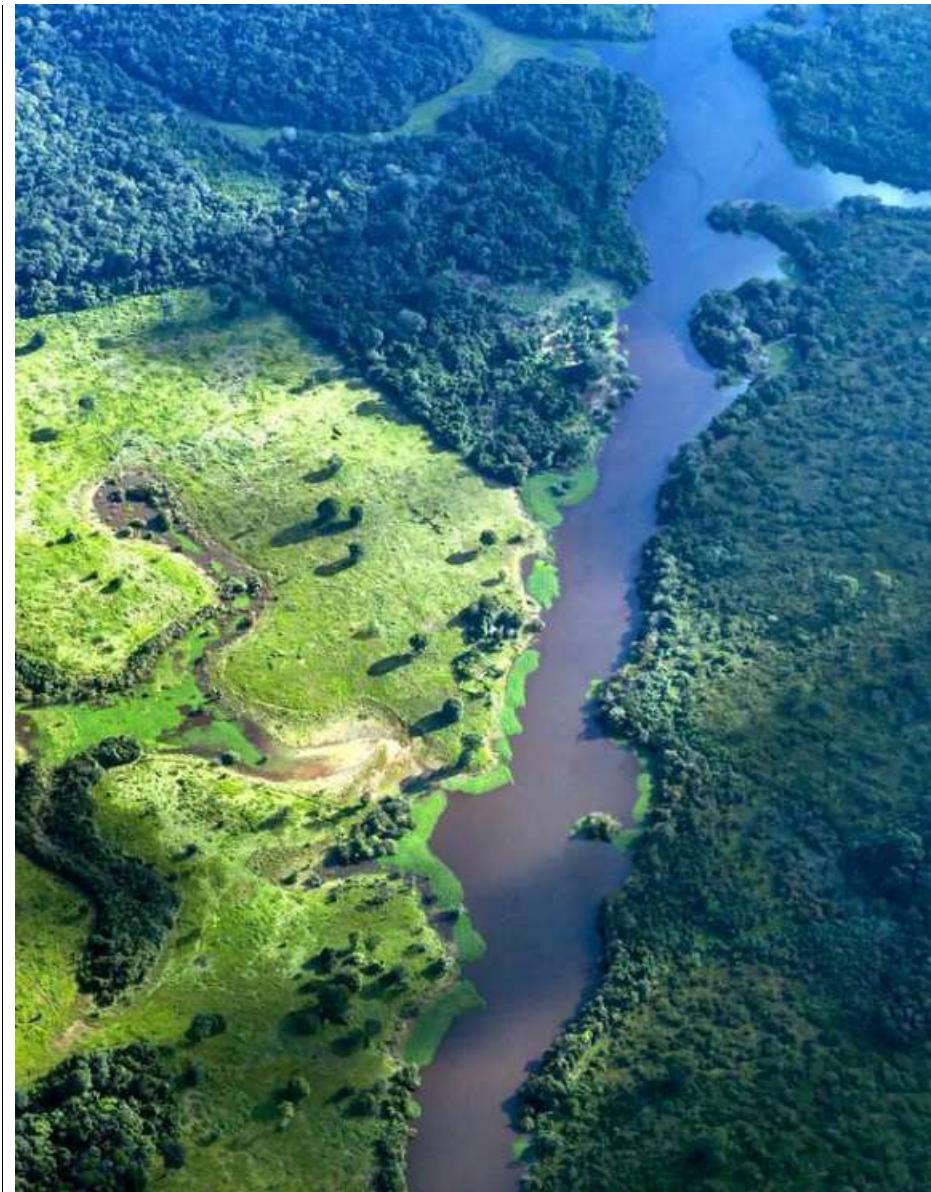
Such mapping is the first critical step in calculating the biomass of a forest, which is essentially weighing the trees from space, to understand how much carbon they are storing to help fight climate change.

How do satellites map water?

To map water bodies from space, scientists mainly use two complementary techniques: optical indexing, using reflected sunlight, and synthetic aperture radar, using active radio waves.

The optical indexing technique makes use of the fact that water reflects visible green light, which is why deep water often looks blue-green, but strongly absorbs near-infrared and shortwave infrared light. These readings are combined in the normalised difference water index (NDWI).

This way, in remote-sensing data, the index has a high positive value over water



GETTY IMAGES

bodies and a negative value over land. A newer version called modified NDWI, or MNDWI, uses only shortwave infrared light. This is often preferred in cities because it's better at distinguishing between water and the shadows cast by tall buildings.

Of course, optical cameras have a weakness: they can't see through clouds or at night. To map water in these conditions, including floods during a storm, scientists use synthetic aperture radar (SAR). To understand how this technology works, please see *The Hindu* article 'What makes the NASA-ISRO SAR satellite so special?', dated July 27, 2025.

In SAR's gaze, surfaces like soil, grass, and buildings – which scatter radio waves in all directions – look bright. Calm water, however, is very smooth, almost like a mirror, and looks pitch black. So by looking for these black matches in a radar image, scientists can map floodwaters even through a cyclone.

Satellites can also estimate water quality. Muddy water reflects light differently than clear water, and water full of algae has a specific spectral signature. This helps environmentalists track pollution or harmful algal blooms.

So much for features above the earth's surface; how do scientists and engineers use satellites to find what's underground?

How do satellites map subsurface features?

Experts look for clues on the surface or use different types of physics.

Valuable minerals like copper, gold, and lithium often form deep

underground, but geological forces push some of them to the surface over millions of years. Even if they're just traces in the soil, hyperspectral sensors can find them.

When sunlight strikes an object, it's reflected. A normal camera may group that reflection into a combination of three main colours: red, green, and blue, e.g. a hyperspectral sensor uses a prism or grating to split that light into hundreds of very narrow, continuous colours and measures the intensity of light at every single frequency across the spectrum.

As a result these sensors can create a spectral signature for every pixel in the image.

So while a 'normal' satellite might look at a forest and say, "This is green. It's a tree", a hyperspectral sensor could look at the same forest and say, "This is a banyan tree. It has a nitrogen deficiency. And the rock next to it is limestone, not granite."

According to a 2023 study in *Ore Geology Reviews*, geologists also use these sensors to even map alteration zones, areas where heat and fluids from deep underground have changed the chemistry of surface rocks.

Oil and gas are trapped deep in the earth but small amounts often leak upwards through very small cracks, a process called micro-seepage. When this gas reaches the surface, it changes the soil chemistry and can even turn the leaves of plants slightly yellow, by stressing them out.

Satellites can detect these subtle changes in vegetation health and soil colour, giving exploration companies a sense of where to drill.

What if there isn't micro-seepage?

If there's no seepage, there's no way satellites' sensors can 'see' the oil or gas directly. However, satellites are still crucial in these situations because, instead of looking for the oil, geologists use satellites to look for the container holding the oil.

Oil and gas don't just lie in big underground lakes, they're also trapped in the pores of rocks and are usually naturally squeezed into specific shapes called traps. The most common trap is an anticline, where rock layers curve upwards like a dome or an arch.

NASA's Landsat satellites or Japan's Advanced Spaceborne Thermal Emission and Reflection Radiometer (ASTER) sensor onboard NASA's Terra satellite take pictures of exposed rock layers on the earth's surface. And if geologists see layers on the surface that are folded into the shape of a dome, there's a good chance they're folded the same way deeper underground.

Another technique makes use of the fact that oil forms when organic materials are buried deep and 'cooked' by the earth's heat for millions of years. This happens in deep depressions called sedimentary basins.

Over the oceans, satellites measure the height of the sea surface with incredible precision. Large underwater geological structures, which might contain oil traps, have a gravitational pull that actually piles water up above them. By mapping these bumps in the ocean, scientists can map the rock structures below the seafloor.

Oil is found in sedimentary rock like sandstone or limestone, which is generally not magnetic. However, the basement rock deep below it, such as granite or volcanic rock, is magnetic. So satellites measure the earth's magnetic field to find where the magnetic basement is very deep.

And where the basement is deep, it means there could be a thick layer of sedimentary rock on top, with the prospect of oil.

In effect, when there's no micro-seepage, satellites can't say "there's oil here" but rather that "there's a geological structure here capable of holding oil".

How do satellites track groundwater?

Since water is heavy, a large underground aquifer actually has a stronger gravitational pull than dry rock.

From 2002 to 2017, NASA operated its Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) mission with two satellites that chased each other around the earth. When the lead satellite flew over a heavy underground aquifer, gravity would pull it slightly faster, changing the distance between the two satellites.

By measuring this change in distance, scientists could weigh the water underground.

One famous 2009 study published in *Nature* used GRACE data to show that groundwater levels in North India were dropping at alarming rates because they were being extracted to irrigate crops.

Remote-sensing makes resource exploration faster, cheaper, and more environmentally friendly. Instead of drilling thousands of holes to find oil or water, we can target specific areas.

It also helps us protect resources: by monitoring forests and aquifers from space, we can ensure we aren't using them up faster than nature can replenish them.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the difference between "artist" and "artiste"?

(R. Ramasubramanian, Coimbatore)

The word "artist" is a general term used to refer to anyone who is skilled at something. For example, he/she may be good at drawing or painting. Ravi Varma and M. F. Hussain are considered great artists. An individual who excels in cooking or in picking locks can also be called an "artist". Musicians, actors and others who entertain people are also called artists.

While the word "artist" has the stress on the first syllable, "artiste" has the stress on the second syllable. The 'i' in the second syllable of "artiste" is pronounced like the 'i' in "fit", "bit" and "hit".

The word "artiste" is someone who practises a performing art: Dancers, singers, acrobats, clowns can all be called "artistes". Since painters, cooks and thieves do not usually perform in front of an audience, they are not generally referred to as "artistes".

What is the meaning of "higgledy piggledy"?

(C. Karikal Chozhan, Thirupparai Thurai, Trichy District)

The 'i' in the word 'pig' is pronounced like the 'i' in "big", "wig" and "dig". The 'i' in the word 'higgledy' is pronounced like the 'i' in "fit", "bit" and "hit".

When you say that something is "higgledy piggledy", it means that it is completely mixed up. Things are all over the place in a mixed muddle; everything is untidy. Here is an example:

When I walked into her room, I found papers higgledy piggledy on the floor.

What is the meaning of "use your loaf"?

(V. Amritha Kalyani, Chrompet, Chennai)

If somebody tells you to "use your loaf", they want you to use your common sense; they want you to think carefully about what you are doing or saying. Perhaps what you are saying is not very intelligent, so they want you to think harder. This expression is an example of Cockney rhyming slang. The 'loaf' here refers to a loaf of bread; 'bread' rhymes with the word 'head'. Here are some examples:

Why didn't you use your loaf and cover the computer before you started painting the room?

The angry chairman told the manager to use his loaf.

If you use your loaf, you can predict your opponent's next move.

What is the meaning of SOS?

(S. Suresh, Royapettah, Chennai)

In the old days, when you were out on the ocean, sailing on a ship, it wasn't possible for you to talk to people on land. If the ship's captain wished to get a message across to someone, he had to make use of Morse code – a radiotelegraph signal.

When a ship was in distress; for example if the ship were in danger of sinking, the captain sent an SOS. SOS was and still is the signal used to indicate that a ship is in trouble. The letters SOS were chosen because they were very easy to transmit and easy to recognise in Morse code.

Later, people created stories about why the letters SOS were chosen. Some said that it was an abbreviation for "Save our souls". Others maintained that it was an abbreviation for "Save our ship".

Nowadays, any appeal for help can be called an SOS; it is not restricted to ships alone.

Published in *The Hindu* on March 16, 1999

Word of the day

Imbroglio:

a complicated, confused, or embarrassing situation that causes many problems

Synonyms:

difficult, disagreement, controversy

Usage:

The deal ended in an imbroglio.

Pronunciation:

newsthw.live/imbrogliopro

International Phonetic Alphabet:

/imbrəgliəʊ/

THE DAILY QUIZ

As the U.S. once again invokes hemispheric influence in its dealings with Venezuela, this quiz revisits the Roosevelt Corollary and how it reshaped the Monroe Doctrine

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

What was the intent of the Monroe Doctrine issued in 1823?

QUESTION 2

What geopolitical crisis preceded the articulation of the Roosevelt Corollary?

QUESTION 3

How does the Roosevelt Corollary expand the Monroe Doctrine?

QUESTION 4

What was one of the earliest uses of the Roosevelt Corollary in practice?

QUESTION 5

Which U.S. policy later renounced the Roosevelt Corollary's interventionist thrust?

**Visual Question:**

The American intervention in which Latin-American country is depicted in this cartoon from March 18, 1905? PUBLIC DOMAIN

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. He became the Nawab of Pataudi in 1952 on the death of his father. Where is Pataudi located in independent India? **Ans: Haryana**

2. Mansur Ali Khan was an Oxford Blue and the first Indian captain there. At which Oxford college did he study? **Ans: Balliol**

3. Why is July 1, 1961, an important date in the life and career of Mansur Ali Khan? **Ans: He was involved in a car accident that left him blind in one eye**

4. Following an injury to regular skipper Nari Contractor, Mansur Ali Khan became the youngest Test captain ever at 21 years and 77 days. Against which country? **Ans: West Indies**

5. Thanks to his superb athletic ability and speed while (particularly) patrolling the cover area, what nickname was given to him? **Ans: Tiger**

6. Under his captaincy, India scored its first-ever series win overseas in 1968. Against which country? **Ans: New Zealand**

7. Name his popular actor wife and son. **Ans: Sharmila Tagore and Saif Ali Khan**

8. Visual: Name the trophy, instituted in 2007 to mark India's 75th anniversary of its first-ever Test against England, that Mansur Ali Khan is handing over to Rahul Dravid. **Ans: Pataudi Trophy named after his father, Iftikhar Ali Khan**

9. Early Birds: Piyali Tuli | Sudhir Thapa | Rajib Ganguly | Dodo Jayaditya | Abhay Krishan

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

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

From Page One**Trump asserts India cut Russian oil to please him**

In the past, the MEA has termed the American imposition of unilateral sanctions as "double standards", given that the U.S. itself buys Russian oil, uranium and critical minerals.

While Mr. Graham did not specify the date of the meeting, Mr. Kwatra had hosted a bipartisan U.S. Senate delegation on December 2 at the Indian Embassy in Washington, where Mr. Graham and Senator Richard Blumenthal were present. Both Senators are leading co-sponsors of a Russia Sanctions Bill introduced in the U.S. Senate that mandates up to 500% tariffs on countries that continue to purchase oil or uranium from Russia.

Mr. Trump had made the claim that India had promised to cut Russian oil imports "completely" on several occasions. As *The Hindu* reported on Monday, Indian oil importers had cut Russian oil imports from June to October in 2025, but imports of Russian oil, along with imports of U.S. oil, rose sharply to seven-month highs in November. Sources in the Union Commerce Ministry quoted in *The Hindu* report had said that despite the cuts, trade negotiations with the U.S. had not moved forward, indicating some "frustration" with the process in Delhi.

Announcing during the press conference that he expected the Russian Sanctions Act would be passed soon, Mr. Trump said he expected India to be amongst the countries affected by it.

SC denies bail to Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam

While Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam were found to have exercised "command authority", the judges noted that the co-accused lacked any "independent ability" to mobilise resources or exert organisational leverage and posed no "systemic risk".

"In the case of the alleged masterminds, namely Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid, the prosecution material comprises direct, corroborative, and contemporaneous evidence.... Where evidentiary strength varies materially between accused persons, the need for continued detention likewise varies," the Bench observed.

The appeals before the top court arose from a September 2 judgment of the Delhi High Court refusing bail to the accused.

Delay not a 'trump card'

Addressing the defence's principal contention that prolonged incarceration without trial offends the right to personal liberty, the Bench underscored that delay, by itself, cannot operate as a "trump card" to override the statutory constraints governing bail under UAPA.

"The jurisprudence of this court does not support a construction whereby delay simpliciter eclipses a statutory regime enacted by Parliament to address offences of a special category," the ruling, authored by Justice Kumar, underscored.

The court also rejected the defence claim that the delay in the commencement of the trial was attributable solely to the Delhi Police and constituted a "fatal flaw" in the prosecution's case. It noted that a perusal of the trial court record indicated that the prosecution had, at various stages, expressed readiness to commence arguments on charge, while objections and requests for deferment were raised on behalf of the accused.

However, acknowledging that the prolonged pre-trial custody of Mr. Khalid and Mr. Imam raises a "constitutional concern", the Bench directed the trial court to expedite the proceedings.

Maduro produced in New York court

No Venezuela death toll has been announced, but Defence Minister Vladimir Padrino Lopez said a "large part" of Mr. Maduro's security team was killed "in cold blood," as well as military personnel and civilians.

Mr. Trump said late Sunday that the United States was "in charge" of the South American nation, while U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said discussions of Venezuela holding elections following Maduro's ouster were "premature".

Approach govt. on EPFO wage ceiling revision: SC

The plea submitted that the inconsistency has prevailed over revisions even though the Public Accounts Committee of the 16th Lok Sabha and the EPFO's own Sub-Committee on Enhancing Coverage and Managing Related Litigation, in 2022, had recommended both periodic and rational revision of the ceiling.

"But despite approval by the Central Board (EPF) in July 2022, the Central Government has not acted upon these recommendations," the plea highlighted.

It flagged two major problems—the absence of a prescribed timeline for regular revision of the wage ceiling under the EPFO and the arbitrary revision of the ceiling leading to "exclusion and reduction in the coverage of the scheme".

The petition submitted that the inclusive framework of the scheme during the initial 30 years has changed into an exclusionary one in the past three decades.

Police in States step up social media monitoring

Dedicated cells rise from 262 in 2020 to 365 in 2024; numbers high in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37); officials cite evolving crime trends for rise in cells

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Over the past five years, police forces across States have dedicated significant resources to monitoring social media platforms, an analysis of police infrastructure data shows. The number of dedicated social media monitoring cells rose from 262 across 28 States and eight Union Territories as of January 1, 2020, to 365 as of January 1, 2024.

Most of such cells are operational in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37).

In Manipur, where ethnic violence erupted on May 3, 2023, the number of police social media monitoring cells rose from three on January 1, 2020, to 16 on January 1, 2024. The expansion occurred despite the Internet being suspended in the State for about 140 days in 2023.

Assam increased the number of social media monitoring cells from one in 2022 to 37 in 2024. West Bengal expanded its network from two to 38 cells, while Punjab doubled its capacity, increasing the

Expanding surveillance

There were 262 social media monitoring cells across 28 States and eight Union Territories as on January 1, 2020. The number rose to 365 as on January 1, 2024

■ Most such cells are operational in Bihar (52), Maharashtra (50), Punjab (48), West Bengal (38) and Assam (37)

■ In ethnic violence-hit Manipur, the number of cells increased from 3 on January 1, 2020, to 16 on January 1, 2024, this despite a 140-day Internet shutdown in 2023

■ Assam increased the number of its social media cells from 1 in 2022 to 37 in 2024, West Bengal from 2 to 38 and Punjab from 24 to 48

■ The number of cybercrime police stations increased from 376 as on January 1, 2020, to 624 as on January 1, 2024.

■ The number of drones available with police forces in States and Union Territories increased from 1,010 as on January 1, 2023 to 1,147 as on January 1, 2024

The annual data on police organisations (DoPO) reports are prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), a police think tank under the Union Home Ministry

number from 24 to 48 between 2022 and 2024.

Earlier, social media monitoring cells were not counted separately or were part of the cybercrime police stations. They began to function as distinct units from 2021, according to Data on Police Organisations (DoPO) reports for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

The annual DoPO reports are prepared by the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D), a police think tank under the Union Home Ministry.

The cells started featuring in the reports since 2021, which includes data for 2020.

Meanwhile, the number of cybercrime police stations increased from 376 as of January 1, 2020, to 624 as of January 1, 2024.

Evolving crime trends'

Police officials attribute the need for dedicated cells to track and pre-empt the evolving crime trends on social media platforms such as Facebook, X, Snapchat, WhatsApp and Instagram.

The 2024 DoPO report

said that the number of drones available with police forces in States and Union Territories stood at 1,147, up from 1,010 as of January 1, 2023.

The report also noted that 5,92,839 police posts were vacant across the country, against the total sanctioned strength of 27,55,274.

Of the total sanctioned strength of 27.55 lakh, the actual strength comprised 3,30,621 personnel belonging to Scheduled Castes, 2,31,928 to Scheduled Tribes and 6,37,774 to Other Backward Classes.

Minister hints at T.N. govt.'s plan to provide cash as Pongal gift

The Hindu Bureau
PUDUCHERRY

Home Minister A. Namassivayam on Monday hinted at the government's plan to provide cash to ration cardholders as Pongal gift in the Union Territory.

'Announcement soon'
"The Chief Minister will make an announcement on the subject. The BJP has also requested Chief Minister to consider giving cash to ration cardholders as Pongal assistance," he said in reply to a query at a press conference.

He was responding to a question on whether the AIADMK-BJP government has plans to provide cash

taining five grocery items with a bag free of cost to card holders as Pongal gift.

Around 3.47 lakh ration cardholders in the four regions of the Union Territory will get the kit containing rice (4kg), Naatu Sakkarai (1 kg), Moong Dal (1 kg), Sunflower Oil (1 litre) and Ghee (300 gm). The Public Distribution System (PDS) outlets will start distributing the kit in other places soon.

Chief Minister N. Rangasamy inaugurated the distribution at a PDS outlet in Thiruvallur.

Speaker R. Selvam, Minister for Public Works K. Lakshminarayanan, legislators and officials attended the event.

U.S. action in Venezuela violated U.N. Charter: Cong.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday expressed "grave concern" over what it described as unilateral actions taken by the United States in Venezuela over the past 48 hours, which "violated established principles of international law".

In a statement, party Foreign Affairs department chairperson Salman Khurshid said such actions transgressed the norms enshrined in the United Nations Charter and various international treaties.

"Respect for national sovereignty and peaceful coexistence have formed the bedrock of the post World War II rules-based world order," he said.

"Any kinetic action that circumscribes these without the express sanction of the United Nations risks the resurgence of primordial rules of statecraft and undermine global stability," it added.

The party said the will of the Venezuelan people must be given primacy, and stressed that the country's natural resources should be utilised for the benefit of its citizens.

Women's safety compromised under 'inefficient' DMK govt.: EPS

The Hindu Bureau
KALLAKURICHI

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami on Monday accused the ruling DMK of compromising the safety of women.

Addressing the district women's conference of the

AIADMK in Kallakurichi, he alleged that there was an increase in crimes against women in the State under the present regime.

Claiming that use of narcotics was rampant in the State, he alleged that the primary reason behind the offences was the free

movement of drugs. Referring to the sexual harassment of a girl in Tirupattur where a DMK functionary was allegedly involved, Mr. Palaniswami said the State is being run by an "inefficient" Chief Minister, and his government has failed to maintain law and order.

Two injured in explosions in Manipur

Press Trust of India
IMPHAL

Two persons, identified as Sanatomba Singh and Indubala Devi, were injured in two explosions in Manipur's Bishnupur district on Monday, police said.

The first explosion, suspected to have been caused by an IED, occurred at 5.45 a.m., while the second explosion occurred nearly 200 metres away around 8.45 a.m.

Delhi HC refuses to stay trial against Lalu Prasad

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Monday declined to stay the trial against Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Lalu Prasad in the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) scam case. It asked the Central Bureau of Investigation to submit its response to his plea challenging an order framing charges against him in the case.

The court said it cannot pass an order on the stay application without hearing

the probe agency. It listed the matter for further hearing on January 14.

When senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Maninder Singh, representing Mr. Lalu Prasad, sought a stay on the trial court proceedings, the High Court said it would consider the application on January 14 after the CBI filed its reply. "Let them file a reply. You should have come earlier, you didn't come. The trial court order was passed earlier," it said.

On October 13, 2025, the trial court had framed

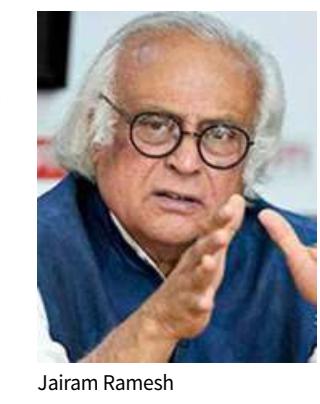
alleged offences of cheating, criminal conspiracy under the Indian Penal Code and sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

'Criminal conspiracy'
Stating that Mr. Lalu Prasad had abused his position as Union Railways Minister during between 2004-2009 to manipulate the eligibility conditions of a land tender process, the trial court framed the charges against Mr. Lalu Prasad, and his wife and others, in the case for the

The matter pertains to a First Information Report (FIR) lodged by the CBI in 2017 against the three and officers of the IRCTC among others.

The Central agency has alleged that Mr. Lalu Prasad, as the Railways Minister, entered into a criminal conspiracy with the owners of some hotels in Patna and Puri for a tender. It alleged that he had manipulated the process and awarded the tender to the accused in exchange for bribe in the form of high-value land and shares.

CM CA-CAE

**Congress targets govt. over Trump's latest tariff remarks**

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday criticised the Union government after U.S. President Donald Trump said Washington could raise tariffs on Indian imports "very quickly", remarking that public displays of bonhomie with the American leader had yielded little diplomatic dividend.

Reacting to Mr. Trump's comments, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said the Prime Minister's personal rapport with the U.S. President had not prevented repeated trade threats. "The PM's good friend in the White House continues his 'blow hot, blow cold' approach to India. He has yet again threatened higher tariffs on US imports from India if India did not stop buying oil from Russia," Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X.

"All those Namaste Trump, Howdy Modi events, all those (forced) hugs, and all those social media posts hailing the US President have done very little good," he added.

Mr. Trump had told reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was aware of his dissatisfaction with India's purchases of Russian crude.

India has maintained that its energy imports are guided by national interest and that it complies with international sanctions regimes.

IN BRIEF



Tripura govt. closes all schools for 5 days due to extreme cold

The Tripura Government has closed all schools for five days starting on Tuesday due to the freezing weather. This comes a day after Chief Minister Manik Saha said the State government was considering a brief winter vacation. A government notification issued on Monday said all government, aided, and private schools shall remain closed from January 6 to 10 in view of extreme winter weather. The schools will open for classes from January 12 since January 11 is a Sunday. The decision will also be applicable to schools in the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD).

11-year-old sexually assaulted and murdered in Chhattisgarh

A 22-year-old man was arrested on Monday for allegedly sexually assaulting and then hacking to death an 11-year-old girl in Narayanpur area of Chhattisgarh, the police said. The girl went missing on December 31, and her partially disrobed body was found on Sunday, said Superintendent of Police (Narayanpur) Robinson Guria. The accused, Sanju Kumeti, a family acquaintance of the victim, regularly visited her house, Mr. Guria said. During investigation, Mr. Kumeti confessed to his crime. He told the police that after the sexual assault, he feared that the girl would tell everyone about the act and decided to kill her, Mr. Guria added. The accused was booked under relevant Sections of the BNS.

Gujarat govt. suspends IAS officer arrested in graft case

The Gujarat government has suspended IAS officer and former District Collector of Surendranagar Rajendrakumar Patel following his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a bribery-linked money laundering case, officials said on Monday. Mr. Patel, a 2015-batch IAS officer, was arrested by the ED on January 2. On the same day, a special court under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act remanded him in the agency's custody till January 7. Mr. Patel fixed bribe rates ranging between ₹5 and ₹10 per square metre for granting approvals for change of land use, the ED has alleged.

Uttarakhand: BJP councillor shoots dead man, arrested

A Bharatiya Janata Party councillor allegedly shot dead a 22-year-old man, who was visiting his house, police on Monday said. Councillor Amit Bisht, alias Chintu, has been taken into custody and is being interrogated, they said. The BJP expelled Mr. Bisht from the party after the incident. Haldwani City Superintendent of Police Manoj Kumar Kartyal said that the incident took place on Sunday at around 11.30 p.m. in the Judge Farm area. The victim, Nitin Lohani, had gone to the councillor's house to meet his son with a friend, Kamal Bhandari. He rang the doorbell, and as soon as the door opened, Mr. Bisht came out and allegedly fired at Lohani, police said. PTI

Coast Guard adds pollution control vessel to its fleet

Samudra Pratap, built with over 60% indigenous content, will substantially enhance the Coast Guard's capability in fire-fighting, maritime safety, environmental protection, and surveillance

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned THE Indian Coast Guard Ship *ICGS Samudra Pratap*, the first of two indigenous pollution control vessels (PCVs) for the Indian Coast Guard (ICG), in Goa on Monday. The Minister described the ship, built with over 60% indigenous content, as a symbol of India's maturing defence industrial ecosystem.

The vessel was built by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL). The Defence Ministry said *Samudra Pratap* is India's first homegrown pollution control vessel and the largest ship in the Coast Guard's fleet so far. Its induction substantially enhances the ICG's capability in pollution response, fire-fighting, maritime safety, environmental protection, and extended surveillance across the country's vast maritime zones.

Commissioning the



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the commissioning of Indian Coast Guard Ship *Samudra Pratap* in Goa on Monday. ANI

ship, Mr. Singh reiterated the government's goal to increase indigenous content in warships to 90%. He said the vessel integrated multiple roles on a single platform, making it effective not only for pollution control but also for coastal patrol and maritime security in today's complex maritime environment.

The ship is equipped with advanced pollution detection systems, special-

ised pollution response boats, modern firefighting equipment, and aviation facilities including a helicopter hangar, enabling greater operational reach even in rough sea conditions.

Protecting marine life

Mr. Singh noted that these capabilities would ensure rapid detection and containment of pollution incidents, helping protect coral reefs, mangroves,

fisheries, and marine biodiversity, directly supporting coastal communities and the blue economy. Emphasising that marine environmental protection is both a strategic necessity and a moral responsibility, the Defence Minister praised the ICG's role in oil spill response, maritime law enforcement, and coastal cleanliness.

Women officers

In a notable first, *Samudra Pratap* will have two women officers aboard. Mr. Singh hailed it as a proud step towards a more inclusive and gender-neutral Coast Guard, highlighting the growing role of women in frontline maritime operations.

Reaffirming the government's commitment to modernising the ICG, he stressed the need for an intelligence-driven and integration-centric force to address emerging technology-led threats. He expressed confidence that *Samudra Pratap* will significantly strengthen India's maritime governance.

The Centre's figure of 0.19% as the affected area ignored geological reality, the group further said

fectively stripped of legal protection," he said.

While the Centre's figure of 0.19% as the affected area ignored the geological reality of the range, the low-elevation zones were not wasteland, according to the group's findings. These regions were the primary water recharge zones and dust barriers for 30 crore people. Mr. Sudhanshu said the group's study had identified critical gaps in the unprotected hills, where the Thar Desert was already expanding.

The Supreme Court had earlier put its directions concerning the definition of the Aravalli hills in abeyance. Expressing concern over the government's approach to the country's oldest mountain chain, climate scientist Sudhanshu said the independent forensic analysis of Aravalis' geography was conducted using satellite data and the Bristol Forest and Buildings Removed Copernicus Digital Elevation Model (FABDEM).

"Our analysis has confirmed that 31.8% of the total hill area falls below the arbitrary threshold of 100 metres. These areas, comprising ecologically vital hills and ridges, are now ef-

SC refuses to hear plea against PM offering 'chadar'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking directions to restrain Prime Minister Narendra Modi from offering a ceremonial 'chadar' at the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, saying the issue is not justiciable.

A Bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi declined the plea, which also challenged the extension of state-sponsored ceremonial honour and symbolic recognition to Islamic scholar Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and to the Ajmer Dargah by the Union government and its instrumentalities.

Practice since 1947
Advocate Barun Sinha, appearing for petitioner Jitender Singh and others, submitted that the practice of the prime minister offering a 'chadar' at the Ajmer Dargah of Moinuddin Chishti,



The Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said the issue was not justiciable. PTI

initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947, has continued since without any legal or constitutional basis.

Mr. Sinha said a civil suit was pending in the trial court on the claim that the dargah was built over the ruins of a Shiva temple.

The top court clarified that the dismissal of the writ petition would affect the pending civil suit.

"You go and seek appropriate relief in the civil suit," CJI Kant said.

Sunali Khatun, who was brought back from Bangladesh, gives birth

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

A month after she was brought back to India from Bangladesh following a Supreme Court order, Sunali Khatun, a resident of Birbhum district in West Bengal, gave birth to a baby boy on Monday.

Ms. Khatun, her husband, and their minor son had been pushed into the neighbouring country in June, along with Sweety Bibi and her two sons, after they were accused of being Bangladeshi nationals.

On December 3, the Supreme Court directed the Centre to repatriate Ms. Khatun, who was in an advanced state of pregnancy, and her minor son. They were brought back on December 5.

Her husband and three others continue to be in Bangladesh.

'Triumph of humanity'
Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee called



Homecoming: Sunali Khatun was accused of being a Bangladeshi national and was forcibly deported. She and her minor son returned to India on December 5, after a Supreme Court order. PTI

the birth a "triumph of humanity". "I am deeply moved and genuinely heartened to learn that Sunali Khatun has given birth to a healthy baby boy at Rampurhat Medical College, Birbhum," Mr. Banerjee said in a post on X.

The Trinamool MP also spoke about how Ms. Khatun was "falsely accused" of being a Bangladeshi national and was pushed into the neighbouring country.

Speaking about the ordeal faced by Ms. Khatun, Mr. Banerjee said: "Her ordeal was a violation of dignity that no citizen, least of all a pregnant mother, should ever be forced to endure. Yet, through it all Sunali displayed extraordinary courage and resolve."

He also added that he will meet Ms. Khatun during his visit to Birbhum on Tuesday.

FAITH

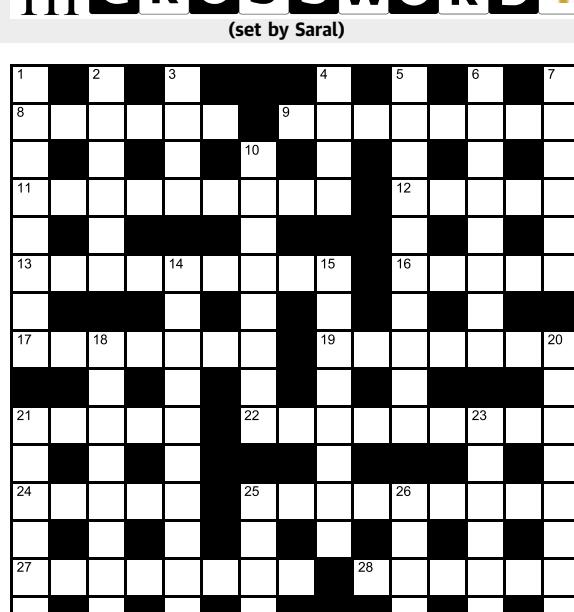
Nrisimha's residency

Perumal took avatar as Nrisimha in order to vanquish Hiranyakashyap, who misused his yogic powers. After completing His mission, Nrisimha continues to help ordinary devotees by helping them gain clarity and gnana, said Tirukkudanthai Dr. Venkatesh.

In Treta Yuga, Mareechi Muni had prescience that Perumal would be offering a darshan to saint Atri, who had undertaken severe penance, and shares the news with saint Vikatan, grandson of sage Kapila. As foreseen, one morning at the end of the autumn season, Atri suddenly heard divine music outside. When he stepped out, he found flowers strewn everywhere. Garuda and Adisesha heralded the arrival of a dark-hued figure, whose eyes were like a lotus. He held the divine conch and discus. The heavenly vision was none other than Lord Nrisimha (not in the *ugra* posture, but with a smiling visage), and Atri spontaneously broke into a *sloka*. A smiling Nrisimha said, "I know what is on your mind. Like a mother happy to give a child what it wants, you too may articulate your wishes."

Sage Atri surrendered to Nrisimha and sought *moksha* for himself, sage Vikatan, and a friend who went by the name Jaali. Nrisimha granted the sage his wishes and added that He would be residing permanently in Tiruallikeni (in present day Chennai). A stunned Atri demanded to know why He wanted to reside there permanently. Nrisimha replied that living in Kali Yuga, people lacked clarity and allowed confusion to cloud their vision. He would be ever-present to offer them *gnanam* and a crystal-clear mind. Nrisimha is the 'loka' guru, offering guidance to devotees. That is why he is called Thelliya Singar.

TH CROSSWORD + 14684



Across

- 8 Artiste rejecting basically shining fancy costume (6)
- 9 Investigation of lock-up fencing ended (8)
- 11 Continuing review of private record with a lecturer (9)
- 12 Picture that is shared by periodical (5)
- 13 Duplicate papers with a client abroad (9)
- 14 Search some baroque style (5)

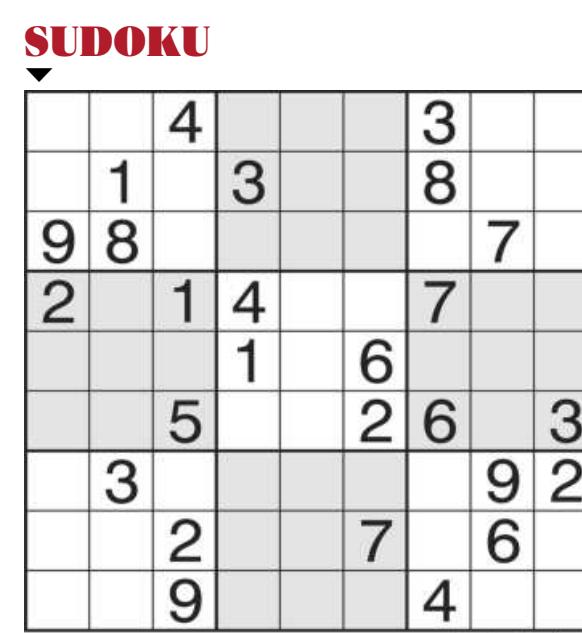
- 15 The French brother leading a party with rector in Canadian province (8)
- 16 Patriots controlling chaos (4)
- 17 Press counter jamming street left in one side of passage (7)
- 19 Perhaps triplet is delicate (7)
- 21 Idea to finish off each incomplete market place (5)
- 22 Except first boy crowd stopping every individual nearby (9)
- 24 Relative value of collaboration (5)
- 25 Verification returned including large network in diagram of building (5,4)
- 27 Promises to carry skirts of toile and top (8)
- 28 Tough stain outside old building at the top (6)
- Down
- 1 Arrived shortly followed by personal assistant to get gin cocktail for champion (8)
- 2 Look around very fast (6)
- 3 Cereal label-date missing (4)
- 4 Rob flipping gadget (4)
- 5 Abandoned liberal squire in hot desert (10)
- 6 Cleared area kept for bird (8)
- 7 Join church workers on time (6)
- 10 Flyer arranging crucial seminar finally (8)
- 14 Clay creator mixed with dry ceramic essentially (10)
- 15 The French brother leading a party with rector in Canadian province (8)
- 18 Surprised celebrity at last met the Spanish upcoming director (8)
- 20 With son leaving western town, heading off forever (8)
- 21 Expression of Republican entering stage (6)
- 23 Heard couple of bovines or bird? (6)
- 25 Support king to divide (4)
- 26 Patriots controlling chaos (4)

(set by Saral)

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at <https://crossword.thehindu.com>



SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



CM YK M CA-CAE

IN BRIEF



IndusInd Bank posts sequential dip in loans

IndusInd Bank reported a sequential dip in loans for a fourth straight quarter reflecting continued pressure on the lender's growth. Loans slid 2.2% quarter-on-quarter in the October-December period, while deposits rose 1.1%, it said. On a year-on-year basis, loans fell 13.1%, while deposits slid 3.8%. This is in contrast to lenders like HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank which reported double digit year-on-year loan growth for the December quarter. IndusInd Bank had been under pressure since disclosing a \$230 million hit in the year ended March 31, 2025 on internal derivative trade misaccounting. REUTERS

Apax to pick up minority stake in iD Fresh Food

iD Fresh Food, a food brand, said funds managed by private equity firm Apax Partners LLP, will acquire a significant minority stake from existing shareholders – Premji Invest and TPG NewQuest – both of which will remain investors alongside its co-founder P.C. Mustafa and his cousins. The financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed. "The Apax funds' investment will allow us to accelerate growth, build capacity, broaden our product range, and scale into more cities and markets," said Mr. Mustafa.

Waaree Energy Storage Solutions raises ₹1,003 crore

Waaree Energies on Monday said that its arm Waaree Energy Storage Solutions raised ₹1,003 crore from a cluster of strategic investors. The latest fundraiser is part of the ₹10,000-crore capital expenditure plan aimed at setting up of a 20 GWh advanced, lithium-ion cell and battery pack manufacturing plant, the company said in a statement. The proposed plant will focus on the production of high-performance cells and battery packs tailored for utility-scale storage systems, electric mobility, and distributed energy applications. PTI



A man walks past the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) logo outside its headquarters in Mumbai.

Closely monitor asset quality, RBI tells NBFCs

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI
Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra, during his meeting with MDs and CEO of select Non-Banking Finance Companies (NBFCs) on Monday, underlined the need for sound underwriting standards and close monitoring of asset quality by the sector.

He further emphasised on the criticality of customer centricity, ethical conduct and responsible lending along with prompt grievance redressal for preserving confidence in the sector.

Heads of Government NBFCs, housing finance companies (HFCs) and microfinance institutions also participated. The participating entities together account for about 53% of NBFC sector's assets.

Meanwhile, the first meeting of the Payments Regulatory Board was held on Monday in Mumbai under the Chairmanship of Governor Malhotra.

Share of southern States in FDI rises as IT inflows double

Sindhu Hariharan
Rohan Das

The doubling of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows into Information Technology (IT) sector in the first half of FY26 (H1FY26) helped the southern States of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu raise their share in total FDI even as Maharashtra and Gujarat saw their shares shrink.

FDI into India stood at \$35.2 billion in H1FY26 (April-September 2025), up 18% from \$29.8 billion in the same period last fiscal, official data show.

The FDI growth was driven by a twofold jump in inflow into the IT sector (categorised as 'Computer Software & Hardware') to \$9 billion in H1FY26. With this, the sector's share rose up to 25% of the total FDI flow compared with 14% in the prior period.

Still in pole position
Maharashtra, still at the top position, saw a reduction in share of total FDI in H1FY26 to 30% vs. 45% (\$10.6 billion). Gujarat's share halved to 6.4% while Karnataka with \$9.4 billion and Tamil Nadu with \$3.6 billion were at second and third spot in overall tally.

FDI into e-commerce majors Meesho and Flipkart, from foreign promoter entities and investors, dominated the top deals. Large PE investments in Access Healthcare Services and Haldiram Snacks and investments by Ardour Investment Holdings in Ada-

SC grants relief to Adani, sets aside levy on SEZ electricity

Customs duty cannot be imposed on power supplied from special economic zone to domestic tariff area; levy lacks statutory authority'

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

In a relief to Adani Power Limited, the Supreme Court on Monday held that customs duty cannot be imposed on electricity supplied from a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA), setting aside a 2019 judgment of the Gujarat High Court and relieving the company of the levy on power generated at its Mundra plant.

A Bench comprising Justices Aravind Kumar and NV. Anjaria ruled that the levy lacked statutory authority and that the State could not retain amounts collected under an invalid tax. Directing the jurisdictional Commissioner of Customs to verify the claim and issue refunds within eight weeks, the apex court cautioned the authorities against raising "hyper-technical objections" that could frustrate the relief granted.

Adani Power operates a coal-based thermal power plant within the Mundra SEZ in Gujarat's Kutch district, with an installed capacity of 4,620 MW.

The plant supplies electricity under long-term power purchase agreements to distribution companies in Gujarat and Haryana, apart from meeting the power requirements of the SEZ.

The dispute traces its origins to February 2010, when the Centre amended customs rules to impose duty on electricity sup-



Fuse off: The Bench ruled that the State could not retain amounts collected under an invalid tax. REUTERS

plied from an SEZ to the DTA, while also seeking to apply the levy retrospectively from June 2009. In the first round of litigation, the Gujarat High Court, in July 2015, had struck down a part of the levy framework and held that Adani Power was entitled to exemption from customs duty on SEZ-to-DTA electricity supplies for a limited period between June 2009 and September 2010. The Supreme Court had subsequently declined to interfere with that ruling.

Following the 2015 judgment, SEZ authorities took the position that the exemption recognised by the High Court was confined strictly to that defined window and that customs duty remained payable on electricity supplied thereafter.

Challenging this interpretation, Adani approached the Gujarat High Court again in 2016, seeking a declaration that it had no liability to pay customs duty on SEZ-to-DTA electricity supplies beyond September 2010, along

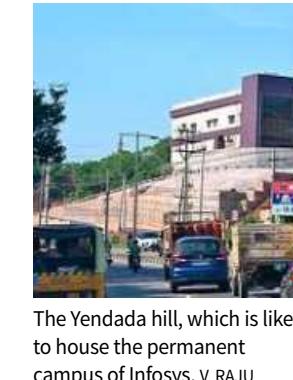
with a refund of the amounts already paid.

In its June 2019 judgment, the High Court rejected the plea, holding that the earlier ruling had consciously restricted relief to a specific period and that Adani could not subsequently secure broader relief that had not been granted earlier. The High Court also relied on the post-2010 regulatory framework, observing that extending the exemption could result in a double benefit, as Adani would neither pay duty on inputs used to generate power nor on the electricity supplied to the DTA. It further held that later levy regimes could not be invalidated without being independently challenged.

Reversing this view, the Supreme Court held that there was no factual distinction between the levy struck down in 2015 and the levy sought to be enforced thereafter for the period between September 16, 2010 and February 15, 2016.

Infosys eyes Yendada hills for permanent campus in Vizag

V. Kamalakara Rao
VISAKHAPATNAM



The Yendada hill, which is likely to house the permanent campus of Infosys. V. RAJU

If everything goes according to the mutual understanding between the State Government and the Infosys management, the IT giant's permanent campus in Visakhapatnam will be established on the Yendada hills along the old stretch of National Highway-16, near the international cricket stadium in Madhurawada.

Final discussions are underway between the government and the company regarding the incentives the government needs to extend, and officials are examining the proposals submitted by the company concerning infrastructure support. It is understood that the government is considering allocating land to the company at a rate of ₹0.99 per acre, similar to what was given to IT giants like TCS and Cognizant in the past.

Confirming this to *The Hindu* on Monday, a government official said, "Yes, the Infosys team recently visited the city to inspect two suggested locations - Yendada and Paradesipalem. The team expressed more interest in the Yendada site due to its scenic view from various directions. They have requested 20 acres of land. The required government land is available on the Yendada hills [survey number 179]. The price and further discussions with the government are yet to be finalised."

Infosys is currently operating its unit in a rented building in the Rushikonda IT zone area. Former Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy inaugurated the In-

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	MONDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	85,440	-0.38
US Dollar	90.30	-0.11
Gold	1,40,400	0.68
Brent oil	61.79	-

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter.	2279.50	-0.30
Adani Ports.	1493.00	3.50
Apollo Hosp.	7083.00	-46.50
Asian Paints	2815.60	43.00
Axis Bank	1285.80	18.90
Bajaj Auto	9497.50	-5.00
Bajaj FinServ	2039.20	0.80
Bajaj Finance	978.75	-11.70
Bharat Elec.	413.80	10.65
Bharti Airtel	2105.00	-1.30
Cipla	1519.80	8.20
Coal India	427.45	-0.45
Dr Reddys Lab.	1250.00	-6.10
Hindustan Unilever	40.20	0.00
Eicher Motors	7482.50	148.00
Etemal Ltd.	281.80	2.35
Grimas Ind.	2848.90	-7.50
HCL Tech.	1607.60	-32.60
HFDC Bank	977.50	-24.10
HFDC Life	759.30	4.45
Hindalco	931.70	6.00
Hindustan Unilever	2384.10	36.10
ICICI Bank	1371.50	16.10
IntGlobeAvi.	5102.50	-3.50
Infosys	1606.40	-34.00
ITC	349.70	-0.35
Jio Financial Servic- es Ltd.	300.40	-1.30
JSW Steel	1185.90	5.20
Kotak Bank	2190.90	-4.20
L&T	4150.40	-13.00
M&M	3790.30	-12.10
Maruti Suzuki	17155.00	195.00
Max Healthcare	1050.50	-12.10
NestleIndia	1314.60	34.90
NTPC	350.60	-1.50
ONGC	238.09	3.37
PowerGrid Corp	271.65	0.70
Reliance Ind	1578.10	-14.20
SBI Life	2075.60	8.20
State Bank.	1005.55	6.60
Shriram Finance Ltd.	1003.35	7.00
Sun Pharma	1728.90	0.90
TataConsumerPro- duct	1182.10	11.40
Tata Steel	185.72	2.84
TCS	3216.10	-34.60
Tech Mahindra	1596.90	-15.10
Titan	4079.70	28.00
Tata Motors PV	373.55	3.20
Trent Ltd.	12489.80	20.20
UltraTech Cement	12087.00	188.00
Wipro	263.30	-5.70

Hindustan Laboratories files IPO papers

Hindustan Laboratories has filed preliminary papers with SEBI to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The company's maiden public offering comprises a fresh issue of 50 lakh shares along with an Offer for sale (OFS) of 91 lakh shares by the promoter. PTI

Bharat Coking Coal sets IPO price band at ₹21 to ₹23

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

Bharat Coking Coal Ltd. (BCCL), a Coal India subsidiary, is set to raise ₹1,071.11 crore from primary markets.

The initial public offer (IPO) is entirely an offer for sale. The firm has fixed a price band of ₹21 to ₹23 a share. The issue would open on January 9 and close January 13.

The shares can be bought in lots of 600 and in multiples of 600 thereof. Half of the 46.5 crore shares will be offered to qualified institutional buyers, 35% to retail investors and the rest to non-institutional investors.

BCCCL is a 54-year-old firm producing coking coal, non-coking coal and washed coal. The firm operates a network of 34 operational mines, including 4 underground mines, 26 opencast mines, and 4 mixed mines as of September 30, 2025.

Bharat Coking Coal was the largest coking coal producer in India in FY25 according to a Crisis report. The firm was incorporated in 1972 to mine and supply coking coal concentrated in mines located at Jharia, Jharkhand and Raniganj, West Bengal coalfields.

The public sector firm has expanded operations significantly over the years with coal output increasing from 30.51 million tonne in FY22 to 40.50 million tonne in FY25, which is an increase of 33%.

(With PTI inputs)

RAJASTHAN RAJYA VIDYUT UTPADAN NIGAM LTD.

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Government of Kerala

Published Tenders from 01-01-2026 to 04-01-2026

Tender ID: 2026 STY_825226_1 * Stationery Controller *

Supply of White Mapliho Paper 75 gsm, RA1 * Closing Date: 24-Jan-2026 * PAC: Rs6000000

Tender ID: 2026 STY_825234_1 * Stationery Controller *

Supply of Mapliho Paper 86 cm Reel, 75 gsm * Closing Date: 24-Jan-2026 * PAC: Rs7236000

Visit [https](https://etenders.kerala.gov.in)

ADEN

Saudi-backed Yemeni forces retake Hadramout after days of airstrikes



Saudi-backed National Shield Forces spread across Yemen's Mukalla on Sunday after retaking the port city which was seized by southern separatists last month. The capital of Hadramout province was retaken by Yemen's internationally recognised government following days of Saudi airstrikes. AP

BEIJING

China, Pakistan reaffirm ties as U.S. outreach to Islamabad deepens



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar pledged on Monday to further deepen ties and expand cooperation as signs of rapprochement between Islamabad and Washington grow. Both sides also called for "visible and verifiable actions to dismantle terrorist groups" in Afghanistan. AP

DHAKA

Bangladesh court sets date to hear sedition case against Sheikh Hasina



A Bangladesh court on Monday set January 21 as the date for framing charges in a sedition case against deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The case relates to allegations that Ms. Hasina and Awami League members plotted to overthrow the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government, local media reported. PTI

HAVANA

Cuban govt. confirms 32 officers killed in U.S. attack in Venezuela



A U.S. military operation in Venezuela killed 32 Cuban officers over the weekend, the Cuban government said on Sunday in the first official death count provided of the strikes in the South American nation. Cuba's government announced two days of mourning for the officers who were killed. AP

'U.S. won't govern Venezuela, but will enforce changes through embargo'

Remarks by Marco Rubio stand in contrast with Donald Trump's insistence that the U.S. will 'run the country' following the capture of its leader Nicolas Maduro; Democrats and Republicans opposed to foreign interventions express concerns

Associated Press

WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio suggested on Sunday that the United States would not govern Venezuela day-to-day other than enforcing an existing "oil quarantine" on the country, even as President Donald Trump again insisted that the U.S. would be in control following its ouster of leader Nicolás Maduro.

Mr. Rubio's statements seemed designed to temper concerns that the assertive action to achieve regime change in Venezuela might lead the U.S. into another prolonged foreign intervention or failed at-



Demonstrators outside the courthouse in New York as Nicolas Maduro awaits his arraignment hearing on Monday. AP

tempt at nation-building.

They stood in contrast to Mr. Trump's broad but vague claims that the U.S. would at least temporarily "run" the oil-rich nation, comments that suggested

some sort of governing structure under which Caracas would be controlled by Washington.

Still, Mr. Trump reiterated Sunday night that "we're in charge," while in-

terim Venezuelan leader Delcy Rodríguez invited the Republican President "to collaborate" in a newly conciliatory stance. "We're going to run it, fix it," he said of Venezuela while aboard Air Force One en route to Washington.

Hours earlier, Mr. Rubio offered a more nuanced take, saying the U.S. would enforce an oil quarantine that was already in place on sanctioned tankers before Mr. Maduro was captured by the U.S. forces on Saturday and use that leverage to press policy changes in Venezuela.

Benefit of the people'
"And so that's the sort of control the President

(Trump) is pointing to when he says that," Mr. Rubio told CBS. "We continue with that quarantine, and we expect to see that there will be changes, not just in the way the oil industry is run for the benefit of the people, but also so that they stop the drug trafficking."

Mr. Trump's vowing that the U.S. will run Venezuela has sparked concerns among some Democrats and drawn unease from parts of his own Republican coalition, including an "America First" base that is opposed to foreign interventions, and from observers who recalled past nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ukraine did not target Putin residence in drone strike as Kremlin claims, says Trump

Associated Press

ABOARD AIR FORCE ONE



Donald Trump

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday told reporters that U.S. officials have determined that Ukraine did not target a residence belonging to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a drone attack last week, disputing Kremlin claims that Mr. Trump had initially greeted with deep concern.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov last week said Ukraine launched a wave of drones at Mr. Putin's state residence in the northwestern Novgorod region that the Russian defense systems were able to defeat.

The allegation came just a day after Ukrainian Presi-

strike happened," Mr. Trump told reporters. "We don't believe that happened, now that we've been able to check," he added. European officials have argued that the Russian claim was nothing more than an effort by Moscow to undermine the peace effort.

Fresh strikes

Meanwhile, Russia bombed Ukraine on Monday with strikes that hit a medical clinic in Kyiv, forcing night-time evacuations into freezing temperatures and killing two people, including a patient at the facility. Moscow launched a total of 165 drones and at least nine missiles overnight, the Ukrainian air force said.

"I don't believe that

Greenland PM says 'no more fantasies about annexation'

Reuters

COPENHAGEN

Greenland's leader declared "enough is enough," and Denmark's allies in Europe affirmed that the Arctic island's future must be determined by its people, rebuffing remarks by U.S. President Donald Trump about acquiring the territory.

"Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark must determine the future of Greenland and nobody else," British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told repre-

ters. On Sunday, Mr. Trump said told *The Atlantic* magazine in an interview: "We do need Greenland, absolutely. We need it for defence."

"Threats, pressure, and talk of annexation have no place between friends," Greenland Prime Minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen said on Sunday. "Enough is enough. (...) No more fantasies about annexation."

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said on Sunday that U.S. comments on Greenland made "absolutely no sense".

The remarks came after U.S. President Donald Trump warned Iran would "get hit very hard by the United States" if the authorities killed more demonstrators.

The protests began on December 28 when shopkeepers in Tehran staged a strike over high prices and

economic stagnation, but they have since spread to other places and expanded to include political demands.

"I instruct the attorney

general and prosecutors across the country to act in accordance with the law and with resolve against the rioters and those who support them... and to

Colombian President slams Trump, says 'stop slandering me'

Agence France-Presse

BOGOTÁ

Mr. Petro rebuffed the accusations saying his "name does not appear in court records."

"Stop slandering me, Mr. Trump." Mr. Petro said on the social media platform X. "That's not how you threaten a Latin American President who emerged from the armed struggle and then from the people of Colombia's fight for Peace."

Colombia's Foreign Ministry called the U.S. President's threats "unacceptable interference" and demanded "respect."

Iran will offer no leniency to "rioters", though the public has a right to demonstrate, the head of the country's judiciary said on Monday, following more than a week of protests.

The remarks came after U.S. President Donald Trump warned Iran would "get hit very hard by the United States" if the authorities killed more demonstrators.

The protests began on December 28 when shopkeepers in Tehran staged a strike over high prices and

Growing clamour: This photo from December 29, 2025 shows protesters marching on a bridge in capital Tehran.

general and prosecutors across the country to act in accordance with the law and with resolve against the rioters and those who support them... and to

show no leniency or indulgence," Gholamhosseini Mohseni Ejei said, according to the judiciary's *Mizan* news agency.

He went on to add that Iran "listens to the protesters and their criticism, and distinguishes between them and rioters".

At least 12 people have been killed according to official announcements.

Since the protests began, officials have publicly struck a conciliatory tone when it comes to protesters' economic demands, while vowing to take a hard line against any chaos or destabilisation.

Former World billiards champion Manoj Kothari passes away

Sports Bureau

KOLKATA

Former World billiards champion and Indian cue sports chief coach Manoj Kothari passed away on Monday, according to his family sources. Kothari was 67 and is survived by his wife and son Sourav. He was not keeping well and was being treated in Tamil Nadu.

"He passed away following a cardiac arrest in the morning," Sourav, also a World billiards champion in 2018 and 2025, told *The Hindu*.

"I lost everything. He was my hero," he added.

Kothari, who won the World billiards title in 1990 and the World doubles billiards championships in 1997 before being con-



Manoj Kothari.
THE HINDU ARCHIVES

ferred the prestigious Dhyani Chand Award for lifetime achievement in 2005, had been serving as India's cue sports chief coach for about a decade-and-a-half.

"Manoj Kothari was an efficient administrator and a fantastic coach. More than that, he was an amazing human being. We went a long way back and shared

a great relationship. Since he was appointed National coach, we travelled together on many international trips. He was always helpful, kind and passionate in bringing out the best in all top players. My heartfelt condolences to the Kotharis," said the 28-time World championships gold medallist cueist Pankaj Advani.

"We lost a legend," said former World champion and Asian Games gold medallist Ashok Shandilya.

"He was always a guiding light for youngsters. I won the 2009 Asian Indoor (team) gold (with Pankaj Advani and Aditya Mehta) and 2010 Asian Games silver in his presence. His contribution as a coach is much bigger," said snooker player Brijesh Damani.

Top pugilists advance with easy victories

NATL. BOXING

Sports Bureau

After the chaos and mismanagement of the opening day, things appeared to get slightly better on day two of the Elite men's and women's National boxing championships here in Greater Noida, even though the inability to complete the day's proceedings meant the organisers had to scramble to bring things back on track on Tuesday.

While the bouts were supposed to begin at Gauhati Buddha University in the afternoon, Monday's delayed bouts meant action began early in the morning as the officials tried to clear up the back-

Divyanshi loses to Matsushima

TABLE TENNIS

Amol Karhadkar

VADODARA



Stellar show: Aadya and Rajdeep are the under-11 champions.

8-3 lead in the second game after winning the opener.

However, the Indian responded impressively. A seven-point winning streak helped the reigning under-19 girls' final of the WTT Youth Contender here on Monday.

In a contest that capped a punishing day for both players – who featured in four knockout matches over a span of seven hours – Matsushima prevailed over Divyanshi 11-6, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-3 in a 45-minute encounter at the SAMA Indoor Sports Complex.

Divyanshi had an opportunity to close out the contest in the fourth game when she surged to a 6-3 lead. But a couple of missed regulation forehand winners proved costly.

In the fifth game, the Japanese left-hander used her pace and earaggression to race to an

lies from the outset. Matsushima raced through the decider to seal the title, before consoling a teary-eyed Divyanshi after the handshake.

The results: Final: Girls: U-19: Miku Matsushima (Jpn) bt Divyanshi Bhownick 11-6, 9-11, 9-11, 11-8, 11-3; U-15: Sreejani Chakraborty bt Tanisha Kalbhairav 8-11, 11-8, 7-11, 11-7, 11-5; U-11: Aadya Baheti bt Sakshya Santosh 15-13, 11-8, 12-10. Boys: U-19: Priyanuj Bhattacharya bt Sarthak Arya 12-10, 11-8, 14-12; U-15: Aditya Das bt Sanjay Jagdish 11-4, 11-9-11-8; U-11: Rajdeep Biswas bt Sharvil Karambelkar 11-8, 11-6, 11-13, 11-4.

MCA-CAE

DECISION PENDING

Awaiting CoE's nod for Pratika's availability for WPL: Abhishek



FILE PHOTO: EMMANUEL YOGINI

Head coach Abhishek Nayar on Monday said UP Warriorz is awaiting clearance from the Centre of Excellence regarding the availability of Pratika Rawal, who had injured her ankle in the ODI World Cup, for the upcoming Women's Premier League. "Regardless, it's always exciting to have Pratika in the set-up," Abhishek said.

UNSTOPPABLE

Suryavanshi smashes Pant's record as India downs SA in Youth ODI



FILE PHOTO

Bhavesh Suryavanshi broke Rishabh Pant's record for the fastest fifty as India u-19 recorded an eight-wicket win via DLS method to take an unassailable 2-0 lead against South Africa in Youth ODI series in Benoni. **The scores:** SA 245 in 49.3 overs (Jason 114, Kishan 4/64) lost to India 176/2 in 23.3 overs (Suryavanshi 68) by DLS method.

TOP EFFORT

Anahat and Aryaveer advance to the British Open semifinals



FILE PHOTO: B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Anahat Singh moved into the semifinals of the British Junior u-19 Open squash tournament in Birmingham with an 11-4, 10-12, 11-9, 11-3 win over Egypt's Barb Sameh. Indian second seed Aryaveer Dewan entered the semifinals of the boys' u-17 category after edging out Egypt's Yassin Kouritam 9-11, 11-3, 10-12, 11-9, 12-10.

BACKUP OPTION

Cadillac hires Guanyu as reserve driver for its debut F1 season



AP

New F1 team Cadillac made another experienced hiring on Monday with the choice of former Sauber driver Zhou Guanyu as its reserve. The only driver from China in F1 history, Zhou has not raced since 2024 but spent the last season as reserve with Ferrari, which is supplying engines and gearboxes for Cadillac's debut season.

Russell's hat-trick wins it for HIL GC

The veteran Kiwi defender lives up to his reputation as one of the best drag-flickers; heartbreak for Pipers as they concede a last-minute goal



Stunning show: Russell was in his element as HIL GC snatched a dramatic win. R. RAGU

HIL - MEN**K. Keerthivasan**

CHENNAI

Adramatic hat-trick by New Zealand defender Kane Russell, capped by a last-gasp winner, helped HIL GC edge SG Pipers 3-2 in a pulsating Men's Hockey India League encounter at the SDAT-Mayor Radhakrishnan Stadium here on Monday.

After a goalless and largely drab first half, the contest sprung to life after the break, with the third and fourth quarters delivering five goals.

The deadlock was bro-

ken early in the third quarter when Pipers' Ky Willott found space in a crowded circle.

A sharp pass from Tomas Domene found the Australian, who neatly spooned the ball past goalkeeper James Mazzarello.

HIL GC responded swiftly through Russell, whose blistering drag-flick off a penalty corner raced past goalkeeper Tomas Santiago. Seconds later, Russell struck again, producing a near-identical effort that slipped through the keeper's legs to give his team a 2-1 advantage.

Pipers fought back in the fourth quarter, drawing level through Dilraj Singh, who finished off a

penalty-corner routine, after a rebound. Moments earlier, Mazzarello had kept HIL GC in the game with three outstanding saves from Domene's powerful penalty-corner drives.

With the clock ticking, Russell – a veteran of over 150 internationals – underlined why he was regarded as one of the most feared drag-flickers in the game. A thunderous strike proved too much for Santiago to handle, completing a memorable hat-trick for Russell and sealing a thrilling win for HIL GC.

The result:

HIL GC 3 (Russell 35-pc, 37-pc, 60-pc) bt SG Pipers 2 (Willott 31, Dilraj 56-pc).

Head leads Australia's reply after Root's ton

THE ASHES

Associated Press
SYDNEY

Joe Root made his second hundred of the series, while Travis Head closed in on his third, as the second day of the final Ashes Test between Australia and England was evenly poised on Monday.

England was bowled out just before tea for 384 at the SCG, as Joe Root led the way with a masterful 160 – his best Test score in the country.

SCOREBOARD

England – 1st innings: Zak Crawley lbw b Nesi 16, Ben Duckett c Carey b Starc 27, Jacob Bethell c Carey b Boland 10, Joe Root c & b Nesi 160, Harry Brook c Smith b Boland 84, Ben Stokes c Carey b Starc 0, Jamie Smith c Boland b Labuschagne 46, Will Jacks c Green b Nesi 27, Brydon Carse c Carey b Green 1, Matthew Potts (not out) 1, Josh Tongue b Nesi 0; Extras (b-1, lb-6, nb-3, w-2); 12; Total (in 97.3 overs): 384.

Fall of wickets: 1-35, 2-51, 3-57, 4-226, 5-229, 6-323, 7-375, 8-382, 9-384.

England bowling: Carse 9-1-43-0, Potts 7-0-58-0, Tongue 10-0-31-0, Stokes 8.1-2-30-2.

At stumps, Australia was 166 for two in reply in its first innings, with Head again in imperious form as he slashed his way to an unbeaten 91.

Ben Stokes had both wickets for the tourist, which struggled to stem the flow of runs in the final session but the scalp of the well-set Marnus Labuschagne late in the day buoyed England's hopes.

Earlier, as wickets fell regularly around him, Root showed all the composure of a 163-Test veteran as he notched up his 41st century off 146 balls.

Towards that end, an early coaching change brought in Abhishek Nayar in place of Jon Lewis. In the auction, the Warriorz think-tank bagged three of the five most expensive players.

In skipper Meg Lanning, Warriorz don't just have the stability of the most astute tactical mind in the game, but also an oasis of runs at the top of the order. The side also has the experience and match-winning abilities of cricketing nomads like Shikha Pandey

Can execution match intent for Warriorz?

WPL COUNTDOWN**Lavanya L**

Having retained just a single player – an inconsistent but learning Shweta Srivastava at that – UP Warriorz made it abundantly clear that it was open to a drastic makeover, provided a change of fortunes came along. Armed with a purse worth ₹4.5 crore, the Warriorz had a great run at the mega auction, retaining key players from the squads of the seasons gone by and making smart acquisitions who might add a certain sheen to the attack.

While the franchise has nailed the messaging game with carefully curated celebrity collaborations and on-ground and digital activations, the Capri Sports-owned franchise looks laser-focused on the actual prize – a maiden Women's Premier League crown.

Towards that end, an early coaching change brought in Abhishek Nayar in place of Jon Lewis. In the auction, the Warriorz think-tank bagged three of the five most expensive players.

In skipper Meg Lanning, Warriorz don't just have the stability of the most astute tactical mind in the game, but also an oasis of runs at the top of the order. The side also has the experience and match-winning abilities of cricketing nomads like Shikha Pandey



Guiding light: Lanning will be in focus again, this time in UP Warriorz colours. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

they haven't managed to replicate since. Too many overseas players meant a struggle to steady the playing XI. A shaky Indian core left too much for the likes of Deepki to do. This time, those gaping holes look plugged. Can execution match intent? It should, if the Warriorz want to emerge from the quick-sands of bottom finishes.

The squad: Meg Lanning (Capt.), Kiran Navgire, Phoebe Litchfield, Shweta Srivastava (wk), Simran Shailkh, Asha Sobhana Joy, Charli Knott, Chloe Tryon, Deandra Dottin, Deepki Sharma, Harleen Deol, Kranti Gaud, Pratika Rawal, Shikha Pandey, Shipra Giri (wk), Sophie Ecclestone, Suman Meena, and Trisha Gongadi.

Warriorz's fixtures: At Navi Mumbai: Jan. 10; vs Gujarat Giants; Jan. 12; Royal Challengers Bengaluru; Jan. 14; Delhi Capitals; Jan. 15; Mumbai Indians; Jan. 17; MI.

At Vadodara: Jan. 22; GG; Jan. 29; RCB; Feb. 1; DC.

*3 p.m. start(s), rest of the matches begin at 7.30 p.m.

Soorma's first victory sends Pipers to the title clash

HIL - WOMEN**Santdeep Devy**

RANCHI

Jude Menezes, if he were watching Monday's Women's Hockey India League game, would have been left scratching his head over what Rani Rampal did differently. For the former India captain, having replaced him as interim coach only a day ago, managed to accomplish what had seemed impossible thus far – getting JSW Soorma Hockey Club its first points on the board. It managed a 2-1 win over Ranchi Royals at the Maram Gomke Jaipal Singh Stadium.

It took Penny Squibb merely 42 seconds to squeeze the ball between the Royals' custodian, Bi-chu Devi Kharibam, and Sabine Plonissen from a short corner. Perhaps the two-minute suspension of Lucina von der Heyde, who would have otherwise been on the defensive battery, helped the already-eliminated team's cause.

Things went from bad to worse for Royals, who lost



Skilful operator: Shannon dribbles her way past the Royals players. R.V. MOORTHY

a review in their efforts to check a goalline save from Squibb.

The fanatic cheering from the stands in the second period seemed to have woken up the home side, lagging 10-2 behind in circle penetrations in the first 15 minutes, from its slumber. The reward eventually came post the half-time break through Agostina Alonso, who rifled a cannonball into the net.

A lot of the credit should go to Hannah Cotter, who cut through heavy traffic on the right before linking up with the Argentine mid-

fielder. Royals, however, ended up dropping the ball soon when Soorma was awarded a penalty stroke for an unwarranted push inside the circle. Olivia Shannon made no mistake, sending Bichu Devi the wrong way. Soorma threw bodies on the line in the final quarter to preserve its lead. Soorma's win may have gotten a party started in the hotel of SG Pipers, which is now assured of a berth in Saturday's finale.

The result: JSW Soorma Hockey Club 2 (Squibb 1, Shannon 39-ps, Alonso 35) bt Ranchi Royals 1 (Alonso 35).

Dhamne makes heads turn with an upset win over Dodig

BENGALURU OPEN

N. Sudarshan
BENGALURU

Highly rated teenager Manas Dhamne registered his first win over a top-250 player when he beat Croatia's Matej Dodig 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 in the opening round of the Dafa News Bengaluru Open ATP Challenger 125 at the S.M. Krishna Stadium here on Monday.

The victory over the World No. 231 was only Dhamne's second match-win on the Challenger Tour, the earlier one coming in June 2025 in Brasov, Romania. So important was the success that the moment Dodig's return sailed long on match-point, the 18-year-old World No. 556 reached for his phone, and an Instagram post of him fist pumping went up in no time.

On court, Dhamne exhibited the same youthful exuberance. He served well – winning 78% on the first serve and 63% on the second – drove his backhand powerfully and was solid from the forehand wing.

Dodig, 20 and the fifth seed here, had two inches on Dhamne (6'2" to 6'0") and planted 12 aces to his opponent's three, but some erratic play in the 12th game cost him the first set. He hit two aces and a service winner but also three double-faults, before Dhamne took it 7-5 when a groundstroke went wide.

In the second stanza, the Croat stabilised, broke to 3-2 and held on for a 6-4 scoreline to level matters. It was, however, creditable that Dhamne did not feel unsettled despite playing someone who had 39 more match-wins.

The Indian broke in the fourth and sixth games of the decider, capitalising on a series of unforced errors. The set lasted just over half an hour, compared to the two nearly 50-minute affairs that preceded it. And that told the story. "More than the win, I am happy for the other things, like the way I played," Dhamne said. "I have to improve, but feel I am on the right track."

Third seed Jay Clarke and fourth seed Lloyd Harris were knocked out.

Other results: First round: Sumit Nagal bt S.D. Prajwal Dev 6-3, 6-3; Harold Mayot (Fra) bt Petr Bar Biryukov (Rus) 6-1, 6-4; Matteo Martineau bt Jay Clarke 4-6, 6-1, 6-2; Jonas Forejtak (Cze) bt Lloyd Harris (RSA) 7-6(5), 6-4; Timofey Skatov (Kaz) bt Neil Oberleitner (Aut) 6-3, 6-3; Dan Martin (Can) bt Vladislav Orlow (Ukr) 6-7(4), 7-5, 6-4.

SNAPSHOTS

SNAPSHOTS**USA advances**

World No. 1 Coco Gauff suffered her first defeat at the United Cup when she was stunned by Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in Perth on Monday.

But after Taylor Fritz won to level the tie for the United States, Gauff made amends with Christian Harrison in the mixed doubles, beating Ivonne Cavalle-Reimers and Inigo Cervantes to seal a quarterfinal spot.

In Sydney, Germany's World No. 3 Alexander Zverev was also on the end of a shock United Cup result, beaten by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz. Former World No. 1 Iga Swiatek was forced to battle hard to clinch the tie for Poland with a win over Eva Lys.

The results: At Perth: USA bt Spain 2-1 (Coco Gauff lost to Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 1-6, 6-3; Taylor Fritz bt Jaime Munar 7-6(4), 3-6, 7-6(6); Gauff & Christian Harrison bt Ivonne Cavalle-Reimers & Inigo Cervantes 7-6(5), 6-0).

At Sydney: Czechia bt Norway

Barbara Krejicikova bt Malene Helg 6-4, 6-1; Jakub Mensik bt Casper Ruud 7-5, 6-2; Krejicikova & Adam Pavlasek bt Ulrikke Eiker & Viktor Durasic 7-5, 6-2.

Poland bt Germany 3-0 (Hubert Hurkacz bt Alexander Zverev 6-3, 6-0; Iga Swiatek bt Eva Lys 3-6, 6-3, 6-4; Katarzyna Kawa & Jan Zieliński bt Laura Siegemund &

Zverev 7-6(6), 6-3).

Chelsea holds Man City

Enzo Fernandez dealt a blow to Manchester City's Premier League title hopes with a 94th-minute equaliser to snatch a 1-1 draw for Chelsea at the Etihad.

Liverpool is fourth and 14 points adrift of Arsenal after it drew 2-2 at Fulham. In Serie A, Inter Milan returned to the top after a 3-1 win over Bologna at the San Siro. In La Liga, Atletico Madrid was held 1-1 at Real Sociedad and Real Madrid thumped Real Betis 5-1.

Top results: Premier League: Manchester City 1 (Reijnders 42) drew with Chelsea 1 (Fernandez 90+4); **Serie A:** Inter Milan 3 (Zielinski 39, Martinez 48, Thuram 74) bt Bologna 1 (Castro 83).

LaLiga: Real Sociedad 1 (Guedes 55) drew with Atletico Madrid 1 (Sorloth 50).

IN BRIEF

**Hazare Trophy: Kohli not to play against Railways**

India superstar Virat Kohli will not feature in Delhi's fixture against Railways in the Vijay Hazare Trophy in Bengaluru on Tuesday. However, pacer Harshit Rana and wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant are available for selection for the game, said Delhi head coach Sarandeep Singh. "Virat is not available. Pant and Harshit will be playing," he said.

Chebet takes maternity break in 2026

Kenyan runner Beatrice Chebet, who won gold in the 5,000m and 10,000m at the 2024 Paris Olympics, is taking a maternity break in 2026, her agent announced on Monday. The 25-year-old is also the world record holder in both events.

VIJAY HAZARE TROPHY – TUESDAY'S FIXTURES

Elite: Group A (Ahmedabad): Tamil Nadu vs. Tripura, Karnataka vs. Rajasthan, Jharkhand vs. Madhya Pradesh, Kerala vs. Pondicherry. **Group B (Rajkot):** Baroda vs. Jammu & Kashmir, Bengal vs. Hyderabad, Uttar Pradesh vs. Vidarbha, Assam vs. Chandigarh. **Group C (Jaipur):** Sikkim vs. Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh vs. Mumbai, Goa vs. Punjab, Chhattisgarh vs. Maharashtra. **Group D (Bengaluru):** Saurashtra vs. Services, Delhi vs. Railways, Andhra vs. Haryana, Gujarat vs. Odisha. **Plate (Ranchi):** Final Bihar vs. Manipur.

LIVE TELECAST

Vijay Hazare Trophy: JioHotstar, 9 a.m.
HIL: Women: Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 5 p.m. Men: Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 7.30 p.m.
The Ashes: 5th Test, day 4, Star Sports 1 & JioHotstar, 4.30 a.m. (Wednesday)

Shreyas to lead Mumbai in Shardul's absence

Practice makes perfect: Shreyas hones his catching skills during a training session. EMMANUEL YOGINI

HAZARE TROPHY**Shreyas Acharya**

JAIPUR

With Shardul Thakur ruled out due to a calf injury, Shreyas Iyer will lead Mumbai in the remaining group fixtures of the Vijay Hazare Trophy.

Shreyas, who joined the Mumbai team on Monday, had a long training session at the Jaipuriya Vidyalya Ground, under the watchful eyes of coaches Omkar Salvi and Atul Ranade.

He looked comfortable while batting against the fast bowlers, and also did some catching drills.

"With Shardul still recovering from the injury, it has been decided that Shreyas will captain the team for the last two group league fixtures," Mumbai's chief selector Sanjay Patil told *The Hindu*.

Even though India's T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav and Shivam Dube are also expected to play in the next couple of games – against Himachal Pradesh last week.

As he did not show any signs of discomfort during

and Punjab – the Mumbai selectors decided to give the captaincy to Shreyas, who is also Shubman Gill's deputy in the ODIs.

This will be Shreyas' return to competitive cricket after a spleen injury during India's tour of Australia last October. The middle-order batter spent 10 days at the BCCI Centre of Excellence in Bengaluru for the last leg of rehab, and as part of the fitness protocol, he also completed his match simulation, having featured in a practice game

last week.

Meanwhile, Mumbai has added off-spinner Shashank Attarde to the squad.

Neeraj ends a hugely successful decade-long association with JSW**Sports Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The decade-long partnership between Neeraj Chopra and JSW Sports is formally over. The star javelin thrower, one of its earliest signings as a teenager, and JSW officially announced the decision on Monday along with the announcement of Neeraj launching his own athlete management firm, Vel Sports. The contract between the two

reportedly ran out in December 2025 with both sides agreeing not to renew it.

Interestingly, company records mention Vel Sports as being incorporated as early as December 2023 with Neeraj as one of its two directors. Neeraj's association with JSW Sports began in 2016 after being scouted through the Sports Excellence Programme and saw the athlete through the biggest moments of his career, and Indian athletics, including gold at the

Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and silver in the 2024 Paris Games with a World Championship crown in between in 2023 besides winning the Diamond League in 2022. Talk of Neeraj taking a more active entrepreneurial responsibility had been around ever since the NC Classic last year, which he practically micro-managed first at Panchkula and then in Bengaluru. While it has not been announced yet, sources have

also confirmed that Neeraj is keen on developing a track and field High Performance Centre as well in the near future.

"Working with Neeraj

has been an incredible experience for all of us at JSW Sports. His success story reflects our shared philosophy of excellence and purpose. We're immensely proud of what we've achieved together and wish him continued success in all his future pursuits," CEO

JSW Sports CEO Divyanshu Singh said in a statement.

"Over the last decade, our journey together has been one of growth, belief, and achievement. JSW Sports has played a defining role in my career, and I'll always remain grateful for their support and vision. As we conclude this chapter, I carry forward the same values into the next phase of my journey," the 28-year-old Neeraj, a Lt. Colonel in Indian Army, said.

Kapp backs Jemimah's leadership traits**WPL**

Vivek Krishnan
NEW DELHI



Looking ahead: Kapp doesn't want to read too much into past results. FILE PHOTO: SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

In a Delhi Capitals set-up that will be led by the young and exuberant Jemimah Rodrigues during the fourth Women's Premier League season, Marizanne Kapp is the experienced old pro. The 36-year-old South African, by virtue of her all-round variety, has been indispensable to whichever side she has turned up for over the course of a lengthy career. It has been no different at DC since the outset.

It puts Kapp in the position to provide an insightful view on the leadership change that has transpired at the Capitals.

With Australia's Meg Lanning, who guided DC to three runner-up finishes in a row, moving to UP Warriorz during November's mega auction, the 25-year-old Jemimah has been asked to step into those big shoes.

"Losing Meg as a cap-

tain is obviously a big thing," Kapp reflected during a virtual interaction on Monday.

"But in saying that, when they asked me, a couple of years ago, who should be India's next captain, I said Jemimah. I feel like she's one of those players who can bring a team together, with her personality and the caring that she has. I feel like she's always been a leader. There will be challenges. But I believe Jemimah will take this opportunity with

both hands and she'll be very successful."

A prevalent talking point as DC prepares for the new season has been its failure to find a way on the big occasions in previous years. Kapp doesn't want to read too much into those results.

"At some stages, it was just a bit of bad luck," Kapp stated. "It's a mixed bag of that and us not having our best day in the final. But I wouldn't say it's a case of not being able to cope with the pressure."

Man United sacks manager Amorim**Agence France-Presse**

LONDON

tantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change".

The club added: "This will give the team the best opportunity of the highest possible Premier League finish."

United is sixth in the table after a 1-1 draw at Leeds on Sunday.

Arjun, Sai Shiva and Ishaan grab the spotlight**Sports Bureau**

CHENNAI

Three 17-year-olds, Arjun Chheda and Sai Shiva Sanakaran, and Ishaan Madesh were in the spotlight with victories in the MRF single-seater categories in the third and penultimate round of the MRF MMSC FMSI Indian National Car Racing Championship 2025 here on Monday.

The results (Provisional): MRF F2000 (Race-2, 10 laps): 1. Ishaan Madesh (15mins, 58.080s); 2. Arjun Chheda (16:09.792); 3. M.B. Tarun (16:21.957). Race-3 (8 laps): 1. Chheda (12:50.994); 2. Madesh (12:51.970); 3. Shivesh Selvarathnam (13:03.884).

MRF F1600 (Race-2, 10 laps): 1. Sai Shiva Sankaran (17:26.932); 2. Nigel Abraham Thomas (17:29.862); 3. Arjun S. Nair (17:34.344). Race-3 (8 laps): 1. Sai Shiva Sankaran (13:51.994); 2. Arjun (13:52.734); 3. Nigel (13:59.360). **Indian Touring Cars (Race-2, 10 laps):** 1. Ritesh Rai (Buzzing Hornet Motorsports) (18:51.94); 2. Biren Pitawala (Team N1) (18:59.574); 3. Karna Kadur (Arka Motosports) (18:59.800). Race-3 (8 laps): 1. Ritesh Rai (14:58.815); 2. Dhruv Chavan (15:22.189); 3. Pithawala (17:10.467). **ITC 1625 (Race-2, 10 laps):** 1. Vidyaprakash Damodaran (Team Performance Racing) (19:46.309); 2. Nikanth Rambal (16:35.344). (Only one finisher).

Indian Junior Touring Cars (Race-2, 10 laps): 1. Viswas Vijayaraj (Team Performance Racing) (19:23.558); 2. Rithvik Thomas (Race Concepts Motorsports) (19:47.878); 3. Jarshan Anand (20:11.101). **Race-3 (8 laps):** 1. Vijayaraj (15:34.116); 2. Jarshan (16:18.644).

Super Stock (Race-2, 10 laps): 1. T.S. Diljith (DTS Racing) (20:45.227); 2. Kesara Godage (Redline Racing India) (14:58.845 +1 lap); 3. Lal Kattikulam Bharathan (DTS Racing) (18:58.193 +1 lap). **Race-3 (8 laps):** 1. Diljith (16:34.197); 2. Godage (16:40.033); 3. Krishanu Dutta Bhuyan (Zion Racing) (16:52.865).

Formula LGB 1300 (Race-2, 10 laps) (Open and Junior): 1. Joel Joseph (DTS Racing) (22:48.689); 2. Lokithingeash Ravi (DTS Racing) (22:48.778); 3. Aditya Patnaik (Momentum Motorsports) (22:57.522). **Race-3 (8 laps, Open and Junior):** 1. Joel Joseph (15:05.346); 2. Vinith Kumar (DTS Racing) (15:08.935); 3. Bhuvan Bonu (MSPORTS) (15:20.145). **MRF Saloons (Toyota Etios) Race-2 (10 laps):** 1. Akshay Muralidharan (21:27.550); 2. Mohammed Arfath (21:32.038); 3. Yash Pawar (22:35.920). **Race-3 (8 laps):** 1. Mohammed Arfath (17:14.385); 2. Tarushi Vikram (17:14.800); 3. Akshay Muralidharan (17:15.536).

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Shubman Gill boost for Punjab ahead of the clash against Goa

Childlike enthusiasm: Gill enjoys himself during a practice session. EMMANUEL YOGINI

As the Punjab team reached the Rajasthan Cricket Academy ground on a cold Monday morning, a handful of fans waited patiently to catch a glimpse of Shubman Gill.

He waved at them, and even clicked a few pictures before being engaged in a game of foot volley with his teammates.

Having missed out on Punjab's last Vijay Hazare Trophy group fixture against Sikkim due to illness, Gill could be heard cracking a few jokes with his teammates.

Staying atop Elite Group C, with 16 points from five matches, Punjab can seal the knockout spot by winning both of its remaining games. Even a victory should be enough to take it to the quarterfinals though the net run rate could come in to play in case of a three-way tie.

When Punjab takes on Goa on Tuesday, the batting department will be

bolstered by the presence of Gill.

While Prabhakar

Gill is likely to continue as captain, it will be a perfect preparation for Gill, Singh is likely to continue as captain, it will be a perfect preparation for Gill,

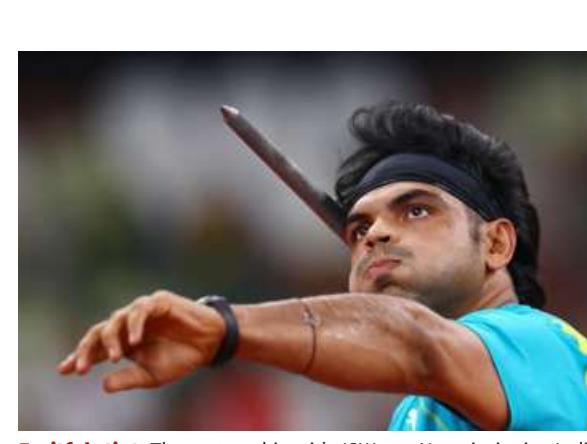
leading up to the ODI series against New Zealand, scheduled to begin on Sunday.

"When we were young, we learnt a lot, playing with Harbhajan Singh and Yuvraj Singh. Similarly, being India's Test and ODI captain, Shubman will inspire the youngsters," Gurkeerat Singh Mann, Gill's mentor and the Punjab Cricket Association's coaching director, told *The Hindu*.

"He makes it a point to talk to each and every player, and make them comfortable. He is very involved in the whole process," said Gurkeerat.

He also said that Gill, having been dropped from India's T20 World Cup squad, has moved on.

"It's quite natural to be disappointed, but he knows that it's part of the journey. He has taken it in his stride and is working hard. He had long sessions recently, and he hopes to make the most of the opportunities that come his way".



Fruitful stint: The partnership with JSW saw Neeraj winning India's maiden Olympic gold in athletics. FILE PHOTO

Neeraj ends a hugely successful decade-long association with JSW**Sports Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The decade-long partnership between Neeraj Chopra and JSW Sports is formally over. The star javelin thrower, one of its earliest signings as a teenager, and JSW officially announced the decision on Monday along with the announcement of Neeraj launching his own athlete management firm, Vel Sports. The contract between the two

reportedly ran out in December 2025 with both sides agreeing not to renew it.

Interestingly, company records mention Vel Sports as being incorporated as early as December 2023 with Neeraj as one of its two directors. Neeraj's association with JSW Sports began in 2016 after being scouted through the Sports Excellence Programme and saw the athlete through the biggest moments of his career, and Indian athletics, including gold at the

Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and silver in the 2024 Paris Games with a World Championship crown in between in 2023 besides winning the Diamond League in 2022. Talk of Neeraj taking a more active entrepreneurial responsibility had been around ever since the NC Classic last year, which he practically micro-managed first at Panchkula and then in Bengaluru. While it has not been announced yet, sources have

also confirmed that Neeraj is keen on developing a track and field High Performance Centre as well in the near future.

"Working with Neeraj has been an incredible experience for all of us at JSW Sports. His success story reflects our shared philosophy of excellence and purpose. We're immensely proud of what we've achieved together and wish him continued success in all his future pursuits," CEO

JSW Sports CEO Divyanshu Singh said in a statement.

"Over the last decade, our journey together has been one of growth, belief, and achievement. JSW Sports has played a defining role in my career, and I'll always remain grateful for their support and vision. As we conclude this chapter, I carry forward the same values into the next phase of my journey," the 28-year-old Neeraj, a Lt. Colonel in Indian Army, said.

Don't think you can ignore anyone at the Candidates

Caruana will certainly be the favourite and Praggnanandhaa, too, if he is better prepared in the opening; Anish can do well if he continues his GCL form, but I have my reservations about Nakamura given the way he performed against players with ratings of 1800



INTERVIEW

Pravin Thipsay**P.K. Ajith Kumar**

During the early days of the Global Chess League in Mumbai, Pravin Thipsay confessed: "Ours is a great team, but the results are not just there."

His concern was understandable. Alpine SG Pipers didn't have the greatest of starts, despite the team boasting superstars like Fabiano Caruana, Hou Yifan, R.

Praggnanandhaa and Anish Giri. But, Thipsay had faith in them, in the team he had picked at the auction after meticulous research. And the players didn't let him down.

They staged a big turnaround, qualified for the final by the slenderest of margins - one game-point - and scored a convincing victory against Triveni Continental Kings, the champion in both previous editions of the league.

Thipsay spoke to *The Hindu* on that December night that he will never forget. *Excerpts:*

How do you feel, Pravin?

I think this is probably the happiest moment in my life.

Really? This is a bigger moment than becoming India's third Grandmaster?

Yes, because it was an individual achievement, but here at the GCL, we have had the best players in the world playing. Yes, 14 of the world's top 15 were here. That is just in men's chess. Plus we have two of the all-time greats in women's chess, Hou Yifan and Koneru Humpy...

And Hou deservedly won the award for the best woman player in the tournament.

The way she bounced back after a poor first half was remarkable. Yes, for someone who plays only probably once or twice a year, it was a really great performance.

When you took over as the coach of Alpine SG Pipers what were your expectations?

The first step was the bidding because you cannot get all the great players. So if you have two players of your choice, normally in other positions, you are outbid by others. It is not a dream team. Almost all the teams had similar ratings. The last day of the league was a dismal one for us, and we barely made it to the final. Before the final,



The Pied Pipers: Superstars like Caruana, Hou, Praggnanandhaa and Giri rose to the occasion when it mattered. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

we had one last meeting, and we discussed several strategies. The top players always see each other's strength. Actually, they feel, Oh, he is very strong.

I said, If you are looking at your opponent's strength, yes, they have enormous strength. Try to look at their weaknesses. Even the team which has won twice before can have weaknesses.

In the tournament, we specifically made a target, like who must win their games. And it worked, we even had an absolute score on some boards. But, on the first board we generally said that 50% would also be fine.

Talking of boards, you made Giri play on the second and Praggnanandhaa on the third.

I think Anish is very solid, and it is not

easy to beat him, generally. As soon as the bidding was done, and we got the players list, I consulted these two players. I wanted to know if they were okay with my idea.

They were. Anish said he didn't mind playing any opposition. And I wanted Pragg to score heavily on the third board.

But your most inspired signing was probably Nino Batsiashvili, who was brilliant as the second female player. She was your silent killer.

I have found that Georgians are very good team players and very loyal, too. When I looked at the list of available players, I thought Nino would be a good option though she wasn't one of the youngest. She played exceptionally well for us. I also wanted Leon Mendonca in the team.

Winning the GCL in your hometown must have felt really special.

Yes, it was nice to see so many people wanted our team to win. And I was happy to see good crowds coming to watch the matches, especially for the weekends.

Our foreign players like Fabiano and Hou were pleasantly surprised by the kind of response from the chess fans here. And I noticed the fans were not disturbing the players before the game, which I think was nice.

So you feel the organiser Tech Mahindra got it right by bringing the GCL to Mumbai after the first two editions were held in Dubai and London?

Yes, Mumbai was an excellent choice.

Chennai would have been interesting, too. Remember the huge crowds that turned up to watch the Olympiad in 2022.

I was talking to the GCL's chairperson Peeyush Dubey, who said the league broke even. How important do you think a professional, glamorous league is for chess to grow in India, and globally?

I think it is great that the league has broken even in just the third season. The chess fraternity needs to learn something from this. I feel alongside the GCL a side event featuring Grandmasters could have been organised at a nearby venue. So they could have got even more players for the GCL.

Your team had three players who will be competing at the next Candidates tournament - Caruana, Praggnanandhaa and Giri. No other team had as many, of course.

At the auction, the choice for the Icons was between the World champion (Magnus Carlsen), the reigning World champion (D. Gukesh) and someone who played the World title match and is now the World No. 3 (Caruana). So it was very difficult to choose.

Do you think Caruana will be one of the favourites at the Candidates this year? He has been playing in every Candidates since 2016.

Yes, Fabi will be a favourite, certainly. And Pragg, too. And if Anish continues to be as prepared as he was here for the GCL, he too could do well. At this moment, I feel Anish is better prepared than Pragg, who, I think, has to be better prepared in the opening.

Hikaru Nakamura says he has already started preparing for the Candidates, even before he came for the GCL.

I have my reservations about the way he played the players with ratings of 1800, but you cannot ignore him, because he is the highest rated player at the Candidates (he is World No. 2, behind Carlsen).

What about the lesser-rated players, like Jovakir Sindarov and Andrey Esipenko?

Sindarov is really good. I remember him playing well at the Chennai Olympiad, where he won the individual gold medal on the third board.

Esipenko is very talented, but he needs to train more strategically. I don't think you can ignore anyone at the Candidates. I feel it will be a very close tournament.

SCIENCE

Hydrogen 'tests' basic physics more precisely after tough theory update

Modern techniques can measure gaps between different energy levels of the H₂ molecule with an accuracy of about one part in a 100 billion; the question is whether the theories used to 'calculate' these energy levels match what experiments have found, and these calculations are very difficult

Vasudevan Mukunth

The hydrogen molecule H₂ is the simplest stable molecule, with two protons and two electrons bound together. Scientists have studied it for more than a century because it's small enough that theory can try to predict its behaviour from basic physics, yet it's rich enough to include many features found in larger molecules.

This said, after all this time, can scientists predict H₂'s energy levels so accurately that the predictions match with today's best measurements?

Four challenges

An experimental technique called spectroscopy can measure the distances between the different possible energy levels of H₂ by observing which frequencies of light the molecule can absorb or emit. Modern setups can measure some of these gaps with a relative accuracy of about one part in 100 billion. At this precision, experiments are sensitive not only to the main predictions of quantum mechanics but also to extremely small effects due to quantum electrodynamics (QED). QED is the theory of how charged particles like electrons interact with electromagnetic fields.

A calculation that tries to predict the effects of quantum mechanics as well as QED effects has to get many things right at once. According to a new study by researchers from Poland, there are four big challenges. First, the two electrons in H₂ affect each other strongly, so the calculation must capture their togetherness, or what physicists call correlation. Second, the nuclei don't sit still: the electrons and the nuclei (the clumps of protons) influence each other's motions. Third, the electrons move fast enough that the special theory of relativity makes a small but measurable difference to their energy. Fourth, there are smaller QED effects that are measurable with today's instruments.

Full monty

Over the last decade, experiments have improved dramatically. Earlier, theory and experiment would agree to within about 10 MHz of each other; newer measurements can reach accuracies of the order of 10 kHz. In these experiments, scientists measure the frequency of light that H₂ absorbs or emits when it jumps between two specific energy levels. The frequency of that light equals the energy difference between the levels (divided by Planck's constant). So 10 MHz and 10 kHz refer to the uncertainty in the measured transition frequency, i.e. how precisely scientists know the difference between two energy levels.

But when measurements got that good, scientists realised that some theoretical predictions were off by several MHz. According to the authors of the new study, from the University of Warsaw and the Adam Mickiewicz University, the scientists suspected one particular reason: the older calculations didn't completely account for recoil effects inside the relativistic and QED parts of the theory. 'Recoil' here refers to the nuclei having a finite mass and responding to the electrons, in slight ways.

Ignoring that response could shift the predicted frequency by very small, yet nonzero, amounts – and which matter at



The Hubble Space Telescope's shot of IRAS 14568-6304, a young star cloaked in a haze of gas and dust. It appears to be embedded in a swoosh of dark sky, which is the Circinus molecular cloud. Most of the gas in this cloud is hydrogen. ESA/HUBBLE & NASA

today's precision.

To catch up, the new study's authors skipped a common shortcut in molecular physics: the Born-Oppenheimer approximation. It assumes the nuclei to be almost fixed while the electrons move, allowing physicists to ignore the effects of the nuclei's small movements. The authors instead solved the Schrödinger equation for H₂, treating the two electrons and two protons together, without using the Born-Oppenheimer approximation. This is called the direct nonadiabatic approach.

Computationally intensive

The Schrödinger equation is the basic rule in quantum mechanics that says how a quantum system behaves. Put differently, it's an important mathematical statement that accepts as its inputs which particles and forces are present and spits out which energy levels and quantum states are possible.

If that sounds simple, the truth is that solving the Schrödinger equation for four particles at once is extremely difficult (which is one of the reasons Max Born and J. Robert Oppenheimer came up with their approximation). The whole four-particle system has a single wavefunction, a kind of mathematical master description that physicists use to predict where the particles are likely to be found. And it depends on the positions of two electrons and two protons simultaneously. That means it lives in a very high-dimensional space and physicists need lots of computing power to represent it accurately.

Each particle also interacts with all the others: electrons and protons attract, electron and electron repel, proton and proton repel. As a result physicists can't cleanly split the problem into 'the part with the electrons' and the 'part with the

protons'. In this picture, without the Born-Oppenheimer approximation, physicists must handle electronic motion and nuclear motion together from the start, which is also computationally demanding.

Finally, the goal here was to predict the light's frequencies with a precision of under 1 MHz. That means the calculation couldn't skip subtle details of the wavefunction, especially in regions where the particles got close.

Exponential functions

To deal with these challenges, the authors used a special kind of wavefunction. A wavefunction is "good" if it can do a good job of describing the stronger attraction when an electron is closer to a proton, the stronger repulsion when two electrons are closer to each other, and the electrons' situation depending on how close the protons are to each other. The team's special wavefunction thus used exponential functions. These functions are designed to describe things that change quickly with distance.

For example, an electron's "influence" around a nucleus tends to be much stronger nearby and drops off as it gets farther away. Exponential functions can naturally describe this sort of behaviour.

After calculating a very accurate 'baseline' energy from quantum

mechanics, the authors then made smaller adjustments due to the special theory of relativity and QED.

Exam for physics to pass

Finally the authors reported their results in two ways. One was the dissociation energy, the energy required to split one H₂ molecule into two separate hydrogen atoms. The authors reported the dissociation energy at the lowest rotational and vibrational states of H₂ in its ground electronic state with a relative accuracy of 7×10^{-10} . Second, they predicted the frequency corresponding to the gap in energy between these states with a relative accuracy of about 3×10^{-9} .

Next, they compared their theoretical predictions to nine recent measurements of these energy levels and found they agreed almost perfectly.

Their findings were published in the *Journal of Chemical Theory and Computation* on December 5.

Reaching this level of accuracy is important for physicists to test QED in molecular systems and to interpret any future mismatch as a possible sign of an unknown force rather than as a gap in the existing theory.

The study's authors also pointed to the next bottleneck: further progress for excited states will require fully nonadiabatic calculations of some especially difficult QED ingredients.

More broadly, thanks to the new work, the H₂ molecule is now an 'exam' that fundamental physics has to pass because experiments and the theory now agree at a level such that any disagreements between them, if any, would have to be extraordinarily small. And physicists developing new theories predicated on such disagreements also have to come up with ways to identify them.

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THE SCIENCE QUIZ

A millennia-old calendar system

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

While the Julian calendar included a leap day once every four years, it was not the first calendar to have such a system. For example, the Roman system that it replaced included a month called X once every two or three years. What is X? In Latin it means 'work month'.

QUESTION 2

Julius Caesar, who instituted the Julian calendar by a decree on January 1 of 45 BC, consulted the Alexandrian astronomer _____ when reforming the Roman calendar in order to base the new calendar on the solar year rather than on the variable lunar Roman system. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 3

Which specific astronomical cycle was the Julian calendar attempting to approximate? This was so that calendar dates would stay aligned with the seasons instead of drifting through the year, thus also keeping the sun's equinoxes and solstices on the same dates.

QUESTION 4

In 46 BC, the Julian calendar reform realigned the Roman calendar with the seasons in 46 BC by creating a _____. This transitory period was effectively a 445-day long civil year that included two extraordinary months between November and December. Fill in the blanks.

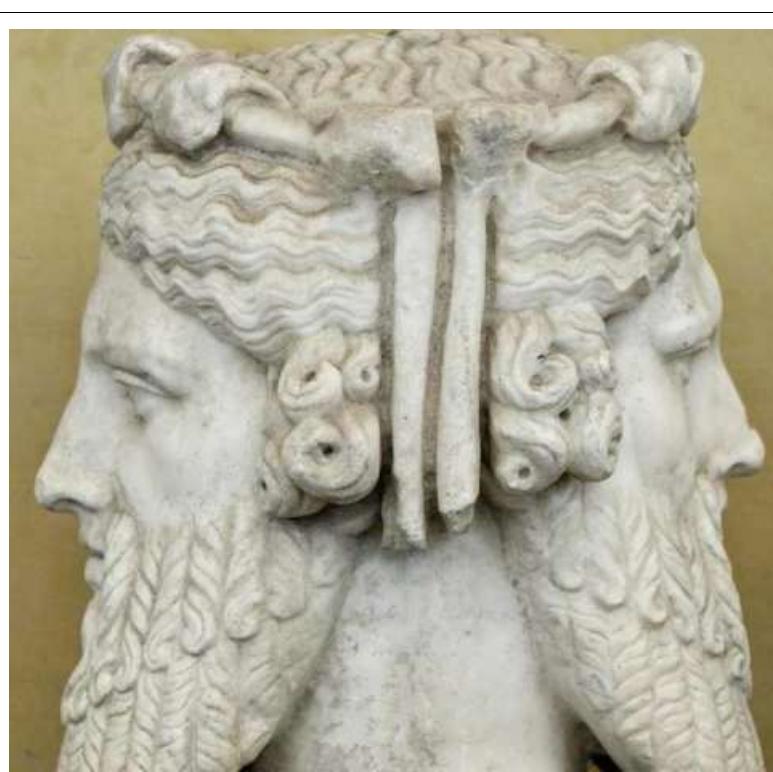
QUESTION 5

What is the difference in the length of

the average year between the Julian and the Gregorian calendars (in number of days)? Pope Gregory XIII instituted the Gregorian calendar in 1582, via the papal bull 'Inter gravissimas'.

Answers to January 1 quiz:

1. Traits influenced by thousands of genetic variants – **Ans: Polygenic**
 2. Condition in which single genes can affect many traits – **Ans: Pleiotropy**
 3. Condition of having only one copy of a gene – **Ans: Heterozygous**
 4. Statistical concept explaining children's lower extreme scores – **Ans: Regression to the mean**
 5. Phenomenon to explain differences despite identical DNA – **Ans: Epigenetics**
- Visual: **Franz Boas**
First contact: K.N. Viswanathan | Ugrasen Bachhor | Surojit Pal | Basit Altaf



Visual: Identify this Roman deity associated with gates and transitions, and identified as the tutelary deity of January. MARIE-LAN NGUYEN (CC BY)



Scientists on the slopes of Popocatépetl volcano in Mexico. AP

Scientists obtain first 3D images from inside major volcano

Associated Press

In the predawn darkness, a team of scientists climbs the slope of Mexico's Popocatépetl volcano, one of the world's most active. Its mission: figure out what is happening under the crater.

Most of the world's volcanoes that pose a risk to humans already have detailed maps of their interiors, but not Popocatépetl, despite the fact that some 25 million people live within a 100-km radius and houses, schools, hospitals and five airports could be affected by an eruption.

Other scientists took some early images 15 years ago, but they showed contradictory results and did not have sufficient resolution to see where the magma gathered. Marco Calò, professor in the Mexico National Autonomous University Geophysics Institute's volcanology department, said,

For five years, the group from Mexico, led by Calò, has climbed the volcano with kilograms of equipment, risking data loss due to bad weather or a volcanic explosion. Now, the team has created the first three-dimensional image of the 5,452-m volcano's interior, which tells them where the magma accumulates and will help them better understand its activity, and, eventually, help authorities better react to eruptions.

This first 3D image goes 18 km below the crater and shows what appear to be pools of magma with rock between them, and are more numerous towards the southeast of the crater

Inside an active volcano, everything is moving: the rocks, magma, gas and aquifers. It all generates seismic signals. The seismographs among the group's tools measure vibrations in the ground 100 times per second and generate data that a researcher processes using artificial intelligence.

Little by little the scientists began to infer what kinds of material were where, in what state, at what temperature and at what depth. The map that emerged was far more complex than the drawings of volcanoes most saw in school, with a main vent connecting a chamber of magma with the surface.

This first three-dimensional cross-sectional image goes 18 km below the crater and shows what appear to be various pools of magma at different depths, with rock or other material between them and more numerous towards the southeast of the crater.

Popocatépetl emerged in the crater of other volcanoes in its current form more than 20,000 years ago and has been active since 1994, spewing plumes of smoke, gas and ash more or less daily. The activity periodically forms a dome over the main vent, which eventually collapses, causing an eruption. The last was in 2023. After hours of walking up the volcano's flank, Calò's team sets up camp in a pine grove at about 3,810 m altitude, an apparent safe spot from pyroclastic explosions.

Having direct knowledge of the volcano provides a much more objective sense of the limits of their analysis, Calò said.

"We have a natural laboratory here." It's "very important to be able to understand and give residents detailed, trustworthy information about what is happening inside the volcano."

Digging up one of the last seismic stations, Calò's face falls. The last registered data are from months earlier. The battery died. Sometimes rats chew the machines' wires or an explosion causes more serious damage.

The project has yielded some certainties and if repeated will allow the analysis of changes that eventually will help authorities make better decisions when eruptions occur.

For feedback and suggestions
for 'Science', please write to
science@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Daily page'